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Lost Cove, North Carolina: The Life and Death of a Thriving Community (1864-1957)

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of Liberal Studies
East Tennessee State University

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of the requirements for the degree
Masters of Arts in Liberal Studies

by
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December 2007

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ABSTRACT

Lost Cove, North Carolina: The Life and Death of a Thriving Community (1864-1957)

by

Christy A. Smith

This research examines the history and events that shaped the people and community of Lost Cove, an isolated Appalachian settlement. Chapter 1 surveys previous written and oral accounts of Lost Cove and the physical/cultural attributes of the community. Chapter 2 explores Lost Cove’s identity, name, and first settlers. Chapter 3 explores the community’s buildings and the families’ livelihood. Chapter 4 examines the effect that the CC & O Railway and the sawmills had on the community. Chapter 5 examines moonshine selling in Lost Cove. Chapter 6 reveals how the church and school acted as a gathering place and how sermons and funerals were conducted. Chapter 7 explains why Lost Cove became a ghost town. Much of the information in chapters 3 through 7 is based on oral history interviews that the author did with former residents of the cove.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer is grateful for the many stories about the history and lifeways of Lost Cove told to her by former residents J.C. Bryant, Geneva McNabb, Homer Tipton, and Isaiah Bailey and Lost Cove preacher Verno Davis. All informants were especially warm and have become a part of my family. Their stories are embedded in my mind and I will never forget their patience, kindness, love, and friendship. To the wonderful, wise mentor, Dr. Tess Lloyd, appreciation is due for encouraging my interest in Appalachian culture and history, as well as guiding me to capture the best stories residing among Appalachian people. Dr. Kevin O’Donnell, my friend and former professor, deserves praise for his patience and direction. Without him, I would not have had the courage and discipline to follow up this thesis with a documentary. Dr. Marie Tedesco, my graduate coordinator, merits commendation for her guidance and counsel in helping me complete a graduate program that incorporates my own roots. Of course, my most indebted gratitude belongs to my mother, my hero, who instilled in me compassion, strength, and faith.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Deep in the remote back country of the Unaka and Bald Mountains of western North Carolina where that state borders with eastern Tennessee, nature reclaims the fields and pastures, the cabin and church yards of “Lost Cove.”

For nearly 60 years, the Lost Cove community of North Carolina has remained deserted. Formerly a self-sustaining, thriving community, Lost Cove is now, according to historian Pat Alderman, “one of eastern America’s most legendary Ghost Towns,” Lost Cove’s development as a remote mountain community involved determination and strength from the people who resided on the slopes of the North Carolina and Tennessee boundary. This study examines the life of this once-thriving community during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The study considers how the cove was developed, what lifeways were like in the cove, and why the community became deserted. Information is drawn from historical documents and from oral history interviews that this author has done with former residents of Lost Cove. This history of this settlement, situated high above the Nolichucky and South Toe Rivers, demonstrates how families in remote communities throughout the Appalachians survived from the Civil War era until the mid-twentieth century.

Lost Cove has always been physically isolated. The cove lies at the edge of Mitchell County and Yancey County, North Carolina, and Unicoi County, Tennessee. The topography of Yancey County is rough, and the elevation of the ridges close to the North Carolina-Tennessee border rise above 5,000 feet. Although the cove’s elevation is only about 2,500 feet, Everett M. Kivette, “Epitaph for Lost Cove: Few Outsiders Ever Saw the Fabled Community, and Fewer Ever Will,” The State Magazine 27 (March 1971): 1.


Arthur, 179.
feet, it is situated about one mile above the gorge of the Nolichucky River (known as the Toe River in North Carolina), and this gorge is quite deep. There have never been real roads into the cove. It has been accessible only by foot trails along the river from Poplar, NC, and Erwin, TN; by a steep trail down Flat Top Mountain; and (in later years) by the railroad that runs along the river.

Yet Lost Cove nestles on nearly four hundred acres of land, and amid its fertile landscape, a small but thriving community found plenty of land to grow crops, maintain orchards, and raise animals. The streams and springs provided the water necessary for crops, animals, and moonshine. From the community’s inception around the Civil War era until the early twentieth century, Lost Cove was self-sufficient, but as the twentieth-century timber industry and railroad transportation routes grew, the cove dwellers began relying on the outside world for basic needs. Ironically, as we shall see in subsequent chapters of this thesis, this dependence contributed to the death of the community, since eventually all its residents moved away.

There is little written documentation about Lost Cove, and what exists is sometimes contradictory. Some accounts and interviews were published in local newspapers of Sullivan, Unicoi, and Washington counties in Tennessee and in Yancey and Buncombe counties in North Carolina. Newspapers from Statesville and Asheville, North Carolina, and Johnson City and Kingsport, Tennessee, also provide information. Several Appalachian Vertical Files in the Archives of Appalachia contain railroad accounts, topographical maps, and photos relevant to Lost Cove. There are no manuscripts or diaries from Lost Cove residents available.

\[4\] Ibid.
A few local histories contain information about the community. One print source that discusses the cove is John Preston Arthur’s *Western North Carolina: A History from 1730 to 1913*, an informative historical account on the settlements and boundaries of Western North Carolina. Though the accounts on Lost Cove are minimal, Authur’s book contains information about the origin of Lost Cove’s name and boundary lines. A North Carolina historian, Lloyd Bailey, Sr., mentions the cove in his in-depth account of the Toe River Valley, *The Heritage of the Toe River Valley: Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey Counties, North Carolina*. Bailey’s book blends historical accounts with church documents, genealogy, and testimonies from families who lived in the western counties of Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey. From Unicoi County historian Pat Alderman, the books *All Aboard* and *The Wonders of the Unakas in Unicoi County*, present some information about the cove, although Alderman is focused on Unicoi County.

Beyond the writers mentioned, most secondary sources in this thesis deal with Appalachia more generally, not Lost Cove specifically. Books by Deborah McCauley, William Way, Wilbur R. Miller, Mary Bogart, James A. Goforth, Henry D. Shapiro, and Bill J. Leonard provide the insight into social and cultural aspects of the Appalachian people, and these insights are applicable to the experience of Lost Cove residents.

The most important accounts of Lost Cove used in this thesis are the oral history interviews I conducted in 2007 with former residents J. C. Bryant, Isaiah Bailey, Geneva Tipton McNabb, Homer Tipton, and Lost Cove preacher, Verno Davis. During the time that I

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interviewed these people, they lived in Unicoi County, TN. I conducted an interview of former residents in several settings. I recorded the interviews on a digital voice recorder. The recordings have been deposited in the Lost Cove Collection in the Archives of Appalachia. The Lost Cove collection includes photographs released to the author, interviews by the author, railroad file citations, books, articles from magazines and newspapers, and photographs from collections already included in the Archives of Appalachia.

Since these informants and their families lived in Lost Cove during different time periods, the data about the settlement occurs during its early, middle, and later periods. Responses by the informants contain genealogy data and lifeways of the families. Sometimes my informants’ accounts contradicted the written accounts in newspapers and local history books. Determining which source is correct is difficult. However, both the written sources and the interviews agree on at least one thing: the love that residents of the cove had for their isolated homeland, even though the pressures of modern life lured them away from it.
CHAPTER 2

LOST COVE’S ESTABLISHMENT

There has long been controversy about when the first settler arrived in the cove and how the place received its name. One theory suggests that members of Daniel Boone’s group were the first to settle into the cove, while another theory notes that Stephen “Morgan” Bailey first settled there during the Civil War era. A theory about the naming of Lost Cove addresses the boundary dispute between North Carolina and Tennessee, while another theory states that the railroad named the community.

Let us begin with the question about the first settlers. Frank Elliott and J.L. Lonon proclaim that members from Daniel Boone’s group may have formed the community. In an article in Blue Ridge Country magazine, Frank Elliott notes that “accounts hold that the community was settled by members of Daniel Boone’s expeditions.”7 Elliott’s account tells about a young girl growing sick and dying during the Boone expedition. Elliott speaks about the young girl’s family burying her along the mountainside while they “built two log cabins” to start the community.8 J.L. Lonon states that when he visited the cove while it still remained inhabited by the descendents of the original settlers, an unknown woman revealed to him that:

During Daniel Boone’s trek through the twelve mile Toe-Nolichucky River Gorge, a young girl from one of the families in the Boone group took seriously ill, and as a result her family could not continue with the band. Another family of friends remained behind with them, and during the girl’s extended illness, while the men were hunting for game, they found the level plateau near the top of the mountain. There they decided to construct a lean-to shelter for the ill girl, as well as for other family members. Several days after the move, the girl died, and was buried near the hut. Reluctant to leave the grave in the wilderness, the two families

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8 Ibid., 42.
decided to build two log homes, which were soon completed. This, apparently, was the beginning of the settlement.  

Lonon also states that “the old lady recalled to me that in her girlhood days (during the Civil War) the Daniel Boone group was joined by other families who were dodging involvement in the war.” Daniel Boone did trek through the mountains of Western North Carolina and early settlers did build cabins along the Watauga and Nolichucky Rivers. However, though these accounts may hold some truth, there are no known written records stating that members of Daniel Boone’s group formed the Lost Cove community. 

Since no records indicate whether Lost Cove was formed before the Civil War, the only known written records show that Lost Cove became a settlement during the Civil War and was founded by a union soldier. Lloyd Bailey Sr., editor of The Heritage of the Toe River: Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey Counties, North Carolina, notes that the first known settler was a union soldier by the name of Stephen “Morgan” Bailey. Born in 1826, Morgan was the son of John “YellowJacket” Bailey and Lovada Ray. Morgan’s father, John, deeded over 100 acres of land to start the town of Burnsville, North Carolina. According to Lloyd Bailey, Morgan served in the Union Army (Co. F, 3rd NC Mountain Infantry) under Col. George W. Kirk. Lloyd Bailey suggests that Morgan came into the cove shortly before the Civil War, “seeking refuge from the bitter altercations” already taking place in western North Carolina, and that

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9 J.L. Lonon. Tall Tales of the Rails on the Carolina, Clinchfield, and Ohio (Johnson City: Overmountain Press, 1989), 27. Lonon’s interview with the elderly lady does not reveal the lady’s name and age.

10 Ibid.

11 Bailey, Sr., vol. 1: 139.

12 Ibid., 139.
Morgan later “claimed disability in his pension application, saying that he had fallen off a cliff and was seriously injured.”

