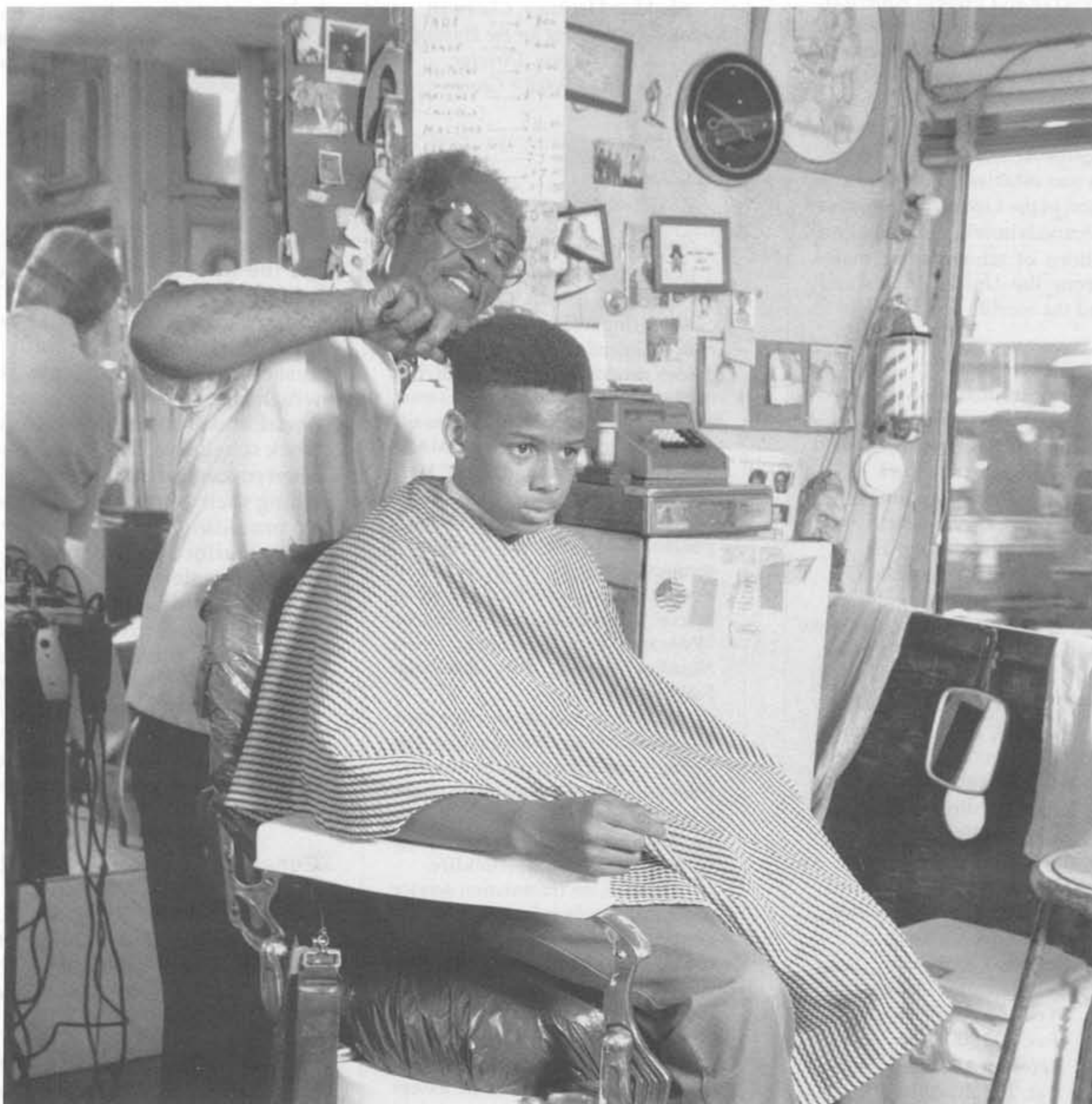
FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

SUMMER 1995 • VOLUME XVII, NUMBER 3



American Folklife Center • The Library of Congress

The American Folklife Center was created in 1976 by the U.S. Congress to "preserve and present American folklife" through programs of research, documentation, archival preservation, reference service, live performance, exhibition, publication, and training. The Center incorporates the Archive of Folk Culture, which was established in the Music Division of the Library of Congress in 1928, and is now one of the largest collections of ethnographic material from the United States and around the world.

Administration
Alan Jabbour, *Director*
Doris Craig, *Administrative Assistant*
Stephanie Parks, *Clerk*
Camila Bryce-Laporte, *Program Coordinator*
Acquisitions
Joseph C. Hickerson, *Head*
Processing
Stephanie A. Hall, *Archivist Coordinator*
Catherine Hiebert Kerst, *Archivist*
Programs
Peter T. Bartis, *Folklife Specialist*
Mary Hufford, *Folklife Specialist*
David A. Taylor, *Folklife Specialist*
Publications
James Hardin, *Editor*
Public Events
Theadocia Austen, *Coordinator*
Reference
Judith A. Gray, *Folklife Specialist*
Jennifer A. Cutting, *Program Coordinator*
Administrative Office
Tel: 202 707-6590
Fax: 202 707-2076
Reference Service
Tel: 202 707-5510
Federal Cylinder Project
Tel: 202 707-1740

Board of Trustees
Juris Ubans, *Chair, Maine*
Robert Malir Jr., *Vice-chair, Kansas*
Nina Archabal, *Minnesota*
Lindy Boggs, *Louisiana; Washington, D.C.*
Carolyn Hecker, *Maine*
William L. Kinney Jr, *South Carolina*
Judith McCulloh, *Illinois*
Ex Officio Members
James H. Billington, *Librarian of Congress*
I. Michael Heyman, *Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution*
Jane Alexander, *Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts*
Sheldon Hackney, *Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities*
Alan Jabbour, *Director, American Folklife Center*

TELEPHONE AND ONLINE INFORMATION RESOURCES

American Folklife Center publications (including *Folklife Center News*), a calendar of events, collection guides, general information, and connections to a selection of other Internet services related to folklife are available on the Internet via the **LC MARVEL Gopher Server** and the **LC Web World Wide Web Server**.

LC MARVEL is available through your local Gopher Server. Or you may connect directly through Telnet to **marvel.loc.gov**, and then log in as marvel. From the main menu, choose "Research and Reference," then "Reading Rooms," then "American Folklife Center."

LC Web is available through your local World Wide Web service. The Center's home page can be accessed from the Library's main menu under "Services and Publications." The direct URL for the Center's home page is: **http://lcweb.loc.gov/folklife**.

Folkline, an information service providing timely information on the field of folklife and folklore, including training and professional opportunities and news items of national interest, is available through both the above Internet servers and by telephone. For the telephone service (available around the clock, except during the hours of 9 A.M. until noon each Monday, when it is updated), dial: **202 707-2000**.

FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS
James Hardin, *Editor*
David A. Taylor, *Editorial Advisor*
John Biggs, *Library of Congress Graphics Unit, Designer*

Folklife Center News publishes articles on the programs and activities of the American Folklife Center, as well as other articles on traditional expressive culture. It is available free of charge from the Library of Congress, American Folklife Center, Washington, D.C. 20540-8100. *Folklife Center News* does not publish announcements from other institutions or reviews of books from publishers other than the Library of Congress. Readers who would like to comment on Center activities or newsletter articles may address their remarks to the editor.

EDITOR'S NOTES

Community health and well-being are the underlying concerns of the two articles for this issue of *Folklife Center News*. Susan Levitas reports on African American family businesses in Paterson, New Jersey, which she shows to integrate traditional and community values with work schedules. The businesses are often successful in shaping and nourishing their communities, as well as in providing goods and services. Mary Hufford shows that the traditional knowledge of persons living in and around our great national forests contribute in important ways to discussions on conservation and land use. Environmental policymakers, she argues, should listen to and learn from "voices beneath the canopy," the people who live in the regions under consideration.

Congress Saves Center Budget

Activities at the American Folklife Center during the months of June and July were dominated by events *continued on page 18*

Cover: On his thirteenth birthday, Michael Young, of Paterson, New Jersey, receives a "high-top fade" from his neighborhood barber, Louis McDowell, September 13, 1994. (WIP-MC-B029-22) Photo by Martha Cooper

African American Family Business in Paterson, New Jersey

Workers at the Sweet Potato Pie, Inc., baking facilities on Auburn Street in Paterson. Here, the workers produce over ten thousand pies per day. (WIP-MC-B022-18) Photo by Martha Cooper

By Susan Levitas

Susan Levitas was one of several folklorists engaged by the Folklife Center during the summer of 1994 to study occupational culture in Paterson, New Jersey. The study, "Working in Paterson," was sponsored by the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office of the National Park Service (Philadelphia), under a 1992 federal program, the New Jersey Urban History Initiative (see Folklife Center News, summer 1994 and spring 1995).

According to Louis McDowell—preacher, distributor of free food to those in need, and owner of McDowell's Barber Shop, on River Street—Paterson was "itself" between the 1930s and the 1950s. Then, it was "a beautiful little city," one that welcomed his family fresh from their farm in Mississippi. With his older sister leading the charge, they came every year, two at a time for four

years, until all seven brothers and sisters were settled and working. In those halcyon days, McDowell remembers everything being "nice"—the streets, the factories, and "even the police."

