

In Whose Tennessee Mountains? Cultural Heritage Tourism on the Cumberland Trail

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A thesis presented to the Honors College of Middle Tennessee State
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from
the University Honors College.

Spring 2020

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Acknowledgements

Words alone cannot express my gratitude for all who helped me along the way, but I will try.

Firstly, I'd like to thank the community of mentors and scholars at MTSU that inspired a love for learning, specifically the Global Studies and Human Geography faculty, and the Honors College faculty.

I'd like to thank my thesis mentor, Dr. James Chaney, for not only the academic guidance he gave me, but also the passion he shared with me for geography that shall carry far beyond my undergraduate studies.

No acknowledgement page would be complete without a shout out to my family: to Mom, Dad, Beth, Grammie, Papa Jerry, Mimi, and Papa Jack, for feeding me, supporting me, and cheering me up like nobody else can.

To all the people who work selflessly to support arts in East Tennessee and preserve culture, keep doing what you're doing. There are people who care. Specifically, Bobby Fulcher, Brad Smiddy, Karen Cumorich, JoAnne Myers, Tony Branam, Rachel Boillot, and Dr. Brenden Martin: thank you all for your shared passions.

And above all, this is dedicated to the artists, musicians, actors and actresses, poets, scholars, and other creatives who color the ridges and valleys with their marks of beauty, whose songs flow over the mountains and echo the voices of Appalachia.

Abstract

Since the end of the Civil War, the concept of Appalachia as an imagined cultural region in the American consciousness has created and perpetuated stereotypes that cast Appalachians as primitive, violent, and backwards. The emergence of the “hillbilly” in popular culture has served to demean and disassociate groups of people from mainstream American culture and influence tourists’ expectations when they sojourn into the Mountain South.

Additionally, economies in Appalachia, whether industrial or tourism-based, have told a story of dispossession: outside enterprise has historically dominated capital in Appalachia, leading to disempowerment among working class people.

The Cumberland Trail, an under-construction state scenic trail in Tennessee, exhibits potential in developing cultural heritage tourism that departs from outsider-constructed identities and instead empowers the bearers of local culture. This thesis seeks to close the gap between Appalachian studies and heritage tourism while applying concepts from both in the context of the Cumberland Trail.



Figure 1. On the Cumberland Trail at Black Mountain, looking northbound. Photo by the author, Mar 12, 2020.

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Introduction

“Unities be hanged! I went into the mountains at Morristown with a Winchester, a revolver, and a guide, determined to sell my life at a fancy price. On the third day I sent the whole armament back to town and went on empty-handed and alone. I might have sent my money back, too, for all the use I had for it. These people are poor and ignorant and simple and primitive, -anything you like along that line,- but they’re as hospitable as the Arabs, as honest as they are simple, and as harmless as unspoiled country-folk are anywhere.”¹

- Francis Lynde, *The Moonshiner of Fact*

Primitive. Ignorant. Unkempt. Anglo-Saxon. Simple. Unembarrassed. These are the words that, over the centuries, have shaped America’s perception of the Appalachian identity. They have flowed over the tongues of fiction writers, journalists, missionaries, scholars, and teachers. They form the basis of a construction which, when critically analyzed, reveals gaps in understanding of a people so diverse - contrary to the popular media - that the definition of a cultural region must be reexamined. In understanding the basis upon which the Hillbilly stereotype is founded, we can begin to understand how simplified understandings of a region’s cultural landscape can serve to confuse and obscure reality. Through myriad forms of analysis - spatial, qualitative, auditory, positional - I will try to capture what it means to be “Appalachian” and “hillbilly”. Over the course of this thesis, I will explore regional stereotypes from their origins to their modern-day manifestations. Such a task necessitates some preface: Although one objective of this thesis is to describe and contextualize the formations and perceptions of a regional culture, opinions on the subject are as diverse as the people affected. My understanding of Appalachian culture and stereotyping is merely one perspective in a sea of literature, opinions, and insights around the subject. I seek to contribute to existing

¹ Francis Lynde, “The Moonshiner of Fact,” in *Lippincott’s Magazine* 57, (1896), 67.

literature on Appalachian stereotypes and build on such research to propose ways in which “heritage” can be more adequately represented and celebrated. It is only through breaking down stereotypes that we can begin to rebuild authentic perceptions of heritage and ensure tourism reflects authentic culture in an uplifting, empowering way.

Rebuilding those perceptions comes through exposure to alternate and accurate representations of culture. There are aspects of Appalachian culture that are rich in both diversity and heritage; I contend that music constitutes one of the best ways to demonstrate that culture because of its uniqueness to the performer and the voice it gives to bearers of culture. Music gives people a platform to address social issues, tell personal narratives, and either deconstruct or reclaim stereotypes.

The Cumberland Trail State Scenic Trail, currently under construction and set to be complete in the coming years, is unique in that it passes through a wide swath of Appalachia opposed to a single location. Sitting entirely within what most define as Appalachia², a wealth of music heritage exists along the trail that could be incorporated into cultural programming to give visitors to the trail a cultural experience in addition to a natural one.

Giving tourists an opportunity to better understand the “cultural landscape”, which is both intangible and tangible in the sense that it is the sum of many material traces – architecture, topography, soundscapes, and resources, for instance – and immaterial traces like events, emotions, and values.³ Music has the ability to transform a

² Karl Raitz and Richard Ulack, “Cognitive Maps of Appalachia,” *American Geographical Society* 71, no.2 (1981): 201-213.

³ Jon Anderson, *Understanding Cultural Geography: Places and Traces* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 253-266.

physical space into a *place* that carries meaning by merging the physical landscape with the events, emotions, and values of the people who occupy that space.

Thus, by promoting cultural programming on the Cumberland Trail as a vessel through which music heritage can be broadcast to those passing through, locals have the ability to tell their stories apart from prefabricated narratives. The Cumberland Trail corridor, unlike established tourism towns and areas farther east in Tennessee such as Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg, has not witnessed the same patterns of tourism development that have not only led to “the neon smear of transient consumer culture ... a chaste Vegas,” as Hoppe (2018) describes it, but also “the idealized mountain South sold” that “doesn’t attempt to challenge stereotypes.”⁴

There are certainly nuances to arguments over whether these tourism towns have done more harm or good to the communities they affect. Does the profitability of the hillbilly outweigh the negativity associated with the stereotype? Furthermore, are hillbilly stereotypes always seen as a bad thing in the eyes of people living in Appalachia? Both questions deserve to be addressed, though both questions are deeply complicated and entrenched in politics, power, and representation. I argue that the answer lies in who controls the narrative, and who ultimately benefits from the situation. We will see that, historically, neither condition has existed for people living in Appalachia in both tourism and other industries.

Chapter one examines the geographic boundaries of Appalachia, and how borders in Appalachia – both imagined and real – have evolved over time. By first establishing *where* Appalachia is, we can address *what* and *who* Appalachia represents.

⁴ Graham Hoppe, *Gone Dollywood: Dolly Parton’s Mountain Dream* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2018), 71-72.

Chapter two examines the origins of the hillbilly stereotype, and how this construction of identity that was imposed on the region in the 19th century has perpetuated today. It takes a critical look at the local color writing movement and parallels with social science of the day and explains the emergence of “hillbilly music”. Lastly, the chapter discusses how some people seek to reclaim the hillbilly and transform it to a source of pride.

Chapter three discusses the legacy of heritage tourism in East Tennessee and the issues that legacy has posed in representing authentic culture. How can cultural heritage tourism be made more sustainable? Secondly, does sustainability in heritage tourism line up with the objectives of the Cumberland Trail?

Chapter four focuses specifically on musical heritage along the Cumberland Trail corridor. Artists have colored the landscape with music for generations, though archival documentation of vernacular music in the area has only existed for the past 50 years. I discuss various manifestations of music and artists that make place in the region by capturing memory, emotions, and landscapes. I pay specific attention to Campbell and Anderson Counties in highlighting how both musicians and community nonprofits showcase and preserve regional heritage.

This thesis began as a genuine interest in vernacular music and nature trails and how those two resources could benefit from each other by incorporating music into the meanderings of the trail as it snakes through the Cumberland. The result was a realization that there already exists a community dedicated to making this happen whose enthusiasm is borne out of a similar appreciation. They understand that voices in the region deserve

to be heard and elevated because those voices represent the real Appalachia as told by the people who lived and still live there.



Figure 2. Map of the status of the Cumberland Trail in 2018. The completed trail will cover about 350 miles.⁵

⁵ "Cumberland Trail – Overview," Trail Maps, cumberlandtrail.guide, last updated Feb. 12, 2018.

Methodology

Cultural geography is spatial in nature. It views culture and cultural phenomena through their relation to each other in space. Thus, an accurate assessment of Appalachian identity, regional heritage tourism, and cultural resources on the Cumberland Trail corridor should incorporate elements of physiography, musicology, anthropology, history, demography, and human geography to understand how places and spaces interact to form culture.

To understand the formations of Appalachia in the American consciousness, I conducted research through different archival and secondary sources to analyze narrative fiction literature, recorded music, policy and policy analysis, map documents, ethnographic surveys, and academic discourse around perceptions of Appalachia to flesh out an understanding of how the idea of Appalachia, and the subsequent construction of the hillbilly stereotype, have evolved since the mid-1800s.

To analyze the state of Appalachian heritage tourism in East Tennessee apart from the Cumberland Trail, I reviewed literature documenting the development of tourism, brochures, website material, and drew from personal experience to inform perspectives on modern tourism.

As for existing developments of heritage tourism on the Cumberland Trail, I relied on notes from events hosted by maintainers and park rangers associated with the Cumberland Trail, notes from the Cumberland Trail Conference annual meeting, discussions with board members of the Friends of the Cumberland Trail, and cultural programming blueprints for future heritage tourism projects along the trail. Additionally,

I drew from personal hikes and camping trips along the Cumberland Trail that happened between October 2019 – March 2020.

To explore current expressions of music heritage along the Cumberland Trail, I analyzed musical archives and literature documenting existence of music on the Cumberland Plateau, much of which came from MTSU's Center for Popular Music as well as recorded audio of musicians from the area. Though music heritage is present along every mile of the Cumberland Trail corridor, a specific region of focus was musical heritage and its preservation in Campbell and Anderson Counties. I researched the history of the Coal Creek Wars and the music that came from it to demonstrate how historic events led to the spatial diffusion of music in the area. Finally, I discuss the conversation I had with the program coordinators of Postmark LaFollette, a nonprofit near the Cumberland Trail in Campbell County, on how existing cultural resources can be leveraged to promote tourism on the trail.

Grounded theory is a method of qualitative analysis that uses inductive reasoning to establish conceptual theory of collected data, allowing new patterns to emerge as a consequence of the data collected.⁶ In this study, a grounded-theory analysis whereby exploration of the cultural landscape through a mixed-methods approach including personal visits to the Cumberland Trail, surrounding landmarks serving as cultural markers, interactions with figureheads instrumental in regional cultural preservation, and listening to music all helped me draw conclusions about the cultural landscape.

My original plan to conduct more ethnographic field studies of the cultural landscape were limited by several reasons. Though I initially intended to hike every

⁶Antony Bryant and Kathy Charmaz, *The SAGE Handbook of Current Developments in Grounded Theory*, (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2019).

existing portion of the Cumberland Trail, my ability to get out on the trail was limited by a bout of the flu in January, storms in February, and closure due to COVID-19 in March.

COVID-19 also posed a problem in meeting with more individuals and accessing resources; in one instance, I was invited to a music jamboree hosted by Postmark LaFollette which was then cancelled, and numerous resources from the Center for Popular Music could not be accessed due to closures, like the Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin, the Charles K. Wolfe Collection, and books documenting music heritage on the Cumberland Plateau. I was also unable to visit Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge to make personal documentation of mountain tourism.

Therefore, much of the research conducted had to be done from a remote setting, and the scope of my study was limited. Nonetheless, this thesis serves as a springboard for future research on the Cumberland Trail as it relates to heritage tourism and helps pave the way for similar studies to be replicated in other areas or on other trails.

