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Moonshining in Rockingham County: A case study on oral traditions and folkways

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Moonshining in Rockingham County:
A Case Study on Oral Traditions and Folkways
Tiffany W. Cole

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

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Acknowledgements

As a native of Rockingham County, born and raised in Broadway, it seems fitting that I would pursue research in local history. My late great-grandfather Lewis Yankee, an amateur historian and genealogist in Brocks Gap, was undoubtedly an inspiration in my pursuit of learning more about my people and channeling my inner local historian. As one of my interviewee's said to me upon realizing my relationship to Grandpap she replied, "Well, you get it honest."

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Abstract

Known as the second oldest profession, moonshining has had a significant presence in Rockingham County since the influx of Scots-Irish settlement in the Shenandoah Valley in the mid-1700s. Once used as a commodity for barter and sale and an ingredient in home remedies, a limited number of people still continue to make moonshine. But the practice is most widespread as the subject of oral histories and folklore as told by Rockingham County residents. Often framed as an honorable tradition whose practitioners were heroes and at times even martyrs in their communities, the collective narrative of those closest to moonshining—the sons, daughters, wives, and neighbors of moonshiners and moonshiners themselves—suggests a nostalgic worldview of an illegal practice.

Basing the bulk of my research on over fifteen oral histories, I will discuss the way in which moonshining's relationship to three themes—natural environment, family and community, and folkways—shape and reflect how local residents positively perceive moonshiners and how moonshiners perceive themselves. The discussion will conclude with a commentary on the paradoxical state of moonshining currently in Rockingham County and the contradictions that arise from claiming to be a traditionalist as compared to a capitalist moonshiner.

Introduction

Illicit distillation, or moonshining, has been practiced from antiquity into current times.¹ Its significance to the Appalachian United States and its people is particularly striking. While author James Dabney predicted in his 1974 monograph *Mountain Spirits* that, “Within another decade, the gentle art of illicit whiskey-making will be only a ‘heard-of thing’ recounted in the folklore and the stories of...old timers,” moonshine continues to be made in select hollows and gaps throughout the mountain South.² Whether as a means to financial stability, as a way to perpetuate tradition, or as a way to express one’s rebelliousness in defiance of the government, moonshining continues to be a prominent fixture in both local lore and actual practice.

Author Carol Kammen argues that topics pertaining to local history “that are disruptive are often ignored” as few local historians consider “strikes or economic downturns, those who lease rather than own land, or those who make their living, legally or not, by selling alcohol.”³ In an effort to broaden the definition of what local history can encompass, which must include the unsettling, the nefarious, and the scandalous characteristics of a community, this study does in fact take into account the “disruptive” as it pertains to one local community. The practice of moonshining in Rockingham

¹ Illicit distillation describes moonshining in terms of its illegality through tax evasion. Home distillation is essentially the same thing, but was practiced before liquor was taxed by the federal government. These terms, along with moonshining, will be utilized interchangeably. Moonshine itself has various synonyms including mountain dew, firewater, hooch, and white lightning. For the purposes of this paper, all such colloquialisms will only be included if used in direct quotes. According to the federal law, moonshining is defined as *malum prohibitum*, which means that the practice is unlawful because of the statutes against it, not because it is inherently bad in itself. For more see the Forward of Joseph Dabney’s *Mountain Spirits*.

² Joseph Earl Dabney, *Mountain Spirits: A Chronicle of Corn Whiskey from King James’ Ulster Plantation to America’s Appalachians and the Moonshine Life* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1974), 231.

³ Carol Kammen, *On Doing Local History*, 2nd ed. (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2003), 67.

County, Virginia is an imperative theme in the local history of the county in particular and in the Southern Appalachians in general. Therefore despite being a topic often ignored by local historians, according to Kammen, because of its seemingly indecent qualities, moonshining must be studied at a local level because of its prevalence in the lives and folklore of county residents.

Particular attention will be paid to the stories of Rockingham County natives who have a connection to the practice—moonshiners, relatives of moonshiners, and people who have been affected by or have knowledge of the practice. It is through the words and stories of these mountain residents that the significance of this timeless tradition, which is a “universal characteristic of Appalachian people,” is best delivered.⁴ This is not an attempt to give exhaustive details of every aspect of moonshining in the county, but rather to make a commentary on how the practice is remembered in contemporary culture and to relay the values that these stories, as a collective, represent about Rockingham County and its relationship to moonshining. The oral histories included here are contradictory, a result of familial and community influence, and biased in their desire to celebrate all things nostalgic, but regardless the oral histories reflect a collective historical narrative about what moonshining means in Rockingham County and to its residents. Moonshining’s connection to the highly valued themes of nature, family and community, and folkways as relayed through the medium of oral histories allows and encourages Rockingham County residents, particularly those associated with the practice

⁴ Peggy Ann Shifflett, *The Red Flannel Rag: Memories of an Appalachian Childhood* (Radford, VA: Commonwealth Press, 2004), 149.

in one way or another, to frame moonshining in a nostalgic and subjective way, memorializing moonshiners as heroes, martyrs, and upstanding community members.

The benefit of utilizing oral histories lies in their ability to relay facts of a particular event or time period that have otherwise gone undocumented, but more importantly oral histories represent personal truths for certain people or communities and allow researchers to find deeper meanings regardless of factual integrity. Rockingham County is just one example of an Appalachian locale with a rich heritage in both storytelling and moonshining; the two are often closely linked. It is the prominence of moonshining in folklore, storytelling, and local history that prompted this work. Therefore this study will be interdisciplinary integrating the fields of history, folklore and folkways, Appalachian studies, and oral history.⁵

⁵ The following works, all of which are not necessarily mentioned or cited in this paper, are integral to the study at hand and any research interest in any of the aforementioned fields would benefit from looking more closely at the following works. Jack E. Weller's *Yesterday's People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965) and Horace Kephart's *Our Southern Highlanders* (New York: Outing Publishing Company, 1913) are both fairly dated, but offer insight into historic perspectives of Appalachia. Both discuss moonshining at length. A more contemporary work on Appalachia is *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004) which is edited by Richard A. Straw and H. Tyler Blethen. This work is a collection of essays written by the most prominent Appalachian historians of the day. The authors include John C. Inscoc, Gordon B. McKinney, and Ronald Eller with topics ranging from slavery, stereotypes, and folklife. *High Mountains Rising* is the best condensed version of Appalachian studies currently available. Various works are available that discuss folkways in the Shenandoah Valley and Rockingham County. Of particular note are Retta Lilliendahl and Tammy Fulk Cullers' *Local Lore of the Shenandoah* (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2007), *Portals to Shenandoah Valley Folkways* (Staunton, VA: Lot's Wife Publishing, 2005) edited by Dorothy A. Boyd-Bragg, and John Heatwole's *Shenandoah Voices: Folklore, Legends and Traditions of the Valley* (Berryville, VA: Rockbridge Publishing Company, 1995). These three works are very localized and are most beneficial in researching Valley history. Dorothy Smith Noble's *Reflections: The People of the Blue Ridge Remember* (Verona, VA: McClure Printing Company, Inc., 1983) and Carolyn and Jack Reeder's *Shenandoah Heritage: The Story of the People Before the Park* (Washington D.C.: The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, 1978) and *Shenandoah Secrets: The Story of the Park's Hidden Past* (Vienna, VA: The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, 1991) are three further monographs which include exhaustive research on the development of the Shenandoah National Park in

In order to fully understand the scope of moonshining in Rockingham County, the way moonshine is produced must be outlined. The following directions and figure are by no means the only way to produce moonshine, but the fundamental steps are generally followed in all distillation operations (see Figure 1). In following the premise of this entire study, one interviewee's personal account as to how she and her family made moonshine will be utilized to describe the process:

You pour your corn and you pour your sugar in the barrel and you fill it up with water and you put in a cake of yeast. And they used to make their own yeast too. My daddy used to make it in the middle of a horse manure pile. Cause that generates heat. And it would ferment faster. And then when it gets to the point when the foam comes to the top and if you stick your fingers in, you can separate the foam. When it stays separate then it's ready to go. After that when it's ready, then you pour the mash, it's called mash, you pour it in the still and make a big hot fire and the still is copper. And then a copper coil goes over into a container. You have to cap the lid and seal it with dough so that if it does get too feisty the lid can lift if it gets too hot and boils too fast. So you boil it at a certain pace and the steam goes out through the coil which is running through cold water. You gotta keep it cold all the time, and dripping into your container on the other side. That's where the moonshine comes out.⁶

Appalachian Virginia and its impact on the mountain populations; moonshining is discussed in each work. Lastly, one culminating work focusing on Rockingham County history rounds out the historiography of this essay. Nancy B. Hess' *The Heartland: Rockingham County* (Harrisonburg, VA: Park View Press, 1976) is the definitive book on the area with a section dedicated to each small community within the county as well as famous homes, slavery, and traditions including moonshining.

The preeminent author on folklore in the United States is Richard Dorson. He has contributed numerous works to the field of study. Dorson's *American Folklore & the Historian* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971) is one of his earlier works. This is a compilation of essays with a variety of contributing authors. Themes range from cultural myths and regionalism, to methods and presentation of findings. As the title suggests this work is the essential guide to folklore studies in America. Dorson's *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1972) and *Handbook of American Folklore* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983) are both necessary titles in folklore research. The former delves more deeply into types of folklore including costume, medicine, narratives, and speech.

⁶Peggy Shifflett, interview by author, Salem, VA, August 17, 2009.

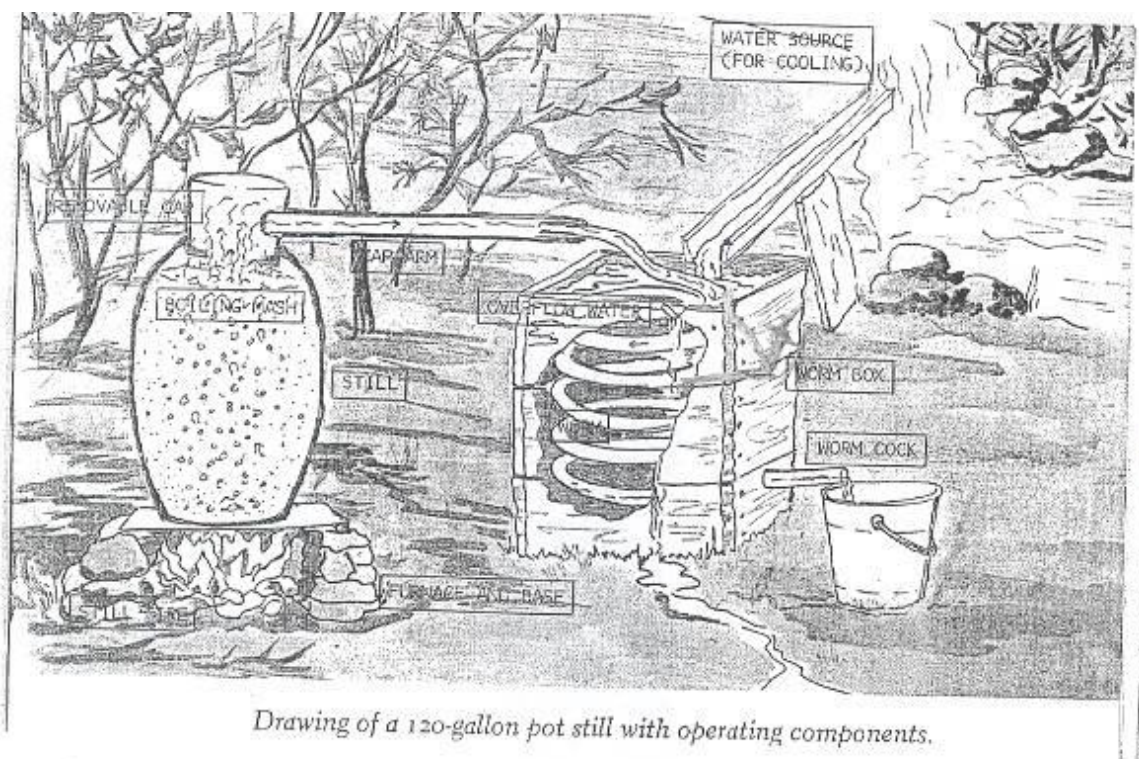


Fig. 1 “Drawing of a 120-gallon pot still with operating components.”⁷

It is also imperative to recognize the historical context of illicit distilling on a larger scale both globally and in the United States. On a global scale, liquor distillation has been practiced for thousands of years in Mesopotamian and Chinese cultures and in some circles is known as the “second oldest profession” following closely behind the equally scandalous and prevalent act of prostitution. Domestically, liquor distillation was at the core of the 1791 Whiskey Act and subsequent 1794 Whiskey Rebellion.⁸

⁷ Jess Carr, *The Second Oldest Profession: An Informal History of Moonshining in America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), 75.

⁸ The United States government accrued significant debt after the American Revolution and subsequently instituted the Whiskey Act to repay the debt by placing an excise tax on distilled spirits. Western Pennsylvanians rebelled against this act in 1794 which was eventually quashed by George Washington who organized nearly 13,000 militiamen to squelch the rebellion. For more see Thomas P. Slaughter’s *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

Furthermore, the significance of liquor to immigration patterns helped to shape the demographic makeup of the United States making the southern Appalachians a hotbed for moonshining.⁹

An early relative to moonshine was the Scottish variety of whiskey distilled just prior to 1500 A.D. by using barley and oats.¹⁰ In Scotland whiskey was “highly admired and extensively manufactured.” And it was the Scots-Irish, “those rollicking, whiskey-making, hard-drinking, hard-fighting folks of legend and folklore who brought whiskey-making to America.”¹¹ It was this “fiery beverage,” that has been a mainstay in the lives of residents of the Appalachian South for nearly three centuries.¹² As immigration to the New World from Europe increased in the late 1600s and even more so in the early 1700s,

⁹ Solid background information concerning the historical context of moonshining in the United States is offered in a few select secondary sources. Jess Carr’s *The Second Oldest Profession: An Informal History of Moonshining in America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1972) is the most significant source. Carr outlines illicit distilling from the 1700s through prohibition and the early 1970s. Of particular importance are the pictures and sketches of stills. A second comprehensive work is Esther Kellner’s *Moonshine: Its History and Folklore* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1971). Her work is based on interviews with revenue agents and moonshiners in Kentucky. Thirdly, Joseph Earl Dabney’s *Mountain Spirits: A Chronicle of Corn Whiskey from King James’ Ulster Plantation to America’s Appalachians and the Moonshine Life* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1974) is also a solid example of moonshining history. His research is also interview-based and the numerous pages of pictures are representative of Appalachian lifestyle and the moonshining culture. All of the above monographs are slightly dated and nothing of any real significance discussing moonshining on a comprehensive level has been published since. For those specifically interested in the economics of moonshining, Wilbur Miller’s *Revenuers and Moonshiners: Enforcing Federal Liquor Law in the Mountain South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991) is particularly useful. Miller examines the tax laws surrounding the practice and his book is a valuable companion to any of the more general history works. Lastly, the most recent source to come to the forefront of interest in moonshine studies is a History Channel documentary entitled *Rumrunners, Moonshiners, and Bootleggers* (A &E Home Video, 2002). This documentary, always a popular program on St. Patrick’s Day, articulates the culture of moonshining through the voices of those personally involved in the practice.

¹⁰ Other grains would have been utilized depending on the availability of indigenous crops. Corn rose to popularity with immigration to the New World. Carr, 3-4.

¹¹ Dabney, 35.

¹² Dabney, xiii.

it was the Scots-Irish in particular, more so than any other immigrant group, who brought with them their appreciation of strong spirits and the techniques to produce such spirits in a foreign landscape.

The first significant wave of Scots-Irish immigration to the United States began around 1717. Estimates suggest that a quarter of a million Scots-Irish came over to America between 1717 and 1776. While they landed at various ports along the east coast from Boston to Charleston, the majority of Scots-Irish came into Philadelphia and the neighboring towns of New Castle and Chester. The immigrants settled in Pennsylvania and its “three lower counties” that comprise modern day Delaware in large numbers.¹³ Many of the Scots-Irish immigrants remained in eastern Pennsylvania. However others began traveling across the unwelcoming Allegheny Range to the Shawnee lands of southwestern Pennsylvania.¹⁴ For some of these Scots-Irish, the mountains of western Pennsylvania resembled their native landscape and the familiarity of the topographical features encouraged their migration westward. While Scots-Irish immigrants trekked further into Virginia, the Carolinas, Tennessee and Georgia, more of their fellow brethren continued to enter the United States. Most of them traveled down the fertile Great Valley of Pennsylvania and continued into the Valley of Virginia, which is known more commonly today as the Shenandoah Valley.¹⁵

As the Scots-Irish began to settle in communities in the vicinity of the Appalachian Mountains, they depended on grain alcohol to sustain themselves, both

¹³ Dabney, 40.

¹⁴ The Alleghenies are part of the Appalachian Mountain Range. Allegheny is also often seen as “Alleghany.” For the purposes of this work it will be spelled uniformly with an “e.”

¹⁵ Dabney, 46.

physically and financially, as they attempted to create some sense of permanence in their new life.¹⁶ One of these enclaves was Rockingham County, Virginia. Rockingham County, the third largest county in the state behind Pittsylvania and neighboring Augusta, extends from the Blue Ridge on the southeast side entirely across the Shenandoah Valley to the first Allegheny ranges on the northwest. It has an area of 870 square miles.¹⁷ Virginia's Appalachian Mountain province encompasses the entire western portion of state including Rockingham County.¹⁸

The story of Rockingham County moonshine as it relates to this particular work begins approximately during the time of Prohibition. Many of the interviewees whose stories are included here were children during the 1930s or their parents were children at the time and subsequently passed down stories. The time span of this work is therefore reflective of the memory of the interviewees with no specific beginning date and continues into the current trends moonshining in Rockingham County. Chapter One presents a discussion of the importance of nature and the topography of Rockingham County to the prevalence of moonshining. Chapter Two similarly focuses on the significance of family and community members to the success of moonshining as children, wives, and law enforcement officials contributed to assisting the patriarchal moonshiner with his trade. Chapter Three presents moonshining as a major contributor to folkways particularly folklore, superstition, and home remedies. The aforementioned

¹⁶ Dabney, xiii.