Although some African Americans in Paterson are second- or third-generation residents, many migrated north during the post-World War II period of great economic growth. In sharp contrast to the current climate, jobs were plentiful. At that time, African American settlement was concentrated in the center of the city, east and west, and to the north, with many blacks living harmoniously in mixed neighborhoods with Italian, Polish, Dutch, and Jewish residents.

Easter Benson, owner of E & A Soul Food Restaurant, on Straight Street, grew up in South Carolina. There, when she was young, she worked alongside her mother picking cotton, stripping corn, cooking, cleaning, and quilting. She wanted a job outside the home, but none were to be had nearby. In 1954 she moved to Paterson, a place she had heard about through friends who had already made the journey north. Once she arrived in Paterson, she soon found work and a good place to live.

Living off the land was a formative experience for southern migrants, many of whom were contributing workers in household economies based around family farms. Youthful responsibilities prepared them for a life of hard work. For example, Easter Benson parlayed her early experience with cooking in quantity for her large farm family and neighbors into a successful soul-food business in Paterson.

On Labor Day, 1942, George and Martha Jiggetts came to the city together and immediately got jobs. Martha had a cousin in Paterson and George, who had been coming north to work in Baltimore and Newark factories, wanted to escape the racial tyranny back home in Virginia.

One of George Jiggetts's experiences in Virginia provides an example. Upon hearing that his father's tobacco harvest received a lower price at the auction than white farmers' harvests, merely because he was black, young George removed the leaves from the buying floor and took them to a town where bidders did not know the origin of his tobacco. This lesson and others he learned in Virginia shaped his work style in Paterson. He quit menial jobs with no future for blacks (and insisted that his wife follow suit), and eventually established his own business, one built on a foundation of hard work and respect for others.

The Jiggetts, now serving a third generation of taxi riders, recall older customers, unaware that the cab company's name had changed from Jiggetts to Nationwide, refusing to get into a cab that did not bear their name. Their daughter, Bobby Wash, who has worked in the business all her life, once had to drive to the house of a customer to convince her to get into a cab without the family name on it.

As young adults, African American workers found opportunities as laborers in factories, small businesses, and private homes throughout the city. Easter Benson came to Paterson on a Sunday, and by Monday was working at Spotless Laundry. After seven years, she went to work at a coat factory, where she pressed seams and linings. For the next twenty years, she worked at different coat factories and laundry facilities, until she launched an enterprise that led to the founding of E & A Soul Food Restaurant.

George Jiggetts mopped floors at Wright Aeronautical, a job relegated to blacks no matter how qualified, until civil rights laws forced open the higher-paying technical positions.

Lenny Jones (a counter worker at Federal Supply hardware store) worked the brine machine at Wellworth's pickle factory for two years until he concluded that smelling like a pickle was hindering his ability to get dates. He turned to work in wire mills, where he spent years learning about the production of insulating wire "as fine as your hair," and learning everything he could about running and repairing wire-making machines in order to make himself indispensable to his bosses. He also worked for a while as a turret-drill operator at a machine shop that fabricated parts for the Alaska pipeline. Louis McDowell spent many years working in the grinding department of a Paterson chemical factory that processed mercury.

Factory jobs were readily available to these Patersonians, but opportunities for advancement were not. While some, such as Edgar Ramsey (the son of a coal miner who became a Xerox executive and, later, established the Sweet Potato Pie Company), were able to parlay a college education into good professional jobs, many others began as laborers and were not able to advance because of discriminatory hiring practices. For example, despite his seniority and vast knowledge of the machines and manufacturing operations, Lenny Jones could not move up at the wire mill. Describing his treatment, he said:

> *After fourteen years at the wire plant, they brought in a man and told me to break him in as foreman. And I said, "After it took me all these years, you want me to train him to tell me what to do?" I decided to keep my knowledge with me. If they weren't going to drain my knowledge to control me, that would be different. It's like showing the enemy how he can catch you.*

Building a life of work in Paterson was a struggle, and many African American workers lost jobs when the factories and mills shut down. However, a significant number of residents moved from the labor force into business ownership, carried on family business traditions, or became entrepreneurs, filling niches at the center and margins of African American life.

As one of the few businesses African Americans could own in the South, barbershops have long played a central role in black communities. The barber, a public figure with professional skills for personal service, is often a highly respected individual with a repertoire of standard and up-to-the-minute hairstyles that express a community's prevailing tonsorial aesthetics. The barbershop, with its informal atmosphere and one-

Louis McDowell awaits his next customer at his shop on River Street in Paterson. (WIP-MC-B034-18A)
Photo by Martha Cooper

room openness, is both grooming parlor and unofficial community meeting place.

There are several black-owned barbershops in Paterson, every one operated by persons (mostly men, but a few women) who are well known in African American circles. In the Bunker Hill section of north-central Paterson, none is better known or more respected than Rev. Louis McDowell, proprietor of McDowell's Barber Shop, at 400 River Street.

On March 31, 1963, McDowell gave a haircut to the first customer in his new barbershop on River Street, but he had been barbering since 1958. After thirteen years of work at a chemical factory, and with seven children to feed, he was looking for a second job. He chose barbering, remembering his brother and father cutting hair for neighbors in their Mississippi home.

Every day after work, for a year and a half, he worked as a barber's apprentice in the shop of his niece's husband, before deciding to study for his barbering certificate and set up shop on his own. At first he operated part-time, opening for business at 4:30 P.M., after the end of his shift at the factory. His barbering business boomed, he hired another barber to operate the business during the day, and in 1983 he retired from the factory and became a full-time barber.

McDowell's visibility and reputation in the community, as both a barber and a preacher (he was once the pastor of his own church) have made his shop a social center in the neighborhood. In recent years, it has also become important as a distribution point for free food to needy neighbors, further underscoring the significance of barbershops in African American culture. McDowell sees community service, religious expression, and barbering as interrelated in his business. He says people look to him for spiritual guidance, often while getting their hair cut.

At Easter Benson's E & A Soul Food Restaurant, at the corner of Governor and Straight Streets, in the shadow of the Erie Railroad overpass, soul food, as she describes it, is homemade and highly seasoned. It includes such items as biscuits, cornbread, macaroni and cheese, sweet potato pie, fresh vegetables (pinto and lima beans, field peas, cabbage, collard greens, string beans, candied yams), barbecued spareribs, pork chops, sausage and peppers, stewed chicken, fried chicken, barbecued chicken, baked chicken, oxtail, hog's-head cheese, and much more. The term "soul food" refers to African American foods emanating from

Easter Benson, owner of E & A Soul Food Restaurant, stirs a pot of food in the restaurant's kitchen. (WIP-SL-B001-36A) Photo by Susan Levitas

the South, but with roots in African culinary traditions. It is a thriving cuisine in Paterson, with at least three restaurants serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner to hundreds of residents every day.

Easter Benson had no thoughts of running a restaurant when, in the 1970s, she opened a candy store across from her house at Tenth Avenue and Twenty-Third Street. It was a modest shop without a name, almost an extension of her own home. Like Reverend McDowell, she was already employed full-time at another job, and the candy store's hours of operation revolved around her work schedule. Therefore, it was open a couple of hours before work each morning and after work until ten at night.

After a year, her husband installed a stove and a refrigerator in the store, and she started cooking for her family, tying her place of business even more closely to her household. Soon, in response to passersby and regular customers who asked if they could buy plates of food, she began selling fried chicken, collard greens, rice, and biscuits. A visit by an official with the board of health, who said she would have to begin keeping books, prompted her to find a new space suitable for the expansion of her burgeoning restaurant business.

In 1986, E & A Soul Food Restaurant opened and changed Benson's life. Ever since, she has operated on four hours of sleep a night, with almost every waking hour devoted to the business. Her day begins at 3:30 A.M., when she leaves her house and drives to the Railroad Avenue farmers market to purchase a day's supply of fresh vegetables. She is the only woman there at that time of day.

Once back at the restaurant, she unloads her purchases, and then begins to make the morning biscuits—following a recipe she has been making "by feel" since she was a child—while two cooks prepare other breakfast staples. The restaurant opens at 5:30 A.M. Throughout the day, Benson supervises the kitchen; peels potatoes; cuts collards, cabbage, beans, and more; goes out to pick up meat and poultry; plans the next day's menu; and chats with her customers.

In a city with few African American women who are business owners, Easter Benson has turned a traditionally female skill into a successful enterprise. Like McDowell's BarberShop, her restaurant serves more than one function: it sells food (its primary function), provides a setting for socializing, and conserves an important tradition. The E & A Soul Food Restaurant is a place workers come to for coffee and conversation on their way to work and a home-away-from-home for regulars, some of whom eat more than

one meal a day there. It is also a place where African American food traditions are perpetuated and shared within the community.

In Carnie Bragg Jr.'s high school yearbook, his simple aspiration is inscribed: "To be a mortician." Bragg, the second-generation director of the most prominent black-owned funeral home in Paterson, grew up in the family business, which was located a floor below the family dwelling. His father, a former New York City garbage collector, started the business in Passaic, New Jersey, in 1937, and moved it to Paterson in 1945.