Chapter 1

Horizons to hollers: Defining the boundaries of Appalachia

The city I live in sits just outside the region of Appalachia as described by the Appalachian Regional Commission. The ARC, which was created by Congress in 1965 as a defining branch of President Kennedy's War on Poverty, defines Appalachia as "205,000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi."⁷ The borders of the ARC's jurisdiction are defined by county lines. In Tennessee, (one of) the Western edges of Appalachia proper ends just ten miles from my house in Rutherford County, at the demarcation where Cannon County begins. Cannon County is where the geography changes from the extremely level topography of the Central Basin, where elevations rarely change more than 50 feet, to the Highland Rim, where snaking creeks carve elongated lowlands through forested hills until more or less leveling out two hundred feet above the basin until the abrupt cliffs of the Cumberland Plateau begin.⁸ The Plateau does not bear too much resemblance to a plateau; it bears the aged marks of "tableland gashed by streams that have cut their way down in deep narrow gulches with precipitous sides."⁹ What made the ARC choose to end Appalachia at the basin? Better yet, why does the political definition of Appalachia end west of Cannon County, but include every county in Northern Alabama that borders Tennessee? Why does Mississippi, a state largely outside

⁷ "The Appalachian Region," Appalachian Regional Commission, https://www.arc.gov/appalachian_region/TheAppalachianRegion.asp

⁸ "Ambient Air Monitoring Plan," Environmental Protection Agency, July 1, 2010, <https://www3.epa.gov/ttnamti1/files/networkplans/TNPlan2010.pdf>

⁹ Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders*, (The Macmillan Company, 1913). Reprint, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984, 27.

of most physiographic and popular descriptions of Appalachia, contain a part of the ARC's Appalachia west of Memphis?

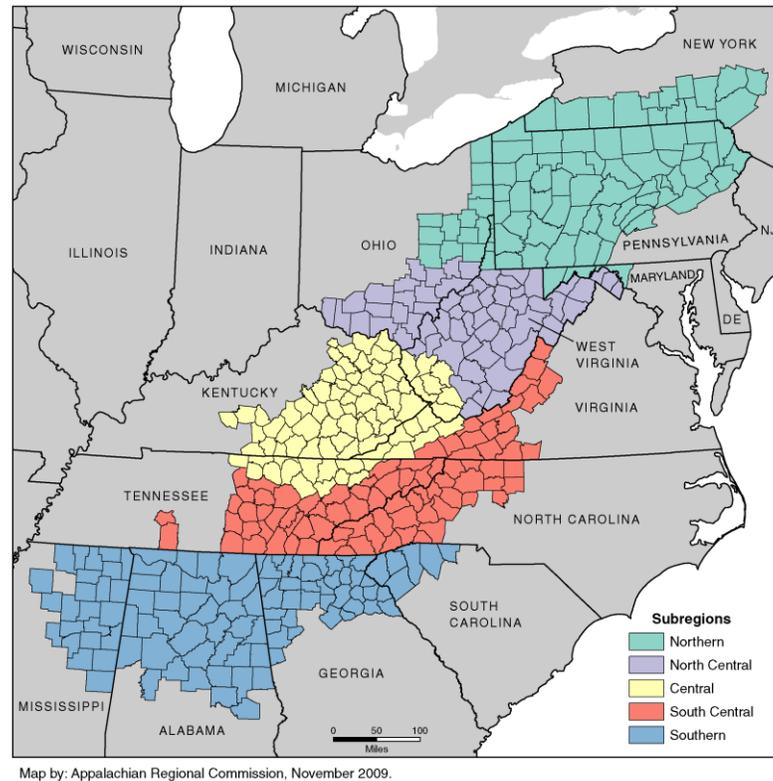


Figure 3. Map of the Appalachian Regional Commission, 2009.¹⁰

In his comprehensive examination of Southern Appalachian culture, the late University of Tennessee geography professor John Rehder argues that politics had much to do with the “bloated region” that “expanded beyond the parameters of a physical uplands environment plagued by white poverty.”¹¹ The definition of Appalachia as established by the ARC and persuaded by members of Congress eager to procure funds for their constituencies is just one way of defining Appalachia. In discussions preceding the formation of the ARC, a section in the 1960 President’s Appalachian Regional Commission report clarified:

¹⁰ *Subregions in Appalachia*, (Washington, DC: Appalachian Regional Commission, 2009).

¹¹ John Rehder, *Appalachian Folkways* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 8-10.

"This then, is Appalachia: a nonurban land with a population over 50 percent rural but less than 10 percent farm; deeply unemployed; all too frequently deprived of the facilities and services of a modern society; dependent on local jurisdictions with an inadequate tax base and too often reliant upon the marginal comforts of a welfare economy. What it [the commission] has found is a record of insufficiency-a history of traditional acts not performed, of American patterns not fulfilled. This sets Appalachia apart from the rest of the Nation."¹²

British geographer Michael Bradshaw, in his 1992 book *The Appalachian Regional Commission: 25 Years of Government Policy* entertains the nuances of how the borders for Appalachia came to fruition, influenced by “the pragmatic terms of marshaling as much congressional support as possible.” He continues to note that Appalachia needed to remain contiguous as well: “the designers of the legislation argued that it was important to produce a compact region - which may be seen as a rationalization of the process by which border counties were often added if they brought in an additional congressional district and the support of its representative.” The 17 counties added in Mississippi in 1967 do not adhere to the physiographic uplands traditionally used to demarcate where Appalachia begins.¹³ Thus, the boundaries set by the ARC do not give an uncontested picture of Appalachia outside of the purely administrative sense. To better understand what constitutes ‘Appalachia’, the idea should be entertained as a cultural region. This opens an entirely new discourse within which exist myriad arguments over what a cultural region is; the scholarship is too vast to cover here. To sum it up, Fordham

¹² Michael Bradshaw, *The Appalachian Regional Commission : Twenty-Five Years of Government Policy*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 44.

¹³ Nevin Fenneman, “Physiographic Subdivision of the United States,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 3(1), (1917), 17–22.

University history professor Steven Stoll notes, in his book *Ramp Hollow: The Ordeal of Appalachia*, that “there might be no reliable way of defining a cultural region.”¹⁴ The answer to the question where Appalachia begins and ends could be that there is no answer, or that there are many. Or, to quote Appalachian scholar Elizabeth Catte, “Appalachia is nothing if not messily defined.”¹⁵ It’s best to understand how the region of Appalachia came to be understood and perceived over time and how Appalachia’s legacy influences its reputation and existence in the modern day.

The origin of the idea of Appalachia as a cultural region of the United States emerged at the end of the 18th century when the American “frontier” still existed on the Blue Ridge. It was a time when Daniel Boone’s legacy stood as a testament to American grit, but elitist perceptions on inhabitants of the region cast most as “barbarians.”¹⁶ The establishment of the Wilderness Road through the Cumberland Gap, which Boone blazed at the request of a North Carolinian judge, opened the Plateau to white settlement in heavily forested territory primarily used as hunting commons for Cherokee natives.¹⁷ In 1805, a treaty removed Cherokee claims to land on Tennessee’s Cumberland Plateau. Over the decades, the erosion of Cherokee land rights by way of federal treaties effectively weakened native land claims until the Cherokees’ forcible deportation out of the territories west of the Mississippi River in 1838, justified by the New Echota Treaty signed in 1835 which many Cherokees argued was illegitimate due to the treaty’s rejection by the Cherokee National Council. The white Southern Highland “pioneers”

¹⁴ Steven Stoll, *Ramp Hollow: The Ordeal of Appalachia*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2017), 5.

¹⁵ Catte, Elizabeth, *What You are Getting Wrong about Appalachia*, (Cleveland: Belt Publishing, 2018), 13.

¹⁶ Stoll, *Ramp Hollow*, 8.

¹⁷ John Campbell, *The Southern Highlander & His Homeland*, (The Russell Sage Foundation, 1921). Reprint, The University Press of Kentucky, 1921, 26-28.

were praised because they lived on the frontier, and therefore extolled the virtues of what Frederick Jackson Turner would put into words at the end of the 19th century.¹⁸ But when the frontier pushed westward, “the pioneers went from the present to the past.”¹⁹

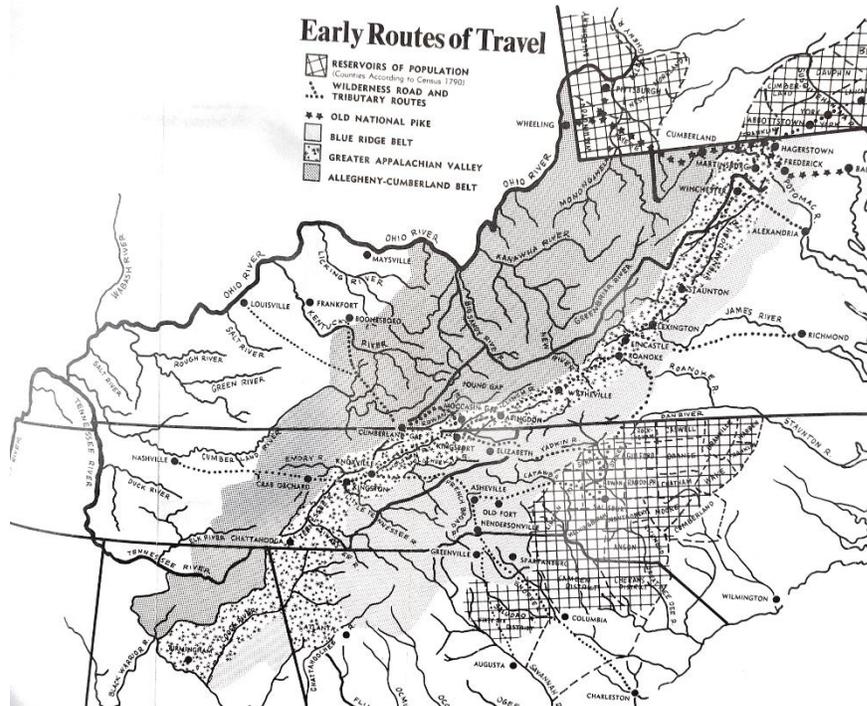


Figure 4. Map of Early Routes of human migration through the Southern Highlands.²⁰

¹⁸ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 1921), Project Gutenberg.

¹⁹ Stoll, *Ramp Hollow*, 13.

²⁰ John Campbell, “Early Routes of Travel,” in *Southern Highlander*, 33.

Chapter 2

Hillbillies: The making of a stereotype

The image of the hillbilly permeates popular culture and informs outsider notions of what it means to be Appalachian. In recent decades the American public has borne witness to manifestations of hillbilly culture through Dollywood, the Beverly Hillbillies, L'il Abner, "Tucker and Dale vs. Evil", "The Wild and Wonderful Whites of West Virginia", and most recently, the emergence of a cultural region defined by its politics: "Trump Country". However, hillbillies, as they exist in the American psyche, are nothing new. In fact, the lazy but hospitable, strong but stubborn, religious but inebriated hillbilly stereotype has been around since the end of the Civil War, and it has almost always been perpetuated by outsiders. Incidentally, the person who first brought the caricature to national attention in the 1870s hails from mere miles outside the ARC definition of Appalachia and the demarcation between 'basin' and 'highlands' - in my hometown of Murfreesboro, in Rutherford County, Tennessee.

Local color writers and early ethnography

Mary Noailles Murfree, the great-granddaughter of Revolutionary War Hero Hardee Murfree (after whom the city is named) was born in 1850 and frequently took trips to elite resorts at Beersheba Springs on the western escarpment of the Cumberland Plateau. In the late 1870s, Murfree began writing and publishing stories depicting dramatized life in the Cumberland Mountains, seeking to capture local dialects, attitudes, customs, and quirks. This emerged among a growing body of literature called "local-color writing," but Murfree's work grew in popularity as some of the first literature centered around Appalachian lifestyles. According to Wright, "no one before or since

Miss Murfree has produced so much fiction about the mountains and mountaineers of Tennessee". There are few works predating Murfree's dealing with Appalachia. Even if other fiction may have existed before then, "Miss Murfree was unquestionably the first writer to bring both the state of Tennessee and the region of Southern Appalachia to widespread public attention through fiction."²¹ Murfree, who wrote under the pseudonym *Charles Egbert Craddock*, depicts characters as welcoming but unintelligent. Perhaps the most noticeable feature of the writing is Murfree's dedication to portraying local dialect. *The Romance of Sunrise Rock*, written in 1880, centers around the physician John Cleaver living on the Cumberland Plateau with a friend who decided to farm sheep.²² The first spoken words in the story come from a local explaining the legend behind a cliff on the Cumberland escarpment which suggests foreign, American Indian influences:

*" 'T war painted by the Injuns, -- that's what I hev always hearn tell. Them folks war mos'ly leagued with the Evil One. That's how it kem they war gin the grasp ter scuffle up that thar bluff, ez air four hunderd feet high an' ez sheer ez a wall ; it ain't got foothold fur a cockle-burr. I hev hearn tell that when they got ez high ez the pictur' they war 'lowed by the devil ter stand on air. An' I believes it. Else how'd they make out ter do that thar job? "*²³

Cleaver was raised with a formal education, a transplant of the region, and lives with his lawyer-turned-sheep-farmer friend Trelawney, who had a similar upbringing. What differs between Cleaver and Trelawney is how their environment affects their personalities: while Cleaver ensures his own, 'educated' dialect stays intact, Trelawney

²¹ Nathalia Wright, introduction to *In the Tennessee Mountains* (1884) by Mary Noailles Murfree, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970), vi-vii.

