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Undergraduate Thesis: Spring, 2017

Progressive Education in Appalachia: East Tennessee State Normal School and

Appalachian State Normal School

Progressive education is a pedagogical movement that began in the late nineteenth century. Progressive education, a new form of liberal ideas and educational reform, emerged during the late nineteenth century and supported children both as learners and as citizens. In the rural areas of Appalachia during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century most students did not have the money to attend private schools, and if they were able to attend school, they often did not have the opportunities to attend high school or college because so few opportunities existed. Most students in rural Appalachia only attended elementary school, and only a small number of rural Appalachia students received a high school or college education, before committing their lives to work.¹

Progressive educators rooted their practices in experience, and emphasized “learning by doing.” Therefore, once Progressive education made its way into Appalachia, it not only helped educate the students through classroom curricula, but also helped educate the students through practical methods such as farming, cooking, woodworking, and weaving. For example, many schools that adopted progressive forms of education included experimental learning, emphasis on problem solving and critical thinking, group work and social skills, collaborative and cooperative learning projects, integration of community service and service learning

¹ Robert Rivers. “Education,” *Watauga Democrat*, July 13, 1899.

projects, emphasis on lifelong learning, and a de-emphasis on textbooks in place of varied learning resources.²

Progressive education was the result of John Dewey's book, *The School and Society*, which became his most widely read work.³ In his book, Dewey lectures on how the world is changing – generations are now being born into an age where they can “press a button and flood the house with electric light.”⁴ Dewey wanted children of this new technological age to continue to be educated in manual labor. Therefore, he emphasized this in his Progressive education ideas by saying, “We cannot overlook the factors of discipline and of character-building involved in this kind of life: training in habits of order and of industry, and in the idea of responsibility, of obligation to do something, to produce something, in the world.”⁵ Dewey goes on to state that because students are not getting educated at home anymore, because of parent absence, it is only natural for the school to overtake student education of practical skills. He also stated that education of manual arts/labor “engaged the full spontaneous interest and attention of the children. It keeps them alert and active, instead of passive and receptive; it makes them more useful, more capable, and hence more inclined to be helpful at home; it prepares them to some extent for the

² Jay Martin. *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography* (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), 200

³ Martin, 199

⁴ Dewey, John. *The School and Society* (Chicago Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1899), 7.

⁵ Dewey, 8

practical duties of later life – the girls to be more efficient house managers, if not actually cooks and seam-stresses; the boys for their future vocations.”⁶

In the early 1900s, parts of the Appalachia region were very isolated from roads, railroads, and towns.⁷ Areas in East Tennessee, Western Kentucky and Western North Carolina dealt with cases of “extreme poverty, high unemployment, the outmigration of young people, school dropouts, malnutrition, and third-generation welfare cases.”⁸ As Margaret Anderson states in her journal about the state of the local Appalachian people, “the situation of the mountain people is critical. They are now to the point where they cannot live comfortably and educate their families without outside help...solutions being offered include: highways, reforestation, flood control and most importantly, education.”⁹

Among these remote, poverty-ridden counties were Ashe, Alleghany, and Watauga counties in Western North Carolina. These counties are separated from the rest of North Carolina by the Eastern Continental Divide – an average elevation of 2,500 to 3,000 feet – that formed their eastern and southern borders. Even into the 1920s, these counties in Western North Carolina struggled to make improvements. For example, in the February, 1921 *North Carolina Education: A Journal of Education, Rural Progress, and Civic Betterment*, a journal that was released monthly in Raleigh N.C., it was stated that, “When this Assembly met in its annual meeting, and the

⁶ Dewey, 12

⁷ Margaret Anderson, “Education in Appalachia: Past Failures and Future Prospects,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* Vol. 26, No. 4 (Nov, 1964): 443