The *Seventh Generation* website indicates that Morgan Bailey enlisted in the Union Army on June 11, 1864, and was discharged on August 8, 1865, before the Civil War ended. If Morgan did see this military service, it may seem unlikely that he came to Lost Cove in 1861. However, he may have entered Lost Cove before 1864 and re-entered the cove again in 1865. In an article published in the *Daily News*, Velmer Bailey, great grandson of Morgan Bailey, recounts how his great-grandfather was the first man to build a cabin in the cove. Since deeds were informal back then, most settlements were not established until the government cleared the land for timber. Informant Isaiah Bailey, Velmer’s son, recollects that his great great-grandfather Morgan Bailey bought land in Lost Cove by trading his shotgun and paying ten dollars for the land.

There is no doubt that Morgan Bailey settled into the Cove around 1861 to 1865. Why he moved there is another question. Possibly he was trying to escape the ravages of the Civil War, which brought chaos to the mountains of Western North Carolina. This area was a constant (if non-formal) battleground: brothers fighting brothers, fathers against sons, and neighbors against neighbors. Gordon McKinney’s article “The Civil War in Appalachia” depicts a time of destruction and fear among families in the southern Appalachian Mountains. McKinney states that “communities were destroyed by confrontations as large armies marched

13 Ibid.


16 Isaiah Bailey, interview by author, 4 October 2007, Erwin, TN, digital audio interview.
across the mountains throughout the war, leaving behind desolated farms and towns and thousands of dead and wounded soldiers and civilians.”\textsuperscript{17} McKinney also notes that many mountaineers opposed forming a southern nation. In the areas of east Tennessee and northwest Virginia (now West Virginia), people “supported the national government, while in areas of western North Carolina and northern Georgia, the people were reluctant to leave the Union. The latter people had to accept the reality of the Confederacy in their states and support the Southern war effort.”\textsuperscript{18}

In their book \textit{Western North Carolina Since the Civil War}, Ina and John Van Noppen also note that “the Civil War brought disunion and discord to Western North Carolina.”\textsuperscript{19} With many young men hiding out in the mountains, the mountains became a refuge from both armies. Thus, if Morgan Bailey was motivated by a desire to avoid the divided loyalties and incessant conflict of the Civil War, Lost Cove’s rocky but fertile mountainside may have seemed like a safe haven to him and his first wife, Rebecca Deyton. In an article by Don Haines, “Gone, But Not Forgotten,” however, Ulis Miller, who lived in Lost Cove from the age of two to sixteen, states that it is “pure fiction” that Morgan Bailey settled into the cove because of his Civil War leanings.\textsuperscript{20} Miller does not dispute that Morgan Bailey was the first person in, “but it had nothing to do with the Civil War.”\textsuperscript{21}


\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 34. McKinney describes the western North Carolina’s loyalty during the Civil War era.


\textsuperscript{20} Don Haines, “Gone, But Not Forgotten: For those who lived there, the community of Lost Cove retains a special place in their hearts.” \textit{Our State Magazine} (October 2004): 152.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
My informants confirm that Morgan Bailey was the originator of the Lost Cove settlement. Mr. Bryant remembers that Lost Cove’s first settler was a man named “Bailey.” Of course, there were other families who moved into Lost Cove during the early days. In my interview with Geneva Tipton McNabb, who lived in Lost Cove from 1918-1926, Mrs. McNabb said that there were around seven families in Lost Cove when she lived there.

According to Mrs. McNabb, her grandfather, John Tipton, was another early settler who owned two hundred thirty acres in Lost Cove. John Tipton, a Union soldier with the 3rd N.C. Mtd. Infantry, walked into Lost Cove with a friend around 1864 during the wintertime. Tipton’s shoes were worn out and he became sick due to walking with only leaves wrapped around his feet. The government initially claimed that Tipton had gone AWOL, but this charge was later overturned. John Tipton did not desert the Union army. He finished out his duties and was honorably discharged. Tipton’s granddaughter, McNabb, carries his discharge papers. As for the Tipton land in Lost Cove, John told his sons to split the farm in half. Each brother built houses in Lost Cove and they and their families took up residence. These brothers were Mrs. McNabb’s father, Dokter Landon Tipton, and her uncle, Wiley Tipton.

As with the debate about Lost Cove’s first settlers, there are debates over how Lost Cove received its name. Perhaps the name came as a result of Lost Cove’s geographic isolation, accessible only by foot (or later, by train). An article in the Asheville Dailey/Gazette on February 22, 1898, entitled “Lost Cove Moonshiners,” presents a different idea about the name. The article explained that revenue agents could not visit the area of Lost Cove due to

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22 Bryant Interview, March 9 2007.


24 Ibid.
the boundary dispute between the states of North Carolina and Tennessee. Neither state could claim the area, and hence it was a “Lost Cove.”

This boundary dispute is worth further examination. John Preston Arthur claims that Captain James M. Gudger from North Carolina and J. R. Neal, a surveyor, were appointed by Governor Scales to determine at what point on the Nolichucky (or Toe) River crosses the state line. The North Carolina and Tennessee commissioners would not yield to the other. Since neither state could claim the jurisdiction of land or determine the state boundary lines, the commissioners named the border territory “Lost Cove.”

Others who have written about Lost Cove have passed down their stories from other accounts. In his railroad book, J.L. Lonon states that the “name ‘Lost Cove’ was given to the settlement by the railroad.” However, the name “Lost Cove” was used before the Carolina, Clinchfield, and Ohio (CC & O) was built in 1909 through the Toe and Nolichucky Rivers. Whatever the origin of the name, it served the settlement well.

No matter why or when Lost Cove was settled, Lost Cove was populated by the spirited mountain folk who thrived as families for nearly one hundred years. The kinship among families provided a stable environment. Through pure determination, these families built their homes in the rough, forested wilderness of the Appalachians. Their lifeways will be the topic of the next chapter.


26 Arthur, 1. Notes by Captain Gudger are deposited by him with his report with the Secretary of State at Raleigh. See Pub. Doc. 1887, and Dugger v. McKesson, 100 N.C., p.1.


CHAPTER 3

LIFEWAYS OF THE FAMILIES

The Civil War turned Lost Cove into a thriving community. After Morgan Bailey’s family moved into the cove, other families followed. By the late 1860s, families such as the Tiptons and Millers nestled into this secluded community.\(^{29}\) The people of Lost Cove were determined to battle the harsh elements and live a quiet life, away from the chaos of war. Since Lost Cove sits high above the Nolichucky Gorge, the terrain was ideal for an alternate life. Stories that I received when I interviewed the descendents of the original Lost Cove settlers show a glimpse of the inhabitants of Lost Cove and the folkways of these inhabitants.

J. C. Bryant, one of my interviewees, notes that his grandfather and grandmother, Arch and Cindy Miller, moved into Lost Cove around 1926. His grandparents came into to help out his relatives Swin and Martha Miller.\(^ {30}\) Since all of the families in Lost Cove were related, the settlement housed generations and generations of Baileys, Tiptons, Millers, and Bryants. Mr. Bryant lived in Lost Cove from the age of two to eighteen (that is, between 1934 and 1952). He discusses the physical arrangement the houses in the cove from 1930s to the 1950s:

From Lost Cove Station, Mack English’s house sat next to Devil’s Creek. After English’s house came Aunt Hester and Uncle Wiley’s house, then the Miller’s house, Frank Bryant’s house, Swin Miller’s house, Velmer Bailey’s house, Clifford Miller’s house, Chester Bailey’s house, Bob Miller’s house, the School and Church building, then John Miller’s house, and the sawmill.\(^ {31}\)

\(^{29}\) Elliot, 42.

\(^{30}\) Bryant Interview, March 9 2007.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.
All in all, there were around thirteen houses while Mr. Bryant resided in Lost Cove, including three houses above Mack English’s house in Big Cove. Mr. Bryant did not know who lived in all of them. In addition to the inhabitants who lived in the cove proper, Mr. Bryant notes that as early as 1915, the section gang lived in the railroad houses in Canebottom, down along the river’s edge. There were eight to nine houses in Canebottom.32

Families in Lost Cove always relied on each other. For those living in the western mountains of North Carolina, frontier life was marked with poverty. From the 1870s to early 1890s, the only contact the settlement had with the outside world was a rugged and tedious trail that crept two and one-half miles around the mountain to Poplar, North Carolina. The families used a sled to haul their herbs and crops to the trading post in Poplar. In Poplar, the families bartered their goods. Although Lost Cove’s settlement changed due to the building of the railroad and the first sawmill in the early 1900s, families continued to need one another for survival.

Lost Cove families worked together to provide enough food and shelter for all in the settlement. Mr. Bryant states that “if

32 Ibid.
we lacked an item, we would borrow it from another family, and next year we would return the item. In other words we borrowed.”

Pat Alderman’s book discusses similar patterns. According to Alderman, because places such as the cove had fertile grounds and lush forest, the families who lived in such locations could produce crops, fruits, and ginseng in order to sustain themselves. They swapped some of these items for goods such as houseware, kerosene oil, coffee, pepper, and molasses. Items like sugar cane and honey were desirable, for these items were needed for taming the sweet tooth.

Since Lost Cove families made little money, they could not always depend on having ready cash. Fortunately, the mountains provided much that they needed to survive. In Don Haines’ article, Trina Fox, who lived in Lost Cove in the 1920s, remembers how abundant the supply of mulberries, apples, and peaches was, for these fruits provided the basis for jellies

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33 Ibid.

34 Pat Alderman, *In the Shadow of the Big Bald: About the Appalachians and Their People* (Mars Hill: Bald Mountain Development Corporation, 1972), 64.
Cove dwellers also had chickens, hogs, and cows for meat. Mr. Bryant states that the abundance of corn, potatoes, cucumbers, tomatoes, and green beans allowed each family to prosper.36

Kinship was a constant force in the settlement, and its effect could be seen in food processing and storage. Bryant said that at night time, after the family picked beans, his aunt Martha would come down to the house. The family would string the beans and lay them on sheets to let them dry. Most of the women in Lost Cove would also gather together to help cook the beans on a boiler and can them. Canning, like drying, was important to the families because it offered food in the wintertime. The families also shucked corn together.37

According to Bryant, each family had a garden. Since almost every house had plenty of spring water when irrigation was needed, the gardens flourished. Bryant notes that the some of

35 Haines, 42.
36 Bryant Interview, March 9, 2007.
37 Ibid.
the gardens were flat and some were sloped. The fertile land provided enough crops not just for
his family but other families in Lost Cove.\footnote{Ibid.}

Horses were used to till the gardens. Mr. Bryant notes that the families used the old
disc tillers, drawn by the horses, when preparing the soil for planting. Planting tobacco every
other year was a constant, and every year the family planted cane. Mr. Bryant states that
tobacco did not grow as well as cane or other crops. Bryant and his friend Homer Tipton, who
lived with Bryant’s family in Lost Cove, used hoes to dig lines for planting the potatoes.