²² Mary Noailles Murfree, "The Romance of Sunrise Rock," in *In the Tennessee Mountains*, 182-214.

²³ Murfree, "Romance," 182-183.

unironically adapts his lexicon to that of his surroundings. Cleaver's repugnance is evident:

*"He felt that every concession to the customs of the region was a descent toward the level of its inhabitants ... Cleaver silently swore a mighty oath - an oath he had often sworn before - that he would not go down with [Trelawney], he would not deteriorate too, he would hold hard to the traditions of a higher sphere."*²⁴

Why would Murfree choose to portray the Cumberland mountaineers as the antithesis to American progress? Part of her characterization could come from her personal experiences, or lack thereof, with local inhabitants surrounding the mountain resorts where she spent her time. Martin notes that "life at these resorts did indeed put her in proximity to mountain people, but the exclusivity of Beersheba Springs and Montvale Springs shielded her from much direct interaction with poor mountaineers."²⁵ Murfree's writing was likely informed by her perception of the mountaineers she constructed through passing encounters with locals, opposed to an intimate relationship with them.

Murfree was just the first to achieve fame through her local color writings in Appalachia. Others, like John Fox, Jr, and T.C. Crawford, set forth on portraying Appalachia as a culture of feuding and bloodlust, playing out stereotypes to a level of grotesque exoticism. Others, however, took a more ethnographic approach, seeking to cache in on their seeming 'discovery' of an American subculture that departed from modernity. Notable among these writers is Will Wallace Harney, a physician who traveled in 1869 to the Cumberland Mountains on the south-east border of Kentucky.

²⁴ Murfree, "Romance," 189.

²⁵ C. Brenden Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South: A Double-Edged Sword*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 48.

Harney describes the region and its inhabitants in ways that emphasize the ‘otherness’ of the region; the essay, titled “A Strange Land and a Peculiar People,” describes people “characterized by marked peculiarities of the anatomical frame,”²⁶ and describes the mountain women as “very pretty, having dark, opalescent eyes, with a touch of gold in them at a side glance, slight, rather too fragile figures, and the singular purity of complexion peculiar to high lands.”²⁷ In *Appalachia on our Mind*, historian Henry Shapiro deconstructs the world which Harney ‘discovers’, noting that his purportedly scientific writing was much like local color writing in that “it involved the selection of certain aspects of reality for consideration instead of others, and an attempt to order the aspects of reality thus perceived.”²⁸

In fact, local-color writing and social scientists at the time frequently made similar observations about the supposed extreme isolation of the mountaineers. Algeo argues that popular ethnographic researchers in Appalachia at the turn of the 20th century frequently appealed to local-color imagery in order to attract more readership. Algeo notes that “The use of local-color imagery in what would be taken as objective, scientific narratives reified imaginative fictional renderings of place, situating in real places a highly selective and distorted version of culture.”²⁹

Kentucky geographer Ellen Churchill Semple, in her influential essay titled “The Anglo-Saxons of the Kentucky Mountains,” emphasizes the geographic isolation of the

²⁶ Will Harney, "A Strange Land and Peculiar People." *Lippincott's Magazine* 12, (1873), 431.

²⁷ Harney, "A Strange Land," 436.

²⁸ Henry Shapiro, *Appalachia on our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 4.

²⁹ Katie Algeo, "Locals on Local Color: Imagining Identity in Appalachia," *Southern Cultures* 9, no. 4 (2003): 27-54.

region in explaining how inhabitants could be so markedly different from outsiders.³⁰

Based on Semple's observations, local lifestyles are molded by the physical environment, leading to intermarriage, little outside communication, a fierce independence and "pioneer character", and racial purity. The latter aspect, to which Semple's essay lends its name, is based on the theory of "environmental determinism", which claims that development and culture are primarily influenced by climate, geography, and isolation.

Why should we question the assumptions made by late 19th and early 20th century social scientists who sought to identify and explain regional identity and development through outdated theory? Because in some cases, the claims either weren't true, or they ignored manifestations of culture that contested ideas of homogeneity in Appalachia. Steven Stoll notes that the linguistic peculiarities and similarities to Elizabethan English mentioned by Semple existed in other parts of the country at the time; furthermore, most white mountaineers traced their origins to Scotland and Ireland opposed to England.³¹ Furthermore, the "discovery" of Appalachia came at an uncertain time: according to Shapiro, "the chaotic state of the social sciences reinforced the tendency to speculation as academic social scientists themselves sought to take advantage of contemporary interest in Appalachia, by preparing speculative articles for the popular press and by utilizing Appalachia as a 'test case' for one or another hypothesis of their own."³² Despite this assertion, the revelatory power of such popular essays, regardless of their scientific truths, was what stuck in readers' minds and what informed their perceptions of Appalachians. In terms of racial stock, Whisnant criticizes the work of

³⁰ Ellen Churchill Semple, "The Anglo-Saxons of the Kentucky Mountains," *The Geographic Journal* 17 (1901). Reprint Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997

³¹ Stoll, *Ramp Hollow*, 19.

³² Shapiro, *Appalachia on our Mind*, 82.

anthropogeography scholars like Semple who “obscured the actually very mixed ethnographic and cultural character of the region, into which thousands of blacks and immigrants had been brought (sometimes literally by the trainload) to work on the railroads and in the mines, and in which thousands of American Indians who had managed to survive the first wave of colonization still lived.”³³

Race was the epicenter of the faulty environmental determinist theories making broad assumptions about development and culture based on geographic isolation and climate. A racial ‘otherness’ was used to distinguish the degenerate mountain white from whites outside the region who enjoyed the products of the Progressive Era. Campbell noted in 1921 that the term ‘mountain white’ itself evoked the ire of Appalachians in the heyday of its usage: “This opprobrious term, coined as a term of distinction by well-meaning advocates of the mountaineer, is resented by all who dwell in the Highlands, by whatever name they may be designated,” Campbell says.³⁴

Harney’s sojourn to the Kentucky mountains and the descriptions of the social conditions he witness, like the “sordid interior” of a cabin occupied by an African-American woman, “sickly with the smell of half-eaten food and unwashed dishes,”³⁵ had greater effects than providing material for fiction writers. It was also the call for northern Protestant missionaries who found a new purpose in educating the highlanders to save them from their degeneracy and squalor.

One key factor in solidifying the Appalachian ‘other’ was the belief that the mountaineers didn’t exploit the natural resources like timber and coal so ubiquitous in

³³ David Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer: People, Power, and Planning in Appalachia*. Rev. ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 29.

³⁴ Campbell, *Southern Highlander*, 18.

³⁵ Harney, “A Strange Land,” 431.

Appalachia, and this arrested development could be overcome through industrialization. According to Elizabeth Catte, “this projection also suited the needs of industrialists who benefited from narratives that suggested the people of the region should be ‘developed’ and put to purpose.”³⁶ Industrialization of the Mountain South by northern corporations, therefore, could enter Appalachia riding on the support of missionaries and philanthropists: the capitalists had come to modernize the mountaineer. The linkage between mission work and profiteering exploits could not be more clear: At the 1908 National Conference of Charities and Correction in Richmond, Virginia, of which John C. Campbell was an invitee, University of Tennessee professor John Claxton argued that investments in agricultural and industrial education in Appalachia could yield substantial profits.³⁷ Although Claxton saw the opportunity to industrialize the mountain south as a way to lift people out of poverty, the reality is that the northern owners of mines and mills that subsequently entered the region extracted huge profit off the land, and hillbilly deviance was regarded as the refusal to conform to an industrializing Appalachia. Tourism, too, showed its potential in accomplishing the objectives of philanthropists and missionaries who had set their sights on Appalachia as their project to develop. An article in the Harrogate Mountain Herald, based out of Lincoln Memorial University, wrote in 1925 about opening Cumberland Gap to tourism: “The people are richly endowed with native ability and when once their arrested development is released by the electric force of education, they will become one of the bulwarks of American citizenship. This section abounds in commercial and industrial possibilities.”³⁸

³⁶ Catte, *What You are Getting Wrong*, 37.

³⁷ Shapiro, *Appalachia on our Mind*, 191-192.

³⁸ “Harrogate on the Dixie Highway,” *The Mountain Herald* 28, no. 1 (1925): 11-12, <https://dla.acaweb.org/digital/collection/Lincoln/id/162/rec/8>.

Modern Perceptions

The hillbilly stereotype is going nowhere. Echoes of the past are present in modern day hillbilly stereotypes, continuing a disparagement manifest in popular films, literature, and TV shows. Some of the most frequently cited media includes “The Beverly Hillbillies,” which Newcomb criticized in 1979 for its portrayal of the Clampett family as morally good, but with a goodness that is “the simple goodness of children.”³⁹ Ironically, the Beverly Hillbillies hail from the Missouri Ozarks, suggesting a diffusion of what is considered hillbilly to other mountain cultures. Newcomb extends the example of the hillbilly as childlike in other examples: Hee-Haw, Barney Fyfe, Goober and Gomer. Such portrayals exude “viciousness” because “mountain people and southerners are not considered as part of the adult population of the country or of the culture.”⁴⁰ Echoes of the simplemindedness of Appalachians was apparent in 2016 with the election of Donald Trump, wherein numerous news outlets portrayed Appalachia as “Trump Country”, citing his large margins of victory in a traditionally blue region. What Dissent Magazine writer Sarah Jones calls the “Trump Country Safari,” mainstream media outlets have been quick to categorize rural America, including Appalachia, as a land of simpletons voting against their own self-interests as extraction industry jobs declined and industrialists continued to roll back protections and regulations for workers.⁴¹ A New York Times editorial written by Roger Cohen two months before the 2016 presidential election paints a picture of white poverty in a small town:

³⁹ Horace Newcomb, “Appalachia on Television: Region as Symbol in American Popular Culture,” in *Appalachian Images in Folk and Popular Culture*, ed W.K. McNeil (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 323.

⁴⁰ Newcomb, “Appalachia on Television,” 324.

⁴¹ Sarah Jones, “Scapegoat Country,” *Dissent Magazine*, Fall 2019.

“Hazard, set in the mountains of eastern Kentucky, is a once bustling town with its guts wrenched out. On Main Street, the skeleton of a mall that burned down last year presents its charred remains for dismal contemplation. Young people with drugged eyes lean against boarded-up walls on desolate streets. The whistle of trains hauling coal, once as regular as the chiming of the hours, has all but vanished.”⁴²

These Trump Country pieces are nothing new. Every longform story supplanted by images of white people standing in front of a lazy diner, or a dilapidated storefront, or a mountain shack in a holler, that tries to understand an entire region of society through the white working class, repeats the same pitfalls that have simplified Appalachia throughout the decades. Consider the February 2016 feature by Vanity Fair writer John Saward titled “Welcome to Trump Country, U.S.A.” A casual discussion with one person about a hot dog turns into an analysis of rural nostalgia:

“You have never heard people speak so fondly, so intimately about hot dogs. Not, like, the nuances of them, but their very existence, the way you would talk about a grandmother or an old Labrador. It’s part reverence, part nostalgia. I have never cared as much about anything as this man did about a hot-dog recommendation. It was sincere and beautiful, him imparting this to someone, a kind of treasure map.”⁴³

Saward portrays the Trump voting Appalachian as simpleminded and hopeless. He paints the Trump Country picture as a place of rural values, simple lifestyles, but hopeless realities where residents are looking for any way out. Pieces like Saward’s and Cohen’s work to “control the narratives” of Appalachia, a trend that has existed since the end of the Civil War. In this specific manifestation of regional blanketing of complex political issues, “the press often used the perceived helplessness of Appalachians to naturalize a

⁴² Roger Cohen, “We Need ‘Somebody Spectacular’: Views from Trump Country,” *The New York Times*, Sept. 9, 2016.