¹⁷ John W. Wayland, *A History of Rockingham County Virginia*, 3rd printing. (Harrisonburg, VA: C.J. Carrier, Company, 1980), 15.

¹⁸ Virginia is divided into three distinct geographic provinces—the aforementioned Appalachian Mountain province, the Coastal Plain in eastern Virginia, and the Piedmont Plateau in the central part of the state. Wayland, 22.

three chapters discuss how moonshining is framed as an integral part of mountain culture and representative of the values embraced by the residents. The significance of land, family and community, and folkways are undeniable as examples of highly lauded values. Chapter Four presents a commentary on the role of the moonshiner as an iconic figure and how he is perceived by community members. Chapter Five takes a more presentist approach to moonshining with observations on the future of the practice as well as the dichotomy between the alleged traditionalists and the capitalist moonshiner. The main theme threaded throughout this work focuses on the way moonshining is framed as a collective narrative in folklore and oral histories, with moonshiners often being remembered as heroes, honorable neighbors, or victims of a corrupt legal system.

Chapter I: Land, Nature and their Significance to Moonshining

To the residents of Rockingham County, the source of their lifeblood and identity has come from the land on which these people farm, hunt, and make a living. Before large-scale industries and accessible highways made their way into the region, many Appalachian communities, including Rockingham County, were obligated to use their natural surroundings to survive both physically and financially. Author Michael Montgomery asserts that this “isolation’ to outsiders may to insiders be ‘independence,’ a desirable condition that grants them freedom.”¹⁹ The isolation of the mountains, not easily navigable on the dirt paths, the deep hollows, and the natural conspicuousness of dense forests allowed for moonshining to flourish in Rockingham County and throughout Appalachia. Connections to the land fundamentally shape the value system held by a majority of community members in the county. Moonshiners thrived in a business that promoted working with one’s hands and turning crops into highly profitable commodities. Their dependence on the land was characteristic of nearly every able-bodied soul in the county prior to mass industrialization and is still a distinguishing trait of the area and a valued endeavor. The oral histories reflect the sentiment that the ability to provide for one’s family simply by exploiting the natural surroundings exemplifies the ingenuity and admirable characteristics of moonshiners in Rockingham County.

The topography and landscape of southern Appalachia, including Virginia’s Rockingham County, is conducive to moonshining (see Figure 2). Valley historian John W. Wayland describes the county as having gaps and hollows on both sides which were

¹⁹ Michael Montgomery, *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place*, ed. Richard A. Straw and H. Tyler Blethen (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 160.

originally settled during the 1800s.²⁰ With the Appalachian range to the west and the Blue Ridge to the east, it is in areas on either side of the county that have had a more prominent moonshining tradition than in the Valley itself. The forests, gaps, and hollows were fundamental in camouflaging stills from revenueurs who were searching out tax evaders particularly when the federal government began taxing home distillation during Prohibition. In Hopkins Gap Peggy Shifflett remembers there being “lots of deep hollows and people could get back in there and make their moonshine.”²¹ Brocks Gap, Simmers Hollow, and Swift Run Gap are a few examples of locations in the county with adverse terrain favorable for moonshining.

²⁰ Nancy B. Hess, *The Heartland: Rockingham County* (Harrisonburg, VA: Park View Press, 1976), 101.

²¹ Shifflett, interview.

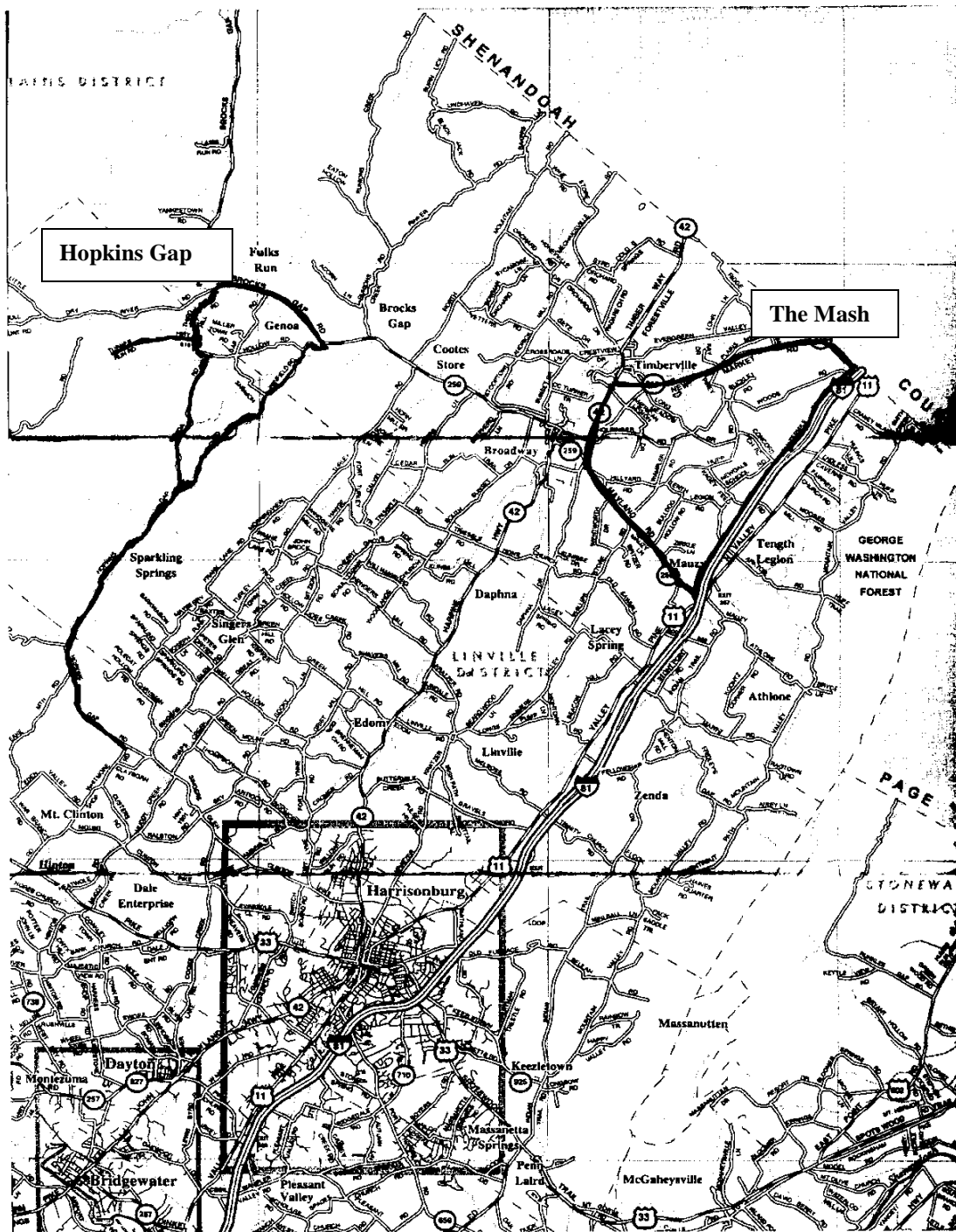


Fig. 2 Partial map of Rockingham County with Hopkins Gap and The Mash outlined.²²

²² Harrisonburg, Bridgewater, and Rockingham County Map, Massanutten Regional Library, Harrisonburg, VA.

The topography, according to Timberville native Chris Mathias, “has a lot of hiding places.” These hidden crevices made it “easy if you really wanted to get away with it. If you really wanted to [make moonshine], you could do it. Just hide [the still] somewhere.”²³ Hiding stills and moonshine in the woodlands became an art in and of itself to many moonshiners in the county. Bennie Cupp, originally of Rocky Bar in eastern Rockingham County, talked of a still that was hidden under a rock overhang in an unidentified location in the county.

[There’s] this place you make moonshine that you never get caught. This place that we go to a lot. That the rocks are still smoked under the overhangs where they ran, you know for years and years and we still go up there a lot. But the rocks are actually black where they built. They had a windlass where they pulled the water up to the still from Big Run and used fresh water. They had ropes and all, hanging down and they worked back up under this cliff. And that is still black. Of course weather can’t get in to it. It faces the south and it’s overhang so no weather gets in there. It’s still the solidest black. Some of the old barrel hoops still up there.²⁴

Framing moonshining as an act of ingenuity by utilizing one’s geographic surroundings in a profitable, yet discreet, manner is typical in moonshiner’s stories. Current moonshiner Stanley Fisk told of a time when he attempted to hide moonshine in the woods. Fisk hid numerous plastic milk jugs filled with liquor in some woodlands and covered up the evidence with fallen leaves. After a rainstorm, Fisk went back to the wooded location to check the moonshine, but to his dismay he saw that his attempt to camouflage the jugs went awry. The weight of the rain compressed the leaves on top of

²³ Chris Mathias, interview by author, Broadway, VA, August 27, 2009.

²⁴ Bennie Cupp, interview with Lula Roach and Hazel Roach by Dorothy Noble Smith, April 15, 1979 Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection (SdArch SNP), Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA.

the jugs and all Fisk could see of his “hidden” moonshine was a patch of red plastic lids sticking up from the leaves.²⁵

The second significant aspect of Appalachian topography which lends itself to high rates of moonshining, according to the folklore, is the abundance of numerous natural streams and rivers. Seen as one of the most important, and undervalued, resources of the central and southern Appalachian region, the creeks, streams, and rivers of Rockingham County all provide the environment and its inhabitants with natural, clean, running water.²⁶ Furthermore this resource is an integral ingredient to moonshine. Some notable water sources in Rockingham County are Dry River, Linville Creek, Shoemaker River, Smith Creek, Runion’s Creek, Elk Run, and Cub Run with the most prominent being the Shenandoah River. Many more unnamed or lesser known water sources scatter the hollows and valleys, one of which is mentioned by Pat Turner Ritchie located in Fulks Run. The G.W. Fulk Distillery was located in Fulks Run during the late nineteenth century and the spring that supplied the distillery with water was known as the Still Spring up through at least 1950.²⁷

Stanley Fisk would always house his stills near a river or stream to make use of the clean water to make his moonshine.²⁸ For John Stoneberger and his family, Lewis

²⁵ The name of the interviewee has been changed to protect his identity, per his request. Any resemblance of this fictitious name to a real person is coincidental. Stanley Fisk, interview by author, McGaheysville, VA, August 14, 2009.

²⁶ David L. Rouse and L. Sue Greer-Pitt, *A Handbook to Appalachia: An Introduction to the Region*, ed. Grace Toney Edwards, JoAnn Aust Asbury, and Ricky L. Cox (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 51.

²⁷ Note that a distillery and a personal still for making moonshine are different, specifically under the classifications of the law. Pat Turner Ritchie, interview by author, Harrisonburg, VA, November 19, 2009.

²⁸ Fisk, interview.

Mountain was also an ideal location to moonshine. Lewis Mountain is centrally located in the Shenandoah National Park in eastern Rockingham County. Greene and Rockingham counties divide the mountain east and west along the crest of the Blue Ridge. He writes that, “The spring water seemed to tast [sic] sweeter and better than any place on earth.”²⁹ Whether it was because of the sweet water or just an abundance of dense forests, Lewis Mountain, like Hopkins Gap in western Rockingham County, was the home of a strong moonshining tradition.

The isolation created by two mountain ranges on either side of the county hindered the ability for large scale industries to enter many of these communities. Roads were often impassable long into the twentieth century and families depended on agriculture and bark peeling for supplementary income.³⁰ The isolation from other communities benefitted moonshiners to a certain degree in Hopkins Gap. Running from the Broadway side of Fulks Run to the outskirts of Mt. Clinton in Harrisonburg, many residents of Hopkins Gap were able to traverse the mountains into the city more readily than other locations in the county. Additionally the markets in the city would have provided more trade or sales opportunities for moonshiners coming from the Mt. Clinton side of the Gap.³¹ When industries did bring jobs into these communities they were usually lumber related, stripping the forests of trees. Hopkins Gap was no exception to

²⁹ John W. Stoneberger, *Memories of a Lewis Mountain Man*, (Vienna, VA: The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, Inc., 1993), xii.

³⁰ Bark peeling is the process of stripping the bark off trees for tanning leather. The tannins were extracted from the bark at local tanneries.

³¹ Ritchie, interview.

this lack of industry. Peggy Shifflett elaborated on the job prospects that community members had to choose from.

People did timbering. And my grandfather sold bark. Sold it by bringing it off the mountain and peeling the trees and stacking it on the wagon and taking it to Broadway and then it was used, probably put on the train and used in tanneries. So they did what they could and they of course raise their own gardens and stuff, but there weren't any jobs there you know.³²

Local historian Nancy Hess describes the early mountaineers who settled in both the Fulks Run area of the county as well as the Elkton area as being a “hardy lot, usually ignorant, with no schooling, very strong in body and undisciplined. Many had no visible means of support but peddled squirrels, berries, apples, and moonshine for a living.”³³

Despite a lack of good formal education and little monetary opportunities besides “peddling berries,” mountain families were able to make do with the resources they had at their disposal, furthering their familiarity with their natural surroundings. And it was this geographic isolation, according to the moonshining folklore, that fostered autonomy and allowed many mountain residents to make a living off of moonshine.

In the mountain enclaves of Rockingham County, prior to the arrival of the timber and coal industries, agriculture dominated the region.³⁴ An integral aspect of Appalachian agriculture has always included raising hogs and poultry and particularly cultivating various grains. These included corn, wheat, and barley which were the real “money-makers” for county farmers.³⁵ Moonshiners insist on their inherent connection

³² Shifflett, interview.

³³ Hess, 101.

³⁴ Rouse and Greer-Pitt, 62.

³⁵ Hess, 67.

to the land through their utilization of cool streams and deep hollows to make their moonshine as well as in the crops that they grew on their land.

Moonshiners marketed their crops in a way suitable to their environment, working with nature instead of against it. For example both corn and whiskey could be shipped via the region's many waterways, but selling corn as a whiskey was the most desirable.³⁶ Corn was financially a more profitable commodity in its liquid form than as a grain transported by the bushel. Whiskey was also much easier to transport over mountains or on rocky roads. This was particularly the case because only small amounts of any crop could be grown in the more mountainous regions of the county where land was rarely flat and often riddled with rocks. If a mountain farmer had a surplus of fruit, corn, or any other grain, the easiest and most profitable way to market that particular commodity was to distill it into liquor. The precedent for this method was established by eighteenth century frontiersmen who had no easy way of transporting corn or rye in its solid form to the eastern or urban markets. In the case of Rockingham County moonshiners the markets in Greene County and the city of Harrisonburg were only accessible by traversing across mountains. By distilling certain grains or fruits into liquor or brandies, the mountain moonshiner could reduce the volume of the crop and in turn raise its value significantly. The liquor could be taken across mountains on horseback with relative ease.³⁷ This sentiment was reiterated by county residents as well. Peggy Shifflett of Hopkins Gap recalls her father having a similar selling strategy. "My dad often told me

³⁶ Rouse and Greer-Pitt, 62.

³⁷ Carolyn Reeder and Jack Reeder, *Shenandoah Heritage: The Story of the People Before the Park*, (Washington D.C: The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, 1978), 46-47.

that you made a whole lot more money on one bushel of corn by making moonshine than he would if he had taken it to Harrisonburg and selling it.”³⁸ This way of selling corn was also discussed in nearly every interview conducted by Dorothy Noble Smith for the Shenandoah National Park Oral History Project in the late 1970s. After asking the interviewees about their own communities, Smith made a point to assert her opinion of moonshiner’s ingenuity to market their product in such a way by converting corn to whiskey or apples to brandy consequently lightening their loads and increasing their profit margin.

Moonshine’s value was not always monetarily based. Many families depended on bartering or trading goods as a way to supply their homes with essentials when they did not have cash or coin to purchase items. Stanley Fisk remembers moonshine being hauled across the Blue Ridge Mountains to Greene County on a mule’s back and traded for other goods like pepper.³⁹ According to Peggy Shifflett moonshine was traded for milk and groceries. The most bartered commodity was sugar, which allowed for more moonshine to be produced. After buying enough sugar at the Farm Bureau to be suspected of moonshining, Shifflett’s family bartered with the former owner of the Harrisonburg Fruit and Produce. The owner allowed them to take sacks of sugar and “of course he got some whiskey back [in return]. He knew what was going on.”⁴⁰ This trading system allowed for the moonshining cycle to continue and further fostered communal relationships and dependence on one another.

³⁸ Shifflett, interview.

³⁹ Fisk, interview.

⁴⁰ Shifflett, interview.

The independent qualities associated with moonshining are apparent in Peggy Shifflett's commentary as she argues that exact self-sufficiency allowed moonshining to flourish in the community. "The men in Hopkins Gap in the early days and still to this day, they want to hunt. Huntin' season comes and they want to stop their job and go hunting. Moonshine allows that. It's another way of keeping your autonomy and it's also a part of the culture. It's that mentality that moonshine fit right into that. People call 'em lazy, but they're not lazy."⁴¹ The flexible work schedule that moonshining allowed, gave mountain men the ability to participate in other pastimes such as hunting. Additionally, Shifflett touches on the self-determining mindset that many pioneers had when settling in the mountains of Virginia. "I'm a free, independent person. And people who went west, which in the really early days [Appalachia] was west, were more independent spirited people."⁴² The rebellious character of the settlers who had the audacity to settle west, a place with unforgiving landscapes, was also inherently self-determining. The oral histories pertaining to moonshining suggest that by making moonshine, these residents were able to fuel their independent temperaments. However the market system also closely tied moonshiners to an interregional economy, which was not as self-sufficient as the moonshiners portray in their oral histories and seem to pride themselves on. Regardless the theme of autonomy is significant in moonshining folklore.