⁸ Anderson, 443

⁹ Anderson, 444

records were all in, it was found that all the counties and towns in the State large enough to form local units had done so. But in the counties of Alleghany, Brunswick, Camden, Caswell, Clay, Cumberland, Dare, Graham, Hyde, Jones, Lenoir, Mitchell, Vance, and Watauga [had failed to organize themselves into local units.]¹⁰ These, counties, especially Ashe, Alleghany, and Watauga, were then termed as the “Lost Provinces” due to their geographic and economic isolation from the remainder of the state. The surrounding mountains acted as a hindrance to the development of transportation, infrastructure, limited contact with outside areas, and slowed economic development as well as educational improvements in the region following the Civil War.¹¹ Because this region was so remote, it only heightened the need for educational reforms. The idea of the “Lost Provinces” was not just limited to the counties of Western North Carolina. Eastern Tennessee dealt with rural, impoverished communities as well. Therefore, bringing education in the form of Progressivism was a bold, and needed step to help these rural communities grow and be successful.¹²

In this thesis, I am examining how East Tennessee State Normal School in East Tennessee and Appalachian State Normal School in Western North Carolina interpreted progressive education differently in their states. This difference is that

¹⁰ “North Carolina Education Association,” *North Carolina Education: A Journal of Education, Rural Progress, and Civil Betterment*, Vol. XV, No. 6 (Feb. 1921): 11

¹¹ Dave Tabler, “The Lost Provinces,” Appalachianhistory.net, <http://www.appalachianhistory.net/2016/08/lost-provinces.html> (April 10, 2017).

¹² Anderson, 444.

East Tennessee State began as a state funded school to educate future teachers¹³ therefore their school and their curriculum was more rounded and set to a structured schedule. Appalachian State Normal School was initially founded to educate the uneducated in the “lost provinces” therefore, curriculum was even more progressive than East Tennessee State’s – based strongly on the practices of farming, woodworking, and other practical skills.¹⁴ I will also be looking at what these different interpretations tell about the states, what it says about the Appalachia region, and how both schools applied these progressive ideas in their schools. Lastly, I will be answering how Progressive education, and normal schools affected the communities in East Tennessee and Western North Carolina.

Although the schools have many similarities –both being located within 60 miles of each other in the Appalachian Mountains - they had, and still do have, many differences. These similarities and differences, which will be explained in detail in the methodology portion of the thesis, include different beginnings: East Tennessee State Normal School began as a state/county funded normal school to educate future teachers, and Appalachian State Normal School began as a small academy to educate students or the people of the “lost provinces” in Western North Carolina. Similarities including their location and their main goals as normal schools to further educate students will also be explained in detail.

¹³ Frank B. Williams Jr., *A University's Story, 1911-1980* (Johnson City, TN: East Tennessee State University, 1991), 9

¹⁴ J.W. Curtis, *Memories of Watauga Academy and Appalachian Training School* (Lewiston Idaho, 1938), 6

The sources used to identify and research the early beginnings of East Tennessee State University and Appalachian State University, as well as the early beginnings of Progressive education in Appalachia, are from primary documents as well as secondary sources. These sources were located at the universities' libraries, city libraries, as well as books obtained through library bookstores, Barnes & Noble, and online retailers such as Amazon.

The primary sources used were a variety of letters and newspapers. For example, letters written by the Presidents of the Schools about status of the students, classes, and reports on attendance, curriculum and tuition. J.W. Curtis's *Memories of Watauga Academy and Appalachian Training School* is an example of letters and reports written about the status of Watauga Academy, which is Appalachian State University during its early years. In his work, Curtis explains the purpose of Watauga Academy, stating facts about education in Western North Carolina at the end of the 19th century. He does not, however, compare or contrast how Watauga Academy lines up with other normal schools during that time.

Again, another example of reports written on East Tennessee Normal School concerning tuition, building costs, salaries, curriculum (including progressive ideas), and attendance is found in the *Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction*. This document was written under Morgan C. Fitzpatrick who was the Tennessee State Superintendent from 1899-1903. In this report, a variety of educational topics are covered, including statistics on the status of schools in Tennessee during the turn of the century, "there were in all 7939 schools with 9484

teachers, and average of 1.2 teachers per school, meaning that the great majority were one-teacher schools.”¹⁵ However, this document does not mention any correlation to North Carolina. In this thesis I am comparing and contrasting the start and purpose of these two schools, and showing their differences and similarities regarding progressivism.