⁴³ John Saward, “Welcome to Trump Country, U.S.A.,” *Vanity Fair*, Feb. 24, 2016.

specific political choice and ignored the voices and stories of those attempting to call a different outcome into being.”⁴⁴

The release of the J.D. Vance autobiography / social commentary *Hillbilly Elegy* that same year spread an all too familiar message: Appalachia is a homogeneous region made of white Scots-Irish and English stock, plagued by its own wrongdoings that undermines its own self interests. Vance portrayed an aspect of Appalachia that exists, undoubtedly, but one that should not be understood as a portrait of *Appalachians*. As is the case for every other region of America, Appalachia is diverse in race, ethnicity, politics, sexuality, religion, and culture. It is important to recognize the trend of generalization and the power structures that underlie those narratives to understand why some Appalachians are actively fighting against mythologized perceptions.

Hillbilly music

Popular country music is not exempt from manifestations of the hillbilly stereotype. Ever since Americans have heard country music played through their radio stations, the presence of hillbilly music has informed and molded how people perceive old-time, string band, and bluegrass forms of music. Tennessee serves as no better an example of how a handful of vernacular music forms from the mountains came to be appropriated and commercialized for profit. Tracing the hillbilly in vernacular music from East Tennessee to Nashville helps illustrate the evolution of heritage as it becomes exposed to large audiences. Furthermore, it serves as another example of the trend of

⁴⁴ Catta, *What you are Getting Wrong*, 51.

resource extraction in the Mountain South - though the resources are cultural, opposed to physical.

Although folk songs have been sung all around America, the idea that Appalachia existed as a cultural hearth for folk music was born out of the work of a handful of folklorists, dubbed “song catchers”, in the first decades of the 20th century. These song catchers were closely associated with the social scientists of the day studying customs and cultures of Appalachians. Though the English song collector Cecil Sharp is the one who recorded the most comprehensive set of British Isle ballads in Appalachia between 1916 and 1918, Sharp’s work relied on the field notes and collection of Olive Dame Campbell between 1907 and 1915.⁴⁵ Olive Dame was from Massachusetts and married John C. Campbell in 1906. Campbell was an Indiana native raised in Wisconsin; a Presbyterian missionary who dedicated himself, like many others, to bringing better education to the children of Appalachia and teaching them the right ways of religion at the same time. Following a few years of teaching at a mountain school in Joppa, Alabama, and a presidency at Piedmont College in Demorest, Georgia, John C. Campbell received a \$3000 grant from the newly created Russell Sage Foundation to conduct “an impartial and sympathetic study to find out what needs are common to these isolated sections, and what needs are peculiar to each, in the hope that when the diagnosis is made a remedy may be found.”⁴⁶ It was during this period that Olive Dame Campbell took an interest in the music being performed in Eastern Kentucky. She notes in a journal entry at

⁴⁵ George Revill and John Gold, “Far Back in American Time’: Culture, Region, Nation, Appalachia, and the Geography of Voice, ” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 108, no. 5 (2018): 1412-1413.

⁴⁶ Henry Shapiro, introduction to Campbell, *Southern Highlander*, xxiv.

the time an interaction with a young girl named Ada B. Smith, singing “Barbry Allen” by the fireside:

Shall I ever forget it? The blazing fire, the young girl on her low stool before it, the soft strange strumming of the banjo—different from anything I had heard before—and then the song! I had been used to singing “Barbara Allen” as a child, but how far from that gentle tune was this—so strange, so remote, so thrilling. I was lost almost from the first note, and the pleasant room faded from sight; the singer only a voice. I saw again the long road over which we had come, the dark hills, the rocky streams bordered by tall hemlocks and hollies, the lonely cabins distinguish-able at night only by the firelight flaring from their chimneys. Then these, too, faded, and I seemed to be borne along into a still more dim and distant past, of which I myself was a part.⁴⁷

This experience then turned into a project for Mrs. Campbell, who began collecting more than 200 ballads, specifically old-style love songs, across Appalachia in North Georgia, Western North Carolina, and Eastern Kentucky.⁴⁸ But Mrs. Campbell was not the first to experience such a transcendental moment. Ellen Churchill Semple’s conclusion that Appalachia, specifically Eastern Kentucky, was replete with Anglo-Saxon blood and a peculiar adherence to Elizabethan customs due to geographic isolation, extended to music:

Under these circumstances, the Kentucky mountaineer reverted to his ancestral type of literature and revived ballad poetry. This has now been handed down from lip to lip through generations, the slightly variant form and phrase only testifying to its genuineness. The ballad of “Barbara Allen,” popular in Great Britain three hundred years ago, and known now in America only to the musical antiquarian, is a stand-by in several of the mountain counties.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Olive Campbell, *The Life and Work of John C. Campbell*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 144.

⁴⁸ Arthur Krim, “Appalachian Songcatcher: Olive Dame Campbell and the Scotch-Irish Ballad” *Routledge* 24 (2006): 91-112.

⁴⁹ Semple, “The Anglo-Saxon,” 173-174.

Upon this context, it is easier to understand how the focus of music collection in the Appalachian Mountains was distinctly centered around that which held British roots. When Cecil Sharp went into the mountains with his assistant Maud Karpeles, he was searching specifically for Anglo-Saxon balladry, despite the existence of other expressions of culture. Citing a diary entry by Karpeles in which the duo visits a hamlet in Watson's Cove, North Carolina only to turn around after finding "a negro settlement", Revill and Gold note that "other residents of the Appalachians were overlooked or disparaged" by Sharp's song catching. Even though Sharp did record black musicians in some instances, "he primarily found merit by asserting the music's whiteness."⁵⁰ Once Sharp's *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* was published in 1917, outsiders began to recognize Appalachia for what they thought it was, and what had been espoused to them by social scientists, missionaries, and writers for the past 50 years: that Appalachia was white, geographically isolated, and culturally homogenous. As Wolfe notes, "the old songs Sharp found were not unique to the area, nor was the area so isolated as popular conception supposed ... nevertheless the popular image of the southern mountains as a prime source of folk songs was formed (and still holds today), and this image was to have much to do with the later commercial development of this folk music."⁵¹

As the genre of country music was forming its foundations in the ballads, gospel songs, Delta blues, and string band music of the day, the hillbilly stereotype was also in its infancy. The word hillbilly became ingrained in the image of the string band in 1924,

⁵⁰ Revill and Gold, "Far Back", 1413.

⁵¹ Charles Wolfe, *Tennessee Strings: The Story of Country Music in Tennessee*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 6.

when a string band recording in Galax, Virginia, was named “The Hill Billies” by a New York recording executive.⁵² Additionally, the humorous image of the backwards hillbilly was bolstered by the association quickly made between the hillbilly and the yodel, which came to represent the wild, reckless side of the mountaineer.⁵³

When the Grand Ole Opry came under the direction of George Hay, the show turned from modern popular tunes to the old-time music of Appalachia: Hay “asked the musicians to stop wearing their business suits and instead to put on overalls and work shirts; publicity pictures were made of musicians in cornfields, with hound dogs, and jugs of moonshine” even though “most of the early Opry musicians were from the Nashville area.”⁵⁴ Just as outside capitalists set up industries of exploitative resource extraction in the Southern Mountains, the hillbilly commodified helped popularize old-time string band music at the expense of authenticity.

The central theme in the work of early 20th century song catchers is problematic. Although Campbell and Sharp’s decisions to collect folk music traditions under the scope of English balladry is understandable, the omission of other types of music represents the reinforcement of a mythologized construction of the region. Specifically focusing on music that perpetuates such a construction effectively silences other voices, like the African American community happened upon by Sharp and Karpeles. Kentucky geographer Deborah Thompson seeks to “question the silences” and the “socially constructed boundaries around the production and consumption of music.”⁵⁵

⁵² Wolfe, *Tennessee Strings*, 41.

⁵³ Tim Wise, “How the Yodel Became a Joke: The Vicissitudes of a Musical Sign,” *Popular Music* 31, no. 3 (2012): 461-479.

⁵⁴ Wolfe, *Tennessee Strings*, 61.

⁵⁵ Deborah Thompson, “Searching for Silenced Voices in Appalachian Music,” *GeoJournal* 65, no. ½, *Geography & Music* (2006), 67.

Other types of music from historically oppressed peoples have existed in the region, despite the lack of attention they have received from scholars and the public. Thompson points to musical expressions from Cherokees that employ flutes, drums, and rattles. Citing oppressive political decisions to outlaw ritual ceremonies (where music would be present) and other assimilatory tactics, as well as the context-specific nature of Native music, Thompson notes that documentation and expression of Native American music forms is limited, though experiencing a revival.⁵⁶ It has not always been trendy to claim Native American ancestry.

On the other hand, African American contributions to musical heritage in Appalachia are no less nuanced but benefit from greater documentation than Native American forms of music. This is due in part to not only the adoption of the banjo into old-time string band music in the mid-19th century, as well as the popularization of the guitar in Appalachia, but also the incorporation of African American cultural elements in oftentimes demeaning and stereotyping hillbilly skits.

Empowering the hillbillies

In recent years, residents of Appalachia have begun to embrace the Hillbilly caricature in an attempt to reclaim a sense of dignity through the exaggerated culture that was and continues to be demeaned. An annual festival in Pikeville, Kentucky, called “Hillbilly Days” has existed since 1977 and features many of the centuries-old stereotypes. Grannies tote their double-barreled shotguns, children wear coonskin caps, ‘haints lumber around. The Hillbilly Days website notes that “Men, women and

⁵⁶ Thompson, “Searching,” 70.

youngsters pick and grin while trying to outdo each other with their wild hillbilly outfits.”⁵⁷ The act of reclaiming the Hillbilly stereotype is what scholar Mark Roberts refers to as “rehillbillification.”⁵⁸ The connotation of the word “Hillbilly” changes depending on the person and the context. The term, just like the people it tries to portray, is full of nuance. In any case, casting the people of Appalachia as hillbillies in a way that mocks and denigrates, especially when they themselves are absent of agency, should be fought against. Above all, the people of Appalachia deserve to detach on their own terms from outdated cultural theories and perceptions that simplify an incredibly complex region that exists not as an outlier to modern day America, but as a part of the whole. One way to deconstruct a stereotype is to facilitate contact between the stereotypers from the stereotyped. The history of tourism in Appalachia and its modern-day manifestation serves as yet another example of a complex web of (dis)empowerment, politics, cultural generalization, and caricaturizing. New Appalachian heritage tourism programming should ignore aspects of commercialized tourism seen in popular tourist towns in East Tennessee. Musical heritage tourism on the Cumberland Plateau and its potential as an agent of change instead of a perpetuation of the status quo will be the subject of the next sections.

⁵⁷ “Hillbilly Days,” Pike County Tourism, accessed Mar. 27, 2020, <https://www.hillbillydays.com/>.

⁵⁸ Mark Roberts, “The Performing Hillbilly: Redeeming Acts of a Regional Stereotype,” *Appalachian Journal* 38, no. 1 (Fall 2010), 78.