Located near the intersection of Rosa Parks Boulevard and Hamilton Street, the business was an immediate success, filling a need within local African American life. As Bragg explained, his funeral home maintains traditions surrounding death that cater to the black community, including burials, wakes, home visits, access to the body for make-up and hair styling, and other personal services.

Like barbers, black funeral home directors gained prominence in their communities because they are skilled professionals who own businesses that provide personal services. Accordingly, they were often looked to for leadership. Carnie Bragg Jr., who was groomed to assume such a role, commented:

> *It's traditional in the black community that, usually, the funeral director is one of the leaders in the community. I've been blessed again by going to Fiske University, where it was understood that, if you went back into the community, you were going to be a leader trying to help other people.*

Bragg took that responsibility seriously. He became president of the Rotary Club, the first black member of the chamber of commerce, and was a founder of the now-defunct Paterson Association for Black Businesses.

The level of activity for a funeral home business is directly related to the size of the local population, and Bragg Funeral Home grew steadily in relation to the growth in Paterson's population. A second building was added to the business in 1957, and the third and fourth buildings followed in the late 1960s. Currently, there are plans to expand again, this time in response to an increase in deaths resulting from the AIDS and crack cocaine epidemics, a fact which saddens Carnie Bragg.

The funeral home's staff of twenty-five is constantly busy with arrangements. As Carnie Bragg Jr. puts it, "People have no idea what is involved in planning—[it's complicated] just like a wedding, but this you have to do in a few days." His own day begins at 6:30 A.M., when he starts answering the phones. He is particularly involved with the personal side of the business, that includes conducting interviews with family members to draw out details about the life of the deceased, such as hobbies and participation in family reunions. Bragg's staff handles the bulk of the financial transactions with customers. In fact, he says, his staff "doesn't allow me to get involved with the business portion because I know most of the families [who come to us], and I tend to give everything away."

Most people learn about Bragg Funeral Home by word-of-mouth, since Carnie Bragg does not advertise in the mainstream media. He continues the black funeral-

Carnie Bragg Jr., second-generation proprietor of Bragg Funeral Home. (WIP-SL-B006-3) Photo by Susan Levitas

home tradition of printing advertisements on paper fans that are distributed at churches throughout the city. The Bragg family name is well-known among African Americans in Paterson, and the business is relied upon to perpetuate long-standing burial traditions.

Jiggetts Transportation, like Bragg Funeral Home, started in a family residence. It was located in George and Martha's rented house on Twelfth Avenue. There were no two-way radios in taxis then, so a speaker was mounted on the Jiggetts's front porch, and when George would drive up and blow the horn, Martha would announce the next customer's address over the sound system. "Every hour in the day we were working," Martha recalls. Even the day she brought her baby daughter, Bobby, home from the hospital, "I worked from the bed, dispatching the cars." As a toddler, Bobby was baby-sat in taxis, and she learned to work the dispatch board by the age of seven. "She was brought up here. She was brought up from a baby into the business."

After saving enough money, the Jiggetts acquired more cabs and moved their operation to 28 Governor Street, "to do nothing but taxis," as George puts it. However, even without the business located in their living room, their home and work lives were forever linked. As a twenty-four-hour-a-day business, the taxi company was always on their minds. Often, George Jiggetts would awake from a dream about a business-related problem, go down to the shop, and put in some work time. For her part, Martha managed the house, drove and dispatched cabs, and spent her waking hours worried about the safety of the drivers. Fifty-two years later, with forty-seven employees and a fleet of taxis, vans, school buses, and charter buses at its current site on Washington Street, this family business, with its humble beginnings, has become an enormous success.

The same can be said of Sweet Potato Pie, Incorporated, a business, located at 140 Auburn Street, that has twenty-eight employees producing more than ten thousand pies a day. In 1983, when he started the business in his home, Edgar Ramsey was working full-time as a manager with the Xerox Corporation. In order to make a go of the pie business, he and his wife divided up tasks so that they could be fit into their already busy schedules. Edgar Ramsey recalls the difficulties of those early days:

Here she had a newborn baby, and when [my wife] came home [from work], her first responsibility was not so much to cook—to prepare the dinner—but to get the potatoes on. So,it was her responsibility to peel the potatoes and put them on

Martha and George Jiggetts, owners of Jiggetts Transportation Service, pose beside one of their buses. (WIP-SL-B006-15) Photo by Susan Levitas

Edgar Ramsey, owner of Sweet Potato Pie, Inc. (WIP-SL-B009-14) Photo by Susan Levitas

the stove to cook, and then she would prepare dinner for the kids. The baby would be crying. She was hungry. And my wife says [to her], "Well, you've got to wait until I get these potatoes peeled." And so, by the time [the potatoes] finished cooking, on an average day, I would be home by then. And so, I would start mixing the batter. But there were times when I wouldn't get home until ten or eleven at night, but you still had to mix the batter because the potatoes were ready.

The Ramsey's experience is a common one in the establishment phase of family businesses as resources—money, time, and energy—are stretched to the limit. Starting a business at home allows the family to more readily accommodate this erratic and all-consuming schedule, in which they are both workers and the managers. Even the children's caretaker was hired with dual responsibilities: the children and the pies.

If they survive this early period, home-based businesses often enter an expansion stage during which the business moves out of the house. For the Ramseys, the expanding business literally moved *through* the house—from the kitchen to the garage to the basement—before it was transferred to a facility on North Main Street and, later, to its current location. Workers were hired to peel the potatoes, make the batter, and assemble and bake the pies. As a result, Edgar Ramsey was able to devote his energies mainly to the management of the business, his wife went back to a regular schedule of work, and the woman who looked after the Ramsey children and worked in the pie business moved into the full-time job of production manager.

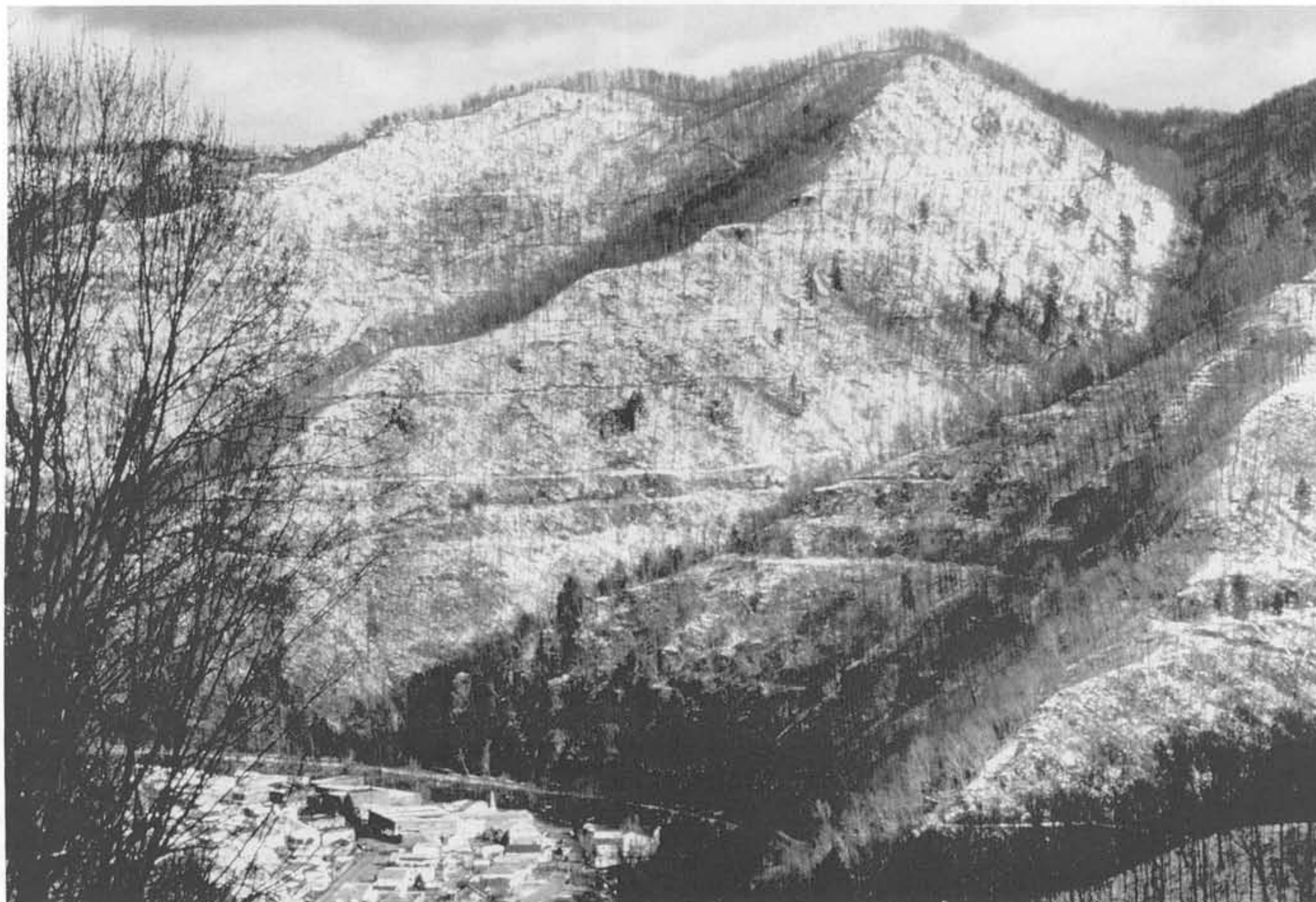
Despite these changes, the pie business still occupies a large amount of Edgar Ramsey's time. As he puts it: "I do this all day, all night sometimes, even on weekends, sometimes sixteen hours a day. You have to take it home with you or to a social affair. It's a twenty-four-hour affair."