Newspapers, specifically the *Watauga Democrat*, were important to researching the early beginnings of Appalachian State University. The newspapers show advertisements for the new school, Watauga Academy, which was started by brothers Blanford and Dauphin Dougherty, in Boone, North Carolina. The primary sources provide direct evidence of what took place at both East Tennessee State and Appalachian State during their early foundation years. The primary sources also help one know and understand what was being taught to the first students, and therefore help one know and understand how progressive education was implemented into both of these schools’ curriculum.

Secondary sources included in this thesis include books written about the founders, and books written about the history of East Tennessee State University and Appalachian State University. Other sources included are books written on John Dewey and the foundations of Progressivism, as well as Sara Gregg’s book, *Managing the Mountains: Land Use Planning, the New Deal, and the Creation of a Federal Landscape in Appalachia*. Secondary sources gave background information

¹⁵ Morgan C. Fitzpatrick, *Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1900-1901*, (Chattanooga, Tennessee: Press of Times Printing Company, 1901), 22.

on Appalachia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, they provided facts to why these schools were started, and the purpose for each one, as well as the growing importance and realistic need for Progressive education in Appalachia.

For example, in Sara Gregg's book, she describes land use, and the effects that the New Deal had on the land in the Appalachian region. She also discusses the effects that the New Deal, and Progressive education had on local communities. Similarly, Jay Martin's work *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography*, discusses the beginnings of Progressive education, and its effects on communities and education as a whole. Sara Stoddard also agrees that Progressive education effected the communities, with emphasis on the Appalachian region, in her book, *Challenge and Change in Appalachia: The Story of Hindman Settlement School*. Even though these sources agree that Progressive education made an impact on the communities where it was implemented, none of these sources mention the implication of Progressivism in normal schools, and they fail to mention what the effect was on small communities such as the lost provinces. Therefore, I am writing about what the effect of Progressive education had on the "lost provinces" of North Carolina as well as the counties in Eastern Tennessee, through East Tennessee State and Appalachian State normal schools.

After the Civil War, the south struggled to offer opportunities as far as public education for its students. However, in the Appalachia region there were rural

communities known as “lost communities,” “Pauper Counties,” or “lost provinces”¹⁶ in which there were overlooked communities where there were very little opportunities for schooling. In these locations, mission schools and settlement schools were predominant, as there were usually no public sources of education.

For example, the Hindman Settlement School in Kentucky was a forerunner in industrial education practiced in the rural areas of Appalachia. Instead of creating a separate institution for hands-on practical education, Katherine Petit and May Stone decided to integrate progressive education into their school. They added manual arts, home economics, and farming to the regular academic curriculum. “There is some evidence that in the earliest years, the manual arts training – largely woodworking – was open to adults as well as to the school children, making it both a school and settlement program.”¹⁷ In turn, these works were taken into the community through extension work.

Progressive education looked slightly different in the southern states than it did in the northern ones. In the north, most of the population was more focused on prohibition, suffrage campaigns, and improvements to schools. However, in the rural towns in the south, many children received little more than an elementary education – which meant no more than five or six years of schooling. And this schooling was only four months out of the year, as the children were needed on

¹⁶ Ruby J. Lanier, *Blanford Barnard Dougherty, Mountain Educator* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1874), 3

¹⁷ Jess Stoddart, *Challenge and Change in Appalachia: The Story of Hindman Settlement School* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 25.

their families' farms. Therefore, progressive education in the Appalachia region was based on providing more opportunities and creating a public school system that allowed students to learn practical skills that they would be using on a daily basis. Besides settlement schools and mission schools, the south also began calling for the need of normal schools.¹⁸

Normal schools were training schools for teachers. These teacher-training institutions were intended to "set a pattern, establish a 'norm' after which all other schools would be modeled."¹⁹ There were little opportunities for education, and for those who did attend school, the education received was brief – as many only received the equivalent of an elementary education. Throughout the Appalachian region, as well as other parts of the United States, there remained the problem of low-salaried, poorly trained teachers.²⁰ Therefore, in order to resolve this issue, it was decided by departments of education throughout the region, "that to improve education, the teaching force must first be improved."²¹

Although public education did exist in Tennessee, most schools were privately operated. Tennesseans, and most others who lived in the Appalachian region during that time, believed that the church and family were responsible for a