Chapter 3

Appalachian heritage tourism in Tennessee

The legacy of highlands tourism

Mountain cultures have long been the source of commercialization in Appalachia, but an adherence to accurate depictions of those cultures have often fallen by the wayside in the pursuit of profit. Such was the case at the Eastern Band Cherokee reservation in Cherokee, North Carolina, where Cherokee natives would use traditional Plains Indians apparel during the 20th century to depict a popular, instead of accurate, image of the Native American, and mountain community tourism gift shops began selling Confederate memorabilia despite Union-leanings during the Civil War.⁵⁹ Today, the town of Gatlinburg is replete with commercialized hillbilly attractions: visitors can play “hillbilly golf” around recreations of moonshine stills, cabin memorabilia, and barrels of “Mtn. Dew”; couples may have a “Hillbilly wedding” and wed barefoot in a creek ordained by a bearded minister in overalls; dining out could entail watching a dramatized dinner-show rendition of the Hatfield and McCoy feud featuring “hilarious hillbilly hijinks guaranteed to make people of all ages hoot, holler and squeal with delight.”⁶⁰ To better understand sustainable cultural heritage tourism, it may be better to point out what it is *not*. For that, Martin has demonstrated that Southern mountain communities through the 20th and 21st centuries have experienced the detrimental effects of outside capital ventures in their spaces, and how a dependency on external capital ended up siphoning economic effects away from those communities, to the point where in one instance, “by the late 1990s, it

⁵⁹ Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South*, 154-62.

⁶⁰ “Hatfield & McCoy Dinner Show: Hillbilly Hijinks Have History,” PigeonForge.com, July 30, 2019, <https://www.pigeonforge.com/hatfield-and-mccoy-dinner-feud-hillbilly-hijinks-have-history/>

was estimated that, although local families still own most of the land in Pigeon Forge, more than 75% of tourism profits were funneled out of the community.”⁶¹ Heritage tourism ventures should depart from a history of outside profiteering in the Mountain South at the expense of rural communities.

Another catch-22 exists in the conflict between depicting authentic culture, and depicting what sells: if the popular image of the Hillbilly stereotype, or imagined geographies of a landscape sympathetic to the Confederacy during the Civil War, or inaccurate representations of Native Americans are what sells, then what is the incentive to develop tourism that ensures accuracy and sustainability if it doesn't pay the bills? The hope is that there is a market demand for heritage tourism that seeks authenticity instead of

Cultural sustainability and the Cumberland Trail

Developing music heritage along the Cumberland Trail should follow a pattern of symbiosis whereby musicians and community stakeholders benefit from local heritage being showcased. In other words, heritage tourism should be approached sustainably which “implies that tourism activities satisfy the social and economic needs of the present, but does not result in the serious degradation of the natural and cultural environment, in order for future generations to have equitable access to them,” according to Kim, Whitford, and Arcodia.⁶²

⁶¹ Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South*, 132.

⁶² Kim, Whitford, and Arcodia, "Development of Intangible Cultural Heritage as a Sustainable Tourism Resource: The Intangible Cultural Heritage Practitioners' Perspectives." *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 14, no. 5-6 (2019): 422-435.

The development of the Cumberland Trail already takes a sustainability approach toward the natural environment. Trail building courses emphasize “building sustainable trails.”⁶³ An ESRI blog notes that “The trail network serves dual purposes, providing recreational opportunities for hikers as well as opening wildlife corridors to support biodiversity of regional flora and fauna. The region is recognized as a global biodiversity hotspot for amphibians, land snails, cave fauna, and vascular plants.”⁶⁴ Habitat corridors allow uninterrupted migration of flora and fauna. Additionally, CTSST currently sits at “Gold Status” under the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation’s Go Green With Us program, which recognizes state parks that exhibit good environmental sustainability practices: CTSST has controlled burns to maintain ecosystems, institutes a volunteer litter pickup program, runs a Trailhead Nursery to grow regionally native plants, and removes invasive species, among other initiatives.⁶⁵ Maintaining cultural sustainability practices, however, is less cut-and-dry, if not simply for the intangibility of musical heritage. Nonetheless, achieving sustainability in cultural heritage tourism is equally as important as environmental sustainability for the social and economic goods that can be obtained through tourism, and “community participation is fundamental to achieve community empowerment and self-reliance.”⁶⁶

Vernacular music traditions as a tourism resource fall under what UNESCO describes as “Intangible Cultural Heritage” (ICH). ICH includes “oral traditions,

⁶³ “June 22nd: Cumberland Trails Conference Intro to Trailbuilding Course,” Friends of the Cumberland Trail, April 30, 2019, <http://www.friendsofthecumberlandtrail.org/cumberland-trails-conference-intro-to-trailbuilding-course/>

⁶⁴ David Gadsden, “Connecting Cumberland Trails for Recreation and Conservation,” Mapping, ESRI blog, Oct. 9, 2018, <https://www.esri.com/about/newsroom/blog/connecting-cumberland-trails-for-recreation-and-conservation/>

⁶⁵ “Cumberland Trail Go Green,” Tennessee State Parks, Tennessee Department of Environment Conservation, accessed Mar. 27, 2020, <https://tnstateparks.com/parks/go-green/cumberland-trail>

⁶⁶ Kim, Whitford, and Arcodia, “Development of intangible cultural heritage,” 425.

performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.” In addition, ICH is “traditional, contemporary, and living at the same time.”⁶⁷ As the commodification of local culture brings up questions of authenticity, the voice of the people affected must be established as the guiding authority in the development of tourism based around cultural heritage. Especially in Appalachia, a region historically dominated by outside influences seeking to control the narrative, tourism resources should be carefully managed in a manner mindful of historic failures to overcome stereotypes. Furthermore, what is constituted as “authentic” or “inauthentic” cultural heritage can be used as a matter of power; I contend that locals and local stakeholders who help to contribute or maintain cultural resources - musicians, culture center managers and workers, residents, etc. - should be the primary agents who make that distinction. The culture vs. commodity conflict showcases “the inherent tension in trying to create an authentic heritage tourism experience in a capitalist society.”⁶⁸ Should those with the means of facilitating tourism development, like private enterprises or government entities, fail at producing an authentic experience for the tourist, an inaccurate depiction of local culture could result.

Numerous issues exist in the world of sustainable heritage tourism, but heritage tourism scholars have advocated ways to increase visibility and support for sustainable heritage tourism practices: namely, promoting ICH to locals, giving local control to ICH resources (community empowerment), and parallel development between ICH

⁶⁷ “What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?” UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, accessed Mar. 27, 2020, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003>.

⁶⁸ Heather Bailey, "Hillbilly Skits to Buford Sticks : Sustainable Heritage Tourism in Tennessee," (PhD diss., Middle Tennessee State University, 2010), 14.

practitioners (i.e., the folk making and sustaining the folk culture).⁶⁹ In the context of the Cumberland Trail and the role it can play in promoting local music culture through tourism development, coordination between the State of Tennessee, local community organizations, tourism researchers, and lastly - but most importantly - musicians and members of the community, should be fostered to create an enriching experience for both travelers along the Trail as well as residents and performers living on the Cumberland Trail Corridor.

⁶⁹ Kim, Whitford, and Arcodia, "Development of Intangible Cultural Heritage," 432.

Chapter 4

Developing heritage tourism on the Cumberland Plateau

In his book *On Trails*, writer Robert Moor describes how trails are both physical and intangible:

The trails we create from the soil are likewise born of a mixture of mud and thought. Over time, more thoughts accrete, like footprints, and new layers of significance form. Rather than mere traces of movement, trails become cultural through-lines, connecting people and places and stories - linking the trail-walker's world into a coherent, if fragile, whole.⁷⁰

Trails can exist for myriad reasons; though the underlying purpose behind most trails is to bring its user from one point to another, trails can be the means by which we experience landscape, both physical and cultural. The Cumberland Trail does not exist as a path of least resistance; rather, it meanders over peaks and across streams with the purpose of bringing pleasure, rather than utility, to its users. Beginning at Cumberland Gap, the historic gap Daniel Boone blazed a horse path through with a group of loggers in the 18th century to allow colonial expansion westward, the trail travels southwest along a stark ridgeline overlooking Poor Valley at the base of the Cumberland Plateau. The trail (much of which is incomplete at the time of this being written) follows the ridgeline until Caryville where it enters the Cumberland Mountains, a knobby patch of dramatic, rugged slopes thick with brush and heavily forested. It continues southwest along ridgelines and into narrow valleys until Chattanooga, where the trail ends near Signal Mountain. The final trail will span around 300 miles, and its eventual continuity means Tennessee will have a fully functional cross-state thru-hike once

⁷⁰ Robert Moor, *On Trails*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016), 202.

completed (estimated completion hovers around 2022). For the purposes of this thesis, the Cumberland Trail Corridor shall be described as counties that contain a portion of the trail.

There is no historical background to the Cumberland Trail State Scenic Trail (CT); the meandering path does not seek convenience. Rather, the CT was designed to follow scenic natural areas along the Cumberland Plateau of Tennessee. With construction beginning in 1965, the trail has another roughly 90 miles to go before its completion. The CT has seen numerous sponsors and partnerships over the years; it was sponsored by the Tennessee Trails Association in 1968, supported by the Cumberland Trail Conference since 1997, and given state park status by the State of Tennessee since 1998, as the 53rd Tennessee State Park and the only linear park in the state.⁷¹ A large figurehead of the Cumberland Trails origins is Bobby Fulcher, the current Park Manager for the CTSSST.

Fulcher is responsible for trail acquisition, which currently sits at over 31,500 acres. In Feb. 2020, an additional 6,000 acres was acquired from the Conservation Fund which transferred the land to the Tennessee Department of Environment and Transportation.⁷² Friends of the Cumberland Trail exists to build community relations and partnerships, such as support from the Tennessee Parks and Greenways Foundation, Land Trust for Tennessee, Conservation Fund, Trust for Public Lands, Nature

⁷¹ Justin P. Wilson *Cumberland Trail State Park*, (Nashville: Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, 2016), https://tnstateparks.com/assets/pdf/additional-content/park-brochures/cumberland-trail_brochure-2016.pdf.

⁷² “Cumberland Trail State Parks adds 6,000 acres,” *Overton County News*, Mar. 3, 2020, https://www.overtoncountynews.com/news/local_state/cumberland-trail-state-park-adds-acres/article_1fce158a-5d92-11ea-b6ab-a7858b8513a2.html

Conservancy, and Foothills Land Conservancy.⁷³ The CT works with various state agencies as well.⁷⁴ Estimates for the trail's completion are around 2022.



Figure 5. The Cumberland Mountains feature some of the most rugged terrain on the Cumberland Trail. Photo by the author, Oct. 14, 2019.

Although sustainable heritage tourism studies is an emerging and active field, and the study of Tennessee Appalachian tourism around the Blue Ridge Mountains well-documented,⁷⁵ there is a gap in research focused around the geographic space of Tennessee's Cumberland Plateau. The past sections describe how the emergence of Appalachian stereotypes traces its origins in part to local color writers like Mary Noailles Murfree, whose vacations in the Upper Cumberland provided source material for characters and narratives she borrowed from and, with great artistic license, embellished. The hillbilly grew in popularity due to a variety of outside forces ending in the

⁷³ "Supporting Organizations," Friends of the Cumberland Trail, accessed Mar. 27, 2020, <http://www.friendsofthecumberlandtrail.org/membership/supporting-organizations/>.

⁷⁴ "Organization History," Friends of the Cumberland Trail, accessed Mar. 27., 2020, <http://www.friendsofthecumberlandtrail.org/about/organization-history/>.

⁷⁵ Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South*; Hoppe, *Gone Dollywood*; Albert Fritsch and Kristin Johannsen, *Ecotourism in Appalachia: Marketing the Mountains*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004).

culmination of modern-day hillbilly attractions and the dispossession of local culture, which some communities are trying to reclaim. The Cumberland Plateau region that informally marks the frontier between Middle and East Tennessee is both culturally and politically deemed a region of Appalachia,⁷⁶ and the cultural heritage of the Cumberland is equally as profound as that of other regions that attract more attention in popular media and see more annual visitors. Tourism's potential in the region to bring economic and community development should be explored more. An overview of expressions of cultural music heritage in the area as well as an assessment of organizations working toward the preservation of music heritage helps set the groundwork for more in-depth research on how to merge cultural heritage and tourism through a sustainability lens. Music is but one of many outlets through which culture can be expressed; I chose to focus on music because of its spatial and temporal qualities as subjects of analysis. Vernacular music, like that which will be highlighted in the following section, tells stories about geographies. In other terms, folk music makes place out of space.

Music establishes sense of place

Music is a medium of cultural communication that contributes to a sense of place and identity.⁷⁷ It gives an auditory, interactive dimension to cultural heritage and sits at the crossroads of history, change, and authenticity. We can learn a lot from music: values, religion, folk tales, connections to nature, politics, and myriad others.