Farming and gardening
sometimes was done according to
the signs. When I interviewed
Homer Tipton, he discussed when
potatoes were dug. By using the
farmer’s almanac, Tipton explains
“when the full moon starts going
down, that’s when you want to dig
your potatoes.”\footnote{Homer Tipton, interview by author, 6 September 2007, Erwin, TN, digital audio recorder.}

From the early 1930s-1940s
Bryant’s family sold herbs. Bryant
discusses how his family hunted
ginseng to sell in Poplar. With
ginseng being a predominant herb

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{revbob.png}
\caption{Rev. Bob Miller House (1980s). Permission to use photograph provided by Jeff Bryant. Erwin, TN.}
\end{figure}
throughout the southern Appalachians, the rich herb provided a great source of income for the families in Lost Cove.

Mr. Bryant also states that he, his mother, and his sisters made hook-rugs to sell in the late 1930s to late 1940s. He notes that his family lived by selling ginseng and hook-rugs. He also states that the rounded and oblong hook-rugs were made from old socks, burlap sacks, lamp oil, soot, and a needle with which Mr. Bryant would weave flowers, such as roses, into patterns. The old socks came from factories around the area. The factories supplied misshaped socks for families to use as materials. If families were using factory goods, by this time the cove was not strictly self-sufficient.

In Mrs. McNabb’s interview, she discusses how her family’s garden and livestock provided abundant food for the family. McNabb says that there was always a garden in Lost Cove. My family had plenty of everything to eat; beef, pork, store canned food, and sausage. A lot of times they had to eat cornbread for breakfast, but it didn’t stump me. They also roasted corn and potatoes in the fireplace ashes. The family loved parched corn. Horses and cattle were abundant, as well as apple orchards, wild strawberries, and blackberries. She comments that there was always plenty of food to eat, and her family never wanted for anything. McNabb speaks about storing cabbage and potatoes in the wintertime by digging holes and covering the cabbage and potatoes with straw. Storing these crops in the ground enabled the family to eat cabbage and potatoes if they did not have enough canned foods to eat. As for storing milk, butter, and fruits, the family deposited the goods along the spring branch,

40 Ibid.
41 McNabb Interview, September 26 2007.
42 Ibid.
where they dug a hole. The depth of the hole and coolness of the water allowed the milk, butter, and fruits to remain fresh.  

Of course, chores were assigned for the children in Lost Cove. Mr. Bryant had to collect wood to cook food and heat the house. His chores also included carrying water from the spring, plowing the fields, and hoeing corn.

Mrs. McNabb acknowledges that she and her siblings always had chores. Mostly, she had to find the younger children and send them to the house, or she had to carry water from the spring. McNabb insists that when her parents told her and her siblings to do a chore, they did the chore without saying they did not want to do so.

Let us turn from foodways to architecture. Undoubtedly, before the arrival of sawn lumber, houses and barns were built of logs, and one of the remaining structures in the cove at the time of this writing is built of logs covered with weatherboards. Mrs. McNabb states that since around 1910, residents built the houses with

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43 Ibid.

44 Bryant Interview, March 9 2007.

45 McNabb Interview, September 26 2007.
wood from the Mack English sawmill. The English sawmill produced boards from walnut, chestnut, oak, and poplar, and the houses built from these materials endured decades of weather. McNabb also describes the chimney of her house, which was built with creek rock. Inside, the fireplace held an iron rod and kettle for cooking beans.46

The houses had plenty of furnishings and even some frills that offered warmth and security. Featherbeds and quilts kept the residents warm. Mrs. McNabb states that the walls had Sears Roebuck catalogs paper glued to them. She says, “the family used to laugh at the wallpaper and stand on their heads to read the catalogs.” The kitchen had an old-time cook stove with an oven above it for cooking cornbread. The house had a pie cupboard. The kitchen table, made out of hardwood, had two long benches on each side for children’s seating.47

Mr. Bryant notes that the family house “was built out of big logs, a log house.” Mr. Bryant goes on to say that the family used clay between the logs so the house would remain airtight. Creek rock became the foundation of the house. The logs laid on top of the rock to remain level. The men would cut long poles to make rafters, and then they would make board shingles and cover them. The window panes were bought in Johnson City, Tennessee, and the families made their doors out of the lumber from the saw mill.48 Mr. Bryant adds that weatherboard was also used for siding. He states that from “the 1920s to early 1940s, the sawmills in there, gave each family a pattern for a house. . . . The lumber was hemlock pine. The pine was the best a person could get at the time.”49

46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Bryant Interview, March 9 2007.
49 Ibid.
Inside the Bryant house, the walls were plastered in newspaper and pasteboard. A big cook stove heated the house. In the kitchen, though, one could feed the chickens through the cracks in the floor. A rug lay on the floor, and in the wintertime when the wind blew, the rug would rise up off the floor. The house had four rooms. The kitchen and dining room were one big room with a separate sitting room and bedrooms. The family used straw beds with feathers on them most of the time. Mr. Bryant’s mother made quilts as well. The materials for the quilts were made of cotton and scraps from clothes.  

Structures such as barns, corncribs, and outbuildings enabled the families to store their crops. According to Isaiah Bailey, the Velmer Bailey family owned two big barns, a corn crib, an apple shed, and a wood shed to store the kindling and firewood. The family raised about forty to fifty bushels of apples a year. Swin Miller’s family had a big barn and corncrib too. Barns and corncribs helped the families store crops so that the crops could remain fresh and animals could not reach the produce.

Figure 6
John Miller Smokehouse (1980s). Permission to use photograph provided by Jeff Bryant, Erwin, TN.

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50 Ibid.

51 Isaiah Bailey Interview, October 4 2007.

52 Ibid.
Mr. Bryant has many stories that involve these barns and sheds. For example, Mr. Bryant notes that Velmer Bailey (Bryant’s second cousin), John Miller (Bryant’s uncle), and Swin Miller (Bryant’s uncle) had apple orchards that supplied a large quantity of apples. John Miller used a smokehouse as an apple house for storing these apples. Velmer also stored his apples in the loft of his barn. Mr. Bryant acknowledges that Velmer’s sons and he would get apples to eat at nighttime, though Velmer never said a word to them. When Velmer came outside to lock up the barn and heard the boys talking, he would turn around and go back to the house until they left the loft. Mr. Bryant notes that Velmer never locked them in the barn.  

Apples were clearly an important crop. Mrs. McNabb also states that her father, Dokter, also owned a huge apple orchard, nearly 115 acres up past the cemetery and along the mountainside. Of course, Mrs. McNabb’s family lived in Lost Cove in the earlier years; Bryant lived there later. Hence, we can see the maintenance of traditional subsistence patterns through the years.

Since fresh spring water ran next to every house, the families relied on the water for gardening, cooking, and drinking. According to Mr. Bryant, Lost Cove spring water ran nonstop. Velmer Bailey’s house had the best spring water; the water came straight out of the mountain. In a Johnson City Press Chronicle article, dated April 3, 1958, Velmer Bailey states that “the water is the best in the world, and contagious diseases seldom reach us.” Mrs. McNabb notes that the spring water next to her house overflowed every springtime. 

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53 Bryant Interview, March 9 2007.
54 McNabb Interview, September 26 2007.
55 Bryant Interview, March 9 2007.
57 McNabb Interview, September 26 2007.
flowed consistently throughout Lost Cove.

Other important aspects of the lifeways of a community are health care and child birth. If any family member in Lost Cove became ill, the families sent for the doctor by hiking out of the cove to Poplar (or later, by train). According to Mrs. McNabb, Dr. Jeff Cooper, a local Poplar doctor, delivered her in 1918 at her family’s house in Lost Cove. Doc Cooper named her “Geneva” after “Geneva, Switzerland.” Mrs. McNabb also states that her brothers and sisters were born in the family home. 58 In Haines’ article, Hazel Miller, Clifford Miller’s wife, also states the Dr. Jeff Cooper was the doctor who would come into the cove. However, Mrs. Miller goes on to say that “most babies in the 1930s and 1940s were delivered by a midwife named Lizzie Howell.” 59 According to Mr. Miller, Lizzie also doctored people and stayed in Lost Cove if more than one baby was due about the same time. 60

The outside world reached Lost Cove not only when doctors and midwives arrived for births and sickness but also by the mail. According to Haines’ article, Clifford Miller states that “we picked up our mail at a place called Caro-Tenn, because it was on the North Carolina-Tennessee border. Outgoing mail was placed on a metal arm by the postmaster, and a train would come by and snatch it.” 61 Even Alderman states that Lost Cove’s post office was named “Carotenn in honor of the two states that practically bordered their settlement. This post office officially closed in 1920.” 62 Though Mr. Bailey does not remember a post office in Lost Cove,

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58 Ibid.
59 Haines, 155.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 John B. Alderman, Historical Materials, 1970-78, Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Series II, Box 5:5.
he does recall his family and others receiving their mail from the Poplar store. Bailey notes that “there was a big box of mail for Lost Cove residents, everyone’s mail was put in it, and whoever went up to Poplar would return with the mail.” One could walk up to Poplar to get the mail, even though by Mr. Bailey’s youth most cove dwellers rode the train to make it easier to bring home whatever groceries they bought.63

In many ways, then, the families of Lost Cove were self-sufficient. But there seems to have always been trade with the outside world, even when trade involved hauling products on a sled. Additionally, medical care was provided by doctors and midwives who lived outside of the settlement. Even mail allowed families to keep in touch with the world outside of the small settlement. While the outside world, beyond the settlement, brought needed income, care, and mail to the families, one outside influence changed Lost Cove forever--the coming of the railroad. That change brought in extra money, but it also eventually devastated the landscape and livelihood of the community.

63 Bailey Interview, September 27 2007.
CHAPTER 4
THE PROSPEROUS YEARS: THE CAROLINA, CLINFIELD, AND OHIO RAILWAY AND LOGGING

From the late 1890s to around 1905, the construction of the South and Western Railway (now called the Carolina, Clinchfield, & Ohio Railway or the CC & O) through the rocky Nolichucky Gorge provided a new way of life for Lost Cove residents. The railroad allowed Lost Cove and other small settlements such as Huntdale, Poplar, and Relief to prosper. As the CC & O railway linked the small settlements to the outside world, the way of life in Lost Cove blossomed, since the railroad also made it possible to sell timber. With trains stopping at Lost Cove Station, families like the Coopers, Hensleys, and Arrowoods moved into Lost Cove because of work being offered. Thus, passenger and freight trains enabled the families to prosper through trading and timber.