Therefore, even though actual pie-making operations have moved out of the Ramsey's home, the business is still very much of the home in the sense that it continues to preoccupy their thoughts and shape their lives. This extension of work into the home—the work-behind-the-work—was found in all other African American family businesses examined for this report, regardless of size or level of success. For all the proprietors, an extraordinary commitment is required; for some, work activities so overshadow every other activity that the workplace virtually becomes their home. As Easter Benson put it when asked if her E & A Soul Food Restaurant is like a second home to her:

To me it's the first [home]—I only sleep at home. It's been, what, like I got home last night at a quarter to nine. I was in bed by quarter to ten. I got up this morning at three o'clock, [and] by three thirty I was gone. So, to me, this is my home. That's just the place I sleep, out there. That's just the place I sleep.

Susan Levitas is a folklorist who lives in Washington, D.C.

Stalking the Mother Forest: Voices Beneath the Canopy



The cove topography in winter, rising above the town of Whitesville, on the border between Raleigh and Boone Counties. Photo by Jenny Hager/ Alpine Productions

By Mary Hufford

In 1992, the American Folklife Center conducted a folklife survey in southern West Virginia to assist the National Park Service in planning a new cultural heritage center near Beckley (see Folklife Center News, winter and spring issues, 1992). During the past several years, Center folklorist Mary Hufford has returned to the region to continue documentation efforts, and has become particularly interested in issues of folklife and conservation.

On a mid-December morning, my commuter plane en route from Washington, D.C., to Charleston, West Virginia, traverses in a matter of minutes Virginia's historic Piedmont. Gaining altitude the plane bisects the ridge and valley of the Shenandoah, where the Skyline Drive meanders south toward the Blue Ridge Parkway. Soon after, the horizon opens onto the great Allegheny and Cumberland plateaus, a crumpled terrain of lower elevation ridges, coves, and hollows, cloaked in a forest bristling skyward without leaves. On this forest, the world's oldest and biologically richest temperate zone hardwood system, the pioneering ecologist E. Lucy Braun conferred the name "mixed mesophytic."

Centered in southern West Virginia, the mesophytic has issued for more than a hundred million years from the black, unglaciated loam of the Central Appalachian coves. Studying the virgin forest in 1916, Braun theorized that these

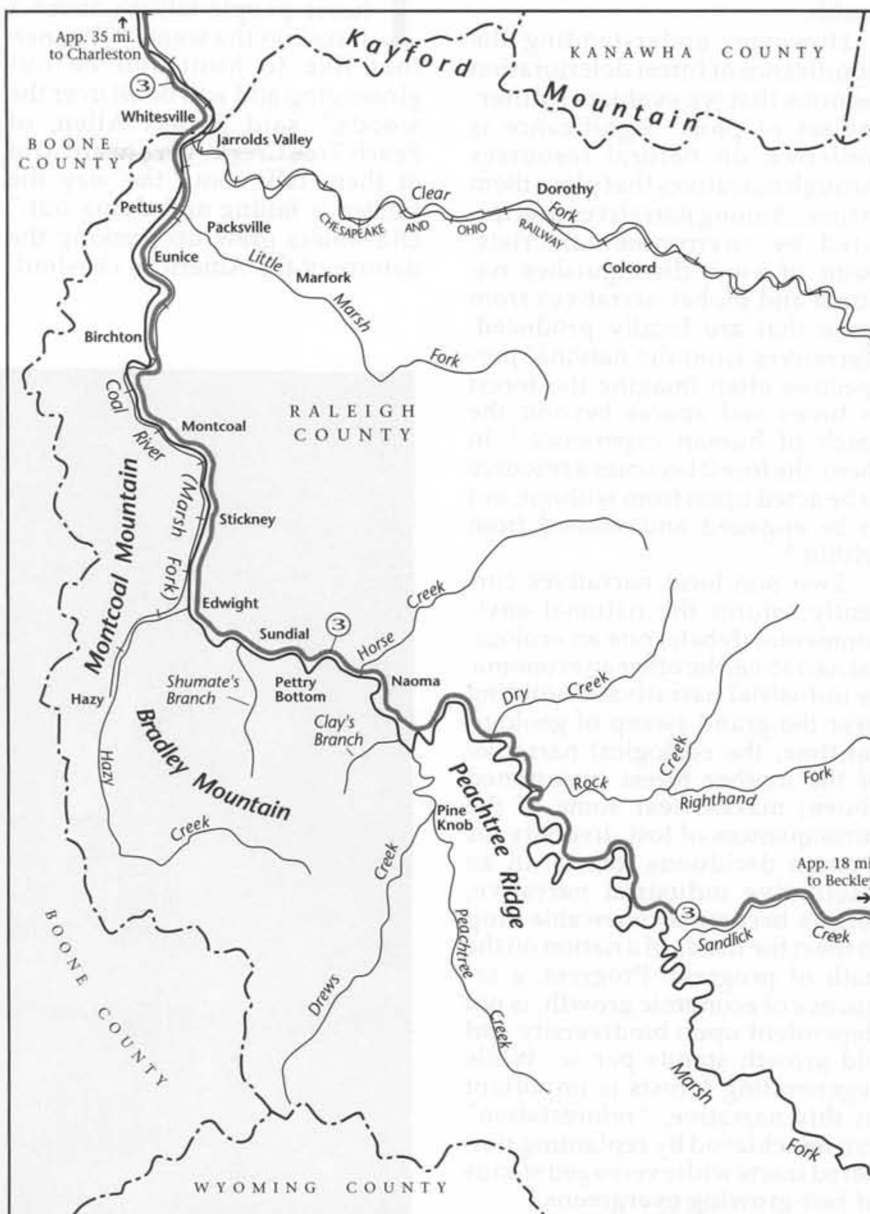
coves are the likely ancestral source of most temperate-zone forest species in the eastern United States. Ecologists are calling it the "mother forest."

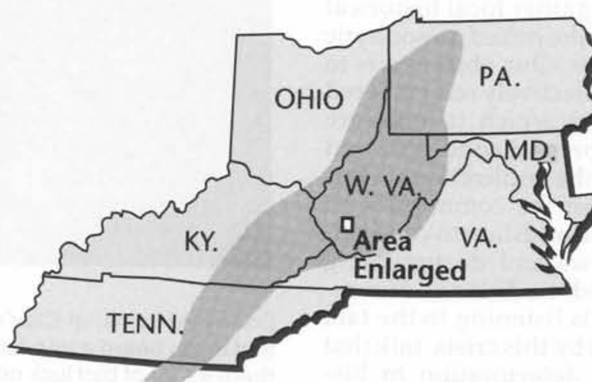
Whereas most forest types are dominated by two or three species, the mixed mesophytic harbors eighty woody species in its canopy and understory. Among them are beech, yellow poplar, basswood, sugar maple, chestnut, sweet buckeye, red oak, white oak, yellow locust, birch, black cherry, cucumber tree, white ash, red maple, sour gum, black walnut, and various kinds of hickory. Yet the coherence of this forest region remains one of America's better kept secrets.[1]

In the 1950s, Braun returned to the Central Appalachian coves to examine a second-growth forest that remained "mixed mesophytic." In the 1990s, however, ecologists are warning that airborne nitrogen, sulfates, and ozone from the Kanawha, Ohio, and Tennessee river basins may be dealing the forest a fatal blow.[2] Within the troubled Eastern deciduous forests, the crisis of the mixed mesophytic poses a special case. If, as Braun argued, the central Appalachian coves sheltered biodiversity against the extreme cold that interrupted the evolution of surrounding forests, it follows that the same coves could again become banks of species diversity, sustaining heat-intolerant plants in a period of global warming.

To comprehend the condition of this forest, you have to get under the canopy and listen. From Charleston, drive the interstate as far as Marmet and then head south along Route 94 as it follows the tributary of Lens Creek to Racine. From there Route 3 winds south and east through District 17 of the United Mine Workers, past dozens of coal camps, towns, and hollows along the Big Coal River. Eventually it comes to Montcoal on the Marsh Fork, where science writer John Flynn directs the Lucy Braun Association's Appalachian Forest Action Project from an old coal company house. Last summer Flynn, who is fifty-six and a native of Rock Creek, began working with residents of the hollows and towns

The Forks of the Big Coal River in Raleigh County





The shaded area in the regional map below shows the range of the mixed mesophytic forest. The enlarged area (above) is indicated.
Maps by Alex Tait/ Equator Graphics

on Coal River to establish permanent plots for monitoring forest health.