However, the value placed upon certain types of music over others can modify perceptions of authenticity. While Cecil Sharp aimed to distinguish specific forms of

⁷⁶ Raitz and Ulack, "Cognitive Maps,"; Campbell, *The Southern Highlander*, 14-16.

⁷⁷ Ray Hudson, "Regions and Place: Music, Identity and Place," *Progress in Human Geography* 30, no. 5 (2006): 626-634.

music to make a connection to folk traditions of the British Isles, the song catcher Alan Lomax took a different approach during his time recording music in Appalachia through the 20th century: he “recognized that there is far more to Appalachian folk music than simple survivals from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe” and saw the region’s music as “traditions forged through multiple currents of history and geography.”⁷⁸ It is his recognition and preservation of a heterogenous Appalachian musical heritage that distinguishes Lomax. Going off this idea - that a key element in Appalachian musical heritage is its heterogeneity and the mixing of cultural elements to create a uniquely American soundscape - the placemaking quality of music will be a focal point to this section.

This could not be truer for the Cumberland Trail corridor. Historical records and accounts of vernacular music traditions on the Cumberland Plateau are well documented and exist as a region-specific manifestation of Appalachian culture and folklore that deserves preservation and support. The presence and recognition of folk music in the region was once showcased as early as 1988 in the “Cumberland Music Tour” that toured across the southeast featuring performances from musicians on the Plateau. It was put on as a collaboration between Bobby Fulcher of TN State Parks, the Tennessee Arts Commission Folklife Program, and the Southern Arts Federation. This next section will make the case that the Cumberland Trail Corridor is home to an exceedingly rich and diverse lineup of musicians and groups supporting the arts, as well as original songs that tell stories about the area.

⁷⁸ Revill and Gold, “Far Back,” 1414.

Examples of musical heritage on the Cumberland Trail corridor

An overwhelming amount of old-time music has emerged out of the Eastern Cumberland Plateau. Traces of Appalachian musical heritage in the Cumberland go as far back as the 18th century. In Fentress County, the Hicks family has preserved the song “The Cumberland Land,” which tells of Cumberland settlers traveling to Nashville. According to Bobby Fulcher, the song was likely only documented by the family itself, passed down through oral tradition, until Fulcher was able to record the song.⁷⁹ However, these songs do not just live in the archives of collectors and folklorists. “The Cumberland Land” is still sung today, whether that be from the Hicks Family themselves who maintained the tune for generations, or modern renditions from the Knoxville-based group The Black Lillies.⁸⁰ Here are some lyrics, sung by The Black Lillies:

The day I parted away from you / In sorrow grief and in trouble too
You gave to me the parting hand / And you wished me safe in Old Cumberland
Land
Oh I took the steering in my hand / I steered through ice and I steered through
sand
Oh I took the steering in my hand / And steered away through the Cumberland
Land
When we got here It was ice and snow / It rained and hailed And the winds did
blow
Which caused us so for to weep and cry / To think with cold We almost died
But thank the lord Good help we found / We all got here Both safe and sound
And it's here in peace We long to be / With the Indian tribes In old Tennessee

Now I found five hundred human graves / All walled in with freemason sign
Which caused me to think in former days / Some human race has passed this
place
Now nothing strange to write to you / Preachin is scarce and religion too
We've a happy land and a fertile soil / We've honey and milk, here's corn and oil
And if you want for to know the time / These words were wrote in '89

⁷⁹ Tony Gonzalez, "How One Tennessee Family Saved a Trove of Disappearing Folk Songs," *Nashville Public Radio*, May 16, 2018.

⁸⁰ “Black Lillies – Cumberland Land (Live from Rhythm N’ Blooms 2011),” YouTube video, posted by “LiveandBreathing,” Dec. 26, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOrluJPJfzE>.

Numerous folklorists have worked to preserve music heritage on the Cumberland Plateau. Notable among those are John Irwin, Charles Wolfe, Bobby Fulcher, and William Lynnwood Montell, to name a few.

Irwin dedicated his life to uplifting the voices and traditions of residents in Appalachia by creating the Museum of Appalachia in Norris, Tennessee, in 1969. The museum grounds, in addition to containing three dozen log structures depicting traditional life in Appalachia, free range farms, a restaurant, and hundreds of thousands of relics, host the “A People and Their Music” exhibit.⁸¹ There, one can find a wealth of information and artifacts from notable musicians that came from the region around Norris and other parts of Southern Appalachia; sections are dedicated to mavericks like Roy Acuff, Uncle Dave Macon, and John Hartford. There is a section dedicated to musical instruments as well, with original instruments owned by musicians of the area. Rare instruments, like the mouth bow and the gourd fiddle, are featured. Documentation of the use of such instruments in the region is also noted: a plaque at the Museum states that “the last known fiddler to play [the gourd fiddle] was the locally famous George McCarroll of Roane County.”⁸² The gourd fiddle is also played by Gene Horner, from Rockwood, Tennessee, a well-known luthier in the Cumberland Mountains. The museum even features the fiddle of Robert Love Taylor, the East Tennessee politician whose fiddling, in part, helped him gain the popularity to clinch the Tennessee governorship twice at the end of the 19th century.

Wolfe (1943-2006) has made extensive documentation of cultural heritage in the region. The Charles K. Wolfe Collection at Middle Tennessee State University contains

⁸¹ “Official Tour Map,” Museum of Appalachia, (Norris: Smithsonian Institution Affiliations Program).

⁸² Author’s notes from the Museum of Appalachia, Mar. 1, 2020.

approximately 3,000 audio tapes of field recordings, oral histories, and interviews. In addition to recordings made by Wolfe himself, the archival contributions of folklorist Bobby Fulcher have been preserved in the Wolfe collection. Fulcher has been involved in recording old-time music on the Cumberland Plateau since 1976, and has documented many tunes never-before-recorded for the Library of Congress, the Tennessee State Museum and Archives, and the Smithsonian Institute, among others. A collection of Fulcher's recordings is available through the digital record label, Sandrock Records, which exists to raise money for the development of the Cumberland Trail State Scenic Trail. One album, titled "Sandstone and Pine Rosin" specifically centers around music that describes the physical landscape of the Cumberland Trail corridor. The liner notes, written by Fulcher, enumerate that "All the musicians included here are connected to the Cumberland Trail corridor, as native residents, locally-based entertainers, or both."⁸³ Songs old and new are featured. Additionally, Fulcher hosts a weekly program on the Knoxville-based radio station WDVX, where Fulcher presents music "made by folks who lived within shouting distance of [the] trail."⁸⁴

Music festivals held in areas around near the Cumberland Trail are another testament to the amount of music coming out of the region, and fall is the time when most festivals take place. The Louie Blueie Festival is named after Howard "Louie Blueie" Armstrong, a Campbell County native renowned for his musical contributions as a part of one of the nation's most prominent black string bands. Armstrong collected accolades as he toured the world, mastering languages and instruments alike and contributing to folk

⁸³ Various artists, *Sandstone and Pine Rosin*, Sandrock Recordings, CD.

⁸⁴ "Cumberland Trail," WDVX 89.9 fm, accessed on Mar. 30, 2020, <https://wdvx.com/program/the-cumberland-trail/>.

music heritage that he first witnessed in LaFollette, Tennessee.⁸⁵ Howard, who died in 2003, received an NEA National Heritage Fellowship, the Tennessee Folklife Heritage Award, and a feature in the Country Music Hall of Fame. The festival, which began in 2007, is held every September in Caryville, Tennessee, at Cove Lake State Park, which intersects the Cumberland Trail. Many local artists and international musicians alike perform at the festival. The Louie Bluie Festival, being untied to one particular genre of music, demonstrates the diverse musical talent in the area and demonstrates that music from the area is not just old-time string bands and gospel music.

At Frozen Head State Park, an annual “Heritage Days” festival in October showcases local music talents from the region, featuring old-time and bluegrass musicians that demonstrate the music heritage of traditional Appalachian and Cumberland Plateau culture. The Cumberland Trail passes through the park.

Artists local to the corridor continue to make music that contributes to cultural heritage. One artist is Maggie Longmire. Although modern country music owes its heritage in part to the old-time folk traditions of yesterday’s Appalachia, those traditions carry on vibrantly while renditions and additions evolve the folk genre to new places. Longmire is from Campbell County; she sees the music she grew up around as a foundation upon which she can create new art. Her 2008 album release, *Granddaughters - An American Opera* tells the story of her experience in Campbell County and the stories of the community that give the area a sense of place. *Granddaughters* borrows elements of ballad storytelling but sonically shares more in common with blues / western country. But the stories it tells have much in common with the folk songs emerging from the

⁸⁵ Bill Boslaugh, “An American Songster: Howard ‘Louie Bluie’ Armstrong,” Vernacular Shellac, July 29, 2011, <https://vernacularshellac.com/2011/07/29/an-american-songster/>.

region throughout the past two centuries. Numerous geographic references can help listeners establish a geographic reference to the history Longmire tells through her eyes. “Cove Lake Moon” depicts a church gathering and baptism in the reflective waters of Cove Lake in Caryville, just a few hundred yards from the path of the Cumberland Trail. The title song, “Campbell County Girl”, is about leaving the small-town life to find opportunity through education. It examines the singer’s decision to go to nursing school in Knoxville and the transformation it brings to her life:

Hey Grandma it’s me
I’ve met a nice family
What you would call well to do
And they’re takin’ a trip to Paris this year
And they’ve asked me to go with them too
And they live in a mansion
out on Kingston Pike
and they’re buyin’ a ticket for me
Oh can you believe it
It’s a dream come true
I’m really goin’ it’s because of you⁸⁶

The singer gets to experience a life that her grandmother never could because of her grandmother’s sacrifices. The desire to leave and pursue a better life outside of small Appalachian towns is frequently described among scholars, writers, political analysts, and everyone in between as “brain drain” wherein rural communities across the nation experience high levels of young adult out-migration due to a lack of opportunity within those rural towns. For the singer, that opportunity is given from grandma’s sacrifice. By leaving her old town behind, she can see the world.

⁸⁶ Maggie Longmire, “Campbell County Girl,” by Maggie Longmire and John Longmire, recorded 2008, track 7 on *Granddaughters: An American Opera*, Cotula, accessed Mar. 27, 2020, <http://cotula.com/cotula/lyrics.html>

Longmire harks to coal disputes in the song, “Me & the Jones Boys,” which chronicles a real life event of the raid of a non-unionized mine at Ivydell by militant unionized activists and the violence perpetrated on the subject resulting from the dispute:

Easter Sunday was just yesterday
Talk was strong that morning
The Jones Boys were comin’
For a non union mine
There’d be hell to pay
Jones Boys was the name
The Union thugs used on their raids
To hide their identity
The L&N was on strike
Union mines shut down last night
Oh could they be coming for me⁸⁷

A note accompanies the lyrics to Longmire’s album, which contains several references to other coal labor events: “Unionism played an important role in establishing safe working conditions and equitable wages for workers during the first half of the 20th Century. In the late 1950’s and early 1960’s the Appalachian coalfields experienced outbreaks of labor violence. The incidents portrayed in these songs happened over fifty years ago and are part of the history and the culture of those times.”⁸⁸ Longmire’s lyrics speak to cultural, religious, and political events in Campbell County that ground her art spatially.

⁸⁷ Maggie Longmire, “Me & the Jones Boys,” by John P Van Huss, John Longmire, and Maggie Longmire, recorded 2008, track 9 on *Granddaughters: An American Opera*, Cotula. Accessed Mar. 27, 2020. <http://cotula.com/cotula/lyrics.html>

⁸⁸ “Lyrics,” *Granddaughters: An American Opera*, Cotula, accessed Mar. 27, 2020, <http://cotula.com/cotula/lyrics.html>

At the crossroads of music and politics: Coal Creek

Because the Cumberland Trail will eventually traverse Tennessee from north to south, organizations promoting cultural heritage in the region should look to the trail for increased tourist traffic around trailheads and nearby towns. Because the trail can act as a link between points of interest, cultural heritage programming can be created that touches various parts of the state and connects places spatially and thematically. The following section describes the historical and cultural connections between regions and music based on their histories of mining rebellions and disasters.