¹⁸ Anderson, 445

¹⁹ Fred Hilton, *JMU "Centennial Celebration – What's a Normal School?"* JMU.edu, www.jmu.edu/centennialcelebration/normalschool.shtml (April 20, 2017)

²⁰ Lanier, 2

²¹ Effie White Sawyer, *The First Hundred Years: The History of Jacksonville State University, 1883-1983* (Anniston, Alabama: Higginbotham Inc. 1983), 20

child's education.²² It wasn't until the act of the General Assembly in 1909 that the Tennessee State Board of Education was authorized to establish (three) normal schools. In Tennessee before the act passed in 1909, local authorities certified the public schools and no established educational criteria existed.²³ Most of teachers during this time were without college training and high school training. However, there were little opportunities for these schoolteachers to practice their skills before they were thrown into the classroom.

As David Sinclair Burleson states in his book, *History of the East Tennessee State College*, "Tennessee, like the rest of the south at the close of the Civil War, had been impoverished by four years of conflict and was now being overrun and exploited by an army of carpet-baggers; when, also, the well-to-do families sent their sons and daughters to private schools..."²⁴ In the 1900-1901 school year, "there were in all 7,939 schools with 9,484 teachers, an average of 1.2 teachers per school, meaning that the great majority were one-teacher schools."²⁵ And of those 9,484 teachers, "76.2% of teaching certificates were third class, or inadequate."²⁶ Little to no progress was made for decades after the Civil War, and not until the turn

²² Jill Sauceman and Kathy Mays, *Oak Hill School Heritage Education Center: An 1886 One-Room Schoolhouse. Teacher's Resource and Curriculum Guide* (Johnson City, Tennessee: East Tennessee State University Press, 1999), 20

²³ Johnson's Depot, "East Tennessee State Normal School," State of Franklin, <http://www.stateoffranklin.net/johnsons/normal/normal.htm> (April 3, 2017).

²⁴ David Sinclair Burleson, *History of the East Tennessee State College* (Johnson City, TN: East Tennessee State University Press, 1947), 2

²⁵ Burleson, 2

²⁶ Burleson, 3

of the century did public schools, normal schools, and the idea of progressive education, make its way into Appalachia.

Through the act passed in 1909, there were three normal schools for the training of white teachers, one in each grand division of the state, and an agricultural and industrial normal school for black students. The state made no financial appropriation to pay for land and limited funding for buildings requiring the cities to make aggressive bids to be submitted to the State Board of Education (for the location of the normal schools).²⁷

Once Johnson City was selected as the home of East Tennessee Normal School, it was decided that the city high school would also be taught in the State Normal School for the next two years. Some of the high school courses offered included manual training, domestic science, agriculture, and a commercial course.²⁸ These courses were a forerunner for progressive education at East Tennessee State University, and the presence of the high school on East Tennessee State's campus would continue until modern days, and is still present on campus as the University School.

The students registered for the first years of East Tennessee State Normal School were sons and daughters of "farmers, mechanics, large landowners, preachers, merchants, attorneys, and doctors of medicine, few of them wealthy or

²⁷ Johnson's Depot, 2

²⁸ *Johnson City Comet*, 2

even well-to-do.”²⁹ These students were required to complete two years of “survey or lower-division college courses in literature, mathematics, history, chemistry, physics, schoolroom management, psychology, and more methods courses in the respective disciplines. Students who completed the normal courses qualified for teaching positions in first-class high schools.”³⁰ These “survey courses” also exhibited ideas of progressivism as it prepared the teachers for the real world in the sense of preparing them for teaching with courses such as schoolroom management.

The introduction of progressive education into the normal schools of Tennessee not only helped the students with regular activities such as cooking and farming, but it also helped the students to prepare for the careers that they were about to enter into by giving them hands-on experience and practice with realities that they would experience once they entered into teaching, or another profession.