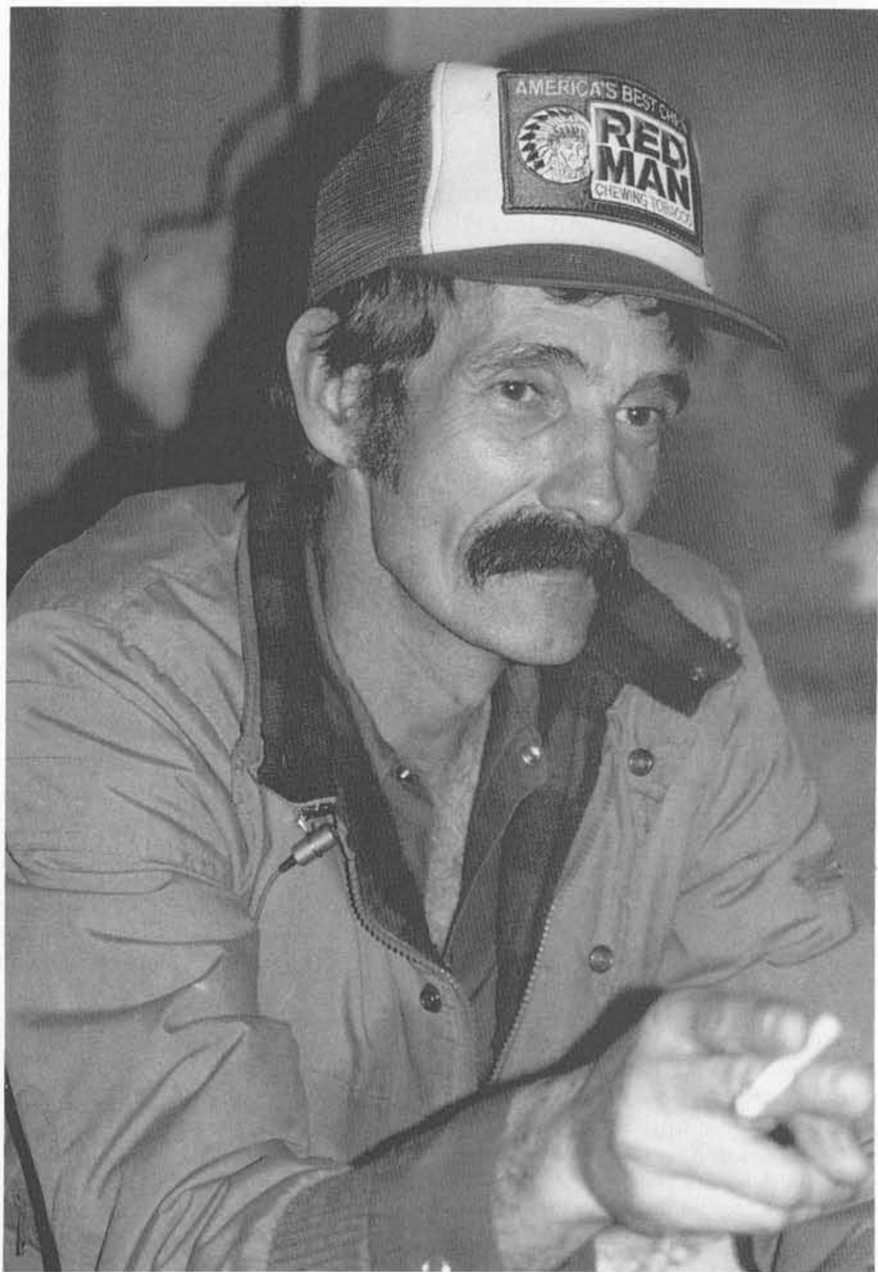
However, understanding the significance of forest deterioration requires that we evaluate a different set of plots. Significance is conferred on natural resources through narratives that place them in time. Among narratives precipitated by environmental crisis, point of view distinguishes national and global narratives from those that are locally produced. Narratives from the national perspective often imagine the forest in times and spaces beyond the reach of human experience.[3] In them, the forest becomes a resource to be acted upon from without, not to be engaged and shaped from within.[4]

Two non-local narratives currently inform the national environmental debate, one an ecological narrative, the other an economic or industrial narrative. Unfolding over the grand sweep of geological time, the ecological narrative of the mother forest (mentioned above) makes clear some of the consequences of lost diversity for Eastern deciduous forests. In an alternative industrial narrative, forests become a renewable crop to meet the needs of a nation on the path of progress. Progress, a sequence of economic growth, is not dependent upon biodiversity and old-growth stands per se. While regenerating forests is important in this narrative, "reforestation" can be achieved by replanting timbered tracts with even-aged stands of fast-growing evergreens.[5]

What is missing in the national discussion are local narratives that depict forests on a human scale. Accordingly, I have been working with John Flynn and other area residents to gather local historical narratives of the mixed mesophytic on Coal River. Our objective is to describe a collectively remembered forest against which to measure the forest's present condition, and to articulate the implications of forest change for the community on Coal River. In addition to conducting interviews and documenting forest-related traditions, our research entails listening to the talk precipitated by this crisis, talk that casts forest deterioration in historical terms.

In beer joints and living rooms, on porches and ridgetops, one hears people talking about a forest on the wane. "The men that like to hunt and be out ginsenging and will be all over the woods," said Robert Allen, of Peach Tree Creek. "I've heard a lot of them talk about the way the timber is falling and dying out." Old-timers grew up tracking the demise of the American chestnut.

A middle-aged generation eulogizes the red mulberry. Up on Clay's Branch, Danny Williams, who cuts timber for a living, tabulates the present crop of decline: "Now it's the red oak, now it's going into your beech, you can't find no solid beech, no solid gum, your poplars is not as bad but getting there, and then your hard sugar maple, they're hollow. Yellow locust is gone. And if it's



Danny Williams, of Clay's Branch on Peachtree Creek. "My mother used to say that if you heard a tree fall in the forest, it was bad luck," he told John Flynn. "Well there's a lot of bad luck now, if anybody's listening." (CRF-MH-B005-06) Photo by Mary Hufford

standing up, it's dead. It just ain't fell yet."[6]

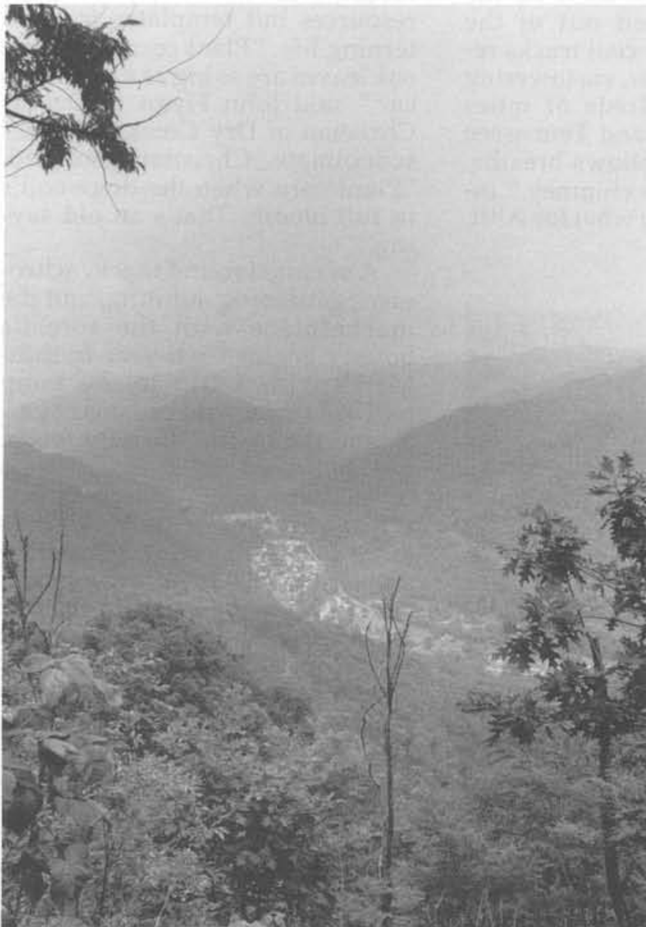
From a porch at the head of Rock Creek Hollow, John Flynn and Ben Burnside discuss the vanishing nut trees: "Of course, the butternut (white walnut)," said Ben, "they're just about a thing of the past. Most of them are dying." "Remember the Chinquapin nuts?" John asked him.[7] "They're gone too, ain't they?" Ben observed.