Much of the Cumberland Trail corridor lies in areas that were once hotbeds for coal mining operations. The CT portion north of the Sluder Road Trailhead, for instance, lies directly in the footprint of an abandoned mine operation, which in 2007 the Cumberland Trails Conference helped put a stop to.⁸⁹ In the late 1800s the State of Tennessee began leasing convict labor to industrial coal mine operations in East Tennessee. Convict leasing was cheaper and could be used to break strikes from free miners. Most convict laborers were black men being forced to work in inhumane conditions. When a Briceville mine operation (East of Frozen Head State Park at North Cumberland Wildlife Management Area) owned by Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company (TCI) on Coal Creek, a tributary of the Clinch River, began leasing convicts in July 1891, a group of 300 free coal miners held the guards hostage and shipped the convicts back to Knoxville. Six days later, after Tennessee Governor John P. Buchanan

⁸⁹ David Reister, "Rock Mining in Soddy Creek Gorge," Cumberland Trails Conferences, accessed April 2, 2020, <https://www.cumberlandtrail.org/trail-segments/three-gorges-segment/soddy-creek-gorge-section-north/rock-mining-in-soddy-creek-gorge/>

marched the convicts back to the mines, the convicts were once again shipped to Knoxville on a train. Following a failed legislator's promise to repeal the convict lease, from 1891-1893 a series of conflicts broke down in the Coal Creek area: "The legal system had failed the miners, and they went to war ... the miners liberated convicts, burned stockades, and fought running battles with the state militia."⁹⁰

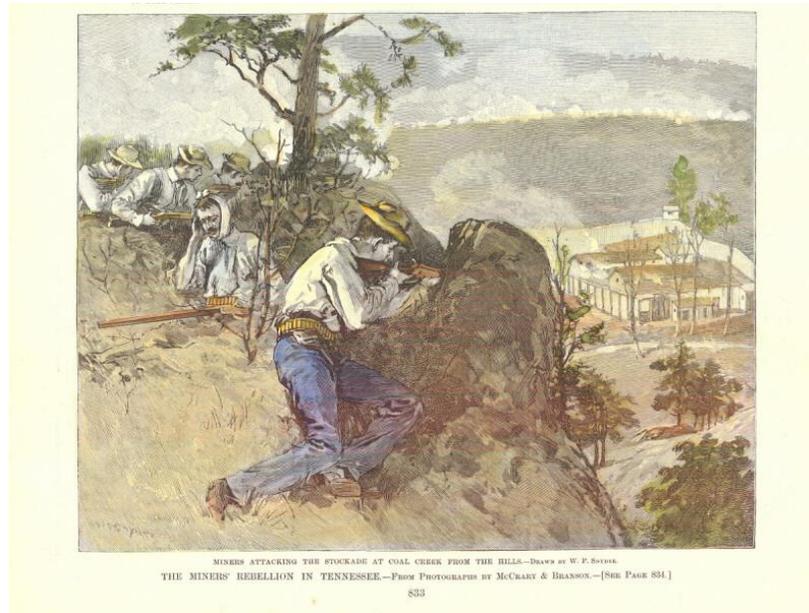


Figure 6. A depiction of the Coal Creek Wars from an 1892 Harper's Weekly issue.⁹¹

The Coal Creek War, like similar labor movements in the South, spawned songs of resistance from the miners. "Coal Creek March", a popular old-time tune covered and made nationally popular by musicians like Pete Seeger, Roscoe Holcomb, Pete Steel, and Dock Boggs. Wolfe documents three variations of "Coal Creek March":

a) *A popular banjo instrumental "chording piece";*

⁹⁰ Paul Bergeron, Stephen Ash, and Jeanette Keith, *Tennesseans and their History*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 201.

⁹¹ "Coal Creek Miners Attacking the Stockade," Aug. 27, 1892, in *Harper's Weekly*, 833.

- b) *A banjo instrumental incorporating various sound effects supposedly describing the Coal Creek troubles; and*
- c) *A banjo tune tied to a song about the troubles.*⁹²

A version performed by Georgia fiddler Ernest Hodges incorporates musical elements that simulate events of the war: Hodges drums on a banjo head to imitate the snares of approaching soldiers, and imitates a bugle call, then performs a chording piece played by the band when the soldiers began fighting.⁹³ The origins of the composition go back to Frank Lewis and Bailey Briscoe, and Frank Lewis composed lyrics to the song which make specific historic references to the disputes:

*The trouble down at Cole Creek
 Came about this way,
 A lot of distant men came
 To take their jobs away
 No son will ever live to shame them
 As long as old Cole Creek stands today*⁹⁴

Another song, titled “Coal Creek Troubles”, takes a more politically charged approach in describing the Coal Creek War. Written by James William Day and recorded by John Lomax in 1937 in Ashland, Kentucky, the song criticizes Governor Buchanan and sympathizes with the miners:

*The corruption of Buchanan
 Brought the convicts here
 Just to please the rich man
 And take the miner’s share
 ...
 I’m in sympathy with the miners
 As everyone should be
 In other states they work free labor
 And why not Tennessee?
 The miners true and generous
 In many works and ways*

⁹² Charles Wolfe, "New Light on the "Coal Creek March"." *JEMF Quarterly* 12, no. 41 (1976), 1.

⁹³ Wolfe, “New Light,” 3.

⁹⁴ Wolfe, “New Light,” 4.

*We should all treat them kindly
Their platform we should praise⁹⁵*

Though not a miner himself, Uncle Dave Macon's contribution to the musical heritage of the Coal Creek Wars should be highlighted. "Buddy Won't You Roll Down the Line" was first documented in 1925 by Macon and begins like this:

*Way back yonder in Tennessee, they leased the convicts out
They worked 'em in the coal mines against free labor stout
Free labor rebelled against it, to win it took some time
But while the lease was in effect, they made 'em rise and shine*

*Oh, buddy, won't you roll down the line?
Buddy, won't you roll down the line?
Yonder comes my darling, running down the line⁹⁶*

The song's title and chorus are a reference to the mine workers running the coal carts, or "darlings" to bring the coal out of the mine, and help miners reach their quotas.⁹⁷ The song makes direct reference to "Lone Rock," which sits northeast of Tracy City, Tennessee. Thus, the spatial diffusion of the labor songs shows musically how the convict leasing labor rebellions spread from one side of the Cumberland Plateau to the other.

⁹⁵ Jilson Setters (J.W. Day), "Coal Creek Troubles," John A. Lomax Southern States collection, sound recording, 1937, <https://lomaxky.omeka.net/items/show/97>.

⁹⁶ Uncle Dave Macon, "Buddy Won't You Roll Down the Line," by The Monroe Brothers and Uncle Dave Macon, track 18 on *Birth of Bluegrass, Vol. 2*, Orange Leisure, 2012, Spotify streaming audio.

⁹⁷ Robert Wells, *Life Flows on in Endless Song: Folk Songs and American History*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 87-88.



Figure 7. A photo of the Lone Rock Mine in Tennessee taken in the 1890s.⁹⁸

The song, “Last Payday at Coal Creek”, lends a historical account that was the result of a mine explosion in 1902 at Fraterville that “busted the company” according to folk musician Pete Steele, who made the song popular:

*Pay day, it's pay day, oh pay day
Pay day don't come to Coal Creek no more
Pay day don't come no more
Miss me, you'll miss me, you'll miss me
You'll miss me when I'm gone
You'll miss me when I'm gone⁹⁹*

Almost 200 miners died as a result of the Fraterville mine explosion, leaving only three men living in the small coal mining community.¹⁰⁰ The Fraterville explosion was but the most deadly in the area, though coal mine explosions in Rockwood, Catoosa, and Briceville have also been documented, which all lie adjacent to the Cumberland Trail.

⁹⁸ C.S. Judd, *Lone Rock Mine, Tennessee*, ca. 1890, albumen silver print, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, <http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/75012/cs-judd-lone-rock-mine-tennessee-american-1890s/>

⁹⁹ Pete Steele, “Last Payday at coal Creek,” by Pete Steele and Ed Kahn, 1958, track 12 on *Banjo Tunes and Songs*, Folkways Records, Spotify audio streaming.

¹⁰⁰ Allen Coggins, “Fraterville Mine Disaster,” Tennessee Encyclopedia, last updated Mar. 1, 2018, <https://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/fraterville-mine-disaster/>

When convict labor was outlawed in 1896, a prison at Brushy Mountain in Morgan County was constructed so that the state could mine coal directly without the need to lease labor. Thus, for the next 70 years, convicts at the penitentiary worked 12-hour days at the Frozen Head Mine. Today, the prison sits three miles from the Cumberland Trail as a tourist attraction. According to Tennessee Department of Tourism Commissioner Mark Ezell, the prison one of the largest employers in Morgan County.¹⁰¹ The tourism operation frequently holds concerts - Dwight Yoakam made an appearance last year - and runs a whiskey and moonshine distillery adjacent to the prison.



Figure 8. This photo depicts convict laborers at Brushy Mountain State Prison returning to prison after a sit-down strike.¹⁰²

In conclusion, the labor disputes beginning in the 1890s on the Eastern edge of the Cumberland Plateau mark a significant point in Tennessee's history of labor relations, and there is no better way to tell the story than through music. Because of the Cumberland Trail's position around areas affected by the Coal Creek Wars, as well as its

¹⁰¹ Mark Ezell, interview with Tom Wilmer, *Journeys of Discovery*, KCBX, Sept. 10, 2019.

¹⁰² Photo taken by author at Brushy Mountain State Penitentiary, Oct. 2019.

proximity and accessibility to Brushy Mountain, the trail sits as a natural conduit to Tennessee's heritage of vernacular music and labor relations.

Supporting Culture and Arts in Campbell County: Postmark LaFollette¹⁰³

An important facet to developing authentic heritage tourism in a region is incorporating existing support structures so that local knowledge can be leveraged to develop relationships with locals.

My trip to Postmark LaFollette in Campbell County, Tennessee hatched out of a tip that Brad Smiddy, who works for the CTSSST, recommended to me when I saw him at the annual Cumberland trail meeting. Brad said to reach out to Tony Branam, and 'tell em Brad Smiddy sent ya'. I ended up shooting an email to Postmark LaFollette, and got a response from Karen Cumorich, who helped me set up a time to meet on Feb. 29, midday.

Before the meeting, I was contacted through email by Tony Branam, who said I should watch a video put together by Dr. Bradley Hansen highlighting the 'Tennessee Jamboree', which existed as a weekly show broadcast by WLAJ - LaFollette's local station - from 1953 to 1978. The Jamboree showcased a variety of family-friendly bluegrass, old-time, country, and gospel musicians on a 500W antenna that eventually switched to 1000W. Postmark LaFollette is helping to bring it back.

Entering LaFollette is like entering any other small Appalachian town. To get there, I took I-40 from just north of Center Hill Lake up until Harriman, cruising on Hwy 61, just on the eastern edge of the Plateau, until Oliver Springs. I passed by an old,

¹⁰³ Karen Cumorich, JoAnne Myers, and Tony Branam (Postmark LaFollette), interview with the author, Feb. 29, 2020.

abandoned brick building with a sign: Olga Coal Company. Getting on Hwy 330/116, I cruised to Rocky Top where I hopped onto I-75 for just a few miles. At Rocky Top I saw business signs indicating the former town's name: Coal Creek. I wonder: why the name change? Rocky Top has a Coal Creek Miner's Museum. In fact, coming from I would love to check it out. I got off on Hwy 25 at Cove Lake State Park (where you can find Mr. Bobby Fulcher and the 'HQ' for the CTSST), passing through Jacksboro on my way there. Every small town said the same thing: A once busy Main Street fallen into abandonment. Maybe an antique or craft store, perhaps a southern diner. But for the most part, it's empty brick buildings bearing old signs of the past.



Figure 9. Postmark LaFollette occupies the old LaFollette post office. Photo by the author, Feb. 29, 2020.

When I got to Postmark, they were finishing up “Stories Yes”, a series of six filmmaking sessions for the youth centered around capturing narratives told by locals. The building is housed in the old post office. I met Karen Cumorich, JoAnne Myers, and Brad Smiddy all packing up, though Brad didn't stay for long. Karen and I began talking

generally about the broader ‘small town’ culture that is exhibited in any agrarian community - regardless of region. As Karen grew up in a small town outside Chicago, she witnessed much of the same lifestyles as those who grew up in LaFollette. Small town, big changes.