The Clinchfield Railroad was the costliest construction in railroad history as well as the finest example of railway construction anywhere. Of course, there was a dispute over who would build the railroad through the Nolichucky Gorge. According to William Way’s book *The Clinchfield Railroad*, there was a bitter altercation between the Southern Railway and the South & Western Railroad (now the CC & O). This altercation focused on the construction of the railway from Poplar, North Carolina to Unaka Springs, Tennessee. When Way gathered his information from the Clinchfield offices in Erwin, he heard this story from the workers:

In about 1905, the Southern Railway, ‘considering the C.C. & O. a menace to the integrity of its property,’ began surveys for a competitive line, presumably to forestall the construction of the Clinchfield, then the South & Western. The Southern was planning to extend its line from Embreeville through the Gorge, and on across the

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64 Mary Hattan Bogart, *Conquering the Appalachians: Building the Western Maryland and Carolina, Clinchfield & Ohio Railroads Through the Appalachian Mountains* (Dexter: Thomson-Shore, Inc., 2000), 42.
mountains. The two lines crossed and re-crossed, and practically coincided at numerous places. At one point near Poplar, the rights of way of the two companies crossed at grade in a tunnel. Litigation followed, and the Clinchfield, in order to hold its rights, placed a force of men at work on the tunnel approach. It seems that the case was postponed from time to time, and the Clinchfield’s construction gang had been reduced to one aged negro with a wheelbarrow and a spade. The negro remained on his job for about three years, and finally the Southern decided not to construct the line. The point in litigation was not utilized by the Clinchfield, for today it passes along the opposite side of the river.\textsuperscript{65}

Thus, a lone African American man whose name is unknown was the only thing that kept the Southern Railway from building the line.

When the railroad gangs (section men) labored to construct the rails through the Nolichucky Gorge, houses were built for them. Later, section men helped the railroad maintain the lines through the gorge. Whether trains turned over or flooding occurred, the section men fixed or hauled out broken rails and trains. According to Bryant, the camp houses stood about one mile above the Lost Cove train stop in Canebottom, between Poplar and Lost Cove proper. There were at least eight or nine houses in Canebottom. The section gangs consisted of not only whites but also of African Americans. However, the African American workers stayed mostly in abodes called “shanty houses.” Mr. Bryant describes the “shanty houses” as railroad cars that sat on the sidetrack rails. Thus, at Canebottom, the sidetracks were used for not only gathering and hauling timber, but also for housing people. Though the African American workers were separated from the white workers, Bryant does not remember racism in the work situation.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{65} William Way, Jr., \textit{The Clinchfield Railroad: The Story of a Trade Route Across the Blue Ridge Mountain} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1931), 156.

\textsuperscript{66} Bryant Interview, March 9 2007.
Since the section men worked on the rails throughout the day, the trains heading north and south needed to signal the men in order for the trains to not kill or hurt any railroad workers.  

In Way’s book, readers learn that the “enginemen [would] sound whistle at abrupt curves between Unaka Springs and Poplar between 7:00 am and 4:30 pm, as a warning to section men.”  

In James Goforth’s book, Building the Clinchfield: A Construction History of America’s Most Unusual Railroad, Goforth presents a detailed railroad schedule for the trains. In the December 7, 1908 schedule, the CC & O lists Lost Cove as having a water station. Water stations were necessary for running the steam engines while providing water for the workers.

The CC & O provided the perfect opportunity for linking the small settlement to the outside world. In general, railroads throughout Appalachia allowed communities to prosper, even if it meant destroying their sense of place. The railroad not only allowed Lost Cove

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67 Ibid.

68 Way, 271. Way provides a list of general laws on the railway held by the Carolina, Clinchfield, and Ohio.

families to reach the outside world, but it also brought the outside world to Lost Cove. In Ronald L. Lewis’ article, “Appalachian Myths and the Legacy of Coal,” Lewis explains that:

Railroads returned with manufactured products, such as dry goods, household furnishings, farm supplies, and other items people purchased from mail-order catalogs. The railroad connected local communities to the national markets and, as elsewhere in rural America, exerted a profound influence on the standard of living. They were the lines of communication [in that they] made available newspapers, the telegraph, and the telephone, while at the same time integrating Appalachians into the national culture and identity.  

Thus, although telephones and paved roads never reached Lost Cove, North Carolina, Lost Cove still had a modern connection with the outside world. When the South and Western Railway (CC & O) was completed from Poplar, North Carolina, to Unaka Springs, Tennessee, Lost Cove became a prominent stop for the trains. While families carried produce to the trading post to sell, they also traveled to the grocery store and doctor by train. Now, the families did not have to walk the treacherous sled trail anymore, even though some still did.

According to the CC & O vertical files located in the Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State University, in 1917, the number of Lost Cove passengers riding the rails southbound exceeded no more than twelve per day, while the number of passengers riding northbound exceeded no more than four.  

Way’s railroad information does not show the train times for rail stations in 1931, but he does state that “Nos. 37 and 38 will stop at Unaka Springs and Lost Cove on signal.” According to Mrs. McNabb, the passenger trains ran south toward Poplar in the morning and north toward Erwin in the afternoon.

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71 Carolina, Clinchfield, and Ohio Railway vertical files. Archives of Appalachia: East Tennessee State University.

72 Way, 261. Way addresses stations for which no time is shown for the trains to stop.

73 McNabb Interview, September 26 2007.
Mr. Bryant states that he and his family rode the passenger trains many times. Bryant liked to ride the train to Poplar to get groceries around 12 pm. Since the trains turned around in Huntdale, North Carolina, the passengers had one hour to shop. Mr. Bryant’s family also rode the trains to Johnson City and Erwin, Tennessee. Even though the trains cost ten cents to ride, all of Bryant’s family traveled with free passes, since Bryant’s father, Frank, was a section gang worker on the CC & O.\textsuperscript{74}

Getting on the train was something of a ritual. Since Lost Cove Station lay along a 3% grade, the trains glided down the river past it. In order to stop, the trains had to

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\textsuperscript{74} Bryant Interview, March 9 2007.
squeeze their brakes about three-fourths of a mile above the station. The brakeman would jump off the train, and place the stool down on the ground for passengers to step-up into the train.  

Sometimes the trains heading into Erwin didn’t even stop for Mr. Bryant. Mr. Bryant laughs about his adventures on the train. The engineers knew when J.C. would be riding the train. According to Mr. Bryant, “the trains would blow the whistle twice up above Lost Cove Station. The whistle blowing would signal the brakeman to slow the train down just enough for Bryant to jump on the train.”

The passenger trains slowed down without stopping for Mr. Bryant, especially when he was the only person riding the train.

Mrs. McNabb also recollects impromptu train rides. She and her friends would “swing the trains” after swimming in the Nolichucky so they could ride up to Canebottom where her

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75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.
Uncle Tom Tipton and Aunt June lived. Tom Tipton’s house sat next to the Nolichucky River on level ground, in Canebottom. The trains would slow down just enough for the kids to jump on and off the train. Mr. Bailey notes that he always rode the train to Huntdale and Erwin. While Mr. Bailey lived in Lost Cove, the cost of riding the passenger trains varied. Mr. Bailey notes that “to ride from Lost Cove to Erwin was twenty-six cents a person. A kid under twelve was free, and a kid over twelve was ten cents or fifteen.”

Though the passenger trains provided opportunities for the families, Mr. Bryant often walked the railroad tracks to Lost Cove from Poplar, North Carolina, or Erwin, Tennessee. Mrs. McNabb said that even after the family left Lost Cove in 1926, the family often walked to visit family and pick apples in her father, Dokter Tipton’s, orchard. Even the trains never deterred families from walking the railroad tracks or trail that they had walked for decades.

While the railroad provided an outlet for families to make money, the saw mills also helped Lost Cove thrive by selling lumber and acid wood to companies throughout the region and beyond. In Wilbur R. Miller’s book, *Revenuers and Moonshiners: Enforcing Federal Liquor Law in the Mountain South, 1865-1900*, Miller insists that:

> After 1890, as railroads came closer to the great timber stands, lumber companies bought up huge tracts and began a wholesale stripping of the forest, leaving bare slopes subject to erosion. Logging became a full-time occupation as young men migrated to lumber camps in the woods and families settled in company towns surrounding sawmills.

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77 McNabb Interview, September 26 2007.

78 Isaiah Bailey Interview, October 4 2007.


In Lloyd Bailey’s 1997 book *The Heritage of the Toe River Valley: Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey Counties, North Carolina*, volume two, Lloyd Bailey notes that the first lumber company into Lost Cove was the Calwell Lumber Company around 1880.\(^{81}\) No information on the Calwell lumber company is available from the early years.

Since timber was a profitable commodity in the hills of Appalachia, railroads worked side by side with sawmills in order for the product to reach the outside world. As the railroads exported the timber, so the sawmills made ties for the railroads. Hemlock, pine, chestnut, poplar, oak, and hickory trees lined the landscape in the Nolichucky Gorge, and the 1907 South and Western Railroad (later CC & O) files state specifications for cross ties and switch ties made by saw mills along the railway: “[H]ardwood ties shall be of white oak, chestnut oak, post oak, chestnut, or locust; softwood ties of long leaf yellow pine, cypress, cedar, or catalpa.”\(^{82}\) Along with these specifications, the railroad also instructed what class of wood was desired, how the ties were made, where to lay the ties at the railroad tracks, and what rules to follow for tagging the ties.\(^{83}\)

No data confirms who brought the saw mill into Lost Cove. In Pat Alderman’s book, *In the Shadow of the Big Bald: About the Appalachians and Their People*, Alderman notes that the first sawmill was hauled into Lost Cove “by freight and drug, piece by piece, to its site around 1905.”\(^{84}\) Around 1909, the Unaka Springs Lumber Company, organized by J.J. Hager and J.W. Broce, acquired approximately 6,000 acres of land in the vicinity of Unaka Springs,

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81 Bailey, vol 2. 113.

82 Carolina, Clinchfield, and Ohio Railroad files, 1899-1983, Industrial Agent Coorespondence, 1909-1925, Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Series III, Box 28-x 87.

83 Ibid.

84 Alderman, *In the Shadow of the Big Bald: About the Appalachians and Their People*, 62.
Tennessee, which is about two miles down the river from the Lost Cove stop. In a CC & O memorandum dated September 28, 1909, Hager and Broce asked the railway to “put in two or more small mills in the timber, drawing the product to the CC & O railway at stations, Love, Chestoa, Unaka Springs, Lost Cove, and Canebottom.”