Not entirely, Mae Bongalis, seventy-eight, informed us later in Naoma:

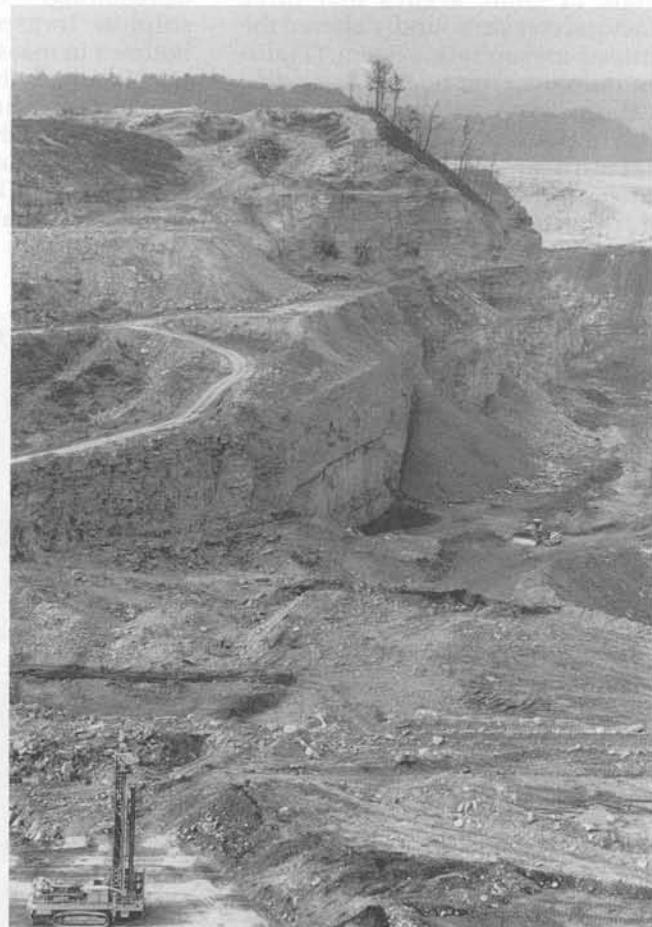
Chinquapins is about all died out, but there's one tree growing up Sandlick. I seen this little branch a-hanging by the door of that little market right by the road? And the guy that owns that place, he's a good friend, and I said, "Beano, where did you get them Chinquapins?" He said, "You know, Mae, nobody knows what they are, how did you know?" I says, "I picked many a one of them," and he said, "Right up there," he said, "in that hill's one tree." And I said, "Any little ones comes up, dig me one."

A growing sense of a world going awry is fueled by historical awareness. "There's something wrong with the roots of the trees," said Kenneth Pettry, sixty-nine, proprietor of the Sundial Tavern. "You can snap off the roots of the [yellow] locust. Back when I was a kid we had to blow out the stumps of locust with dynamite."

Other residents report trees snapping off in high winds ("Snap locusts," Joe Aliff wryly terms them), littering the forest floor with pieces of the canopy; falling over "for no reason at all," disclosing desiccated root wads and dappling deep woods with unaccustomed light; "throwing" limbs on people walking and working in the woods; gushing water "like a faucet" onto chainsaws; and erupting into sylvan grotesques of exaggerated, nitrogen-induced growth. "Joe



Beyond the the town of Dorothy, on Clear Fork, viewed from Kayford Mountain, a blue haze laden with sulfates settles into the Appalachian hollows at day's end. (CRF-MH-B009-36) Photo by Mary Hufford



Surface mine at the head of Cabin Creek in Kanawha County, viewed from Kayford Mountain. Ironically, the localized effects of stripping and clear-cutting are compounded by the return through the air of sulfates from coal-burning facilities hundreds of miles away. Ecologists emphasize that over the long term (hundreds of years), this air pollution, visible in the photo to the left, is more devastating than stripping and clear-cutting. (CRF-MH-B009-33) Photo by Mary Hufford

Aliff has [paw-paws] on his north hillside," John Flynn related to Robert and Mary Allen, "They're fifty feet tall, and you look up and say, 'Paw-paw?'"

Some ecologists are linking these symptoms to long-term deterioration from airborne toxins. Acknowledging a problem, foresters have implicated a complex array of blight, fire, agricultural abuse, and disease. The ecologists counter that a healthy forest system can tolerate such incursions, and that the unprecedented failure of multiple species to regenerate is worth serious and immediate scrutiny. Orie Loucks, who holds the endowed chair of ecosystems studies for the state of Ohio, argues that three factors have profoundly altered the mixed-mesophytic system: (1) aluminum toxicity, related to acidification (from sulfates, exceeding thirty pounds per year per acre); (2) nitrogen deposition, which reduces the capacity of trees on the northern slopes to resist fungal infections; and (3) ozone deposition, which diminishes the photosynthetic capacity of trees, which in turn diminishes the roots.[8]

Ironically, the Clean Air Act of 1990, which set standards attainable by central Appalachia's low-sulphur bituminous coal, triggered a campaign to retrieve what remains of the strippable reserves in the Coal River Valley.[9] Clear-cutting in tandem with strip-mining compounds what residents see as the accelerating deterioration of the forest. Loucks emphasizes, however, that the gradual, long-term damage caused by airborne toxins is, in contrast to clear-cutting, irreversible.

In other words, the less visible aspects of the process are the more devastating. "Low" as it is, the sulphur transported out of the hollows in massive coal trucks returns through the air, via towering smokestacks hundreds of miles away on the Ohio and Tennessee rivers. Here the hollows breathe, "drawing air like a chimney," inhaling and exhaling what Joe Aliff, a disabled coal miner in his fifties, calls "that damned blue haze." It comes, he says, "like a thief through the air."

Even in what residents perceive to be a deteriorated state, the comparative vitality of this forest is striking. Following his first visit to the coves on Coal River, plant pathologist David Houston of the USFS Northeastern experiments station commented, "I marvelled at the lushness and species diversity and the magnitude of the trees."[10] Around that lushness, diversity, and magnitude, residents of the Coal River Valley have for generations created culture. The fertile coves that once replenished the Eastern deciduous forests teem with plants, wildlife, and structures that are not merely economic resources but templates for patterning life. "Plant corn when the oak leaves are as big as a squirrel's ear," said John Flynn to Dennis Christian of Dry Creek, a former schoolmate. Christian returned, "Plant corn when the dogwood's in full bloom. That's an old saying."

Ben Burnside, harvesting ramps behind his home on Rock Creek. Ramps, wild cousins of garlic, thrive in the rich, moist soils of the central Appalachian coves. (CRF-TE-B001-09) Photo by Terry Eiler

A seasonal round that synchronizes gardening, hunting, and the marketplace with the forest's bounty begins each year in mid-March with a trip to the ramp patch. Ramps, wild cousins of garlic and the first of the wild foods, are featured at spring feasts throughout the southern mountains, together with boisterous jokes about the odor ramps bestow on their loyal consumers. "Get that hot sausage," said Ben Burnside, "have them ramps ready, scramble in the egg, three slices of cheese, boy, I'll tell you, ain't nothing better."

In every season the forest supports the round, with spring greens (poke, dock, "crow's feet," "woolly britches," cresses, "shonny lettuce," dandelions, wild mustard, and a number of others), berries ("sarvice" berries, wineberries, blackberries, raspberries, "sheep tits," huckleberries, and mulberries), and the nuts and fruits of fall (hazelnuts, acorns, chinquapins, beechnuts, butternuts, walnuts, persimmons, paw-paws, and bitternuts, pignuts, and mockernut hickories). There are mushrooms, the spring morels called "molly moochers," the red ones of autumn

Mabel Brown, Jenny Bonds, Jean Landy, and Edna Turner of Drew's Creek, cleaning ramps for the Pine Knob Ramp Supper, held each year in April. "There's a thousand and one different ways to eat them," said one patron. (CRF-TE-B003-16) Photo by Terry Eiler

that Elsie Rich, of Jarrold's Valley, called "bull's tongue," and the "little white ones" that remind Mary Allen of choice seafood. "You cut them in two, they're kind of like a scallop," she said, "and roll them in flour and fry them; they're good."

Hunting and digging ginseng, the most famous of the wild cash crops, is an abiding passion for a number of men on Coal River. "I'd as soon ginseng as eat when I'm hungry," said Dennis Dickens, eighty-five. "Every spare minute I had was spent a-ginsenging." And, of course, each season has its quarry, and each quarry its aficionados. Gathering wild products provides opportunities to observe this year's distribution of preferred game, whether deer, bear, turkey, grouse, rabbit, raccoon, groundhog, squirrel, or rattlesnake.

Participation in this round also informs local timbering practices. Bob Daniels, of Dry Creek, owner of Appalachian Hardwoods, spoke of the importance of den trees. "Some people call beeches 'wolf trees' because they gobble up all the nutrients. [But] I like to leave four or five, if they're not too close together, for game."

Such talk may seem at first blush irrelevant to national goals of forest preservation and management, since none of the forested land there falls within a national forest. Yet the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (P.L. 94-588) charges the U.S. Forest Service to maintain for the nation "a natural resource conservation posture that will meet the requirements of our people in perpetuity." On Coal River, descriptions of a forest as part of a living, working landscape spell out those requirements, modeling a diversified system of mixed-age stands that is a dynamic, healthy, and human environment.

Tied to a diminishing seasonal round, memories of residents highlight the importance of old-growth in a biocultural system. Traditional practices like honey harvesting, squirrel hunting, and tapping maple syrup depended on the presence of mature trees. "When I was young," said Kenneth Pettry, "I hunted a lot. You couldn't go a hundred feet in the mountains until you found walnuts, beeches. You don't see it no more. Hickory was thick then. You could go into a grove of hickories and had to watch where you stepped or you'd fall in the nuts. It ain't that way now. Dad showed me and my two older brothers how to tap sugar maples. Show me a sugar maple today you could get a pint out of. The walnuts that stood in our barnyard was six foot through."