When Tony showed up, we began a conversation more about musical heritage in LaFollette. The interview was quite informal; we sat around a table with desserts and sweet tea. Though I came prepared with notes, I relied on them little - the conversation was open-ended, and my way of documentation was through written notes. My intentions going into the interview were to collect information about Postmark, local musical heritage, and how Postmark was helping sustain that heritage. Lastly, I thought I would ask about the hillbilly stereotype.

Questions:

- What sort of music comes through the Jamboree / LaFollette?
- How has that Jamboree impacted tourism?
- Do you feel like this region belongs to “Appalachian Culture”?
- What is “Appalachia” to you?
- Do you feel like in some places (e.g. Gatlinburg, Pigeon Forge) the idea of Appalachia is contorted to sell tourism?
- How do you feel about that?
- How do you think we could promote cultural heritage that’s authentic to the region?
- What do you know about the Cumberland Trail?
- Regional identity: How are people tied to the land here?

I ended up using these questions as rough guidelines to move the conversation when one topic was over.

At the beginning I learned of Crossroads: Change in Rural America, a Smithsonian exhibit passing through small towns in the South. An excerpt from the exhibit, on Postmark’s website, explains: “Crossroads: Change in Rural America offers

small towns a chance to look at their own paths to highlight the changes that affected their fortunes over the past century. The exhibition will prompt discussions about what happened when America's rural population became a minority of the country's population and the ripple effects that occurred"¹⁰⁴. Crossroads had been at Postmark in the fall, until it moved to Morristown.

I asked Tony why he got involved in Postmark, and his answer was that he was trying to encourage people to participate musically and enjoy music through the Jamboree, and that lots of music exists in the region. When I asked Tony what he would consider this 'region' of music, he said that "when I think of our area, I think of Cumberland Gap to Norris".

Karen mentioned that notable artists have come from areas around Campbell County like Dean Dillon, from LaFollette, and Kenny Chesney, from Luttrell.

I asked Tony how he went about choosing artists for the monthly Jamborees. He said, first and foremost, to "consider your audience" - an audience which is mostly interested in bluegrass and country music. He brings in "Appalachian music, but not excluding". Most performers are local, and the artists are paid for their performances. He referenced me to "Katie's Restaurant" which hosts local music on Friday nights from 6-8pm. He also references me to **Greg Marlow**, a local musician active in local bands like **New Harvest** and **New River Rising**. I'd like to reach out to Marlow.

How does Postmark find these people for the Jamborees? "You know some people and they lead you to other people," says Tony. There's a lot of hidden talent according to Karen, 80% of which, she says, is bluegrass Americana music. In terms of

¹⁰⁴ "Smithsonian Institute," Postmark LaFollette, last updated Nov. 9, 2019, <https://postmarklafollette.weebly.com/smithsonian-exhibit.html>

creating original songs, Tony says that a few do original songs like Marlow. He guesses, when I ask what the ratio is, that original songs are about 10% of what's played at the Jamborees. He mentions **Keith Lambert** who produces his own stuff.

But one of the difficulties in expanding Postmark's reach is due to the fact that people only have so much time. Between very understandable commitments at church, which is a large presence in many people's lives, and other social events, Karen and JoAnne said it was complicated in getting people more involved with their nonprofit.

I then asked about some of the other hindrances of their nonprofit. To Tony, one of the biggest issues is the lack of ability to promote the Jamboree and events. JoAnne said that, since the city is a ways off the interstate, there are no hotels or fast food stops nearby. In addition, Karen stated that "we have local businesses that don't correlate with what we're doing. They all think we're doing a great job, but they also have to support it." She said that it's unclear how people get information in today's times, but most newcomers hear about Postmark through word-of-mouth still. She cited the difficulties of social media and technology in effectively communicating the event. 500 people will see the event ad on Facebook, but what does that mean for attendance?

I can't help but wonder how an established, well-marketed thru hike could help Postmark get its word out. Part of backpacking is experience to the local culture, in my opinion. It enriches the hiker's experience and offers something engaging to them. It could help bring a younger audience to the Jamborees. I did not mention all these things, but while they were talking, I was formulating internally.

I asked about the word hillbilly.

A quick tale from JoAnne - she heard, in regards to the term 'hillbilly', that it came about when a group of British researchers did work in the Southern Highlands and noted their retainment of Older English dialects, thus referring them to William Shakespeare of the hill country - hill, billy.

Karen noted that she sees an exaggeration of the hillbilly type around certain people in the town, and what she calls the "good ole boy network ... people not wanting to move forward." A stubbornness. And as JoAnne puts it, in terms of being hillbilly? "We all exaggerated [acting hillbilly] in high school," she says. Tony talks about how country music of the 1940s-1960s was frequently accompanied by hillbilly comedian skits, and cites a local example: **Hotshot Elmer**, who would perform with the **Blue Valley Boys** on the Jamboree, and whom Postmark has a photo of in their front lobby. Karen mentions **New River Rising** who "love to make fun of themselves" in their music in regards to being hillbillies. She says that she can hear differences in accents between someone living "in the hills" versus in town, even. She mentions Stinking Creek which is "a whole different world", citing extreme isolation as a reason for the different accent. Tony even mentioned talking to someone at one point from the hills around the area who sounded like they could have been from Scotland or Ireland.

The geography of LaFollette's hills and hollers is referred to in relative terms. It's always going "over to Knoxville" and "up the valley," similar to how, in Karen's life in Illinois, people references "the other side of the prairie."

We began talking about the educational enrichment that Postmark has on locals. But it can be hard for people to understand the idea that there is local culture worth preserving. Karen says, people ask, "what culture?" Tony: "The general problem the

community has comes from not having a sense of place. Anything we can do to bring that together, like instilling a sense of home, family, where they are, who they are - is good for the community.” Karen brings back up churches. “It’s great that people are so committed to their churches,” she says, “but it does occupy much of their available time. And it’s hard to compete with that thought process.” The kids, according to JoAnne, love the theater and plays that Postmark organizes.

We discussed this idea a bit more - that one goal is to convince people that there exists a culture worth preserving. Demonstrating value to the community can be tough, and the idea of supporting the arts doesn’t make as much sense when compared to economic blight. And Tony says that in general, this area isn’t used to going out and doing things. Part of that does have to do with ingrained ideas of ‘going out’ in religious culture. Tony says that “when I was growing up, going to music and playing cards was a sin. I never went to the Jamboree even though dad liked bluegrass.”

Sometimes the religious values can rub culturally, like when Postmark programmed a play called ‘Where I Belong’ and jokes are made implying the preacher is alcoholic. Another play, ‘Mountain Voices’, presents a situation involving a girl with her native grandparents being jaded by a preacher when he preaches being good and kind to everyone, and the kids still bully her for being a ‘half-breed’.

One of the goals Tony states is to work as much as possible with young people and get them involved. Karen said she wants more people to experience all the talent in Campbell County. Though the kids love the plays, Postmark’s inability to provide consistent play programs can lose kids. Karen says, “the importance of us being able to operate on a regular basis is important to keeping the young kids active.”

Economic divides can also stretch social fabric. Karen said she finds some poorer folk in the area to be stubborn about newcomers, because a lot of outsiders bring economic diversity. There is a tension between rich folk looking down on poor folk, and poor folk not wanting the rich people's help, she says. On one hand, segments of the local community may feel that people moving to live on the lake look down on them. On the other hand, segments of the transplants feel they may be maligned with the local community.

Postmark's relationship with the City of LaFollette is nuanced. While Karen says Postmark is grateful for the City's support in handing over the building to them, she feels like not everyone on the council sees the value in what Postmark is trying to accomplish - especially if the building were to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, potentially costing the historical society more money to upkeep. Postmark used to be under the jurisdiction of the Campbell County Historical Society until they became a 501(c)(3). And though Campbell County, according to Karen, got \$56 million in tourism revenue in 2017, and the city/county promotes tourism, such as a yearly ATV festival, she isn't sure where the revenue is going.

Tony cites a stubbornness. The city doesn't want to take new ideas. Karen has a suggestion: Let artists move into downtown dwellings otherwise empty with a stipend. If the artists can't turn a profit, move on to the next. Karen also mentions her position as a woman rubbing against local government hurting the case.

I mentioned at this point how the Lee administration is seeking to promote rural tourism through the Office of Rural Tourism. Karen says that one hurdle for Postmark is having someone to manage grant funding - there's no paid executive director to deal with

that. To pay an ED you need grant funding, but to get that funding, you have to have someone monitoring grants. Karen says Postmark is working on expanding the board of directors. Rich patrons are hard to find, and geography plays a part - LaFollette is far from Knoxville where the money is. Furthermore, finding grants can be hard because of the lack of ethnic diversity in Campbell County which disqualifies them.

At the end of the interview, I was told to look into **Grace Moore**, an opera singer from Jellico, as well as **Homer Roderhaven**, a singer/songwriter from Jellico. Jellico isn't very far, but its geography dictates a hassle, so the musical heritage of that town is hard to connect with, according to Karen, because it's, in LaFollette terms, "on the other side of the mountain."

Mar. 21 will be the next Postmark Jamboree. It will feature 15-year-old **Kacey Moore** from Norris. In addition, they will showcase **7 Mile Junction**, and maybe **Robert Sisters**. Maybe the house band.

I intend to go. The meeting went well, and I learned a lot of information. In my interactions, I could tell they were very happy to know someone was working toward preserving musical heritage like they are trying to do. My geography background helped me teach them about more of the idea of geographic connections to music and the ways they create 'sense of place'. I really think LaFollette exhibits great potential to be a 'trail town'. A rich musical heritage exists, and an outlet to showcase that, as well as a support network, although small, exists. There is good food - I ate at Katie's for dinner afterwards. In fact, LaFollette is the only town the trail really passes through. It's a ten-minute walk from Postmark. I went there, took a few pictures, then was on my way back to Knoxville.

Conclusion

Artists, community organizations, folklorists, and historic preservationists pepper the Cumberland Trail and create a sense of place through their dedication to observing and maintaining cultural heritage in the region. However, the ability to collaborate between those actors should be probed more in the quest to develop tourism programming that highlights music heritage and its spatial connection to the areas the Cumberland Trail passes through. By exposing trail visitors to music, they can make a connection between the landscape they walk through and the music borne out of that landscape. A multisensory approach to trail programming allows visitors to immerse themselves in the cultural landscape in an intimate way. Walking through nature may develop an understanding of a region's physical geography, but exposure to local cultures develops and understanding of the region's human geography.

This thesis sought to bridge the gap between discourse on the negative side of Appalachian stereotypes and documentations of folk cultures of the Cumberland Trail corridor, by arguing that tourism in the region could be leveraged to upend stereotypes and promote authentic cultural heritage. Though a wealth of cultural heritage outside of music exists along the trail, such as traces of Native American migration routes through Avery Trace, traces of human migration through Cumberland Gap, Native American glyphs at Head of Sequatchie, the Brushy Mountain State Prison, and numerous mining and timber operations around the trail, the focus on music heritage was a decision made for three reasons: 1) Music has been well documented through the work of archivists and folklorists as well as the retainment of songs passed down the generations; 2) Music is a common thread that can serve to link seemingly unrelated events and memories and

thematically tie aspects of culture together, and 3) music, unlike static historic events, continues to live through the performance of artists and evolve in the process. It also serves as a way to allow the narrative of Appalachia be molded by its living inhabitants because anyone can create music.

Of course, the narrative of Appalachia and Appalachian tourism cannot be affected if those with the ability to shape narratives are not empowered and given a platform. The ability of the State of Tennessee, community organizations (such as Postmark LaFollette), tourism associations, and tourism ventures (like concerts held at the privately-owned Brushy Mountain State Prison tourism site) could help in uplifting the voices of Appalachia.

Future research could further flesh out ways in which music heritage tourism could be incorporated into cultural programming on the Cumberland Trail. Though the music heritage in Campbell and Anderson Counties was highlighted in this thesis through the musical connection to labor disputes at coal operations and though highlighting the work of Postmark LaFollette to preserve and sustain music heritage, the Cumberland Trail passes by many other culture centers, museums, music venues, and historic sites. Furthermore, gauging public opinion over what visitors would like to see incorporated along the Cumberland Trail is a good way to measure enthusiasm for music heritage programming.

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