As has been discussed previously, it is on the eastern and western side of the county that the majority of moonshining took place and still continues to have a presence. Prior to and even during the presence of the National Park System on the Blue Ridge

⁴¹ Shifflett, interview.

⁴² Shifflett, interview.

Mountains during the 1920s and 1930s, many families lived in those mountains and at their base (see Figure 3). In December of 1924 and the summer of 1925 two organizations, the Southern Appalachian National Park Committee and the Shenandoah National Park Association, respectively, championed the initiative to reclaim inhabited land in the Blue Ridge Mountains to form a park. Ten years passed before families were relocated to neighboring communities, but the transition experience was not the same for every family, ranging from unsettling at best to traumatic at worst. While some were apprehensive of abandoning their homes, others relished the opportunity to have a greater access to schools and medical facilities, leaving behind a life in the mountains that was becoming increasingly difficult.⁴³

⁴³ Reeder and Reeder, 58-59.

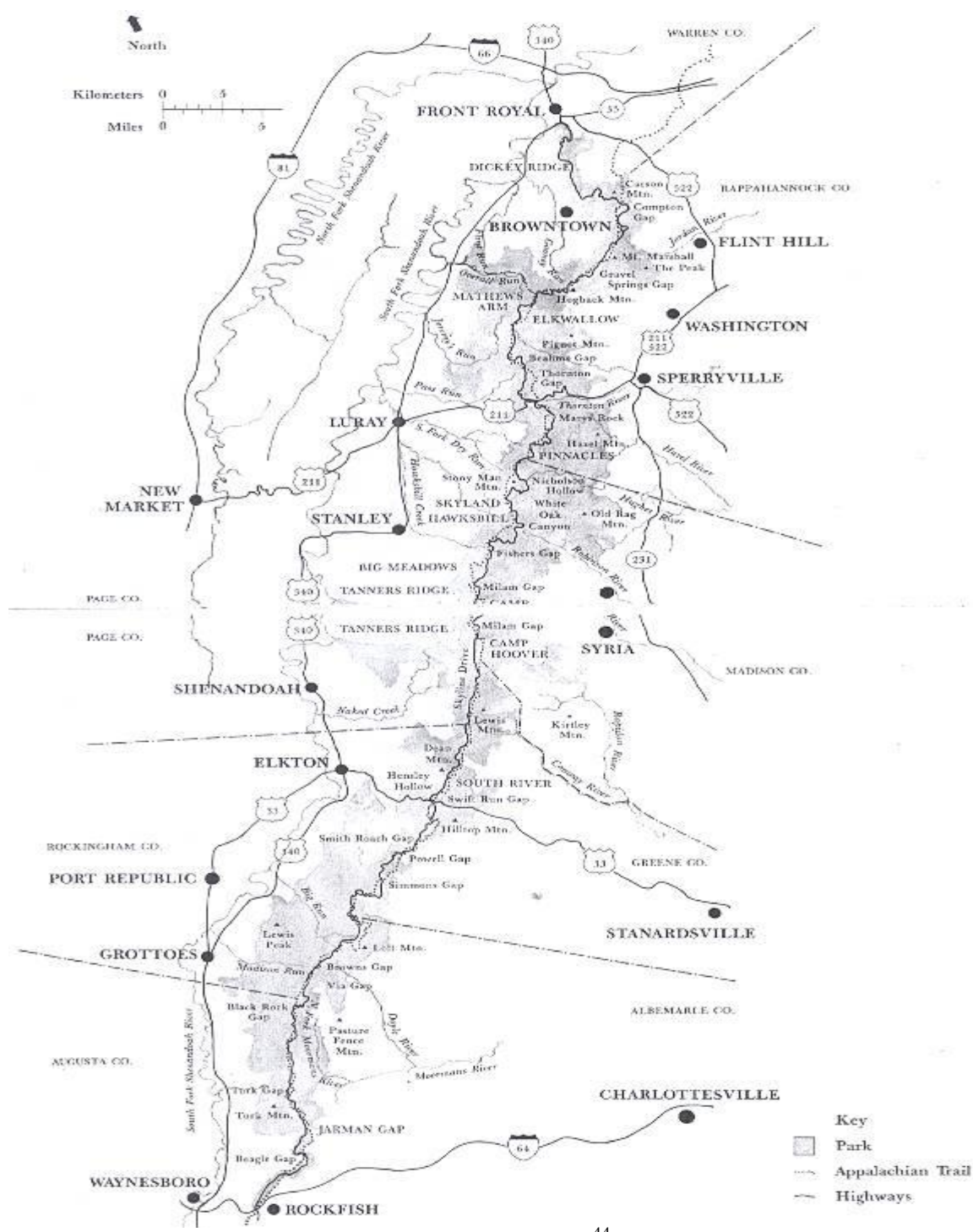


Fig. 3 Map of Shenandoah National Park.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Darwin Lambert, *The Undying Past of the Shenandoah National Park* (Boulder, CO: Roberts Rinehart, Inc. Publishers, 1989), xii-xiii.

The increase in hardships in the Blue Ridge was partly blamed on the establishment of the park. The limited amount of special use permits that were ordered to allow for families to stay in their homes severely impeded their abilities to do much else. Hunting and fishing was prohibited as was cultivating land that had not been cultivated the year before. Cattle grazing was also drastically restricted as farmers were not allowed to utilize land “in the Park Area between the Lee Highway and the Spotswood Trail.”⁴⁵

Natural setbacks like rocky and eroded soil also made mountain life arduous as it was difficult to grow crops in any significant amount. The terrain also hindered their ability to raise livestock successfully for profit. A chestnut blight hit the area in 1929 which deprived mountain residents of one of their cash crops. Lastly tanneries stopped accepting oak bark for their tanning process, limiting what types of bark the residents could peel to supplement their income. In spite of all these setbacks the residents of the Blue Ridge adapted and proved themselves resourceful. And despite the depleted soil, residents managed to raise a sufficient amount of crops and livestock for subsistence purposes before the park limited such activity.⁴⁶ Thus these families made moonshine as a means toward financial stability at a time when little work could be found and many struggled to be successful farmers. Their main priority was to provide necessities for their families. Paul “Duke” Harris, of Brown’s Gap, confirms the ingenuity that many mountain residents had when other options seemed unlikely.

We really had no other way to make a living. All the timber had been cut out, bark was all peeled and it wasn’t hardly a way we could lived if we’d

⁴⁵Reeder and Reeder, 81-82.

⁴⁶Dorothy Noble Smith, *Recollections: The People of the Blue Ridge Remember* (Verona, VA: McClure Printing Company, Inc., 1983), 7.

a stayed in. After we got in the whiskey business we always had money and bowled [at Blackrock Hotel]. In the winter we raised moonshine. After we got into that we'd bury the barrels and pack leaves around them so it would heat and work then when it wasn't too bad we'd run off some mash.⁴⁷

Families relied on moonshining and making brandy, which made the small amounts of grain and fruit that they were able to cultivate on the mountain, very profitable. As some industries began to deteriorate in the Blue Ridge, moonshining flourished; so much so that residents like Paul Harris had disposable income to allocate on luxuries like bowling.

Howard Maiden, whose family lived in the Swift Run area of the county near Elkton, admitted that “there was quite a bit of [moonshine] made in the [Shenandoah National] park. Pretty near in every hollow had a still.”⁴⁸ When asked by interviewer Janet Baugher Downs if he remembered if there were any stills in the Swift Run area of eastern Rockingham County, Ralph Baugher replied,

Oh yeah, there was a few of them around. Pop owned twenty acres of woodland down there right there where the swimming pool is today there up on [Route] 33. As you're going up toward the mountain on the left side there from where the swimming pool is, papa had twenty acres of woodland back in there. And there was people back in there that had made liquor and had their still set up on papa's land. I've seen the spot where they had it set up at. But up against Hightop, Sandy Bottom is quite a few—a lot of stills around, people made moonshine.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Paul Doug “Duke” Harris, interview by Dorothy Noble Smith, November 14, 1979 Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection (SdArch SNP), Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA.

⁴⁸ Howard Maiden, interview by Dorothy Noble Smith, August 3, 1977 Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection (SdArch SNP), Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA.

⁴⁹ Baugher is referring to the swimming pool at Swift Run campground approximately three miles from the Swift Run Gap entrance to Skyline Drive in Elkton. Ralph Baugher interview by Janet Baugher Downs, March 4, 2000 Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection (SdArch SNP), Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA.

While interviewing former mountain resident Preston Breeden who was born between what is now mile marker fifty-nine and sixty on the parkway, Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) member Edward Garvey stated that, “of course, up and down the mountain why some of the families at least, used their corn crop to make moonshine, or apples to make apple jack or apple brandy.”⁵⁰ Breeden responded that,

They made five, ten gallons, the most I saw made. I hope as much as ten gallons. Nobody to buy it. Like everybody to give it to them or no money to buy it with. Some people did have cider mills where they could make it. Grind them up, but to make apple brandy you got to beat them apples up to make a pulp like. And they had old timey grinders for apples where you made that at.⁵¹

Breeden alludes to the fact that few families had the means to purchase moonshine or brandy. Having moonshine gifted to you would have been a blessing, but as in other parts of the county it was also used for bartering purposes. Families on the Blue Ridge Mountains traded chickens, eggs, hams, salt, coffee, kerosene, cloth, and sugar. Moonshine would have been one of the most valuable of all these commodities.⁵²

⁵⁰ The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, founded in 1927, is a volunteer-based organization dedicated to preserving the conserved land along the Appalachian Trail as well as maintaining the upkeep of shelters, cabins and other facilities. The PATC has also published various books about the Shenandoah National Park and the Appalachian Trail. For more information see <http://potomacappalachian.org>. Preston Breeden interview by various members of the PATC, November 19, 1982 Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection (SdArch SNP), Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA.

⁵¹ Breeden, interview.

⁵² In Chapter 3 the medicinal advantages of moonshine will be discussed. While often consumed for pleasure, moonshine also was said to have healing properties and was particularly valuable for isolated mountain families who had little access to doctors. Smith, 7.

Despite a lack of monetary resources, few residents saw this poverty as a setback asserting that, “we didn’t need much money. We lived better than anyone does now.”⁵³

The way mountain residents utilized their natural surroundings was a topic of interest for former superintendent of the Shenandoah National Park Edward Freeland (1942-1950). Freeland was a proponent of interpreting and exhibiting moonshining and its relationship to the Blue Ridge Mountains for visitors as a way for them to understand the historical significance that the tradition played in the area before the Shenandoah National Park was opened and during its transition period. He stated, “You know another thing that I think in this human history interpretation, you know there were just lots of stills in the hollows where they made illegal liquor. But it seemed to me that something like that could be done in the living history program [at Skyline Drive]. I don’t see why not; it’s part of the history.”⁵⁴ To a certain degree this idea was made a reality at Mabry Mill in Floyd County where a nonoperational still was set up for display. Pat Turner Ritchie of Fulks Run remembers visiting Mabry Mill as a child and first being exposed to moonshining through this exhibition.⁵⁵ Freeland envisioned a more comprehensive interpretation of moonshining on the Blue Ridge Mountains, however, with special demonstrations using a working still and with specific focus on the “man-nature relationship.” Freeland called for the use of maps or park rangers to “even point out maybe the locations of old corn fields; in some cases the surviving trees from apple

⁵³ Smith, 7.

⁵⁴ Edward Freeland interview by Darwin Lambert, May 14, 1978 Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection (SdArch SNP), Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA.

⁵⁵ Ritchie, interview.

orchards because some of what they distilled was apple brandy.”⁵⁶ For Freeland and many mountain residents on the Blue Ridge, the intricate symbiosis that took place between nature and human was understood and respected. The land, while unforgiving at times, provided for families when there were few other alternatives available.

The land that makes Appalachia and Rockingham County so unique is furthermore what allowed for moonshining to flourish. The Scots-Irish settlers who made their way west past the piedmont of Virginia brought with them their knowledge of distilled spirits into a landscape which initially was practical for moonshining simply for the vast quantities of water sources. As the government began taxing and actively enforcing liquor laws, the gaps and hollows of the county allowed for moonshiners to conceal their stills and moonshine from the prying eyes of revenueurs. The value of land to Appalachian residents has always gone beyond just making moonshine. Through farming, hunting, and raising livestock, mountain dwellers have constantly found ways to utilize their surroundings to make an autonomous living in the face of limited industrial opportunities while creating stability for their families. While some uses of the land were remembered in oral histories as being more ingenious and profitable than others, such as moonshining, the relationship between man and his natural environment was mutually give and take. Bark peeling and lumbering were definitive industries in the Blue Ridge, yet both had detrimental effects on the environment, drastically altering the state of the forests and killing trees. Moonshining rose to prominence when the reliance on other industries decreased and the transition from farmland to parkland in the Blue Ridge

⁵⁶ Freeland suggested using only water for demonstrations and heating the still with burners instead of firewood. Freeland, interview.

forced many families to rely on it due to other land use restrictions; families had few limited alternatives to provide income and bartering commodities.

Chapter II: The Role of Family and Community in the Success of Illicit Distilling

The tight-knit communities that make up the county for generations have come to accept sharing farm tools and skills, looking out for one's family members to the point of clannishness, and trust in one's immediate neighbors as the ideal way of living. All members of a family were utilized for farming or other household duties regardless of sex and starting at a relatively young age. These values are also apparent in the practice of moonshining. A practice deemed illegal by the federal government is one that has been generally accepted, if not celebrated, by many community members in Rockingham County. The business of moonshining is often a family affair with recipes being passed down through generations, with mothers and wives assisting their male counterparts, and with children running supplies through the mountain hollows. Furthermore many of the mountain enclaves in the county are comprised of only a few families who over time married into one another, which further explains the clannish tendencies of many communities.⁵⁷ Family friends and community members such as law enforcement officials, judges, and school teachers also played a significant role in the success and prominence of moonshining throughout many county communities. By aiding and abetting, or at least turning a blind eye to the practice, community members enabled moonshiners and encouraged moonshining to continue into current times.

Perhaps the most obvious characteristic of the folklore of moonshining that pertains to family values is the oft mentioned necessity for moonshiners to provide financially for their family. Particularly in terms of the early to mid-twentieth century

⁵⁷ For example, last names like Dean, Hensley, and Shifflett are very prominent in the Elkton area of Rockingham County. Shifflett and Morris are recurring surnames in the Hopkins Gap/Fulks Run area.

time period, moonshining is framed as one of the few available industries for families living in the rural mountains of Rockingham County. Timberville native Chris Mathias posits that “especially during Prohibition or during the Depression it was a way for people to make a living when they didn’t have a job and when everything else was going away from their favor they had that to fall back on.”⁵⁸ County resident Harold Garrison of Brown’s Gap also spoke of the financial perks of moonshining for a man with limited opportunities. Garrison sought work in Hershey, Pennsylvania at the chocolate factory, but soon realized that he could “make more [money] out of moonshine than making candy.” He subsequently moved back to Rockingham County to resume moonshining.⁵⁹ Peggy Shifflett maintains that in “those days” moonshining was a way to make a living and it fed many of the families in Hopkins Gap.⁶⁰ For Tammy Losh of Grottoes, a large family necessitated that the patriarch make moonshine. “My ex-husband, his grandfather was a moonshiner. And he had five children, so to support his family he made moonshine. That’s what they did.”⁶¹ For Peggy Shifflett, “our whole life was always centered around our relatives back [in Hopkins Gap].”⁶² The folklore suggests that making moonshine as a way to ensure family security and stability is seen as honorable and perhaps is one of the reasons why so many community members were supportive of the practice.

⁵⁸ Mathias, interview.

⁵⁹ Harold Garrison, interview by Janna Zirkle and Tim Devine, October 9, 1980 Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection (SdArch SNP), Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA.

⁶⁰ Shifflett, interview.

⁶¹ Tammy Losh interview by author, Harrisonburg, VA, January 5, 2010.

⁶² Shifflett interview by author, August 17, 2009.

Moonshining techniques and recipes were generally passed down orally from experienced family members to children at a very young age, through a sort of apprenticeship system. Stanley Fisk of eastern Rockingham County learned how to make moonshine from his uncles and male cousins on his mother's side of the family. One of his uncles was a third generation moonshiner who was dedicated to continuing the tradition and passing it on to younger family members. He also inherited the art of proofing moonshine by testing the bead, or bubbles on top of the moonshine, through years of shadowing elders. To test the potency or proof of moonshine, Fisk inspects the bubbles that sit on top of the moonshine after shaking it in a clear glass container. If bubbles are halfway above and halfway below the top of the moonshine and dissolve starting in the middle and working their way out, the content is approximately 100 proof or fifty percent alcohol. With the help of his uncles, Fisk was also able to construct his own homemade stills using copper and silver solder.⁶³ Peggy Shifflett admits to first being exposed to moonshining at the age of five.

My first experience was seeing my grandmother drunk [off moonshine] and my mother fussing about it. And my Uncle Jim showed me his [apple] brandy when I was young and he also took me into his sheds and showed me where he hid it under the floor and told stories. I was five years old when my Uncle Rob died. Just turned five, but I know that he had it around and people came to the house and bought it.⁶⁴

Exposing young people to moonshining at an early age all but ensured that the practice would thrive and continue for generations.

⁶³ Fisk, interview.

⁶⁴ Shifflett, interview.