In Sundial, Wesley Scarbro, twenty-two, abandoned squirrel hunting five years ago. "There used to be stands of hickories all over," he observed, "and it was more of a challenge. But now you go and there's very few hickories where they can feed, and you know that they're all going to be around that one tree, and there ain't no sport."

"And I'll tell you another thing," said Robert Allen, sixty-seven. "Wild bees. There used to be a lot of them around here, and now they're dying out. The wild bees would be in the older trees. The younger trees wouldn't be big enough." Lining bees with the aid of a sweet lure, one could follow them to their hive, exploiting the terrain of the coves to keep the bees in sight. "I'll tell you the best way to beeline," said Dave Bailey, fifty-eight, of Stickney. "Get in the holler where the sun comes up and comes down in. Get over on the other bank and set there and you can watch them in that sun." Breaking into the wild stash, one could track the course of a blooming season in a mixed mesophytic hive. "The linden is more mild," said Robert Allen, "It's almost clear. Locust honey is a little stronger honey, and it's amber colored. Then you get the poplar, it's almost black and it's real strong."

As talk about *change*, forest talk is part of a larger effort to construct local history through historical discourse.[11] Constructing history, we relate ourselves to our surroundings and position that relationship in time. History is, as Henry Glassie writes, "a prime mode of cultural construction... a way people organize reality to investigate truth to survive in their own terms."[12] On Coal River, historical discourse renders coherent a struggle to maintain "place" on land that has shifted over the past century into the control of absentee owners. Through sayings, place-name etymologies, genealogical digressions, local anecdotes, and historical recollections,

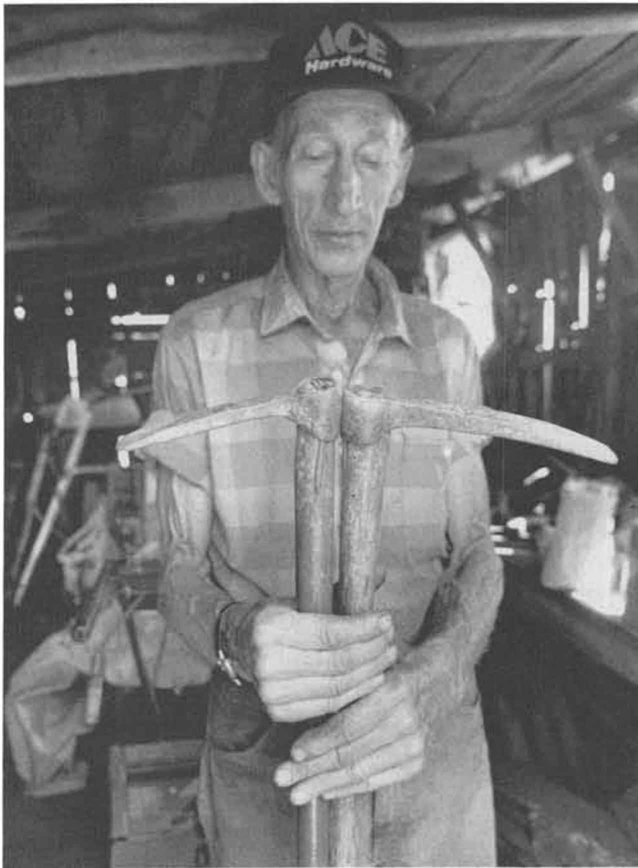
speakers challenge a historical process that separates people from their land and resources. Authenticating their relationship to the land, such talk defends against the cultural disappearance (via stereotyping) that operates in tandem with literal removal.

Local historical discourse does not separate the woods from the mountains, for to do so literally would be disastrous: "What's holding up the mountains? Trees!" as Gary Bone of Dry Creek put it. Nor does it separate woods from people: "They're taking away our dignity by destroying our forest," wrote Vernon Williams on a recently circulated petition to study and protect the forest. Viewed historically, knowledge of the mixed mesophytic has aided physical and cultural survival over the past century. During what Mae Bongalis called "the Hoover times," reliance on wild foods minimized dependency on the company store. "Back in the bad times," said Bongalis, "I seen people go out, be snow on the ground. Rake that snow and leaves off, you find little sprouts like that and pick it to eat. People didn't even have grease to go on the stuff after they cooked it. They just boiled it and ate it. And we had plenty."

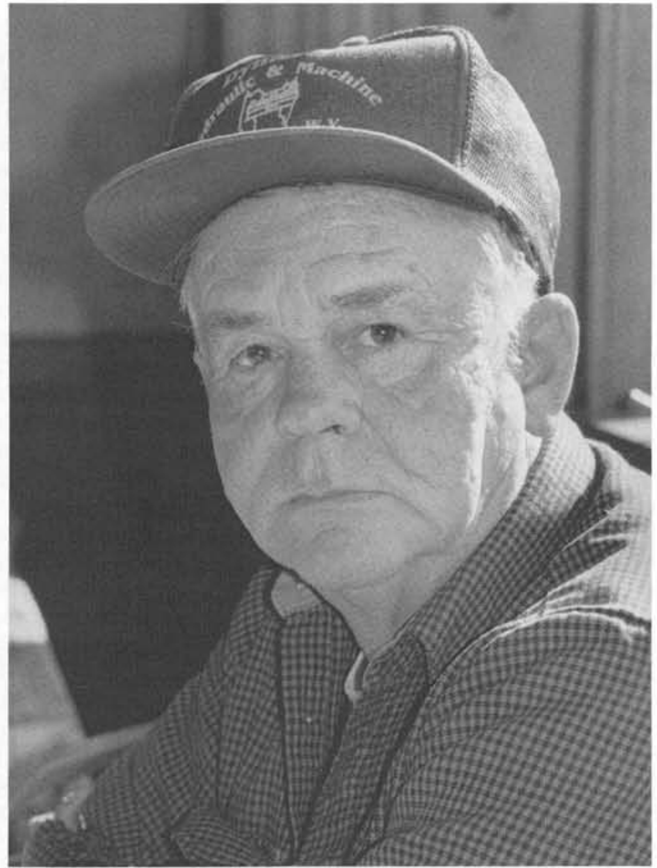
Recalling when, in a later era, the mines were idled during "slack run," Dave Bailey cited the incorporation of "commodities"—food from the government—into family menus that included "blackberry flitters" from canned wild blackberries, "shoestring beans" dried and reconstituted from the garden, and memorable casseroles built around "spam" (canned meat) from the government. For some currently "cut off from work" the woods continues to be culturally as well as economically sustaining. "I make my living in construction," wrote Dennis Price, forty, on the above-mentioned petition. "But really, I consider myself a ginsenger." His advice: "Don't lay around on your deadbeat ass and get a check from the government. There's ginseng, there's bloodroot, there's yellow root."

Place-names and related narratives fasten community history to the surrounding terrain. Taken as a whole, the names conferred on nearly every wrinkle seen from the air index forest history: Ground Squirrel Hollow, Honey Camp Hollow, Redbud Hollow, Sugar Camp Hollow, Seng Creek, Isaac's Fork, Spring Hollow, Dogfight, Ma Kelly Branch. "Each hollow has a name," emphasized Dennis Dickens, referring to the coves (also called "swags" or "drains") flanking the slopes rising away from Peach Tree Creek:

> *Now Bear Branch, what gave it its name, a man cut a bee tree, and had more honey than he could carry and he left a bucket a-sitting there.*



Ben Burnside, of Rock Creek, with "seng hoes" (for digging gingseng), made by himself and his father from modified automobile springs. (CRF-TE-B001-05) Photo by Terry Eiler



Bob Daniels, owner of Appalachian Hardwoods, Dry Creek. (CRF-MH-B005-10) Photo by Mary Hufford

And when he went back to get it, a bear had picked the bucket up and carried it out the mouth of the hollow and down the creek below there, past old Mose's house, and there set his bucket on the walk where the bear'd eat the honey out of it.

Other thresholds to local history in the forest include the "Marrying Rock," on Peach Tree Ridge where couples awaited the blessing of the circuit rider; family cemeteries, old homeplaces, wagon roads that connected families scattered on both sides of a ridge, and sites associated with Indian ancestors, like the rock mortars Mae Bongalis's grandmother showed her as they searched for red pucoon and slippery elm. "My great grandfather was an Indian witch doctor," said Bongalis.

My grandmother and all her brothers, they lived in Indian Creek. She'd take us up in them woods and she'd take an old stick and go to raking leaves and dirt, and show us in the cliffs where there was a hole — be about this big, then go down til it was little. They'd take what they call a hickory maul, and they'd put their corn down in that hollow, and then beat it with that maul til they had meal to bake bread, and she said, they built a fire on these big rocks and get them real hot and then they wiped them off and put their corn meal on and stir it up on that and bake it.

The rocks were charred when Bongalis was a girl, and the mature trees her grandmother pointed out were saplings when their ancestors hung meat on them to cure.