In Western North Carolina, less than 60 miles away from East Tennessee State Normal School, progressive education was also emerging. Appalachian State Normal School had humble beginnings as Watauga Academy, began by brothers Dauphin and Blanford Dougherty. Boone’s population at the start of Watauga Academy in 1899 was 155.³¹ Dougherty’s vision was of a “teacher-training school for the ‘Lost Colonies’ beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains.”³²

²⁹ Williams, 24

³⁰ Williams, 9

³¹ Curtis, 6

³² Curtis, 6

In both Tennessee and North Carolina, common schools, or public schools were not popular, and education was considered to be the responsibility of the church and home.³³ Therefore, there were no public secondary schools in Watauga County in 1899; the only secondary education that one could receive was through private academies.

Dougherty looked to the state for help to start a public school in Watauga County. During the first year that Watauga Academy was open (1899), Watauga County could only afford to keep its schools open an average of 11.25 weeks. The struggles of beginning a public school in a rural area did not end once Watauga Academy was opened. Problems consisted of poor attendance because of parental indifference, ignorance, poverty or lack of transportation.³⁴ In addition, short terms, and poor instruction also kept students from coming back. Therefore, Dougherty focused on improving the quality of teachers, and not much later, Watauga Academy became a state-supported school named Appalachian Training School for Teachers.

Progressive education was also present during the early years of Appalachian State University. Watauga Academy, which progressed into Appalachian State Normal School, was a school located in the “lost provinces” that was created to reach out to the children who had little to no opportunities to attend secondary school whether it be for lack of money to attend private schools, or the lack of schools in the Western North Carolina region. The courses that these

³³ Sauceman, Mays, 20.

³⁴ Lanier, 24

students took were based on the idea that the students should be “trained for productive citizenship”³⁵ and offered opportunities in areas such as “planting, growing, harvesting, cooking, weaving, and woodworking.”³⁶

The emergence of Normal schools, public schools focused on teacher training and progressive education gave students in Appalachia the opportunity to continue their education beyond elementary school and secondary school. Specifically in the “Lost Provinces,” Dougherty, through Watauga Academy, and later on Appalachian State Normal School, helped to provide the opportunity for higher education for many students in the counties of North Western North Carolina. In addition, Watauga Academy provided these students with hands-on classes that helped to prepare them to become active citizens in their communities. Also, as Blanford Dougherty wished, Appalachian State Normal School helped to better prepare students to become better teachers by offering courses that allowed them to learn about classroom management, and other needed topics.

Appalachia exhibited the use of Progressive education just as the rest of the world did. East Tennessee State Normal School, and Appalachian State Normal School, “offered activities designed to develop the children’s talents in relation to their social use.”³⁷ These talents were useful traits such as woodworking and farming. These traits helped to sustain these communities by educating the young

³⁵ Anderson, 445

³⁶ Martin, 199

³⁷ Martin, 200

generation.³⁸ Rural communities such as the “Lost Provinces” of Western North Carolina were in dire need for improved education systems.

Activists in education, such as John Dewey, Sidney Gilbreath – the first president of East Tennessee State Normal School, and Blanford Dougherty – the founder of Watauga Academy, were all dedicated to establishing new standards of education in their surroundings.³⁹ Dewey’s ideas of Progressivism were to educate children on tasks they would be accomplishing at home or in their field of work, and Gilbreath and Dougherty both implemented this in their schools.⁴⁰ Over the next thirty years after the beginnings of Watauga Academy and East Tennessee State Normal School, attendance at these schools rose, “Attendance gradually improved in Watauga. In 1907, the General Assembly passed a compulsory attendance act which [required] children between the ages of eight and fourteen years to attend school for four months each year...In 1915, Dougherty announced that of the 4,407 children of school age in Watauga County, 3,583 were enrolled and 2,536 were in daily attendance. This was 3.1 percent above the daily attendance average of the state.”⁴¹ Population also expanded in the years that followed the establishment of East Tennessee State Normal School and Watauga Academy – later known as Appalachian State Normal School. In Washington County, population grew from

³⁸ Anderson, 444

³⁹ *Watauga Enterprise Newspaper*, June 28, 1888

⁴⁰ Sauceman, Mays, 16

⁴¹ Lanier, 35

22,604 during the 1900 census, to 45,805 in 1920, and Watauga County population in North Carolina grew from 13,417 in 1900 to 15,165 in 1930.⁴²

Progressive reformers also created new structures for twentieth-century political, cultural, and social institutions. For example, “Robert Doughton, of Alleghany County, U.S. Representative from 1910 to 1953 was a key player in creating road access into the region [of the lost provinces]. He was a major force in promoting the construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway, which further opened the former Lost Provinces to jobs and tourists.”⁴³ Furthermore, in Washington County, the paved highway from Johnson City to Boone was completed in 1931 and “with the completion of the Clinchfield Railroad [in 1909], Washington County was served by three railroads radiating out of Johnson City in six different directions. Johnson City became the rail hub of Upper East Tennessee.”⁴⁴ The excellent rail service brought many industries into the area, as well as a growing number of tourists.