No matter who brought in the first saw mill, we do know that some time after 1910, Mac English built a saw mill along Devil’s Creek, just below the Lost Cove area. According to Mrs. McNabb, Mac English’s saw mill may have been on her uncle Wiley Tipton’s land. Mr. Bailey observes that Mac English owned around 5,000 acres of land along the Nolichucky River, from Poplar, North Carolina to Devil’s Creek.

English hired Lost Cove residents to work the timber and load the trucks. Residents such as Dokter Tipton, Wiley Tipton, Velmer Bailey, and Clifford Miller all worked the saw mill. Mrs. McNabb says her uncle, Wiley, ran the saw mill. Mrs. McNabb states that Mack English owned a commissary in Lost Cove, too, where tobacco, snuff, sugar, and other commodities were purchased. While the men worked the mill, some women cooked for the workers. J. C. Bryant’s wife, Dixie Lee Tipton Bryant, had family living in Lost Cove, and Mr. Bryant acknowledges that Dixie’s mother worked as a cook for Mac English, while her father worked the saw mill. Almost everyone in Lost Cove worked at the Mac English saw mill.

85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 McNabb Interview, September 26 2007.
88 Isaiah Bailey Interview, October 4 2007.
89 McNabb Interview, September 26 2007.
90 Bryant Interview, March 9 2007.
The sidetrack built along Devil’s Creek became a major stop for the CC & O. Because the saw mill sat about a mile above the sidetrack, trucks loaded with timber drove alongside Devil’s Creek to bring the lumber or acid wood to the railroad. Alderman notes that English and his brother had “brought in a truck to move the sawed timber to the loading zone.”

Because the saw mill produced a large amount of cross ties and acid wood in the Nolichucky Gorge, the railroad needed to make changes to the rails at Lost Cove to keep up with hauling all those wood products. In the CC & O files, a petition was admitted by F.B. Vines of Johnson City concerning the extension of a sidetrack. The letter is addressed to Mr. Vines from the CC & O’s general manager, L.H. Phetteplace. The letter states:

Mr. Brewer has brought to my attention the matter of extending the sidetrack at Lost Cove for business which you expect to offer at that point. He states that you have somewhere in the neighborhood of 8000 cords of acid wood, 11000 cords of pulp wood and 500-600 carloads of logs. This being the case we will be willing to extend the siding under the usual agreement; that is, you to do the grading and furnish the switch timber and ties…

In a remitted correspondence from the railroad’s industrial agent, Mr. Vines did comply with the railroad rules and regulations. After Mr. Vines graded the roads to “get the Lost Cove sidetrack extended North with sufficient clearance,” the sidetrack handled four to five cars for hauling timber, pulp wood, and acid wood to the markets. The railroad began shipping no less than “two cars daily for the next two years, and . . . may [have] run two cars daily for four years.”

For nearly fifteen years, Mac English’s saw mill shipped acid wood, pulp wood, and railroad ties throughout the eastern United States. Bryant notes that most of the “wood [was]

91 Alderman, 62.


93 Ibid.
shipped to Kingsport, Tennessee or Canton, North Carolina.”94 In Haines’ article, Clifford Miller recalls making “a living cutting railroad ties and by chopping up dead chestnuts.” The chestnuts were shipped to Canton.95 The large number of cross ties that railroads always needed enabled the saw mill to survive. Since the railroad corporation bought fresh ties needed for laying down the steel tracks, the small saw mills along the Appalachians thrived for many years.

Mac English’s saw mill produced some of the best acid wood, pulp wood, and cross ties from the region. Though the chestnut blight of the early 1920s hit the cove, wiping out the chestnuts entirely, the massive amount of timber along the Nolichucky enabled the families to make good money. Production and money allowed Lost Cove families to thrive. But in 1925, production and money ceased in one day.

According to J. C. Bryant, the land near Devil’s Creek caught on fire, and the blaze swept across the mountainside, burning Mac English’s saw mill and everything in its sight. Everyone working for English fought the fire wholeheartedly. The fire burned nearly everything in its path, approximately 25,000 acres of land. The Lost Cove settlement was spared.96 Both Bryant and Bailey tell how the families fought the fire that swept through Lost Cove. Both men stated that their families must have back-drafted the flames or dug ditches surrounding their properties and buildings. Not a single house in the cove was lost. However, Mac English’s saw mill burned down. The timber jobs in which Lost Cove residents had

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94 Bryant Interview, March 9 2007.
95 Haines, 155.
96 Bryant Interview, March 9 2007.
worked so hard had dwindled to ashes in one day. As Homer Tipton observes, “that the fire was the worst in Yancey and Unicoi County history.”\textsuperscript{97}

After the forests were depleted by the fire, these once-fertile lands ceased to produce timber. Mac English moved with his family to Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1926. Mr. English left his two-story house, built with the finest hardwoods, and stepped onto the train bound for Knoxville. He never returned to Lost Cove.

Life in the cove changed, but profit soon re-entered the mountainous community when a second sawmill was built in 1939. In the meantime, Lost Cove families continued farming until around 1939.\textsuperscript{98} The 1939 sawmill was the last structure to be built in the cove. Situated up in the cove but far away from the houses, this sawmill, like Mac English’s, produced pulp wood and acid wood. Mr. Bryant notes that the parts for the sawmill were hauled up the one mile mountainous trek

…with a sawmill engine on a sled and a cable wire. The people would pull the cable up so far, and then anchor the cable down as they inched up the mountain. They would build the road in front of them as they went up the mountain. In order for the sled not to turn over, they would hold items like saws up to the edge of the sled. Men would also walk behind the sled and place sticks in the holes of the wheels so the sled would not slide back down the mountain.\textsuperscript{99}

Lonon notes that Miller revealed to him that “he, with the help of other Lost Cove residents, had transported the sawmill into the area one piece at a time.”\textsuperscript{100} While the families worked this new sawmill every day, Swin Miller’s 1938 Chevy truck transported the lumber from the sawmill to the railroad tracks. According to Lonon’s book, the railroad moved

\textsuperscript{97}Homer Tipton Interview, September 6 2007

\textsuperscript{98} Bryant Interview, September 27 2007.

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{100} Lonon, 25.
Miller’s truck into Lost Cove on a flat car. Of course, Lost Cove’s sidetrack existed before the second sawmill was hauled up the mountain. Thus, Swin Miller’s truck helped the families earn more income by transporting as well as milling the timber.

Along with the Millers, Tiptons, Baileys, and Bryants, families such as the Coopers also worked the mill. According to Lloyd Bailey, Mr. Harrison Cooper and wife Mary Ethel Shelton moved into Lost Cove during the depression. Mr. Cooper ran the saw mill and logging camps while his wife cooked the meals for the working men. Although the second sawmill helped the families survive, the forests would once again be depleted; by the late 1940s, this second sawmill eventually ceased to produce wood for income.

The livelihood and income on which Lost Cove residents had come to depend faded once timber resources were depleted. The settlement had become economically linked to the outside world, and when this link snapped, the community dwindled. Furthermore, by this time young men were leaving the settlement for the Korean War and seeking marriage in nearby towns. Eventually, the community met its demise.

\[^{101}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[^{102}\text{Bailey, vol. 1, 187.}\]
CHAPTER 5
MOONSHINE IN THE MOUNTAINS

For over 150 years, the world outside of Appalachia has stereotyped the Appalachian mountaineer as being overly fond of moonshine, or illicit whiskey. Even in the 1860s, when Lost Cove was founded, conflict with revenuers over whiskey taxing and illicit manufacturing of potent liquor was making news throughout the Americas. America became enthralled with the mountaineer and moonshine. Newspapers portrayed moonshine as a requirement for being Appalachian. In popular mythology, feuding always accompanied moonshining. As Shapiro notes, the “tendency of mountaineers to engage in feuds, and more specifically the practice of private justice through ambush or ‘bushwhacking,’ and the tendency of mountaineers to manufacture illegal or untaxed whiskey, had already become a part of the mythology of Appalachian otherness by 1900.”

Although clichés about mountaineers, moonshine, and feuds are annoying, manufacturing illicit whiskey was an important source of income for some people in the mountains. In Loyal Durand’s article, “Mountain Moonshining in East Tennessee,” Durand states that to the mountaineer under economic pressure after the Civil War, moonshine brought in a better profit than unprocessed corn since corn was of low value and difficult to transport. Gordon B. McKinney states that “in the late nineteenth century, 75 percent of all Internal Revenue officers in the United States were stationed in the southern mountains, trying

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104 Shapiro, 104.

to enforce the liquor tax."\(^{106}\) Tom Robertson’s article “Moonshine on the Mountain” examines how whiskey making became an economic necessity in some communities. Robertson quotes Jack Hatfield as saying, “making whiskey was a way of life. Before the coal mines came, you either dug roots, raised a garden, or make whiskey. It was a thing of necessity, whether you was feudin’ or not, you had to do it.”\(^{107}\)

Moonshine enabled some Lost Cove dwellers to increase their income by selling it to nearby towns or railroad men, some dwellers made the “shine” for themselves and their families, and some traded “shine” for basic goods. However, despite the clichéd equation of moonshine with mountain feuding, moonshine did not bring feuds to Lost Cove.

\(^{106}\) McKinney, 85.

True mountain entrepreneurs seized opportunities to sell and make moonshine to benefit themselves as well as railroad workers, lumberjacks, and miners.\textsuperscript{108} The average moonshiner needed to be skilled, have good marketers, and have high ambitions. According to Arthur, moonshine stills “are usually located on small, cold streams, and on wild land little adapted to cultivation. Sometimes, however, stills are situated in the cellar or kitchen or other innocent looking place for the purpose of diverting suspicion.”\textsuperscript{109} Since moonshine stills were hidden in the mountains of Appalachia, the families, neighbors, and skilled moonshiners protected and supported one another. The kinship bond held strong in the mountains. No tax revenuers or lawman could penetrate the support system. Because Lost Cove is situated high above the Nolichucky River in isolation, moonshining was able to thrive there. In his book entitled \textit{News from Yancey: Articles from Area Newspapers (1840-1900)}, Lloyd Bailey Sr. published an article from 1898 that states:

Revenue Agent A.E. Aiken returned yesterday from a trip through Egypt township in Yancey County. Illicit distilling, he says, is on the decrease, and that the only place in Yancey County where the revenue law is being violated to any extent is in what is known as “Lost Cove,” which section he did not visit. Lost Cove is a section that lies contiguous to both the North Carolina and Tennessee lines, neither state claiming jurisdiction as the boundary lines between the two states is not definitely known, hence the name of “Lost Cove,” where the moonshiner frolics unmolested.\textsuperscript{110}

Because of Lost Cove’s isolation, moonshiners did not deal with revenuers as often as did moonshiners closer to towns such as Burnsville, North Carolina, or Erwin, Tennessee.