Evidence of the familial nature of moonshining is further represented by the female's role in the practice. Generally thought of as a male dominated venture, many Rockingham County women took part in moonshining in a myriad of degrees and capacities varying from sales to making dough which was used to seal the cap on the still. Peggy Shifflett talked of female family members who helped their male counterparts with moonshining in Hopkins Gap. Shifflett's mother was an integral piece in the family practice playing a few roles:

My mother was famous for her sales. She sold it when she was a teenager or even younger maybe. She stayed home from church and sold moonshine on Sundays. I know the amount she made one Sunday. And she got scared of having that much money around up on that mountain to hide. It was over \$200.⁶⁵

Shifflett's mother was also well known for her homemade dough. By using dough, which is pliable, the still cap was able to expand or contract based on the varying degrees of pressure and temperature change that were necessary for making moonshine. Shifflett's mother would be awakened in the middle of the night to put together a batch of her famous dough for the moonshiners in the family. According to Shifflett, "that was one of the things she bragged about till she died, how good her dough was."⁶⁶ At least three other female members of Shifflett's family were also involved in moonshining. Shifflett's Aunt Hazel Morris took over the business while her Uncle Jim Morris was incarcerated after being caught by revenuers. Women were also being jailed for their connections to moonshining. Her Aunt Lena Shifflett and Aunt Goldie Crawford were both imprisoned for a few days in 1940 for bootlegging liquor. When the local health

⁶⁵ Shifflett, interview.

⁶⁶ Shifflett, interview.

department realized that Lena had an infant and that her husband was bringing the child several times a day to the jail to get breastfed, the authorities were forced to release both women. Neither was ever charged on counts of bootlegging.⁶⁷ East Rockingham County resident Stanley Fisk also knew of women who were a part of local moonshining. The majority of these women were mothers or wives of moonshiners who approved of the practice and played a supportive role more than anything else.⁶⁸ From minimal involvement as an encouraging matriarch for their husbands or sons to even being arrested themselves, women proved that they could both take over the practice when their male counterparts were unable to and were always “their backup support.”⁶⁹

The roles of children as hired hands and as lookouts were also integral to the success of moonshining in Rockingham County. Stanley Fisk remembers when children were paid to carry supplies, such as sacks of sugar, for moonshiners up the mountains on the eastern part of the county. They would be compensated between twenty five and fifty cents for their labor.⁷⁰ Bennie Cupp, resident of Rocky Bar near McGaheysville, commented on child employment in the moonshining business in a 1979 interview with Dorothy Noble Smith.⁷¹ Cupp claimed that from Brown’s Gap to Luray in Page County, moonshiners hired young boys to carry sugar and apple brandy on their shoulders through the harsh mountainous terrain. Typically sugar was sold in one hundred pound sacks, but

⁶⁷ Shifflett, interview.

⁶⁸ Fisk, interview.

⁶⁹ Shifflett, interview.

⁷⁰ Fisk, interview.

⁷¹ Dorothy Noble Smith, New Jersey native, retired to Luray, Virginia. She wrote for the *Page News and Courier* and authored *Recollections: The People of the Blue Ridge Remember* (Verona, VA: McClure Print Co, 1983) after doing extensive interviews with individuals and families, many of whom were directly affected by the construction of the Shenandoah National Park, Skyline Drive, and Blue Ridge Parkway. See Chapter 1 for more information on the residents of the Shenandoah National Park.

the small boys, not strong enough to carry an entire sack themselves, divided up the sugar and made numerous trips up and down the mountains of eastern Rockingham County. Cupp's own father also worked for moonshiners as a young man and was paid enough money to be able to purchase a nicer wardrobe. "I've heard Dad say that the first pair of store bought shoes, first store bought clothes he got, he got from carrying a shoulder full of moonshine from down there at Rocky Bar up there at the mountains. He ordered a whole suit of clothes from Sears Roebuck."⁷² Peggy Shifflett's uncles also worked for moonshiners in Hopkins Gap as teenagers. They were orphaned at a young age and as a way to "have some change in their pocket" they earned a quarter a day working for "bigger moonshiners." Occasionally the boys would be paid by the gallon or the amount of moonshine produced.⁷³ Her Uncle Jim Shifflett began moonshining at the age of twelve, which eventually evolved into him hiring workers to assist him as his business took off, producing about one hundred gallons of moonshine a week.⁷⁴ Pat Turner Ritchie, who is also an amateur local historian and genealogist, interviewed a man from Criders who claimed to be a runner for his father as a child. "He said, 'I guess you would call it a runner. When I was about ten my dad would make moonshine and I would deliver it to whoever wanted it. So I guess I was a runner.'"⁷⁵

Children also served moonshiners as lookouts, keeping watch for revenuers entering the mountain communities. Peggy Shifflett's cousin was one of the many students to jump out of the window of the one-room schoolhouse in Hopkins Gap to warn

⁷² Cupp, interview.

⁷³ Shifflett, interview.

⁷⁴ Shifflett, 161.

⁷⁵ Ritchie, interview.

of the impending danger that came with revenueurs. Not one to be intimidated by Federal authorities, the young boy stood up to revenue agents who tried to get a lead on moonshining operations. “My cousin Gifford jumped out the school window I think and the revenue agents caught him and they asked him where they could find some moonshine and he’s the one that said, ‘I wouldn’t tell you where you could find shitwater.’”⁷⁶ These young boys remained loyal to the moonshiners in the community for whom they worked for and distrustful of revenueurs and outsiders in general. The unwritten agreement in Hopkins Gap between many of these laborers and the moonshiners they worked for ensured that if a revenueur ever did successfully raid an operation and confiscate a still, the workers, who were often times children or teenagers, would face the consequences of the law without revealing the identity of their employer.⁷⁷

An example of the communal nature of moonshining comes from Rockingham County native John Stoneberger who wrote about moonshining in his 1993 memoir *Memories of a Lewis Mountain Man*. In it he discusses that on Lewis Mountain, moonshine always had a place at the forefront of his mother’s house. He writes that:

Mama said that a gallon of moonshine whiskey with rock candy in it was always on the mantelpiece over the fireplace in the living room in the home where she was raised on Lewis Mountain. This custom was part of our way of life and everyone could use it of their own free will...when the level would drop within a couple inches it would fill up again.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Shifflett, interview.

⁷⁷ Shifflett, 161.

⁷⁸ Stoneberger, 59.

He continues to memorialize the moment, as a child, in which his mother gave him “the honor of carrying a half-pint bottle of yellow corn liquor as we walked the last two miles to Grannie Roche’s place.”⁷⁹ Stoneberger went on to write that travelers and strangers were often given a drink of the family moonshine. It was used to warm up the young men who had been out hunting and came back cold and wet. A local minister would even take a small nip of their moonshine before his Sunday evening nap.⁸⁰ The tradition of moonshining therefore was a staple in many mountain homes as a means of hospitality towards visitors and sharing the fruits of their labor with others.

Often times moonshine was given as a gift for special holidays throughout the year including Christmas. Evidence alluding to this practice is described in a report of confiscated liquor dated December 27, 1923, signed by Rockingham County Sheriff W.L. Dillard. The report outlines both the cases against defendants who had stills destroyed as well as cases against those who were in the possession of liquor. While only four completed stills were destroyed, fifteen people, whose names differed from those with destroyed stills, had their liquor destroyed. The amounts confiscated varied from “1/2 of a half-pint” for E.A. Bradford to “2 ½ gallons” for Leon and Arias Shiflett. These amounts are relatively small compared to how much an average still could produce—between ten to twenty gallons at one time. The number of people within this report who were in possession of moonshine combined with the small amounts they had in their

⁷⁹ Stoneberger, 60.

⁸⁰ Stoneberger, 59.

ownership and the late December filing date of the report suggests that these half-pints, pints, and quarts of moonshine could have potentially been given as holiday gifts.⁸¹

The role of religion within a society that makes moonshine is also of interest here. Christians seemingly celebrated the birth of Christ by giving moonshine as gifts, ministers were known to partake in a few sips, and women sold moonshine on Sundays instead of going to church. Yet according to Peggy Shifflett, “they didn’t consider it a sin to make moonshine.” Because “it was a way of making a living and feeding your family, it fit right in with religion. People just kinda did what they wanted to do during the week. And I don’t see that they saw a conflict between the two.”⁸² While residents of Hopkins Gap, in this instance, may have been God-fearing people, their religious convictions did not appear to include temperance. Religion was either not actively pursued or was pursued as an afterthought to other priorities. Desmond Dove asserts that he went to church regularly as a child, but that as an adult religion does not play a significant role in his life.⁸³ Part of this obvious dichotomy may be attributed to a lack of stories within moonshining folklore that pertain to drunkenness. For many moonshiners, their trade was beneficial in providing for their families and as will be discussed in Chapter 3, it had medicinal purposes as well. Yet the most obvious disadvantage is often not discussed.⁸⁴

⁸¹ “Report of Confiscated Liquor,” Rockingham County Circuit Court, December 27, 1923.

⁸² Shifflett, interview.

⁸³ Desmond Dove, interview by author, Linville, VA, August 8, 2009.

⁸⁴ One of the few interviewees that touched on drunkenness did so in a positive way. Pat Turner Ritchie told a story of William Dove who was originally from Rockingham County, but had to flee to west first to Nebraska in 1887 and then to Colorado in 1897 after making a batch of poison moonshine that subsequently killed his brother John. This story has become a part of the Dove descendants personal narrative and is remembered fondly as the reason for the family’s settlement in Colorado. Ritchie, interview. For more on this story see Lewis H. Yankey, *The Dove Family of Rockingham County, Virginia* (Criders, Virginia: locally published, 1991), 95.

Despite strict laws and the presence of some officials dedicated to breaking up stills and hunting down moonshiners, not all law enforcement officials were anti-moonshining. Local residents tell stories time and time again of sympathetic local police officers and judges who were perhaps customers of moonshiners or at least appreciative of a well made whiskey. They thus tended to be more lenient in their enforcement of the law. An undated story tells of one unnamed county judge who was particularly fond of moonshine and “liked to ‘nip’ once in a while.”⁸⁵ Prior to hearing the case of a condemned bootlegger, the accused contacted the judge to plead for mercy. The judge told the man to bring a jug of his moonshine to court on the day he was to stand trial. On the day of his trial he asked the bootlegger for a sample and the judge declared, “any man who can make moonshine that good should be set free.” As the story goes, the bootlegger was subsequently released to continue his illicit affairs.⁸⁶ Stanley Fisk knew of several local sheriffs’ deputies who had families in the moonshine business. The compassionate deputies were known to tip off the moonshiners when other police officers were intending to search homes or other property for moonshine, giving the moonshiners enough time to hide or dispose of their product.

Peggy Shifflett wrote about a similar story in her memoir *Red Flannel Rag* concerning her uncle Robert Crawford. He was known for making high quality moonshine for his own personal consumption and he also sold it to prominent members of the community. By selling his product to community members, Crawford simply fulfilled a demand for illicit liquor which further exemplifies the communal nature of

⁸⁵ Hess, 102.

⁸⁶ Hess, 102.

moonshining in a small community. “[Robert] was followed one time by revenue agents and they stopped him. And he told them that, ‘If you just follow me to the location of my delivery, I’ll let you take me in.’ And so he stopped at the judge’s house and took the moonshine in. And the [revenue agents] kind of drove away.”⁸⁷ The endorsement of moonshining by judges and police officers not only made the laws against the practice seem illegitimate, but it inhibited any real enforcement, thus making moonshine a permissible business in the eyes of the community.

Tammy Losh has a similar perception of local police officers and their actions reflecting compassion or at least apathy towards moonshining practices in Rockingham County. “A lot of the local law enforcement in particular, they know it’s going on they just turn a blind eye to it and nothing’s ever said. So therefore your Federals know nothing about it at all. If they know you and they know your family, then they more or less just kind of let it go as long as you’re not hurting people.”⁸⁸ Peggy Shifflett also discussed a related story concerning one of her relative’s operations during the Prohibition era. “My Uncle Shirley told me that there were times when the police, local police would walk right past the still ‘cause they knew who was making it and they knew he was feeding his family and ignored it.”⁸⁹ However when Federal officials came into the rural areas “they didn’t know the local people so they just cracked down on everything.”⁹⁰ Both Losh and Shifflett reiterate with their stories the idea that within

⁸⁷ Shifflett, 163.

⁸⁸ Losh, interview.

⁸⁹ Shifflett, interview.

⁹⁰ Shifflett, interview.

one's community, neighbors are likely to look out for other familiar community members whether they are civilians or law enforcement.

Desmond Dove also alluded to the intimate relationship between local law enforcement and moonshiners in his description of his arrest in 2006. According to Dove, county authorities “looked over a lot of [moonshining],” with little motivation to prosecute violators. After hearing of Dove’s arrests “a couple of [the local authorities] was actually pissed off cause there was one or two that has drank some of mine.” While Dove admits that local law enforcement were “supposed to” inform Federal authorities of moonshine operations, “they wouldn’t.”⁹¹ Stories from locals suggest that it was the Federal officials who were much more threatening to moonshining than the local officials who were regular customers or simply chose not to incriminate moonshiners.

Other community members simply refused to “get involved” by failing to inform the appropriate law enforcement officials of any known or suspected moonshining. School teachers were no exception. Peggy Shifflett remembers the story of a former teacher who taught her parents at the one-room schoolhouse in Hopkins Gap, and was also a former colleague of hers. After teaching with him, the school teacher relayed a story to Shifflett about his students’ interest in moonshining compared to their studies. This unnamed teacher knew what signs to look for if his students’ parents were out in the woods making moonshine. “He said, ‘You could tell when the big moonshine day was happening because the kids weren’t paying attention and they would be looking out the

⁹¹ Dove, interview.

windows.”⁹² Many of these particularly distracted students were on the lookout for revenuers entering Hopkins Gap. At the first sight of trouble it was not uncommon for the students to simply jump out of the schoolhouse windows and flee. While the school teacher admitted to knowing what the students and their parents were doing, his subsequent reaction was to ignore the situation. Shifflett recalls that the unnamed teacher reacted accordingly because he “knew what they were doing so he didn’t reprimand them or anything.”⁹³ Therefore it was because the teacher knew the students were skipping school to warn of revenuers or assist in their parents moonshining that he remained tight-lipped. The clannish nature of the Hopkins Gap area required that the teacher, a community member himself, ignore the illicit practice. According to Shifflett, “if he had started reprimanding or ratting on people he wouldn’t have had a job.”⁹⁴ Whether it was due to a fear of losing his teaching position or an apathetic attitude towards local moonshining, the school teacher never disciplined students for jumping out of windows or informed police of moonshining activities within the community. In terms of more contemporary moonshiners, Pat Turner Ritchie admits that while she considers the dangers of alcoholism to be very serious due to seeing family members battle it, she would be apprehensive in speaking out against a peer who made moonshine. “If I knew someone personally who was [making moonshine], I don’t think I’d turn them in. But I wouldn’t think highly of it.”⁹⁵

⁹² Shifflett, interview.

⁹³ Shifflett, interview.

⁹⁴ Shifflett, interview.

⁹⁵ Ritchie, interview.

Some community members also enabled their moonshining neighbors either by directly or indirectly assisting with the illicit practice. Stanley Fisk revealed a story about getting hassled at a local hardware store while he was trying to buy supplies to make a still. The clerk at the hardware store, suspecting that Fisk was a moonshiner, insisted that he cut Fisk's copper for him instead of allowing him to take it home to cut it himself. After a brief argument, the owner of the hardware store who was an acquaintance of Fisk and was fully aware of his intended project directed the clerk to sell Fisk the uncut copper in bulk without further incident.⁹⁶ Randall Dean formerly resided on Dean Mountain near Elkton until the age of fifteen. Dean admitted that while his close neighbors did not make moonshine, he and his father sometimes assisted local moonshiners in moving their supplies.

My dad and I, when we'd bring a load of lumber to town or around someplace, we've had people stop us when we'd get to the feed mill and say, "Would you haul this hundred pounds of sugar up for us?" So we have done this for them. I think it usually went on over maybe the other side of the mountain or somewhere. But we didn't try to find out where the still is. We didn't want to know.⁹⁷

Tammy Losh's father once found an all-copper still while running traps in the wintertime. He subsequently sold it to a local moonshiner for extra money to provide for his own family.⁹⁸ Both the sympathy and apathy that many county residents had toward

⁹⁶ Fisk, interview.

⁹⁷ Randall Dean's family sold their ninety-six acres of mountain land to the government as part of the Federal Recreation Demonstration Project which later turned the land over to the Shenandoah National Park. Randall Dean, interview by Dorothy Noble Smith, June 26, 1979 Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection (SdArch SNP), Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA.

⁹⁸ Losh, interview.

moonshining contributed to much of the success and prominence of the practice for generations.

While many community members were sympathetic to the plight of the moonshiner or at least apathetic, some neighbors were actively involved in moonshining themselves. In some areas at one point in time, a majority, if not all, of the community members were rumored to be involved in moonshining in one capacity or another. Peggy Shifflett asserts that many family friends and neighbors were moonshining along with her own family in Hopkins Gap in the early to mid 1900s. In fact, according to a statistic passed down to her by her father, “everybody was making [moonshine] except for one family and they were bootlegging it.”⁹⁹ Regardless of the absolute truth of that statement, it speaks of the prominence of moonshining in many communities. While every family may not have been producing their own moonshine, they at least knew of it taking place or assisted moonshiners in some way.

Rockingham County residents continue to be apprehensive of outsiders as is the case with current moonshiner Stanley Fisk. As a local of the area Fisk has grown close with many of his neighbors, but he is not completely open about his moonshining activities with everyone. He admits that the majority of his neighbors are aware to some degree, but he tries to keep his actions unknown to his newer neighbors despite their budding curiosity. Fisk admits that he has not gained the level of trust needed to confide in his newly settled neighbors about his moonshining compared to the openness

⁹⁹ Shifflett, interview.

he has with more familiar community members.¹⁰⁰ Further back in the 1970s, Hazel Roach of Rocky Bar expressed her concern of outsiders and their intentions. “If a stranger came around that nobody knew there was sort of a fear of what his purpose was, you know till you knowed something about him.”¹⁰¹ It took residents time to feel comfortable around outsiders, especially when so many of them were revenuers.