Although, Progressive education brought a positive impact to the people of Appalachia, some local communities were not thrilled to have outsiders imposing on their freedoms and privacy. Just as Anderson states in her researched Journal, *Education in Appalachia: Past Failures and Future Prospects*, “a young Highlander who, after expressing gratitude to the missionary who had come in to help build a

⁴² Richard L. Forstall, “Population of States and Counties of the United States: 1790-1990.”

<https://www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/PopulationofStatesandCountiesoftheUnitedStates1790-1990.pdf> (April 15, 2017).

⁴³ Tabler, 9

⁴⁴ “Railroads of Washington County, Tennessee.” State of Franklin. <http://www.stateoffranklin.net/johnsons/washrail.pdf> (April 15, 2017).

school, said with characteristic mountain frankness, 'Bring us your civilization, but leave us our own culture.'"⁴⁵ In addition, William Link also suggests in his book *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930*, that there was a bitterness of the local communities against outsiders wanting to impose progressive ideas onto the people of Appalachia. Link writes that, "On the one hand, southern traditionalists, located in farms, villages, and small towns, understood 'community' in local, neighborhood terms; accordingly, they viewed social problems passively and often indifferently...Progressive Era reformers, on the other hand, saw 'community' differently. Originating in a middle-class white urban environment...they saw solutions through the expansion of coercive state intervention."⁴⁶ Therefore, in the eyes of some local Appalachian citizens, the reformers, and the changes they brought, were not always accepted.

Normal schools in the Appalachian region also adopted Progressive education in their curricula. Normal schools provided a more enhanced learning for soon-to-be teachers, and provided practical training for them before they graduated and began to teach. For example, Dougherty stated in 1921 that Appalachian State Normal School was to improve "the departments of science, pedagogy, manual training, domestic science, agriculture, and business."⁴⁷ At Appalachian State Normal School and at East Tennessee State Normal School, additional courses were

⁴⁵ Anderson 446

⁴⁶ William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 6

⁴⁷ Lanier, 90

also offered including observation and practice in teaching.⁴⁸ Normal schools offered manual training that “allows a teacher to give instruction to a student more concretely than does mere literary training.”⁴⁹ This manual training, and practice helped students to better prepare to educate youth. The better equipped teachers that attended the progressive normal schools of East Tennessee State and Appalachian state, may have also indirectly lead to the increase of attendance in schools during the following years, as well as the lengthening of school years from a few weeks to a few months.⁵⁰

East Tennessee State Normal School boasted a larger more developed school, in a larger more developed county; however, with this being taken into account, Appalachian State Normal School was otherwise very similar in ways of school attendance, progressive curricula, and funding. Because they were so similar, besides for Watauga County being a “lost province” and highly impoverished, even though they were in different states, it means that the societies that were formed were very much local Appalachian societies, rather than being highly influenced by state government.⁵¹

Normal schools, such as East Tennessee State Normal School, and Appalachian State Normal School, played a significant role in preparing teachers for

⁴⁸ Lanier, 91

⁴⁹ J.Y. Joyner, *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina* (Raleigh, North Carolina: Edwards & Broughton, State Printers, 1902), 426

⁵⁰ Lanier, 35

⁵¹ Link, 6

careers.⁵² And it is evident that Progressive education played its part in modeling what it expected from teacher training through these normal schools through its manual training curricula. Appalachia experienced progressivism through the many reformers such as Gilbreath and Dougherty who implemented “learning by doing” in their schools, and similar methods of training are still used to this day, proving its effectiveness.

⁵² Joyner, 426

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