\textsuperscript{108}Shapiro, 30.

\textsuperscript{109}Arthur, 272. Arthur discusses the history of moonshine, its definition, and how it is made.

Revenuers did not prevent the families from making corn liquor, nor did the courts, despite the fact that according to Arthur, by 1912 Lost Cove moonshiners had had many a day in court. Arthur notes that Geneva Tipton McNabb’s grandfather, John D. Tipton, was accused of having begun business by the light of the moon, as was evidenced by sundry indictments in the United States court at Asheville. His example was soon followed by others; but, whenever it appeared to Judge R.P. Dick that the alleged stills were in the disputed territory, he directed the discharge of the defendants.\textsuperscript{111}

The boundary dispute of Lost Cove enabled the moonshine haven to keep making “shine” without disruption. The families did not worry about jail time due to the disputed territory. Additionally, Wilbur Miller notes several instances involving moonshine in which the judge, R.P. Dick, lent mercy (for reasons unknown) to the moonshine makers. In several court cases in Buncombe County, North Carolina, Judge R.P. Dick routinely suspended the sentences of moonshiners in minor cases where retailing was done:

Dick “was known for his kindly temper” when hearing revenue cases. From 1882-1883 Judge Dick normally suspended sentences for petty revenue violators, mostly sellers rather than distillers, who paid reduced fines averaging about $20.00 instead of the minimum of $100.00 and a thirty-day jail term prescribed by law.\textsuperscript{112}

Judge Dick’s lenient views suspended an all time high of 60 percent of cases in 1887.\textsuperscript{113}

Most families in Lost Cove made corn liquor. In Lost Cove, corn liquor was seen as differing from moonshine. One person I interviewed, who wished to remain anonymous, explained that berries or sweeteners were added to moonshine but not to corn liquor, causing the corn liquor to have a strong taste that most railroad men preferred. This anonymous interviewee says that stills in Lost Cove were never hidden.\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{111} Arthur, 334.

\textsuperscript{112} Miller, 181.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{114} Anonymous.
Mountaineers also made brandy from cherries, blackberries, and raspberries. According to the Van Noppens, making brandy was a family affair; everyone worked together to pick fruit from the orchards and make their spirits. In Lost Cove, entire families participated in making corn liquor. The anonymous interviewee’s family helped out their father while he made it. Mr. Bryant also helped his father during the distilling process. According to Mr. Bryant, there were at least two stills in Lost Cove. Although he acknowledged that his father made plenty of moonshine, Mr. Bryant never told me who owned the other still.115 Mr. Bryant states that “there was one house in the cove that had a basement. Within the basement, moonshiners had a tunnel that shot out to the hollow and up a mountain to get away from the revenuers.”116

Families were willing to work together to distill moonshine because it was a great cash crop, better than tobacco and corn put together.117 In his article, Durand estimates the extent of moonshine production in East Tennessee for the year 1956. Durand states that “officials of the Tennessee State Alcohol Tax Division of the Department of Finance and Taxation estimate a state moonshine production of about 1,664,000 gallons per year.”118 In 1956, North Carolina lists the illicit whiskey production at probably five or more times that of the Tennessee production.119

Lost Cove dwellers often sold moonshine to railroad workers and area townspeople. My grandfather, Bob Johnson, who lived in Erwin and was a CC & O engineer, often told me

115 Ibid.
116 Bryant Interview, March 9 2007.
117 Bryant Interview, March 9 2007.
118 Durand, 170.
119 Ibid.
that my great-grandfather, Hank S. Johnson, also an engineer, bought moonshine from Lost Cove dwellers as well as making his own. Mrs. McNabb confirmed that “Old Man Johnson” bought plenty of moonshine up in Lost Cove.\textsuperscript{120} Since Lost Cove dwellers made moonshine, many railroad engineers, brakemen, and section workers hiked one mile up the ridgeline to buy the “shine.” Since Mr. Bryant’s father worked for the railroad, selling moonshine was easy and profit was plenty, because demand was high for the moonshine, which could be used for recreational or medicinal purposes. Mr. Bryant states that his father Frank also made moonshine to carry out and sell. Frank made thirty gallons in one setting.\textsuperscript{121}

According to Mr. Bryant, almost everyone in Lost Cove drank moonshine. Sometimes the women drank it as medicine to lessen cold symptoms and relieve pain. Almost every man, especially the young men, would drink moonshine just about everyday. To Mr. Bryant and Mr. Tipton, moonshine was like spring water. The taste quenched their thirst. However, for these two men, moonshine running and buying became a chore of sorts. Mr. Tipton states that they walked out of Lost Cove three trips in one night just to get moonshine from people on Martins Creek, which was at least five miles from the cove. If Mr. Bryant did not have moonshine he would walk the miles to Martins Creek.\textsuperscript{122} Mr. Tipton never made it to Martin’s Creek that night due to drinking the hard stuff himself. Mr. Bryant and his friend Harry left him alongside Short Branch, near Unaka Springs, where he lay on the ground until Mr. Bryant and Harry returned.\textsuperscript{123} Mr. Bryant adds that they put a rock against Mr. Tipton so he would not roll off

\textsuperscript{120} McNabb Interview, September 26 2007.
\textsuperscript{121} Bryant Interview, September 6 2007.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{123} Tipton Interview, September 6 2007.
down the mountain. When the men returned, Mr. Tipton could not believe that the men
returned so quickly. Both men laughed hard, after remembering their journey.  

Moonshine kept Lost Cove families from living in poverty. The extra income allowed
families to travel to the markets for food and see the doctors in nearby cities. While moonshine
making remained hidden during the pillar years of the church, moonshine still ran through the
blood of many Lost Cove men.

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124 Bryant Interview, September 27 2007.
CHAPTER 6

MOUNTAIN VIEW BAPTIST CHURCH AND LOST COVE SCHOOL

Even if moonshine was made in their settlement, families in Lost Cove never strayed from religion and education. To Lost Cove dwellers, religion kept them closer to God, and the school provided the best education for their children. Both church and school blended together religious and worldly issues to expand the students’ minds. For Lost Cove dwellers the church brought out religious zeal and emotional piety among the families, while the school taught autonomy and integrity. Both institutions used the same building, and the institutions augmented the social and kinship networks in the settlement. Lost Cove’s church and school house stood on a tiny knoll high above most of the houses, and it could be seen from every house in the settlement.

In Deborah McCauley’s book, Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History, McCauley notes that “Appalachian mountain religion is one of the very few uniquely American religious traditions to which Protestantism in the United States can lay claim. It is made up of church traditions found almost entirely in the region’s mountains and small valleys.” 125 The Lost Cove church was of the Free Will Baptist denomination. According to Howard Dorgan, author of the article, “Old Time Baptist of Central Appalachia,” the establishment of the Toe River Association of Free Will Baptist organized in 1850, at Jack’s Creek Church in Yancey County, North Carolina. 126 Dorgan observes that


126 Bill Leonard, ed. Christianity in Appalachia: Profiles in Regional Pluralism (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 122.
Free will Baptists accepted a doctrine of the general atonement that Christ died for all persons. Sinners receive grace by freely trusting Christ. For most Appalachian “Freewillers,” that faith includes the rudiments of a creedal statement first adopted in 1916 by the North Carolina State Conference of Free Will Baptists: “We believe, as touching Gospel Ordinances, in believers’ baptism, laying of the hands, receiving of the sacrament in bread and wine, washing the saints’ feet, anointing the sick with oil in the name of the Lord, fasting, prayer, singing praise to God and the public ministry of the Word, with every institution of the Lord we shall find in the New testament.\textsuperscript{127}

When the Free Will Baptist church formed in Lost Cove, the church and school functioned as two institutions but one social setting. Lost Cove’s churches did experience several changes.\textsuperscript{128} The first accounts of a church being built in Lost Cove was around 1880. According to Lloyd Bailey, the earliest families built the church together, naming it Tipton’s Chapel after a family in the settlement. In Lloyd Bailey’s book, Chester Bailey, who lived in Lost Cove, recounted the names of the preachers of Tipton’s Chapel. According to Chester Bailey, “Reverend Mark Wilson, Rev. Joe Ramsey, and Rev. Jim Hunter were associated with the church until the closing.” The church folded around 1904. No records are found regarding why this church failed to continue.\textsuperscript{129} A second church, named Lost Cove Free Will Baptist, was formed in 1909 by John Beam and others and lasted until 1919.\textsuperscript{130}

When this second church joined the Jacks Creek Free Will Baptist Association in 1911, the founding members elected Rev. Dan Miller as their pastor. Soon, church delegates like Robert Miller, Sam Miller, and W.M. Hensley, represented the church at association meetings. The church remained a member of the Jack Creek Association until 1919, when it failed to report minutes to the association. As a result, it was dropped from the association. Though no

\textsuperscript{127} Leonard, 123.

\textsuperscript{128} Bailey, vol.2, 113.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
records are found regarding the church’s continued operation, Lloyd Bailey insists “that the church continued to operate for some years” after it was dropped from the association.  

When Lost Cove church finally resumed operations, the church became known as Mountain View Free Will Baptist Church. In 1934, twenty-odd years after being excluded from the association, the church was again active. The members elected Bob Miller as their first pastor. Members such as Velmer and Harley Bailey served as deacons, while their sister Serivella Bailey worked as the clerk. By 1935, the church re-entered the association with Rev. W.G. Honeycutt as the pastor. The church welcomed twenty-seven members through its doors. Delegates serving the church in 1935 were sisters Bonnie Miller, Jettie Bailey, and Augustine Bailey. Clifford and John Miller served as deacons. Mountain View was the third and last church formed in Lost Cove.

Since Appalachian culture rests on profound beliefs in the church and God, isolation rarely deterred mountain settlements from religious participation. The church instilled in families the Free Will Baptist beliefs and practices. According to McCauley, practices such as plural eldership, anointment with oil, and foot washings are characteristic of Free Will Baptists. Even in Lost Cove foot washings occurred every six months and communion almost every month. Among some Free Will Baptists, women served as leaders but not pastors. In Lost Cove, the women of the church were leaders and were admired by the community.