Such accounts, which bolster a sense of belonging on the land, also help to maintain a critical perspective on the historical process that has shaped the region's destiny. Recurrent in oral tradition are vignettes that dramatically pit the knowledge of corporate agents against the intimate knowledge of area residents. "Now what did you say to the guy when he told you you could get three hundred dollars for your walnut if it was one inch larger?" John Flynn asked Dennis Dickens. "I told him I'd just wait for it to grow," Dennis Dickens responded, to appreciative guffaws. "You know, that walnut tree is just about the same age I am."[13]

Mae Bongalis, of Naoma. One of the earliest women to mine coal, she entered the mines at the age of eight to help her father. (CRF-TE-B005-01) Photo by Terry Eiler

In national news coverage of environmental crises, one often hears the argument that environmental regulation costs jobs. Indeed, high rates of unemployment in places like Coal River are usually cited to rationalize controversial forms of resource extraction and use. In Stickney, Gary Bone, an unemployed coal miner, challenges the pitting of economic growth against environmental health: "You can't destroy our environment just because we have a depressed economy."

The talk on Coal River constitutes a missing perspective in the national environmental debate. Shifting toward "ecosystem management," the U.S. Forest Service grapples with the question of where human beings fit into ecosystems. The task is to create environmental policy that registers local as well as national and global concerns. Sifting through the rubble of progress, tallying the cost, voices beneath the canopy compel a hearing.

Notes

1. See E. Lucy Braun, *The Eastern Deciduous Forests of Eastern North America*. New York: Macmillan, 1950, pp. 39-121.

2. For further discussion, see Charles Little, *The Dying of the Trees*. New York: Viking, 1995.

3. For instance, Gregg Easterbrook, in a bid for "ecorealism," writes that "North America does appear a great deal different compared with how it must have looked five centuries ago, but what is nature's perspective? At the small scale level upon which most earthly creatures dwell, hardly anything has transpired." "Thinking Like Nature: The Environment in Perspective," *Washington Post Magazine*, April 9, 1995, p. 19.

4. The distinction between the forest as a world to act upon from without and a world to be shaped from within is drawn from Kathleen Stewart's contrast between touristic acts of remembering and the effort of southern West Virginians "exiled" at home to "remember" what is constantly dis-

membered. See her "Nostalgia—A Polemic," *Cultural Anthropology* 3:227-41, 1988.

5. For example, in *The Southern Appalachian Forests*, published by the Department of Agriculture, 1905, a photograph of a forest is captioned: "Timber is a crop." In a song sheaf recently donated to the Archive of Folk Culture entitled "Songs of the Foresters," the song "Schenks's Foresteers" celebrates early reforestation efforts in the Cradle of American Forestry. Its chorus (to the tune of "John Brown's Body") goes "Pinus, Pinus Ponderosa (3x) in Schenks's Foresteers!" Nearly a century later, much that is advertised as sustainable forestry still comprises evergreen plantations. See, for instance, the advertisement in the "Outlook" section of the *Washington Post*, Sunday, June 18, 1995.

6. Yellow or "mountain" locust is the local term for what botanists recognize as a subspecies of black locust. In contrast to the black or "field" locust that sprouts in open fields and makes a bad fence, yellow locust is a towering, rot-resistant cove species. While not highly regarded by foresters, yellow locust is prized locally as the wood of choice for fences, barns, mining posts, and an excellent heat source in distilling whiskey.

7. Chinquapin here refers to the shrub chestnut, *Castanea pumila*, not to be confused with the Chinquapin oak.

8. See John Flynn, "Epidemic: Forest Death Similar to Black Lung in Trees," *Beckley Register-Herald*, October 6, 1991; and "Experts: Clean Air Act Not Enough," *Amicus Journal*, Spring 1991.

9. Pat Canterbury, of Naoma, pointed out that, in place of the old "3 R's"—"Readin, Ritin, and Route 21," which in the 1950s and 60s alluded to outmigration as an imperative for economic survival—a new "3 R's" is making the rounds: "Remove (the mountain top), Remove (the coal), and Reclaim (the land, usually with grass)."

10. Quoted in John Flynn's memo to Orie Loucks, June 16, 1995.

11. Charles Briggs discusses historical discourse in *Competence and Performance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988) as a mode of speaking that constructs the past. Thinking of history as a symbolic construct that relates past, present, and future, historical discourse models historical process.

12. *Passing the Time in Ballymenone*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981, p. 652.

13. James Jarrell reported to John Flynn that Dickens recently dismissed yet another timber agent with the words, "I'll sell as soon as you have enough horses to pull it all out." Telephone conversation with John Flynn, July 24, 1995.

EDITOR'S NOTES *from page 2*

that took place across the street in the U.S. Capitol. The Center figured in an unexpected way in the legislative branch appropriations process (which provides the annual budget for the Library of Congress, the Government Printing Office, the Architect of the Capitol, Congress itself, and several other legislative branch agencies). An amendment in the House of Representatives to the legislative branch appropriations bill proposed transferring the Center's allotment to the Congressional Budget Office to be used for implementing the "unfunded mandates" legislation authorized earlier this year (some members suggested the Center might raise private funds for its work).

As word of the action spread, Center supporters called and wrote their congressional representatives to express concern for the future of the Center (which regularly raises private money for exhibitions, publications, and special projects but is dependent on federal money for the basic functions of collection maintenance, reference service, and administration). On their own initiative or at the request of constituents, a number of members spoke on the House floor in support of the Center. Nevertheless, the amendment was passed by the full House.

The House action resulted in a profusion of publicity ranging from reports in newsletters and magazines in the field of folklife to sympathetic coverage in major newspapers such as the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Sun Times*, and the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*.

On July 18, the Senate Appropriations Committee reported its bill for legislative branch appropriations. In it, the Center received full funding at its current level. According to the committee report, the American Folklife Center's "programs, combined with presentations, research projects, publications, and exhibitions benefit hundreds of thousands of Americans annually and strengthen public education about America's cultural heritage. The Committee believes this vibrant element of the Library provides a benefit to the American people far greater than its relatively low cost, and strongly supports its activities." On July 20, the bill was passed on the floor of the Senate. On July 27, the House-Senate Conference met to reconcile the House and Senate versions of the bill, and the Folklife Center's funding was fully restored (in other words, the Senate version was accepted by the House).

The Center's authorization process (separate from the legislative appropriations process) began on July 19, when Sen. Mark Hatfield (R-Oregon) introduced a bill (S. 1051) providing for a four-year term. The bill is cosponsored by Senators Ted Stevens (R-Alaska), Thad Cochran (R-Mississippi), Claiborne Pell (D-Rhode Island), Daniel Moynihan (D-New York), and Harry Reid (D-Nevada). That process must be completed by October 1, when the present legislation expires.

Correction

Domenick Sportelli, owner of The Hot Grill in Paterson, New Jersey, writes that "on page 11 of [*Folklife Center News*, spring 1995), the name of my partner Carmen LaMendola is misspelled. Also it is noted that Pete Leonidas has since passed away! He is alive and well in Cyprus, Greece." Apologies to Mr. LaMendola and Mr. Leonidas for the errors. Mr. Sportelli also asks for additional copies of the newsletter, "due to the demand among customers and friends alike." Apparently they have been going like, ah, Hot Texas Wieners!

Gerald E. Parsons, folklorist, 1940-1995

Gerald E. Parsons, reference librarian for the Archive of Folk Culture at the American Folklife Center for twenty-one years, died on July 13, at the Washington Hospital Center, where he was undergoing treatment for cancer. A memorial service attended by over two hundred people was held at Saint Mark's Episcopal Church on Capitol Hill, on July 20. In 1994, Parsons created "The Gerald E. and Corinne L. Parsons Fund for Ethnography at the Library of Congress," in honor of his parents (see *Folklife Center News*, winter 1995, for articles by and about Gerald Parsons, including one on the Parsons Fund). Donations may be made to the fund in Parsons's memory. Make checks payable to the Library of Congress Trust Fund Board, with "Donation to the Parsons Fund" written on the comment line. Send checks to the Library of Congress, American Folklife Center, Washington, D.C. 20540-8100. Parsons was an avid outdoorsman who spent many hours in railbird marshes and duck blinds along the Patuxent River and on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. In this photograph, he poles a New Jersey skiff on the Patuxent River near Upper Marboro, Maryland, while former Folklife Center staffer Carl Fleischhauer attempts to record Frank Astemborski and Jim Owings, who are railbirding nearby, September 1984. (PFP84-BPJ-233888-2-25) Photo by Paula Johnson

The mixed mesophytic forest on Rock Creek Hollow in early spring. Originating in coves throughout the central Appalachian plateaus, the mixed mesophytic is, according to ecologists, the world's oldest and biologically richest temperate zone hardwood system. In an article by Mary Hufford, residents on West Virginia's Coal River describe the effects of air pollution on their region and way of life, page 10.
(original in color: CRF-TE-C001-10) Photo by Terry Eiler

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
AMERICAN FOLKLIFE CENTER
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20540-8100

OFFICIAL BUSINESS
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE, $300

BULK RATE
POSTAGE & FEES PAID
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
WASHINGTON, D.C.
PERMIT No. G-103

ISSN 0149-6840 Catalog Card No. 77-649628