Some Rockingham County residents were not completely supportive of moonshining in many of the mountain enclaves. Lucille Blose Coffman of the Naked Creek community firmly exclaimed that no members of her family participated in moonshining. Nor were any of her immediate neighbors moonshiners.¹⁰² For Zada Lam of Swift Run Gap in eastern Rockingham County, she also affirmed her mistrust of moonshining and subsequent bootlegging that went on in the area which in turn she claimed misrepresented her community as one only concerned with making illegal liquor.

Well I think the mountain people have been misrepresented, so much by saying that the only way they had [to make a] living was through bootlegging. Well we didn't do any bootlegging. I mean there was some, but it wasn't around right in our vicinity because nobody wanted to bootleg. But there was some of it went on and maybe that was the only way they had to feed their family. I don't know, but we fed ours other ways. My daddy wouldn't allow an empty whiskey bottle on our place. If he did, he'd break it.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Fisk, interview.

¹⁰¹ Cupp, interview.

¹⁰² Lucille Blose Coffman, interview by Dorothy Noble Smith, August 27, 1978 Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection (SDArch SNP), Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA.

¹⁰³ Zada Hazel Lam, interview by Dorothy Noble Smith, August 3, 1978 Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection (SDArch SNP), Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA.

Fulks Run native Pat Turner Ritchie was raised in a family who was admittedly “non-alcoholic” and consequently was not in “that network” referring to moonshining.

However when her father Garnett Turner, who himself was very much against alcohol, found a still on a parcel of his newly purchased land on Shoemaker Mountain in the early 1960s, instead of destroying it or turning the evidence over to the police, he simply moved the still to a more remote location.¹⁰⁴ Before moving the still, which “wasn’t in operation then, but it wasn’t rusty and falling into the ground” either, Turner took his wife and five children to Shoemaker Mountain to inspect the still. “After we’d all gotten a good look at it, then he moved it maybe a hundred yards up the mountain just to hide it a little bit. He didn’t tell the revenuers or anything.”¹⁰⁵ After a period of time the alleged moonshiner entered the Turner family store in Fulks Run inquiring about “some copper things” of his that had been moved on Shoemaker Mountain.¹⁰⁶ The Turner patriarch suggested to the man that he look further up the mountain a bit to find his copper possessions. A few days later the still was gone. Despite his family’s strong feelings towards temperance, Garnett Turner still refused to incriminate his fellow neighbor to the authorities for a practice that was not only illegal, but stood in stark contrast with his own personal convictions. The respect for a fellow community member was stronger than his dislike for alcohol.

Despite significant community support for moonshiners and large percentages of community members either making moonshine themselves or indirectly assisting their

¹⁰⁴ Shoemaker Mountain is located off of Hopkins Gap Road in Fulks Run.

¹⁰⁵ Ritchie, interview.

¹⁰⁶ Garnett Turner was the former postmaster of Fulks Run and also started Fulks Run Grocery and Turner Hams Store.

fellow neighbors, not all Rockingham County residents were proponents of or active participants in moonshining. Some residents had personal convictions against drinking any type of alcoholic spirits. Furthermore moonshining was more prominent in the mountain communities of the eastern and northwestern parts of the county, making the practice relatively remote from communities in central Rockingham County. In general it was because of the support and acquiescence on behalf of family, friends, and Rockingham County community members that moonshining prospered for as long as it did. If it were not for dutiful wives and children, or helpful neighbors who hauled supplies and refused to give information to revenuers, or the law enforcement officers and judges who themselves were often customers of these highly regarded moonshiners, the practice would not have been nearly as successful.

However as Peggy Shifflett asserts her pride in coming from a family that made illicit spirits she does so with a caveat, conversely arguing that, “moonshine really kind of destroys communities too ‘cause it destroyed Hopkins Gap in terms of communal spirit. There was a communal spirit there at one time....But then when competition came in...they started price wars and quality wars. People were shot and shot at. The violence came in.”¹⁰⁷ To be sure moonshining had a way of connecting families and community members, but sometimes with negative consequences. Therefore while it is evident that family and community support was crucial to the practice of moonshining, it did not come without its consequences. Such consequences as Peggy Shifflett alludes to are all but missing in other oral histories, signifying the need to positively frame moonshining.

¹⁰⁷ Shifflett, interview.

Children missed out on what little schooling they had because of their loyalty to moonshining and conflict arose in the midst of competition. Community members, while outwardly approving of the practice may simply have been too frightened to speak out against moonshiners in turn creating underlying tensions between neighbors. However dissent and opposition were not nearly enough to quell the practice or dissuade moonshiners from continuing their trade. The moonshining folklore insists on the overwhelming community support and familial involvement in the practice, in turn framing moonshining as an accepted endeavor.

Chapter III: Superstition and Home Remedies in Moonshining Folklore

The folkways of Rockingham County residents are deeply entrenched with tradition. As such, many of the traditional practices overlap—oral traditions and moonshining for example. Within these oral histories themes of the supernatural in folklore and home remedies as an expression of folklife are present as well. Noted American folklorist Richard Dorson confirms that “fabulous, supernatural, and magical conceits thrive in the floating mass of oral tradition.”¹⁰⁸ These mystical tales typically involve “supernatural beings, persons with supernatural knowledge and power, and the protection and destruction of family and property.”¹⁰⁹ In some examples of Rockingham County folklore, the supernatural characteristics in many oral histories coincide with the tradition of moonshining, often utilized for invoking fear into children, or nosey revenuers, and teaching moral lessons. Moonshining’s prevalence in folk medicine recipes promotes the beneficial aspects of moonshine, in turn downplaying any disadvantage that might occur from drinking strong spirits.

The story of Hopkins Gap resident Tom Crawford’s 1936 death is more than a tale of a still raid gone awry. Widely held superstitions are tightly interwoven into this story and that presence further magnifies community members’ attachment to oral traditions, folkways, and moonshining. Both the testimonies of county natives Peggy Shifflett and Sandy Bowman discuss visions and portents of death prior to Crawford’s death. Shifflett remembers the story her dad told her:

¹⁰⁸Richard M. Dorson, *American Folklore and the Historian* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 146.

¹⁰⁹Linda Dègh, *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, ed. Richard Dorson (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), 76.

Tom said, “I looked up and saw Jesus standing on a rock near where I was working [making moonshine]. I stopped making whiskey and came on home.” Later that day he told Uncle Rob what he had seen. Uncle Rob said, “Nobody sees Jesus and lives,” and he warned Tom, “That’s a sign that something bad is going to happen.”...his mother told later, “He was real quiet while he eat his supper. Just as we was getting’ ready to turn in for the night, [Tom] told me, ‘As I passed by the graveyard, I saw a big white bird rise up and take flight.’”¹¹⁰

Tom Crawford subsequently was killed by a revenuer.¹¹¹ Sandy Bowman relayed a similar story to Valley historian John Heatwole in 1998, mentioning the same vision of Jesus.

A second folktale centered on moonshining and the supernatural is the story of Jess Craig. In an interview with John Heatwole, Margie Roadcap Edington of Hopkins Gap discussed the supernatural forces that are at work in the mountains of Rockingham County. Jesse L. Craig, born May 6, 1872, was a moonshiner in Hopkins Gap and “was known to be fond of his own product.”¹¹² After his death on January 27, 1957 Craig’s home went through numerous tenants’ hands before eventually being abandoned.¹¹³ The folklore suggests that each morning the tenants would hear Jess’ ghost awaken from his slumber as he coughed and cleared his throat. Perhaps what drove them away

¹¹⁰ Shifflett, 167-168. There are various versions of impending death being connected to birds in Rockingham County folklore. For more see John Heatwole’s *Shenandoah Voices: Folklore, Legends and Traditions of the Valley* (Berryville, Virginia: Rockbridge Publishing Company, 1995), 39-48.

¹¹¹ See Chapter 4 for the complete story of Tom Crawford’s death.

¹¹² Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society, “Rockingham County Tombstones by Church: Gospel Hill Mennonite Church Cemetery,” <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~varockin/HRHS/cem/gospelhill1.htm> (accessed December 11, 2009). John L. Heatwole, *Shenandoah Voices: Folklore, Legends and Traditions of the Valley* (Berryville, Virginia: Rockbridge Publishing Company, 1995), 94.

¹¹³ Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society, “Rockingham County Tombstones by Church: Gospel Hill Mennonite Church Cemetery,” <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~varockin/HRHS/cem/gospelhill1.htm> (accessed December 11, 2009).

permanently was hearing the ghost ask, “Can I have a drink of whiskey?”¹¹⁴ This particular folktale is representative of Appalachian folklore in that it encompasses the supernatural aspect like so many other stories. Its focus on moonshine also suggests that the traditional drink is yearned for even in the afterlife.

Lastly, a folktale has emerged from the same Hopkins Gap area of Rockingham County, which combines the supernatural and the Jack tale sort of folklore—the necessity of using one’s smarts.¹¹⁵ Rockingham County resident Eugene Souder told the story of the Glutton Buck to local historian and folklorist John Heatwole in 1995. As the folktale goes, to discourage revenue agents from raiding stills in the early to mid 20th century, a group of moonshiners with a flourishing operation concocted a story about “the fabulous and terrible Glutton Buck that inhabited the lower reaches of The Knob.”¹¹⁶ Souder described the Buck as being “a huge deer with a tremendous rack of antlers, an attitude and a hide impervious to bullets. It had fireballs for eyes and an insatiable hunger for the flesh of curious children. The story was that anyone, child or not, who met up with the beast near the foot of the hollow would meet a sad and frightful end.”¹¹⁷ Furthermore, the legend goes that those curious enough to enter the hollow were said to have heard pounding, thumping, and snorting noises, but they did not dare investigate to find out if

¹¹⁴ Heatwole, *Shenandoah Voices*, 95.

¹¹⁵ Michael Ann Williams, *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place*, ed. Richard A. Straw and H. Tyler Blethen (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 144. The term “Jack tale” gets its name from the fairy tale Jack and the Beanstalk in which the protagonist, Jack, outwits a giant from who Jack steals various items.

¹¹⁶ John L. Heatwole, *Supernatural Tales* (locally published, 1998), 49. The Knob is a hollow which leads up to the mountain in Hopkins Gap.

¹¹⁷ Heatwole, *Supernatural Tales*, 49.

the sounds were a product of the Glutton Buck or just ordinary whitetail deer that are common in that particular mountainous region.¹¹⁸

Within the collective Rockingham County narrative, there are many stories of moonshine playing an integral role in folk medicine and home remedies up through current times challenging the stereotype that moonshine is inherently toxic. The high alcoholic content of moonshine validates its prominence in home remedy elixirs and treatments which kill bacteria and help to heal infections. In *Folk Medicine in Southern Appalachia*, Anthony Cavender explains the rationale behind folk medicine's overwhelming presence in the Mountain South:

The health care infrastructure in Southern Appalachia was poorly developed prior to and well after the turn of the twentieth century. There were few hospitals and clinics in the region, none in some rural areas. It is generally accepted that rural Appalachia has long had a scarcity of doctors, but it may well be that in some areas the problem was with the distribution of doctors. Doctors have always been present in the region, but as in other parts of the world, they tended to reside in towns. The older generations in Southern Appalachia today remember well the shortage of doctors and the poor road conditions or lack of roads in the rural areas. They often say that by the time sick people got to a doctor, or vice versa, they had already gotten well or died.¹¹⁹

The physical isolation that Cavender describes is one of the defining factors which forced many communities to utilize their ingenuity and rely on home remedies in Rockingham County. Furthermore, folk medicine encouraged people to make use of herbs, plants, and roots that surrounded them in their natural environment for healing purposes. For many families this also meant using moonshine.

¹¹⁸ Heatwole, *Supernatural Tales*, 49.

¹¹⁹ Anthony Cavender, *Folk Medicine in Southern Appalachia* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 24.

Throughout Appalachia there are many commonly known home remedies that incorporate moonshine in an effort to cure a variety of ailments or assist in treating symptoms. Whiskey and asafetida mixed with milk or water has been known to assuage the irritability of colicky babies. Folklorists suggests that if a person has come down with the measles they stay out of the cold and drink whiskey, a few drops for children and a tablespoon for adults, which will help them to sweat and break the fever. Moonshine has also been widely used to alleviate the pain associated with toothaches and to remedy poisonous snakebites.¹²⁰

As a result of having no real access to formalized health care and in an effort to avoid death or at least maintain some semblance of health, many rural families turned to moonshine to treat a variety of illnesses. Hopkins Gap resident Peggy Shifflett recalls a story of how moonshine's healing properties were used for both humans and livestock during her childhood:

[Moonshiners] fed it to their cows when the cow got sick. They mixed it with various home remedies and treated their babies. One of my favorites to talk about is sheep manure tea to bring out the measles. You mix it with a little sugar and a little moonshine and give it to the kid and it apparently really helped. My cousins were the last people to get the sheep manure treatment for the measles, but my mother refused to give it to me.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Eliot Wigginton, ed., *The Foxfire Book* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1972), 235, 242, 245, 299.

¹²¹ Shifflett, interview. Sheep manure is excreted in the form of pebbles. The pebbles would be boiled, drained, and mixed with sugar and moonshine. Sheep manure is known to have antibiotic properties. This home remedy is also noted in Elmer Smith, ed. al's work *The Pennsylvania Germans of the Shenandoah Valley* (Allentown, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania German Folklore Society, 1964). In that recipe two ounces of moonshine was added to strained sheep manure and "It wasn't long before those measles started popping out," 133.

After being bitten by a snake, Brown's Gap resident Harold Garrison stated that whereas now a person would generally go to a hospital or doctor to get the bite examined and treated for poison, he "always said liquor would get rid of it."¹²² Grottoes resident Tammy Losh recounted a time when her brother was suffering from cancer. "My brother that passed away, he would put a little bit of moonshine in his coffee in the mornings when he first got cancer because of course it made you feel good."¹²³ Asserting that "moonshine has been put to many good uses by God-fearing people," John Stoneberger remembers a story relayed to him as a child by his Aunt Josie. After a neighboring family came down with the whooping cough, Stoneberger's father, W.B., rode into Shenandoah, the nearest town, to obtain medicine from the doctor. But as many of the roads and bridges had been damaged by an earlier flood and were nearly impassable, W.B. Stoneberger's horse slipped on a rock, throwing him into the cold river. To break the eldest Stoneberger's chill, he was given a "hot toddy of moonshine whiskey and ginger...and he didn't as much as get a bad cold from all the exposure."¹²⁴

For many rural families who rarely had access to general practitioners for fevers or infections, a dentist's presence in many of the isolated communities in Rockingham County was even rarer. As such, families utilized the inherent benefits of moonshine for oral ailments. Desmond Dove promoted the benefits of moonshine for toothaches stating that you "put it in your mouth and swish it around; hold it for a minute" and the pain and

¹²² Garrison, interview.

¹²³ Losh, interview.

¹²⁴ Stoneberger, 61.

discomfort from the toothache will be relieved.¹²⁵ Similarly, Tammy Losh remembered moonshine being applied to a teething baby's gums to alleviate their discomfort and in turn they would cease crying.¹²⁶

Other variations of home remedies using alcohol often substituted store bought whiskey for home distilled liquor as is the case with Pat Turner Ritchie's grandmother. "Even my grandmother, who would never say that she drank strong liquor or anything made cough medicine from whiskey and rock candy," she remembered, "You take a teaspoon full and that was your cough medicine. And I know she made that even in the 1970s because we were having a family gathering at our house and my uncle found her whiskey bottle and was parading it around."¹²⁷ Brandy was also used in a folk medicine recipe in Brown's Gap. Paul "Duke" Harris recalls his mother making a concoction of apple brandy and peppermint for "cramps and sickness."¹²⁸

Home remedies, as exemplified with sheep manure tea, were a prominent fixture among Appalachian families who were at one time either too isolated from hospitals and doctors who were able to make house visits or were without the monetary means to afford such health care. The aforementioned concoctions are examples of natural folk medicine as defined by folklorist Don Yoder. Natural home remedies, as compared to magico-religious folk medicine, rely on herbs, plants, minerals, and animal substances in curing diseases.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Dove, interview.

¹²⁶ Losh, interview.

¹²⁷ Ritchie, interview.

¹²⁸ Harris, interview.

¹²⁹ Don Yoder, *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, ed. Richard Dorson (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), 192. Magico-religious folk medicine relies on charms, holy

As these examples of folklore suggest, supernatural tales and home remedies concerning Rockingham County and its residents are closely associated with moonshining. Whether used in a story warning of superstitions, in a tale suggesting how one might go about eluding revenueurs, or telling how to cure the measles, moonshining and other types of folkways are directly integrated into Appalachian culture. By framing moonshine as a subject in cautionary superstitious tales, moonshine's role is nostalgic. Furthermore by emphasizing the medicinal benefits of moonshine as opposed to talking about any real disadvantages, Rockingham County residents are able to think of the practice positively.¹³⁰

words, and holy actions to treat illnesses. For more on folk medicine, see Don Yoder's chapter in Dorson's *Folklore and Folklife*, 191-215. For more on localized home remedies in Rockingham County and the Shenandoah Valley, see John Heatwole's *Shenandoah Voices: Folklore, Legends, and Traditions of the Valley*, 49-66.

¹³⁰ The oft held assumption is that moonshine can cause blindness. This notion is derived from the methanol that is produced in the first two ounces of moonshine rather than ethanol. Methanol attacks optic nerves and can cause blindness or death.