131 Ibid.
132 Ibid.
133 McCauley, 129.
134 Bryant Interview, September 6 2007.
Mr. Bryant notes that the men sat on one side of the church and the women on the other side. During foot washings, “the men folk would take the benches in the church and face each other. The men would start at one end of the pew and one man would wash the man in front of him. The men would go back and forth.” The repetitive foot washing continued until the last man on the pew was cleansed. The men dried their feet with a towel. The women also participated in foot washings, cleansing other women’s feet. Mr. Bryant’s mother, Janie, always washed feet, along with his Aunt Martha and Bob Miller’s wife. Mr. Bryant states that “communion was held during foot washings. The members would eat flat bread and drink blackberry juice or grape juice during the Passover supper and then the members would wash the feet.”

While foot washings were a part of the church, being saved was evident in church members’ “crying eyes and amens.” Pastor Davis notes that the church held revivals every year with families gathering in the one-room church and schoolhouse. Hymns were sung and bursts of shouting sounded out. According to Lloyd Bailey, the last known revival was conducted by Rev. Clyde Fender on November 18-23, 1956.

In an interview with Verno Harris Davis, the last preacher to speak in Lost Cove from 1951-1953, Davis recounts that foot washings were normally done by the preacher, or other members of the congregation who lived a life with God. You had to be a pretty good person. In other words, it was expected of you to take part. You had to examine yourself, that was the

135 Bryant Interview, September 6 2007.
136 Ibid.
137 Davis Interview, September 18 2007.
138 Ibid.
main thing. If there was anything wrong, you would ask the congregation to pray for you before you got the foot washing. That shows respect in the God’s word. It was nice and we enjoyed it. We had about three or four foot washings while I was up there.\footnote{Verno Davis, Interview by author, 28 Sept 2007, Erwin, Tennessee, digital audio interview.}

In 1943 Mr. Davis became ordained through the Jack’s Creek Free Will Baptist Association. At first, Mr. Davis was a visiting preacher who spoke the word of God at homes of the sick and elderly. Evangelistic work was a clear calling for Mr. Davis. According to Mr. Davis, Velmer Bailey, a deacon of Lost Cove church, asked him to preach for the church at a church conference. Mr. Davis believes that Velmer Bailey asked him because he shouted when he preached to the church when he visited. Davis laughs at his own comment.\footnote{Ibid.}

Mr. Davis’ pilgrimage and teachings to the Lost Cove people left a distinct impression in the minds of the families. According to Mr. Bryant, the most prominent preacher he remembers was Mr. Davis. Mr. Davis worked for Erwin Utilities, but on Saturdays after work, he would drive his truck from Little Bald Creek up on Spivey Mountain to Unaka Springs and walk into Lost Cove in the evening. Mr. Davis and other preachers spoke on Saturday evenings and had Sunday morning services and preaching.\footnote{Bryant Interview, September 6 2007.} Mr. Davis never rode the trains into or out of the settlement. By the time church dispersed, the trains already left the station. After church, Mr. Davis ate lunch with one of the families in the cove, alternating between families each time he preached. He recalls sleeping at everyone’s house as well. According to Mr. Davis, “I started out on foot around 3:00 p.m. I walked up and down the tracks one to two times a month.”\footnote{Davis Interview, September 18 2007.} The eight-mile, round-trip walk never deterred Mr. Davis from preaching. His dedication to the people at Lost Cove church and to God empowered his preaching and life.
Mr. Davis’ preaching, led by the Spirit, was strong and powerful. For one to two hours, he preached in the church. Mr. Bryant acknowledges that “Mr. Davis received five cents once. He would not charge nothing; in other words if they gave him five cents, they gave him five dollars.”

Though Mr. Davis was one of just a handful of preachers who spoke at Mountain View Free Will Baptist Church, other honored ministers from 1915 to the 1950s were Rev. Bob Miller, Rev. G.W. Honeycutt, Rev. Dock Taylor, Rev. Quince Miller, Rev. Van Hensley, Rev. Cecil H. Higgins, and Rev. Elbert Wheeler. Since Lost Cove sat isolated from the outside world and no permanent minister lived in Lost Cove, the church hired various ministers throughout the years to serve, and many ministers from neighboring towns walked into Lost Cove once a month. Only during the last several years of Lost Cove did just one minister serve, and that man was Verno Davis.

While Mrs. McNabb lived in Lost Cove, she remembers little Sam Miller, who once represented the church at the associations, as a hymnal teacher. He taught singing school while the children sang gospel songs. Once, a racially charged situation occurred in the cove’s religious landscape. According to Mr. Bryant, from the mid 1930s to late 1940s, an African American preacher who resided at the railroad camps along Canebottom preached to the black men working the railroad. The black preacher also worked with Mr. Bryant’s father, Frank. Mr. Bryant notes that this “black preacher would walk into Lost Cove to speak with the families and eat with different families every Saturday for supper.” Mr. Bryant's family ate

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144 Isaiah Bailey Interview, October 4 2007.
146 Davis interview,
147 McNabb Interview, September 26 2007.
with the black preacher many times, as well as other families. Mr. Bryant notes that when the black preacher wanted to preach at the Lost Cove church, one member would not allow him to preach. Mr. Bailey could not understand why the disgruntled member did not like the black preachers, since the member worked with the black men on the railroad. But finally, after members of the church got together to talk about the situation, they let the black preacher preach in the church. Mr. Bryant believes he preached one time. He adds that “they all thought the world of him (the black preacher).”

Free Will Baptists are taught to be in fellowship with every one else, as with God. Though prejudices entered many mountainous communities, I never heard a negative word about race relations my from Lost Cove informants.

Lost Cove’s church stood on a tiny knoll high above the houses, and it was seen from every house in the settlement. The church became the families’ foundation, their home and fellowship house. While revivals and services inspired the congregations, burials also played an important role in the mountainous community. According to Lloyd Bailey, the last known revival was conducted by Rev. Clyde Fender on November 18-23, 1956.

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148 Ibid.
149 Ibid.
Every family that lived in Lost Cove buried a family member in the cemetery. The overgrown cemetery sits high above the once thriving town, situated in a woody area close to the Swin Miller house. According to Mr. Bailey, his two brothers, a grandmother, and some cousins are buried in Lost Cove. Mr. Bryant’s grandmother and grandfather, Arch and Cindy Miller, are buried there as well. Mrs. McNabb states that her grandfather John D. Tipton and his wife Caroline Peterson Tipton are buried in Lost Cove. Along with her grandparents and her uncle Everett T. Tipton, the gravestones date back to the late 1800s. The cemetery also holds the bodies of small children. Mr. Bryant once said that typhoid had entered Lost Cove in the earlier years.

According to Mr. Bryant, his grandmother, Cindy Miller, died one evening, and they buried her three days later. Before the burial, young people would sit up and watch the deceased person’s casket, because animals would show up and get into the grave. The people who died never were embalmed. Because the ground was hard, the men took three days to dig

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151 Isaiah Bailey Interview, October 4 2007.
the gravesite. The graves were eight feet deep. The men would dig a four foot wide and long hole, then grade it down six inches, then dig another four feet. Mr. Tipton adds that “when they started to cover the grave up, they would lay boards across the casket to stop the dirt from caving in on the casket.” The families would gather at the deceased person’s home. Velmer Bailey and Chester Bailey, both carpenters, often built the caskets for families in Lost Cove. Mr. Bryant notes that the Baileys would use oak wood for the caskets. Mr. Bryant also states that John Miller and Velmer Bailey made the headstones for the deceased. The deceased were treated with care and love from their families and extended family.

Though death was a part of life, life in the cove flourished through the youth and schoolhouse. Mr. Bryant notes that the one room building had desks on one side and pews on the other side. Of course, spring water flowed outside the building and an outdoor toilet or ‘privy’ as Mrs. McNabb calls it, and a big wood stove provided heat for the school and church during winter months. In the steeple of the one-room building, a bell directed children as well as church members into the church. While no information is found regarding the establishment of the school, Alderman notes that some of Lost Cove teachers were Bob Holliday, Royce Brinkley, Carl Young, John Hensley, and Sinclair Conley, the last teacher in Lost Cove.

152 Bryant Interview, September 6 2007.
153 Tipton Interview, September 6 2007.
154 Bryant Interview, September 6 2007.
155 Ibid.
156 McNabb Interview, September 26 2007.
157 Alderman, In the Shadow of the Big Bald: About the Appalachians and Their People, 62.
Mrs. McNabb remembers that in 1924 her teacher was a man named John Howell. Mr. Howell would stay in the cove all week with her Aunt Hester and Uncle Wiley Tipton. Mrs. McNabb adds that “abc’s, writing, and figuring were subjects in second grade.” She also states that “the children did more in that one room school than they did in a bigger school.” Her oldest sister was told that she knew more than students did in high school. Since most teachers boarded with families such as the Tiptons and Millers, their teachings helped the students learn about the outside world, and, in return, the outside world came to this little mountain school.

The most prominent teacher in the cove was Sinclair Conley. Mr. Conley’s background education is astounding. In an article from the *Asheville Citizen Times*, readers learn that Mr. Conley graduated from Wake Forest College and Rochester Theological Seminary and taught psychology and education at The University of Florida and the Oklahoma Baptist University at Shawnee. Mr. Conley also served as dean of Biltmore (now Asheville-Biltmore Technical College) from 1927-1933. After retiring from teaching, Mr. Conley returned to his family’s farm in Jack’s Creek and taught at local schools. Conley entered the cove by train on Mondays. According to Robert H. Fowler, staff writer for the Greensboro Daily News, Mr. Conley “rides the train every Monday to Lost Cove station and hikes to the home of Rev. Bob’s brother, Swin Miller, where he boards and rooms until Friday.” Mr. Bailey adds that

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159 Ibid.
161 Greensboro Daily News, “Lost Cove is Completely Shut In by 4,000-Foot Mountains.” August 5, 1951.
“Conley would ride the train from Huntdale to Lost Cove and leave out on Friday afternoon.”

According to Mr. Bailey and Mr. Bryant, Mr. Conley was a great teacher. In Haines’ article, Ulis Miller, a student of Conley and former resident of Lost Cove, states that “Mr. Conley was an excellent teacher and very strict.” Though Mr. Conley taught beyond his retirement age, the students in Lost Cove learned about the world and about community. Mr. Conley was a Democrat and worldly gentleman who taught the students about life and school subjects. Even though families in Lost Cove were Republican, Conley was well respected. According to Fowler, Mr. Conley “draws on his schooling in education, religion, and psychology to teach the fifteen pupils and help them overcome the disadvantages of being cut off from the outside world.” Mr. Conley told Fowler that “I try to teach them life and not entirely books.” Mr. Conley loved his students. In the Asheville Citizen Times article he states that “I’ve got here some of the brightest students I have ever had anywhere. They are eager to learn.”

The Greensboro Daily News reported that the Lost Cove school teaching hours were “Mondays 2:00 to 4:30 p.m. and Tuesday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.” With the grade level in Lost Cove ending at seventh grade, Mr. Conley taught students up to eleventh grade. This meant that Yancey County did not have enough funding for the Lost Cove

162 Isaiah Bailey Interview, October 4 2007.
163 Haines, 154.
164 Greensboro Daily News, August 8, 1951.
165 Ibid, 2.
166 Asheville Citizen Times, October 5, 1952.
School; however, Mr. Conley kept teaching the students up to eleventh grade. He bought the students above seventh grade their books for the school year. Mr. Conley knew that the students needed an education, so he bought the books in order for students to stay in the Lost Cove School.

Mr. Miller remembers that Mr. Conley “is given credit for establishing a high school curriculum in the cove, having the foresight to know that a seventh-grade education would soon be insufficient.” While Mr. Conley educated the students very well, the pupils also had fun playing during recess and after school. Mr. Bailey states that, “they would play games like baseball, football, and softball.” Mrs. McNabb remembers playing ball and tag as well. Even though playing ball helped the pupils remain kids, education enabled them to look forward to high school.

While Mrs. McNabb lived in Lost Cove, the number of students reached around fifteen. As Lost Cove grew during the 1930s and 1940s, the student population grew. Mr. Bailey states that “at one time he could remember thirty-two kids at school in different grades.” The student population decreased in the late 1940s to 1950s. Attendance in the one room school dwindled to eleven students. By 1950, the improved roads and transportation in Yancey

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168 Haines, 154.

169 Isaiah Bailey Interview, October 4 2007.


171 Isaiah Bailey Interview, October 4 2007.

172 Ibid.
County enabled the school districts to consolidate the public schools. Education in North Carolina became an economic issue.  

According to the Yancey County Historical Association, “most of the smaller schools had been closed and their students sent to consolidated units. The smallest school (serving about a dozen families) was Lost Cove.” The consolidation meant that students in Lost Cove needed to attend high school elsewhere in the county. For the students in Lost Cove, those students who wanted to continue their education in high school had preparations to make in the neighboring towns. The association states that “the county paid room and board in the Bee Log area. They walked out of the cove each Sunday afternoon and returned the next Friday afternoon.”

In the early 1950s, Mr. Bailey attended the Bee Log School until his family moved out of Lost Cove. Since students attended the high school some twenty miles away, Mr. Conley taught only a hand few of elementary children in the Lost Cove School.

The population in Lost Cove dwindled due to the state economy, denial of a road, the discontinued passenger trains, and the depletion of timber. Lost Cove’s families began to deal with the new arrangements and soon found themselves walking the train tracks out of their once thriving town, a town that enveloped security and autonomy. To them, Lost Cove embodied a “sense of place and self.” Today, the only sign left of the church and schoolhouse is the concrete steps where the building once stood.


CHAPTER 7

THE END OF A THRIVING SETTLEMENT

For many years, the residents of Lost Cove hoped that the government would build a new road into their valley. A new road meant children could go to high school and complete their education and that people could sell goods to local markets. Mr. Conley stated in the *Asheville Citizen Times* that “a rough road would cost not more than $10,000 to $15,000. There is a good route available.”175 Though Mr. Conley submitted the road problem to Governor Scott of North Carolina, no assistance was confirmed. As economic resources like timber began dwindling, Lost Cove residents began moving out. Mr. Bailey notes that “it was too expensive to build a road for the amount of families left in the cove.”176 For example, Mr. Davis recalls that when he began preaching at Lost Cove, there were around eleven to thirteen families living in Lost Cove and the last year of his preaching only three families remained.177

Of course, there were various factors that contributed to the demise of this thriving community. The coming of big coal trains and the hauling of products from West Virginia to the coast of South Carolina destroyed the passenger trains. Passenger trains no longer carried families to the store and doctor. The new highways and new automobiles offered transportation that the railroad could not provide. Additionally, since school systems were consolidating their smaller schools, the board of education pressured Yancey County officials to make arrangements for boarding high school students in the mountains in nearby Bee Log, North Carolina. The families became victims of a new world that depended on transportation and income.

175 *Asheville Citizen Times*, October 5, 1952.
176 Bailey Interview, October 2007.
177 Davis interview
Around the 1950s, Clifford Miller remembers, “the supply of timber finally gave out and brought on hard times.”\footnote{178} The fertile lands produced the last of the oak, pine, poplar, and ash trees. Lost Cove’s landscape craved new trees but none were to be found. Though families triumphed over hard times in the past, now times were different. The ability to earn income in Lost Cove began to fade once timber was depleted. Lost Cove’s earlier self-reliance had given way to dependence, and people wanted a new life in neighboring towns, new jobs, and new schools. Young men like J.C. Bryant, Isaiah Bailey, and Homer Tipton left Lost Cove for the army or for education. Some say that the families simply grew tired of struggling in the later years. The isolated life proved too hard to handle. Consequently, Mr. Bailey states that “there were only three to four families left in Lost Cove after 1952.”\footnote{179}

According to an article in the \textit{Raleigh News and Observer}, “of the thirteen families who were last to leave, one moved to a home near Burnsville, North Carolina, while the others went to Erwin and Jonesborough, Tennessee. Those employable are working at various jobs. The school children are in regular attendance at nearby schools.”\footnote{180} Mr. Bryant’s family moved to Erwin, while he joined the Army and headed to Korea in 1950. Even in the 1950s, his family often returned to Lost Cove for apple picking and seeing the families that were left. Life in Lost Cove was not the same as it used to be.\footnote{181}

Isaiah Bailey’s family was the last family to leave Lost Cove. Velmer Bailey states in an article published in the \textit{Johnson City Press Chronicle} on April 3, 1958, “we don’t want to

\footnote{178} Haines, 155.  
\footnote{179} Bailey Interview, October 2007.  
\footnote{181} Bailey interview
leave, but we have no choice. The others have left and we can’t stay here alone.”

Velmer Bailey, his wife Servilla, sons Okie, Isaiah, Hosea, and daughter Pricilla left Lost Cove on December 26, 1957. The only sign left of the community are words written on a wooden wall behind the pulpit in the church. Mr. Velmer Bailey wrote as follows:


Mr. Bailey states that they took with them what they could carry. They took two cows out of the cove as well. That day, no trains ran along the Nolichucky River. The family hiked out, down the railroad tracks to Unaka Springs. Though Velmer did not want to leave the community, Isaiah knew the family would never return.

Today, some families still own land in Lost Cove. Mr. Ulis Miller owns one of the three houses still standing. Mr. Bailey’s uncle’s daughter owns five acres of land in Lost Cove. He states that the government (National Forest Service) kept buying up the land from the descendents. Not too long ago, Mrs. Tipton’s sixty-two acres was bought by the government. Only five people that he knows own land in Lost Cove.

Though no trespassing signs align the pathway into Lost Cove, many hikers including former residents still walk the rugged trail around the mountain to visit the cemetery and to catch a glimpse of the community. Along the trail one can see Swin Miller’s 1938 Chevy hunkered down in the ditch. The rusted truck hauled timbers and families up and down the road to the railroad. The spring still runs in Lost Cove, though it flows softer than it once did. The

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182 Last Family Leaves Isolated Cove Section, Never to Return,” Johnson City Press Chronicle, 3 April 1958, p.83.

183 Haines, 153.

184 Isaiah Bailey Interview, October 4 2007.

185 Isaiah Bailey Interview, October 4 2007.
cemetery sits alone, although no weeds hang on to the stones. In May of 2007, fires swept through Lost Cove, burning much forest. Most of the houses have been burned, too. Only three remain standing.

Life once ran deep through this community. The fertile grounds provided good farming for the families, while the timber provided a source of income. But although Chester Bailey’s house now sits abandoned, the former residents of Lost Cove still remember their lives, struggles, and triumphs in the settlement.
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Tipton, Homer. Interview by Christy A. Smith, 6 September 2007, Erwin, TN, digital audio interview.


APPENDIX

SKETCH OF LOST COVE INFORMANTS

Mrs. Geneva Tipton McNabb (b. 1918), 89 years old, resides in Erwin, Tennessee. After leaving Lost Cove, Mrs. McNabb’s family moved to Erwin. She married Harry McNabb in 1942. She worked for the Southern Pottery Company, Industrial Garments, Hoover, and NN, Inc. before retiring. Mrs. McNabb has seven children. Her daughter, Eldora McNabb lives with her today. Geneva is a wonderful woman, who paints replicas of the old pottery patterns on dried out gourds to sell during the fall festivals.

Mr. J.C. Bryant (b. 1932), 75, resides in Erwin, Tennessee. After leaving Lost Cove at the age of 18, J.C. joined the army and fought in the Korean War. He married Dixie Lee Tipton in 1954. He and Dixie Lee have four children. J.C. provided the best information for me during this process. His smart wits and loveable character kept me wanting more information.

Mr. Isaiah Bailey (b. 1940), 67, resides in Erwin, Tennessee. After leaving Lost Cove at the age of 18, Mr. Bailey, his parents, brothers, and sister moved to the Lamar Community in Washington County, Tennessee. He married Nellie Lynn Bailey in 1942. They have one child, Angela Bailey. Mr. Bailey retired from NFS (Nuclear Fuel Services) in 2006. His family resides in Erwin, Tennessee.

Mr. Homer Tipton (b. 1932), 75, resides in Marion, Indiana. He married Ore Lee Watts in Erwin, Tennessee in 1952. They have six children.

Mr. Verno Davis (b. 1915), 92, resides in Erwin, Tennessee along Spivey Mountain. After leaving his preaching job in Lost Cove, Mr. Davis preached in various churches in North Carolina and Tennessee. He married GayNell Hensley in 1922. They had seven children, with only one not living. Mr. Davis still preaches today.
VITA

CHRISTY A. SMITH

Personal Data:  
Date of Birth: July 1, 1972
Place of Birth: Johnson City, Tennessee
Marital Status: Single

Education:  
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee; Appalachian Studies, (MALS), 2007.
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee; English, B.A., 1998.
Public Schools, Erwin, Tennessee

Education Experience:  
Fall 2005  Appalachian Teaching Project, Washington, D.C. Presentation
Spring 2005  28th Appalachian Studies Conference, Radford, VA. Presentation
Spring 2004  Diagnosing Struggling Reader, Johnson City Library, Grade 3 & 6
Spring 2003  Homework Club: Tutoring, North Side Elementary, Grades 3-5

Professional Experience:  
Administrative Assistant, NN Inc., Erwin, Tennessee, 1995-to present.