Chapter IV: The Moonshiner: How an Appalachian Icon and his Trade are Immortalized, Remembered, and Misremembered

In response to Fulks Run resident Desmond Dove's moonshining-related arrest in August 2006, D.L. Blye of the Virginia Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) commented on the presence of moonshining in Rockingham County. Blye asserts that, "It's thought of in terms of novelty and folklore."¹³¹ Moonshining, according to Blye, is naively thought of only in terms of a romantic tradition and as being the subject of a quaint story one might hear from a grandparent. To be sure, the novelty and romance of the practice are undeniable in terms of how moonshiners of yesteryear are talked about and how they are remembered in oral histories. They are rarely portrayed as criminals or deviants, but as honorable community members. Their lives and contributions are celebrated long after they are gone. The collective memory of moonshiners reflects this community's desire to make heroes out of regular people and to promote a reverence and pride in tradition.

Memory, as reflected in oral traditions and folkways, is not necessarily the most credible means of relaying history. Memory is fallible, adversely affected by age, selective, overexaggerates significance, and is subject to personal biases or agendas. However, the way in which memory is skewed can be telling of what people perceive as the truth and in turn is reflective of their societal values. Therefore, the significance of oral history does not necessarily lie in the factual accuracy of any given account, although it is often utilized to gain facts, but in the meaning that a person attaches to a particular story. Oral historian, Alessandro Portelli argues that "untrue" statements are psychologically "true" and that discrepancies in fact can be more telling than factually

¹³¹ *Daily News-Record*, April 24, 2007.

accurate accounts. According to Portelli, “the importance of oral testimony may often be not in its adherence to facts but rather in its divergence from them, where imagination, symbolism, and desire break in.”¹³² Perhaps the best example showcasing the subjective nature of memory in oral traditions is the story of the murdered moonshiner Tom Crawford.

Tom Crawford, born May 30, 1913, hailed from the Hopkins Gap community in the northwest corner of the county.¹³³ By all accounts it is agreed that he had a vested interest in moonshining as did many people living in the immediate area at the time. There is also agreement among sources that the twenty-two year old Crawford was shot from behind and killed by a revenue agent on August 10, 1936 while he was tending to his still. However, the consensus stops there as to what ensued during the still raid in Hopkins Gap in the summer of 1936.

The accounts of Rockingham County community members differ dramatically from the story published by the *Daily News Record (DN-R)* in the August 11th paper. The headline in the paper reads, “A-B-C Inspector Accidentally Kills Man During Raid; P.B. Porter, Jr. Stumbles Closing in on a Still; Pistol is Discharged; Thomas Crawford at Still Hit by Bullet.”¹³⁴ According to the account in the *DN-R*, Porter’s revolver accidentally discharged while he was running towards the sight of smoke, a clue that moonshine was being made in the immediate area. The gun went off as he stumbled over a log that was

¹³²Allesandro Portelli, “Peculiarities of Oral History,” *History Workshop Journal* 96, no. 12 (Autumn 1981), 100.

¹³³Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society, “Rockingham County Tombstones by Church: Gospel Hill Mennonite Church Cemetery,” <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~varockin/HRHS/cem/gospelhill2.htm> (accessed on October 21, 2009).

¹³⁴*Daily News-Record*, August 11, 1936.

in the path of the still location. Furthermore, he insisted that Alcohol Beverage Control (ABC) inspectors were specifically ordered not to shoot in the vicinity of moonshine stills unless it was in self-defense. A moonshiner was not to be shot at even if he was running away. The theory was that his face would be recognized and a warrant would be sworn out for his arrest. However Porter, apparently sensing danger, was carrying “his .38 caliber revolver in his hand for protection,” but “had no intention of shooting anyone.”¹³⁵ Porter claimed that he was unaware that the discharged bullet had hit Crawford; initially thinking that he was attempting to turn himself in. After running a few steps Crawford turned and sat down. When Porter approached Crawford, he realized that he was in fact not surrendering, but in the process of bleeding to death. A second agent, Inspector J.W. Morrison accompanied Porter as he drove Crawford through the winding roads of Hopkins Gap to Rockingham Memorial Hospital (RMH) in Harrisonburg. Crawford died from a gunshot wound just below his left collar bone before the inspectors were able to arrive at the hospital.¹³⁶

A second moonshiner, Harold Lam, was also at the still when the raid ensued. The *DN-R* reported him as running “on the first sight of the officers.”¹³⁷ Lam claimed he did not witness the shot; as he was running up the side of a bank as he heard the gun discharge. When the inspectors approached, the two men had almost finished running the moonshine and were in the process of removing the cap from the still. According to the newspaper, a somber feeling ran through every person involved in the incident including

¹³⁵ *Daily News-Record*, August 11, 1936.

¹³⁶ *Daily News-Record*, August 11, 1936.

¹³⁷ *Daily News-Record*, August 11, 1936.

the ABC agents. The *DN-R* reported that the inspectors were “grieved over the fatal ending to the raid” and Porter himself was “considerably upset by the unfortunate affair.”¹³⁸ Furthermore Porter’s peers knew him as being “very cool and not excitable.”¹³⁹ Without investigating any oral histories or folklore passed down through generations, one would assume that the story the *DN-R* reported was the *only* story. However, the collective memory of this event among community members is vastly different and is telling of the feelings towards both moonshiners and the government.

Peggy Shifflett, author and native of Hopkins Gap, remembers the murder of Tom Crawford differently. The story was told to her by her father and is therefore a form of postmemory. Postmemories are those stories that are transmitted to a younger generation by the older “witness” generation that actually experienced an event or lived in a particular time period.¹⁴⁰ Therefore Shifflett’s perception of Tom Crawford’s murder, moonshiners, and revenue agents is closely related to how her father told her the story of Crawford’s death. She expresses her gratitude for his storytelling in the acknowledgment of her memoir writing, “Thank you Dad for your incredible memory and your devotion to sharing Hopkins Gap history with your children. Thank you for passing on to me you curiosity and intellect.”¹⁴¹ Shifflett retells the story in the following manner:

Tom was making moonshine with a man named Harold Lam on August 10, 1936. They were in one hollow, like Little Hog Pen Run making and

¹³⁸ *Daily News-Record*, August 11, 1936.

¹³⁹ *Daily News-Record*, August 12, 1936.

¹⁴⁰ For more on postmemories consult Marianne Hirsch’s *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1997) and Susana Kaiser’s *Postmemories of Terror: A New Generation Copes with the Legacy of the “Dirty War”* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

¹⁴¹ Shifflett, vi.

my daddy was up higher making, and Uncle Shirley, were up higher. And they always had a guard posted. If they saw a revenue agent coming down the road they would shoot a gun so many times. And they had their guard at the mouth of Little Hog Pen Run. But [Revenue Agent Porter] stopped up higher like even up this way further from Big Hog Pen Run and went across the mountain and came in on them from behind. Tom Crawford was reaching down to get a piece of wood for the fire. And his shotgun was close by, but he wasn't reaching for that; he was reaching for wood. And the revenue agent shot him in the back of the neck and killed him. Basically there was a hearing and [the revenue agent] said he tripped on a root and that's how he shot [Tom Crawford], that it was an accident. But Tom died right at the scene. The revenue agents were so scared after they killed him that they took him, they got him to their car, got his body, and they sat him up straight in the back seat. They arrested Harold Lam who was with him and made Harold sit up against [Tom Crawford] to hold the body up. And they took him out of the Hopkins Gap, took him all the way to Broadway, and brought him to Harrisonburg that way instead of coming up through the Gap because they knew they would get shot. When word got out that he was killed that they wouldn't make it. And eventually [Tom Crawford's] death was avenged. [Revenue Agent Porter] was killed a year later in east Virginia, east of the Blue Ridge.¹⁴²

There are obvious differences between Shifflett's account and that which was covered in the newspaper. According to Shifflett, Crawford was shot intentionally and she posits that there was even an attempt to disguise the murder. Most interesting is the fact that the story of Tom Crawford differs even further from what Shifflett writes in her own memoir. In it she writes that Crawford was "scraping the dough off the still cap when the revenuer snuck up behind him" as opposed to feeding the fire.¹⁴³ Coincidentally Shifflett's memoir account actually coincides with the *DN-R* story that Crawford and Lam were taking the cap off the still.

¹⁴² Shifflett, interview.

¹⁴³ Shifflett, 168.

John Heatwole, Shenandoah Valley historian and author, interviewed Rockingham County resident Sandy Bowman for his work *Supernatural Tales: Ghosts, Poltergeists, Phantom Animals and Unusual Occurrences* and she had an even different version of this story. According to Bowman, Porter was “known for shooting first and asking questions later.” Porter was watching Crawford from a ridge and as Tom bent over to put wood under the fire, Porter “raised his rifle to his shoulder and fired, hitting Tom in the back.”¹⁴⁴ Bowman’s version of the story has Porter sniping Crawford from afar with a rifle, not accidentally and at close range with a revolver as the *DN-R* reported. Bowman also questions Porter’s character suggesting that he was a ruthless law enforcer, whereas the *DN-R* reported him as being fairly remorseful.

The memories attached to Tom Crawford’s murder, both by the news media and community members, are illustrative. While it may never be known conclusively just how or why Tom Crawford was killed, the sentiments expressed by community members about his death suggest empathy for a man who was “making moonshine to make ends meet like so many people in Brocks Gap.”¹⁴⁵ Whether this is simply a case of misremembering, an accurate reflection of the truth, or a conscious effort to martyr a moonshiner is unknown. It must also be noted that this event occurred over seventy years ago. The *DN-R* accounts were written within days of the incident while the oral traditions attached to the story have been relayed, retold, and interpreted over that seventy-year span. However, it is also prudent to call into question the accuracy of the

¹⁴⁴ Heatwole, *Supernatural Tales*, 31.

¹⁴⁵ Heatwole, *Supernatural Tales*, 31. Brocks Gap is a larger geographic area in northwest Rockingham County which includes Fulks Run and Hopkins Gap.

DN-R articles. Also based on eyewitness testimony, newspaper accounts are never completely void of bias or falsehoods and would likely have been predisposed to tell the story that Porter relayed. Regardless it seems natural for a community who prided itself on individualism and autonomy through moonshining to remember things in a subjective manner concerning this incident. The testimonies of Peggy Shifflett as relayed to her by her father and county resident Sandy Bowman, and even John Heatwole's interpretation of the story in his work suggest an attitude of compassion for Tom Crawford in his untimely death. According to community members this is not a story of accidental death, but the intentional and malicious murder of an innocent man providing for his family who in turn became a martyr for his community for generations to come.

Moonshine and the men who make it have also been the subject of numerous songs and ballads in popular culture as a whole as well as local songs in Rockingham County. Some of the earliest examples show up in 1920s fiddler conventions and operatic festivals in the South. Musical skits entitled "A Corn Licker Still in Georgia" and "Kickapoo Joy Juice," songs entitled "John Makes Good Licker," and performers named "Moonshine Kate" pay homage, sometimes satirically but always affectionately, to moonshiners.¹⁴⁶ Folklorist and folk musician Bascom Lamar Lunsford co-wrote the drinking song "Old Mountain Dew" in the early twentieth century. In it Lunsford sings of selling moonshine to a deacon for medicinal purposes.¹⁴⁷ More contemporary examples of moonshining's presence in the lyrics of country and western music include

¹⁴⁶ Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 76.

¹⁴⁷ Harkins, 91.

George Jones' 1959 release "White Lightning" which references a man outrunning revenueurs and extols the potency of his alcohol, Steve Earle's 1988 song "Copperhead Road," and the 2008 release from country singer Matt Stillwell entitled "Shine." The aforementioned songs are all, to a certain extent, anthems celebrating the moonshining tradition and glorifying those who practice it.

Moonshiners in Rockingham County have also been immortalized in song as well as in story. The story of one moonshiner named Mr. Scothron¹⁴⁸ and his monetary donation to a neighboring family to assist in their venture to start up a business during the Great Depression is the basis for the ballad "Moonshine Money" written in 2007 by Timberville native, and part time amateur musician, Chris Mathias. Mathias was born in 1981 in Harrisonburg and was raised in Timberville, specifically in an area known as "The Mash." The area was aptly named because, as one story goes, there was a moonshine still from which the mash spilled into a nearby creek, giving the creek and the area, located in the "hills of the Valley" between Mayland and New Market, its name.¹⁴⁹ Mathias posits that the moniker was given to the area for a different reason: "It was deemed that way during Prohibition from what I understand as the mash is what you make the moonshine out of. And it was very fertile corn country. There is even a road called Mash Lane now."¹⁵⁰ Regardless of the origin of its name, "The Mash" is known as having significant ties to moonshining. The story behind Mathias' ballad takes place in this general area.

¹⁴⁸ The spelling of this surname is only an estimate. The interviewee was not sure on the exact spelling.

¹⁴⁹ Hess, 159. Mathias, interview.

¹⁵⁰ Mathias, interview.

The influence for Mathias' song is based on a story that was passed down from his father and grandfather. It characterizes a local moonshiner, known only as Mr. Scothron, as being a man of noble character with generous inclinations during a time of great hardship for many families:

It was during the Great Depression and my grandfather and his brother wanted to start a farming company, which is now Mathias Brothers.¹⁵¹ They went to the bank and of course they couldn't get a loan. So they went to Mr. Scothern to his house, which is the house I grew up in, and they negotiated a deal because he had cash. They negotiated a deal like he was the bank and the way [my grandfather] tells it they did it over a lantern lit table and they shook hands and made the deal. Then Mr. Scothern took a shovel out in the back yard and dug up the jars of money and then when he brought them in and sat them on the table, they had to scrape the dirt away and count out the money.¹⁵²

The lyrics of the chorus to "Moonshine Money" further reflect a sense of gratitude and reverence towards Mr. Scothern—the moonshiner who gave of himself to help a neighbor during the Depression.

*Granddaddy bought the farm with moonshine money
The banks wouldn't loan in a blue collar town
Set it all up over a lantern lit table
Mr. Scothern went out to dig it out of the ground*

The rest of the ballad traces the singer's relationship with his grandfather and his seemingly infinite wisdom concerning life experiences. Mathias includes this song in his set list when he performs in local bars and the reception has been positive due to its story-telling qualities, its ability to resonate with audiences.¹⁵³ Mr. Scothron is forever

¹⁵¹ Mathias Brothers is an agriculture based company that is still in business today.

¹⁵² Mathias, interview.

¹⁵³ Mathias, interview.

immortalized, at least for local audiences, in song as a moonshiner who because of his charitable ways, allowed for his neighbors to venture into their own business. Just like Peggy Shifflett's story of the Tom Crawford murder, Mathias' song and the story that influenced it are based on an event that took place approximately seventy years ago. Yet the need to remember and memorialize moonshiners by generations once and twice removed is telling of the importance of these people to their families and to the culture as a whole.

The refusal to acknowledge guilt or any criminal wrongdoing in moonshining and the need to perceive moonshiners as blameless providers also perpetuates the notion of moonshiners as celebrated heroes, or at least as innocent entrepreneurs. The origins of this sentiment may go back even further when the United States government first started taxing home-based distillers after the American Revolution to pay for war debts. At that point the government began criminalizing a trade that had been practiced for years by placing a tax on moonshine. This act of legislation in turn takes all blame and subsequent guilt off of moonshiners while portraying the government as the antagonist. Furthermore it is difficult to modify one's perception of a practice that was argued to be done exclusively for "putting food on the table," which is a common theme.

These sentiments are more reflective of the idea that if done in a traditional manner and for an honest reason, moonshining was not a criminal act. Peggy Shifflett comments on the criminality of moonshining. Her family, including her father, uncles, and grandfathers, made moonshine into the mid-twentieth century.

The moonshiner that I knew was not a criminal. He was a person making a living using what he had and his surroundings to feed his family. So I'd like people to realize that. Moonshiners were not stupid. They were making a whole lot more money with what they had by turning it into whiskey, which people would purchase at a higher price. So I'd like people to think about the time in which we're talking about was hard, hard living.¹⁵⁴ It was a somewhat convenient and fairly easy, highly risky way to keep your family eating. It's a part of our past in this country in the mountains particularly. We need to look at the old traditional moonshiners in a different way.¹⁵⁵

By arguing that moonshine was made in order to feed one's family, it makes the practice seem virtuous and selfless.

Contemporary moonshiner and resident of eastern Rockingham County Stanley Fisk has similar feelings to Shifflett's. Seventy-two year old Fisk prides himself on making moonshine using traditional methods and has done so since he was sixteen years old. He made the copper still he currently uses to make moonshine with his own two hands. Fisk says that the only innovation in moonshining practices that he has adopted is the switch from wood fire heat to propane; all else has remained unchanged since he first learned the practice at a young age. Despite hauling moonshine across county lines and even dabbling in stock car racing, Fisk demands that, "I've never felt guilty for making moonshine and none of my family did either."¹⁵⁶ Outside of producing and hauling moonshine, Fisk has lived a fairly law-abiding lifestyle. His only encounter with law enforcement was for a minor traffic violation in Harrisonburg in the 1970s. Fisk has never had feelings of remorse for evading taxes on the moonshine he makes, nor has he

¹⁵⁴ The general time period that Shifflett referenced during her interview spans the 1930s-1960s.

¹⁵⁵ Shifflett, interview.

¹⁵⁶ Fisk, interview.

ever felt ashamed. According to Fisk if moonshine is produced with traditional materials, in smaller quantities, and not with intentions of getting rich quick, then the practice is harmless and absolutely not criminal.¹⁵⁷ However if the practice must be prosecuted, Fisk suggests that misdemeanor charges should be the maximum penalty for moonshiners adding that, “Felony charges are crazy. Moonshining by itself does not warrant a felony charge.”¹⁵⁸ Speaking in terms of more modern examples, the argument against moonshiners as criminals according to Fisk is based solely on the manner in which the moonshine is made and the intention of the producer. For Fisk, moonshiners like him should be commended for their commitment to keeping tradition alive; the unlawful aspect of the practice is irrelevant.

As a result of moonshiners effectively being perceived as innocent entrepreneurs, law enforcement officials are in turn made out to be the enemy. The exception to this rule is the sympathetic nature of local law enforcement towards moonshiners who often-times had relatives, friends, or acquaintances who made and provided them with moonshine. Local residents did not perceive federal officials as being as compassionate. The revenuer who shot and killed Tom Crawford in 1936 is remembered by locals as being trigger-happy with vindictive tendencies. In eastern Rockingham County one infamous revenuer is the subject of many stories concerning moonshine raids and in turn the recipient of vengeful feelings from local residents. When asked by interviewer Janna Zirkle if revenuers were ever found “sneaking around,” a Brown’s Gap resident remarked,

¹⁵⁷ Fisk, interview.

¹⁵⁸ Fisk, interview.

Old Dertin of Harrisonburg. He was supposed to be the fastest runner over at this mountain up here. Me and another old girl would [be] making liquor back up here on Brown's Gap one night. Every time she'd make a run through the daytime, Old Dertin would get her. So, I come out one night and she was making a run, so I spent the night with her, making a run there. We put everything away, cleaned everything up. I reached down to get me a drink of liquor. She said, "Well, by God, this one time, Old Dertin didn't get her." Old Dertin raised up behind the log and said, "'Got you right now." That son of a gun laid there the best part of the night, and we didn't see him come in there, he crawled in there some way. He was close, right on us, laying beside the log. He said, "I got you right now." Take us into Harrisonburg and fine us so much and give us so much time there in jail, so many times.¹⁵⁹

The same revenuer was involved in an altercation with the father of Brown's Gap resident Paul "Duke" Harris. Harris' father encountered two revenueurs during the process of making moonshine. What subsequently ensued typifies the commonly-held perception of revenueurs compared to that of moonshiners.

[Father] was caught making moonshine by John Durden and Dofflemeyer. He was caught carrying a still under his arm. And he told the revenueur men he knew he had to pay for that and could he pay them his fine. And they told him yeah and if you give us two hundred dollars a piece you can go. He didn't have but a hundred and he give them the hundred and he come over to my house and got a hundred dollars from me and took back and give them the other hundred and they let him go. He went on and thought he was free. And later on in the day they caught my brother manufacturing whiskey—Marvin Harris. And when he went in late that evening to bail him out they turned him in for bribing and he got two years in Atlanta, Georgia Penitentiary.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ The exact spelling of "Dertin" is unknown. Two interview transcripts reflect two different spellings, but it is assumed that "Dertin" and "Durden" are the same person and the spelling inconsistencies are due to transcriber error. Garrison, interview.

¹⁶⁰ Harris, interview.

Thus Harris' father is remembered in this story as being a respectful person who acknowledged his accountability in paying a fine for manufacturing moonshine while the notorious John Durden and his cohort are seen as opportunistic rogues. Perhaps just as telling as Garrison and Harris' stories is interviewer Dorothy Noble Smith's reaction. After hearing the account of Harris' father going to jail for allegedly bribing revenuers, the interview transcript reflects Smith as exclaiming, "How terrible! That's injustice isn't it?" Smith's reaction further plays into the narrative of moonshiners being guiltless bystanders actively pursued and coerced by devious revenuers.

A more contemporary example of the harsh feelings held toward federal law enforcement by moonshiners is exemplified in the case of Desmond Dove and his 2006 arrest relating to moonshine production. Desmond Ray Dove, native of Rockingham County, was charged in the summer of 2006 with three felonies and two misdemeanors including manufacturing alcohol, possessing untaxed alcohol, and possessing distilling equipment according to court documents.¹⁶¹ On August 19, 2006 police, including Harrisonburg and Rockingham County SWAT teams, Virginia State Police, and the U.S. Forest Service, raided the home of Dove and his then-wife Cindy Litten Dove in Fulks Run. Desmond Dove was not home at the time of the raid. He was working construction in West Virginia when he got the call from his wife that authorities were at the house.¹⁶² His description of the events surrounding the raid and ensuing court case paint the federal officials involved in a very negative light. The newspaper reported that Dove was

¹⁶¹Marijuana was also being grown on the Dove property. Dove claims that neighbors planted it on his land and that he did not care. The charges involving marijuana were subsequently dropped. *Daily News-Record*, August 27, 2006. Dove, interview.

¹⁶²The property bordered national parkland. *Daily News-Record*, April 24, 2007.

initially charged on five counts total (three felonies and two misdemeanors). Dove conversely asserts that he was charged with many more infractions, too many to accurately remember. “Truthfully I can’t even think of them all. I think it was like eight felonies and four or five misdemeanors. I can’t even *think* of them all.”¹⁶³ His testimony suggests a villainous quality of the law enforcement officials by leveling him with excessive charges. Dove’s description of the bust also depicts an unwarranted reaction on the part of federal authorities:

It must have been thirty [federal agents that came] with automatic weapons. [Cindy] woke up with guns shoved in her face. They had stuff broke up that didn’t have anything to do with anything. I had hundreds and hundreds of Mason jars I used for canning my beans and stuff from my garden and they broke all of them. And never, not once in my life have I ever had [moonshine] put in a Mason jar. They just laughed. They took all my guns, seventeen or eighteen of them, kept them, wouldn’t give them back even after I beat [the charges]. And half of them were antiques.¹⁶⁴

While Dove claims that the federal authorities kept his guns, seemingly for no reason, the *Daily News-Record* reported that he actually “agreed to relinquish the *six* weapons seized by police.”¹⁶⁵ The discrepancies between Dove’s story and that of the *DN-R* reflect a very palpable distrust of federal law enforcement. From Dove’s point of view, the federal authorities were basing a case on suspect evidence. Downplaying the severity of his charges, Dove questioned the priorities of the law enforcement asking, “Why don’t

¹⁶³ Emphasis his. Dove, interview.

¹⁶⁴ Dove, interview.

¹⁶⁵ Emphasis mine. *Daily News-Record*, April 24, 2007.

they go catch murderers and rapers and stuff like that instead of farting around with somebody who's not hurting anybody?"¹⁶⁶

In terms of the scope of Dove's alleged moonshine operation, there are distinct differences between Dove's recollections and the reports from the *Daily News-Record*. Soon after the bust and into the next year, D.L. Blye of the Virginia ABC Staunton Office stated that, "the scale of the [moonshining] operation was so small that very little could be produced at one time...the tax revenue lost is little."¹⁶⁷ However, Dove asserts that the federal officials "thought it was a huge operation."¹⁶⁸ The facts surrounding the final judgment of the case brought against Dove are also disparate. The *DN-R* reported that, in accordance with the agreed-upon plea bargain, Judge T.J. Wilson "ordered a 30-day suspended jail sentence for each misdemeanor conviction."¹⁶⁹ Dove however contradicts that a plea deal was sought, affirmatively denying it. "Shit no I didn't [plea bargain]," he said, "I took them to court and beat them. I made them look like asses. They didn't have evidence or anything. I beat all the charges except for just the possession [of untaxed alcohol] charge."¹⁷⁰ Dove vehemently asserts that the raid and court case were blown out of proportion and that the news media, such as the *Daily News-Record*, failed to get solid facts before reporting on the case. In the end, Dove appears to have come out of this ordeal as a hero-type figure that beat the system. The newspaper clipping from his arrest,

¹⁶⁶ Dove, interview.

¹⁶⁷ *Daily News-Record*, August 27, 2006 and April 24, 2007.

¹⁶⁸ Dove, interview.

¹⁶⁹ *Daily News-Record*, April 24, 2007,

¹⁷⁰ Dove, interview.

with corresponding mug shot, is even enshrined in a picture frame in his sister's house as homage to Dove.¹⁷¹

Law enforcement officials are also characterized as not only being ruthless and unsympathetic to the moonshiner's cause, but also are relayed in stories as being dim-witted or out-smarted by the men they are attempting to apprehend. Timberville native Chris Mathias told of an account depicting the law as dense compared to the more ingenious moonshiner:

[The revenuers] would come out to his place and they came out one night and Mr. Scothron saw them out there. And the story is that Mr. Scothron got his gun; it was a full moon or whatever and was out there and he snuck out there you know to kind of watch them. And he said that they got within a couple feet of like, he had had a false ground and covered like a little cellar or whatever that had a false top on it and they were a couple feet from stepping on it. And if they stepped on it they would fall right through to where he kept all his moonshine. And that he had the hammer back and that he was ready to rock-n-roll and they came within a couple feet and never found it.¹⁷²

The notion that a moonshiner would have the brains to outsmart a law enforcement official is antithetical to the widely portrayed stereotype of mountain moonshiners as being generally uneducated and therefore unintelligent. When referring to moonshiners in the Fulks Run area, Pat Ritchie described them as being "pretty rough people; usually not the most educated people."¹⁷³ The example of the Timberville moonshiner Mr. Scothron is just one among many instances within the folklore that assert that particular stereotype to be overstated. While it may be true that many mountain residents suffered

¹⁷¹ Dove, interview.

¹⁷² Mathias, interview.

¹⁷³ Ritchie, interview.

from a lack of a strong formal education, comparatively their wits were often based on survival skills and common sense as opposed to book smarts. Peggy Shifflett very simply stated the intellectual capacity of moonshiners she knew: “They were just smart people.”¹⁷⁴ Desmond Dove demonstrated his intellectual prowess when discussing the steps for making moonshine and the heat requirements. “Alcohol evaporates at 190° F and water does at 212° F.”¹⁷⁵ Moonshiners like Dove emphasize their understanding of the foundations of physics and chemistry based on the scientific knowledge required to produce clean, non-toxic moonshine. These skills however were learned by being hands-on apprentices and not necessarily in a school room. However even the assumption that moonshiners in particular, or mountain residents in general, were only intelligent when it came to the malleability of copper or ways of camouflaging stills is slightly stereotypical in and of itself. Peggy Shifflett, who came from a long line of moonshiners, attended Madison College and earned her Ph.D. from Texas A&M. She went on to teach sociology at Radford University and has authored three books relating to her childhood in Hopkins Gap and Appalachian traditions.¹⁷⁶

The stories and songs that make heroes and martyrs out of moonshiners, in conjunction with an underlying feeling that moonshiners as a whole are not criminals simply for making moonshine and are not stupid simply for their lack of access to vast educational opportunities, also relay a sense of pride in the tradition. While moonshining is deemed illegal by the government, a form of tax evasion, many locals perceive it as

¹⁷⁴ Shifflett, interview.

¹⁷⁵ Dove, interview.

¹⁷⁶ Shifflett, interview.

harmless and sometimes outright beneficial to the community. The folklore frames moonshining nostalgically as a tradition that has been practiced in the mountains of Virginia and throughout the mountain South since Scots-Irish immigrants first began settling in Appalachia in the early 1700s. Subsequently having ties to moonshining results in a feeling of pride, not shame.

Chris Mathias exudes his pride of his upbringing in an area of the county known historically for its ties to moonshine. Going so far as to purchase vanity license plates with “MASHER” on them, Mathias affirms that he is proud to be a part of a place with connections to moonshine like “The Mash” in Timberville—“Absolutely I think it’s a great story; I think it was a great heritage.”¹⁷⁷ Stanley Fisk has similar feelings. He prides himself more so on the traditional aspects of how he makes moonshine.

Reiterating the heritage of and cultural significance of moonshining, Fisk claims that he would like for his children to follow his lead and carry on the tradition. His nephew has also taken up moonshining on a smaller scale, simply for the reason of continuing the practice. Fisk’s nephew constructed a miniature still that only produces a quart of moonshine at a time and costs three times as much as the grain alcohol sold in the ABC store, “but he likes to do it for tradition’s sake.”¹⁷⁸

Whether it is the need to remember the better days gone by, perpetuate a tradition, or celebrate one’s heritage, the role of community members’ perspectives in shaping the way moonshining is talked about and remembered is undeniable. Moonshiners are

¹⁷⁷ Mathias, interview.

¹⁷⁸ Fisk, interview.

remembered as heroes, as proponents of a harmless tradition, and as victims of the legal system. The end result of these perceptions is a pride in this celebrated practice.

While many of the aforementioned stories being relayed today actually occurred in the early to mid-twentieth century, sometimes even earlier, their presence in modern dialogue represents a desire to remember, whether correctly or not, and celebrate a tradition that is definitive of Appalachian culture. Yet the practice still continues today in select hollows and mountains throughout Rockingham County. The staying power of moonshining into the future is unclear at best. Moonshiner Stanley Fisk is positive that the tradition will continue into further generations, but he is unsure for just how long, positing that “the times are changing.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Fisk, interview.

Chapter V: The Perceived Future of Moonshining: Its Prominence and the Traditionalist vs. the Neo-Moonshiner

Home distillation and making moonshine has been a mainstay in Rockingham County and the surrounding areas in the Blue Ridge and Appalachia for hundreds of years. Author Joseph Earl Dabney posited in his 1974 work *Mountain Spirits* that “within another decade, the gentle art of illicit whiskey-making will be only a ‘heard of thing’ recounted in the folklore and the stories of old timers.” Yet he goes on to suggest that “wherever good whiskey is appreciated the memory of the pure corn copper pot craftsmen will live on.”¹⁸⁰ To be sure, moonshining has a strong presence in the folkways and oral histories of “old timers” as can be heard in the stories of every narrator in this study.¹⁸¹ These stories will continue to be passed on from generation to generation and will play a significant part in the collective memory of county residents. But to suggest, as Dabney has, that moonshining will die out into nonexistence by the 1980s was obviously a misguided assessment of the practice.

The first edition of *The Foxfire Book* discusses moonshining at length and editor Eliot Wigginton takes a different stance from Dabney asserting in the chapter entitled “Moonshining as a Fine Art” that the practice is not extinct, but rather has changed.¹⁸²

The chapter begins by declaring that,

¹⁸⁰ Dabney, 231.

¹⁸¹ Narrator is a synonymous term for interviewee.

¹⁸² Comprised of articles originally written for the Foxfire Magazine, the Foxfire books are a series of anthologies documenting the culture, folkways, and lifestyle of the residents of the southern Appalachian Mountains based primarily on their own oral histories. First written in 1972, the compilation now includes twelve books, with the last published in 2004, and several other special publications. Topics in the Foxfire series include, but are not limited to snake lore and snake handling, hunting tales, midwifing, burial customs, banjos and dulcimers, foot washing, and home cures. For more on the Foxfire Magazine, the book series, and the Foxfire Fund, Inc. history see <http://www.foxfire.org>.

The manufacture of illicit whiskey in the mountains is not dead. Far from it. As long as the operation of a still remains so financially rewarding, it will never die. There will always be men ready to take their chances against the law for such an attractive profit, and willing to take their punishment when they are caught. Moonshining as an art, however, effectively disappeared some time ago.¹⁸³

The explanation for moonshining's transformation away from an art, according to Wigginton, can be attributed to three reasons. Firstly, Wigginton suggests that the influx of aspirin and other modern medicines essentially diminished the need for many home remedies including corn whiskey. Second, an increasing affluence in the second half of the twentieth century within rural Appalachian communities allowed residents to have a greater access to industries and also convinced young people to stray from their parent's moonshining ways and make a living by choosing an alternative, less risky, career path. Lastly, Wigginton argues that greed and the overpowering desire to make the greatest profit possible, even if it means jeopardizing the quality of the moonshine, has inevitably steered the practice away from its traditional roots.¹⁸⁴ Wigginton acknowledges that while moonshining has dramatically changed from the art he describes prior to the mid-twentieth century, it continues to be practiced, but for reasons far removed from providing for one's family, continuing a tradition, or celebrating one's heritage.

Moonshining in Rockingham County continues to be practiced today if only on a smaller scale. Stanley Fisk currently knows of five or six moonshiners who "still [make moonshine] right" in addition to himself. According to him, areas in the eastern part of

¹⁸³ Wigginton, 301.

¹⁸⁴ Wigginton, 301.

the county still have operations for making moonshine.¹⁸⁵ Desmond Dove also confirmed the current presence of moonshine in the county, but declined to name specific locations.¹⁸⁶ For Peggy Shifflett, who does not reside in Rockingham County anymore, she is uncertain of moonshining's status within the county. "I have no clue. I don't think it's happening in Hopkins Gap. But I don't know. The only place that I hear from anymore is Page County and that's because one of my brothers goes over there or has a connection there. So I'd say it's not very common. That would be my guess, but there are certain families that will always do it."¹⁸⁷ Timberville native Chris Mathias posits that moonshine still has a significant presence in the county and is very accessible to purchase.¹⁸⁸ Tammy Losh speculates that the area surrounding Crimora and Brown's Gap may still have practicing moonshiners, "but almost always in Elkton."¹⁸⁹ There is no doubt that the prevalence of moonshining has decreased in Rockingham County the past fifty years. A surge in industries, less remote communities, and more navigable roads have allowed residents to pursue jobs outside of moonshining. But despite a greater availability of financial opportunities for rural mountain residents, the practice is still occurring within the county on a small scale and in other adjacent areas. Peggy Shifflett posits that for some people it is moonshining's criminalization which gives them a reason to make moonshine and feeds an innate need in thrill seekers. "It's kinda more like defying the law and living on the edge. There are people that have to do that you

¹⁸⁵ Fisk, interview.

¹⁸⁶ Dove, interview.

¹⁸⁷ Shifflett, interview.

¹⁸⁸ Mathias, interview.

¹⁸⁹ Losh, interview.

know.”¹⁹⁰ However it is the non-traditional techniques that some moonshiners are utilizing combined with other nefarious enterprises they are involved in (drugs, weapons) that is changing the perception of moonshining.

Moonshiners of a more purist persuasion will surely continue their trade for as long as tradition is valued in Rockingham County, but the folklore pertaining to the future of moonshining in the county suggests that the practice is becoming more capitalist and non-traditional than the moonshining of the mid-twentieth century and before. As Joseph Earl Dabney asserts “these purists are admittedly rare” and are being slandered by operations defined by “greed, gangsterism, and bribery, with poison pouring out of filthy stills.”¹⁹¹ Yet defining modern moonshiners as more capitalist than their predecessors is a relative characterization. Moonshiners of the early to mid-twentieth century strove to provide economic stability for their families and at times were able to take advantages of luxuries like a new car or other forms of entertainment. They were also deeply entrenched in an interregional economic trading system that went beyond simple subsistence production of moonshine. The greed and gangsterism that Dabney refers to was in fact beginning to take shape in Hopkins Gap as Peggy Shifflett relays in her telling of the loss of communal spirit due to the increase in competition. Regardless, traditional moonshiners are thought of as honorable men, not drug abusers. Traditionalists craft a moonshine still using only the best copper and the cleanest silver solder, not car radiators or turkey deep fryers. Yet these non-traditional characteristics of current moonshining

¹⁹⁰ Shifflett, interview.

¹⁹¹ Dabney, xvi.

practices do not support the long-held view of moonshiners as heroes and champions within their community.

Some modern moonshining operations are perceived as taking a more reprehensible turn and it is to the dismay of traditionalists like Stanley Fisk. On December 2, 2008 the Mt. Crawford home of Robert Dale Oscar was raided and the story of what was found at his residence hit the front page of the *Daily News-Record*. Oscar was charged with felony illegal manufacturing of distilled spirits in addition to two misdemeanors for having an unlicensed still and possession of untaxed liquor when his operation was stumbled upon by police. They were actually at the home searching for a different person other than Oscar on suspicion of charges unrelated to moonshining.¹⁹² However, it was the narcotics, drug paraphernalia, guns seized, and also perhaps the nature of the still itself which was rigged out of a beer keg, which frustrated Fisk. As a personal acquaintance of Oscar's family, Fisk attested to the fact that "they were devastated by the case."¹⁹³ Not only had the accused manipulated a beer keg into a working still, but Fisk speculates that Oscar was also shortcutting the moonshine process and inevitably the quality by running it abnormally faster than it ought to be run or even using large quantities of legal grain alcohol to dilute the product. Fisk also posited that Oscar was making moonshine to support his drug habit.¹⁹⁴ All such practices are in contrast with the traditional ways of making moonshine that Fisk himself promotes. He

¹⁹² The newspaper is vague about what or who the warrant was originally intended for. *Daily News-Record*, December 4, 2008.

¹⁹³ Fisk, interview.

¹⁹⁴ Moonshine can be produced more quickly if a radiator is used as the condenser. There are obvious health risks associated with such practices however. Fisk, interview.

had an adverse response to the 2008 arrest of Robert Oscar, and said, “It hurts my feelings and it doesn’t bother me when they get caught.”¹⁹⁵ Other residents had similar feelings towards modern-day moonshiners.

Peggy Shifflett feels that if the moonshine is made in mass quantities or produced in an unsafe manner then the moonshiner is a criminal, and she concurs with Fisk that “they should be caught.”¹⁹⁶ However, Shifflett does acknowledge the disparities between capitalist moonshiners and traditionalists. “I see a difference if it’s connected to other crime. If you’re just doing a little bit to give to your friends and family, I don’t see a problem with it. And you’re doing it right. Doing it the traditional way that is safe.” Shifflett, who gets her moonshine from a self-proclaimed traditionalist and admits that “I don’t want them to stop ‘cause that’s where I get mine,” is of the mindset that some modern day moonshiners disparage the names and actions of the purists by “using traditional things and making money off of it and doing criminal acts.”¹⁹⁷ There is an obvious dichotomy, however, with Shifflett’s characterization of a modern, non-traditionalist and traditional moonshiner. While their product was given as gifts, one of its main purposes was to provide a commodity for selling or bartering in addition to personal use. The lack of industry in many mountain communities mandated that families find alternative avenues for financial prosperity, and moonshining was a viable option. Contrary to Shifflett’s perception of traditional moonshiners, they were in fact

¹⁹⁵ Fisk, interview.

¹⁹⁶ Shifflett, interview.

¹⁹⁷ Shifflett, interview.

participating in a criminal act and making money off of it, but the folklore and oral histories do not recognize this paradox.

Grottoes resident Tammy Losh has similar feelings towards modern-day moonshiners, specifically those who have strayed from traditional techniques:

The people I would call moonshiners now are white trash ‘cause that’s what they look like to me and that’s what they are because they don’t wanna work. They would rather make moonshine and meth, usually both, instead of working. And this is my opinion of course; moonshiners today are nothing but people that are lazy and don’t wanna work. And they’re just trash. The people that I know who still make moonshine and sell it, they will do anything to make money; anything for a dollar. Beg, borrow, or steal; that’s what they do. Don’t like them. I really don’t associate with them, but I know who they are and I know what they do. So I’m like, “Hmm, get a job.” The people now have other alternatives instead of making moonshine.¹⁹⁸

She goes on to conjecture about recent copper theft and its potential links to moonshining. “A couple weeks ago, [there was] so much copper tubing thefts in the area. You can’t sell copper tubing like that and I really do think [moonshiners] was using it for their stills. And I think the people that worked at those places [that sold the copper tubing] knowed somebody and was letting them take it.”¹⁹⁹ To characterize all modern-day moonshiners as drug dealers and thieves is potentially misguided, similar to old stereotypes of moonshiners as slack-jawed and ill-educated hillbillies, but it does represent a current trend of sentiments towards people who represent the tradition in a negative way. Losh does admit a difference if moonshiners, like Fisk of eastern Rockingham County, make liquor using traditional methods and equipment. “I think if

¹⁹⁸ Losh, interview.

¹⁹⁹ Losh, interview.

they're doing it for gifts and everything, then they're trying to carry on tradition. Some people do do things for their heritage and I think that's okay. But then again I'm all for the southern heritage.”²⁰⁰

For Pat Turner Ritchie, former resident of Fulks Run, regardless of the manner in which it is made moonshining is not “on par with weaving or spinning or any other traditional craft.”²⁰¹ The illegality of the practice combined with Ritchie’s own personal convictions against alcohol lead her to declare that, “I wouldn’t want my daughter to marry [a moonshiner].”²⁰² In addition, upon hearing of Desmond Dove’s arrest in 2006, she was concerned about the way that her hometown would now be portrayed and perceived by others. “I was annoyed because we try to give Fulks Run a good name and Brocks Gap a good name and then ‘Fulks Run Man Arrested for Moonshining.’ Oh no! It just set us back another twenty years. We’re trying to get away from that [stereotype].”²⁰³ Not only did the police find the appropriate components necessary for constructing a still at Dove’s residence, but they also seized \$15,000 worth of marijuana plants that were located on his property.²⁰⁴ While Dove asserts that the marijuana was not his, but belonged to a group of neighbor kids who he allowed to use his property for the purpose of growing the plants, the mere association of illegal drugs with moonshining inevitably evokes an image contrary to that of a traditional moonshiner.

²⁰⁰ Losh, interview.

²⁰¹ Ritchie, interview.

²⁰² Ritchie, interview.

²⁰³ Ritchie, interview.

²⁰⁴ *Daily News-Record*, August 21, 2006.

While many argue that moonshining operations are becoming more nefarious in nature, there are still “purists” who practice illicit distilling simply for the sake of continuing an Appalachian tradition. Stanley Fisk only uses copper and silver solder to build his stills (see Figure 4).



Fig. 4 Photograph of Stanley Fisk’s most current still. Photo by Stanley Fisk.

The three stills he has constructed in his lifetime have all been made of traditional materials. While he affirms that copper is the best metal to use, “I’m okay with stainless steel” for construction purposes. Fisk also does not charge for his moonshine, and has not for years. As recent as the summer of 2008, he hauled some of his moonshine to Fredericksburg to give to some of his friends. As a way to disguise his illicit product, he stores it in the bottles of the ABC regulated corn whiskey “Virginia Lightning” and when his friends are finished he takes the bottles back and brings them more moonshine, a

practice similar to that of an old time milkman.²⁰⁵ Despite his coincidental connections to illegal drugs, Desmond Dove proclaims to be more of a purist than not. His extensive knowledge of appropriate temperatures and equipment needed to make moonshine reflects an innate appreciation of traditional approaches.²⁰⁶ The future of moonshining appears to be one of inconsistencies between what it means to be a traditionalist and what it means to be a capitalist moonshiner. While some traditionalist moonshiners do assert their existence, they allege that the purity of their trade is being tarnished by larger-scale operations that not only involve making moonshine for profit, but also growing and selling marijuana.

As with most legally and illegally traded commodities, moonshine has undergone significant price increases over the years. As the price of sugar and yeast increase so does moonshine. Combined with the added danger of getting caught and the inception of drug task forces who are targeting moonshiners for multiple offenses beyond illicit distillation, moonshiners who charge for their whiskey are forced to recoup their expenses in order to make their practice viable. During the summer of 2009 Stanley Fisk knew of a friend who paid \$80 for one gallon of moonshine, whereas forty years ago the same amount would have cost someone \$10 to \$15.²⁰⁷ In four decades the price of moonshine has increased anywhere between 430% and 700%. Peggy Shifflett likens this price inflation with an increased desire by some modern day moonshiners to become wealthy, which according to her was never the sole intention of the moonshiners of old.

²⁰⁵ The Virginia Lightning distillery is located in Culpepper, Virginia. Fisk, interview.

²⁰⁶ Dove, interview.

²⁰⁷ Fisk, interview.

“I guess if you don’t get caught you can get rich if you make big quantities of it,” she said, “I don’t think any of the traditionalists were concerned about being rich. They might have liked to have a new truck or clothes for their kids and stuff like that, but nobody was trying to get rich. And that’s sort of the goal today with the big moonshiners.”²⁰⁸ In her own experience she has seen blackberry moonshine sell for \$27 per quart as of 2008.²⁰⁹

The collective narrative surrounding moonshining has come to embrace the hobby aspect of moonshining, something it was never intended to be and which furthermore is a fairly modern interpretation of the practice. At some point the definition of what a traditional moonshiner embodied changed. Now making money off of moonshine equates capitalist and making it for the sake of hobby suggests tradition. For many of the interviewees involved in this study, one of the most valid distinctions between so-called traditional moonshiners and those who practice the trade today is the accessibility and availability of alternative careers. For families who were once severely isolated from profitable industries or nearby roads, moonshining was an autonomous and advantageous vocation. Certainly times have changed and Rockingham County residents have a greater access to other metropolitan areas and competitive careers within their own communities. When modernization and industrialization began to take off in the mountain communities of Rockingham County, what it meant to be a moonshiner was altered. No longer was it

²⁰⁸ Shifflett, interview.

²⁰⁹ In the interview, Shifflett says that the price of one quart of blackberry moonshine costs \$27 and that a gallon costs \$54, but the fact that there are four quarts in a gallon, not two, would make one quart cost \$108. Shifflett, interview.

acceptable to profit off of moonshining, only to continue the practice for the sake of tradition.

Moonshining in modern-day terms is not necessarily thought of in the same way that it has been remembered in previous generations. The reasons people have for making moonshine currently are as disparate as the perceptions of such moonshiners. While some traditionalists still exist, the pure moonshiner is being overrun, at least in the headlines, by those who make their moonshine in a beer keg. In a time when careers are not simply limited to lumbering or farming, various options are available for those who insist on making moonshine strictly for the profit motive. No longer is moonshining the only viable option left for fathers and husbands to provide for their families, which was the generally accepted reason for moonshining through the better half of the twentieth century. Others continue the practice to stay connected to an Appalachian tradition, making it for tradition's sake. However, not charging for the product and gifting it to friends and trusted neighbors is a slightly modernist approach to a trade that was once practiced for economic reasons. Conversely, modern-day moonshiners who now sell their whiskey are considered capitalists who are tainting a beloved tradition. The reality of what traditional moonshiners actually were is being glossed over by sentimentality and nostalgia. To a certain extent the capitalist moonshiner is more traditional than the traditionalist.

Conclusion

Moonshining is an endeavor in which its participants are celebrated, championed, martyred, and also derogated by community members. With the exception of how current market-based moonshiners are framed, the folklore describes police officers and revenueurs as being either villainous or incompetent. If said law enforcement officers are not actively pursuing moonshiners, then, as portrayed in the oral histories in this study, they are guilty of enabling the moonshiners by purchasing their liquor or refusing to prosecute crimes based on their tradition and heritage. The only caveat is the new-age moonshiner who also grows and sells marijuana, manufactures meth, and produces moonshine using a beer keg instead of a traditional copper still. He is not a martyred moonshiner championed by his community, but framed as a lowly criminal giving “real” moonshiners a bad name. The evolution of moonshining, according to the collective narrative of Rockingham County residents, has changed from a fairly innocent practice to one associated with drugs and the lack of a work ethic. The consensus seems to be, from both practicing moonshiners and those with past familial ties to moonshining, that the practice has changed for the worse from what it used to be and what it used to represent. When a community’s traditions are seemingly devalued and disparaged by a new twist on a particular practice, then those traditional community members seek to distance themselves from the new wave of moonshiners (or neo-moonshiners) and in turn denounce their take on the practice.

The dependence of moonshiners on their family and community members combined with their strong awareness and respect for land and its capacity to provide financial stability is at the heart of the stories told by county residents. Because the

practice is based on values held in high esteem, and furthermore because of its prominence in other forms of cultural elements like folklore, superstitions, and home remedies, traditional moonshining is embraced, honored, and spoken of fondly by many county residents. Despite the criminality of the act, those who are closest to moonshiners or who are moonshiners themselves, wax nostalgic about the practice in such a way that claims an innocent quality to the practice rather than a nefarious one. Moonshining has been revered for centuries because it embraces and thrives off of certain communal values held with regard in mountain communities throughout Appalachia and in Rockingham County.

A significant aspect that led to many generations of successful moonshining is the natural environment in which moonshiners practiced their trade. Looking at Rockingham County as a microcosm of Appalachia, it is the more mountainous regions that had the most considerable occurrences of moonshining. The eastern and western ends of the county respectively border the Blue Ridge and Appalachian mountain ranges and therefore in areas such as Hopkins Gap in western Rockingham County and Elkton, Grottoes, and McGaheysville in the eastern half, moonshining prospered and still does to a certain extent compared to the valley in the center of the county. The physical landscape complements moonshining as it provides clean and natural water sources and the dense forests allowed for moonshiners to camouflage their stills and operations from the prying eyes of revenueurs or more currently ABC or ATF officials.

According to the oral histories, the isolation of many families compelled them to pursue a profession that was easily accessible in their rural communities. With little

industry in the early to middle half of the twentieth century in many rural communities, combined with substandard dirt roads, some residents found moonshining to be the only profitable trade available to them in their remote neighborhoods. Furthermore, it corresponded well with a seemingly innate need to be autonomous in whatever profession one chose. By turning what few grains they could grow in the rocky ground into alcohol, moonshiners created the greatest profit margin possible. Thus they found moonshining to be an advantageous practice within the context of their natural surroundings. For those involved in moonshining in Rockingham County, the practice represented a contradictory symbiosis between man and nature, a relationship that seems to lend itself to a mutual respect between the two halves, but contradictory since for generations many of these same moonshining families and their neighbors significantly deteriorated their landscape through other environment-based ventures: bark peeling and lumbering. When the trees were completely stripped or large areas were cut down, families relied on moonshining more than ever before as the few other industries that were once available were now gone. Given this bleak reality, mountain moonshiners asserted to their ingenuity in utilizing their natural resources to make moonshine in order to provide for their families in one of the few ways possible.

While landscape and physical environment played a pivotal role in the existence of moonshining Rockingham County, it was the ambivalence and in many instances outright support of community and family members which made the practice successful for generations during the twentieth century. Moonshining was very much a practice that revolved around the participation of all family members including the children,

grandparents, and wives of the patriarchal moonshiner. As lookouts, runners, and bootleggers, family members played complementary roles to the moonshiners they were related to. School teachers and local law enforcement officials both seemed more than willing to oblige area moonshiners in propagating their trade and consequently allowed for the practice to continue and flourish for generations through the mid-twentieth century. However, not all community members approved of their neighbors' illegal practices, adamantly proclaiming that their families were not involved and managed to feed their children by non-nefarious means. While some neighbors were against moonshining, their actions reflected ambivalence more than outrage at the practice.

The oral histories of the narrators featured in this study are really what make the story of moonshining in Rockingham County significant. The legitimacy and factual accuracy of interviewees' stories were taken into consideration when drawing conclusions about their particular worldviews. As was seen with the factual discrepancies between the interviewees' own accounts of a particular event and what was described in the *Daily News-Record*, facts are relative and often-times personal truths are just as important.²¹⁰ As newspaper accounts and published documents are also based on first-hand testimony that can be swayed or altered to align with a certain agenda or bias, to constantly question the accuracy of oral histories or to utilize them strictly for the purpose of gaining factual information is to completely miss their benefit and purpose, which is to uncover the psychological truths, desires, values, and methods for framing a collective history.

²¹⁰ See the Tom Crawford and Desmond Dove stories in Chapter 4.

It is through folklore, oral traditions, and memoirs, basically through the words of the people, that the heart and soul of the Appalachian moonshiner is best conveyed. Through this attachment to the natural environment, family and community, and folkways the historian is offered an interesting perspective into how locals as a collective remember the moonshiner. He is framed as more than a slow-minded mountain hillbilly and the “purist” moonshiner is thought of as the epitome of all things associated with Appalachian tradition. While the recollections of those who remember him might reflect bias, subjectivity, contradiction, or simply a case of misremembrance, the errors in memory reflect a need to positively memorialize the moonshiner. Furthermore, the intimate interplay between folklore and moonshining is irrefutable as Appalachian people relayed stories of supernatural visions and home remedies which were all connected to the practice of moonshining. The face of modern moonshining might be evolving into a business including a myriad of illegal activities, but the need to continue that positive perception and practice of a traditional moonshiner is evident in the stories and folkways of Appalachian Rockingham County.

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