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# The Farmers' Federation: Regional Racial Mythologies as Agricultural Capital

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The Farmers' Federation:  
Regional Racial Mythologies as Agricultural Capital

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

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May 2019  
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This dissertation is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## **Abstract**

In 1927, the Farmers' Federation agricultural cooperative in Western North Carolina launched an organization to solicit funds from wealthy donors. The money raised through philanthropic campaigns enabled the cooperative to fund large-scale agricultural projects, which helped members navigate the dramatic agricultural transformations of the early twentieth century. Although the cooperative advocated a progressive program of business-minded, scientific farming, its leadership modified programs to reflect farmer members' limited resources and the realities of mountain production. As a result, the co-op provided a crucial bridge between white farmers and new methods of agricultural production that reached deep into peoples' familial and productive lives. Cooperation, however, was never sufficiently profitable for those projects to be self-sustaining. Instead, the cooperative relied on fundraising that traded on the region's relatively new national image as a reservoir of pure Anglo-Saxon stock. Fundraising efforts promised urban elites that donations to white mountaineers would combat the threat they perceived arising from Eastern European and Catholic immigrants by drawing a previously isolated, but racially pure, population into national life. Within this framework, the Farmers' Federation boosters erased the area's substantial African American population and helped create a regional identity that denied black Appalachians' existence. Contrary to this depiction, black highlanders were woven into all aspects of mountain life. In fact, the expensive programs that the co-op created with donated money relied on and exploited African American labor.

As a result, the Farmers' Federation cooperative provides a lens for uncovering the national culture of white supremacy beneath the mythological racelessness of stereotypical depictions of the Southern mountains. Furthermore, the Farmers' Federation and its fundraising

efforts reveal the economic benefits that Southern whites accrued as a result of national elevation of the region's racial associations. Finally, an examination of the Farmers' Federation and its fundraising arm traces one instance in which wealthy donors' efforts to buy a particular vision of racial supremacy through philanthropy brought millions of dollars into the highlands, supporting the creation of institutions, schools, and infrastructure with the capacity to maintain racial disparities long after the decline of national fervor for investing in mythological Anglo-Saxon populations.

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The errors that remain in the text to follow are my own, but everyone listed here, and many others, made my work vastly better than it would have been without their help.

## **Dedication**

Dedicated to my mom, Jama Payne, and my partner, Matt Elmore.

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
Chapter 1: Whitening the Mountains: Creating the Racial Mythology of the Southern Highlands .....	10
Chapter 2: Myths and the Market: Market Routes in the Southern Highlands.....	45
Chapter 3: Transforming the Mountains: Farmers' Federation Programs.....	75
Chapter 4: Living the Lie: Farmers' Federation Rhetoric and Reality .....	114
Chapter 5: Costs and Consequences: Accounting for the Value of Whiteness .....	152
Conclusion .....	183
Bibliography .....	190



## Introduction

“I would very much like to find some definition of a Southerner with which I could identify myself,” C. Vann Woodward wrote in 1953.<sup>1</sup> Woodward spent his career attempting to craft that definition, but nonetheless felt himself a Southern expatriate, a native son whose views and identity marked him as anomalous to the region. His effort to disentangle “Southerner” from the mythology of the Lost Cause, the anti-modernity of the Southern Agrarians, and the massive resistance to the Civil Rights movement laid the foundation for a wealth of productive studies into the other Souths that existed alongside and continually combated the dominance of regional identity rooted in white supremacy. “Southern” conjured images of plantations, benevolent patriarchs, and whites willing to defend the racial hierarchy by any means, but the racial hierarchy within these associations acknowledged the presence (and subjugation) of Southern African Americans. The Southern mountains offered a geographic alternative to this identity that was both regionally distinct and racially homogenous. Plantations could not exist in the highlands and, therefore, the mountain South did not require the conceit of benevolent masters to redeem the region from slavery. The persistence of pro-Union sympathies in the highlands during the Civil War marked the mountains as a South for Northerners, a South unstained by slavery and rebellion. For Woodward, the struggle was to define himself into “Southerner,” a category that continually transformed to embrace an ever-changing system of racial subordination. Black Southerners in the twenty-first century continue to fight for a South that recognizes them as equal and active participants in a region where whites persistently seek to

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<sup>1</sup> C. Vann Woodward, ed. Michael O’Brien, *The Letters of C. Vann Woodward*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 134.

reassert racial control. Meanwhile, black mountaineers face a regional identity that denies their very existence.

Historians have repeatedly demonstrated the extent to which the accepted associations of these regional identities defied reality. Stereotypical depictions of the antebellum South insist that Southerners opposed both urbanization and modernity, that slavery and secession united white Southerners in an unflinching defense of a society defined by enslavement, rural production, traditional economies, and premodern lifeways. But scholars have showed that Southerners did not reject the moral threats of urbanization and the market economy based on a deeply-held philosophical preference for rural life.<sup>2</sup> The South achieved regional political cohesion on slavery only after the mounting threat of slave resistance and revolt convinced slaveholding Southerners that the appearance of unity on the national stage was more important than their internal disagreements.<sup>3</sup> The South did not march lockstep out of the Union. Instead, pro-secession evangelists campaigned tirelessly to convert reticent Southerners to join South Carolina's fire-eaters.<sup>4</sup>

Close examinations of the postbellum South also document the many Souths and many Southerners who, like Woodward, fit uncomfortably within the dominant definition of "Southerner." Most directly, Southern people of color continued to defy definitions that

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<sup>2</sup> For examples that situate the plantation economy and urban enslavement within the national Market Revolution, see Mart Stewart, *"What Nature Suffers to Groe" Life, Labor, and Landscape on the Georgia Coast, 1680-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002); Seth Rockman, *Scraping by: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Robert Pierce Forbes, *The Missouri Compromise and Its Aftermath: Slavery & the Meaning of America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Lacy K. Ford *Deliver Us From Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South, 1787-1840* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Charles B. Dew, *Apostles of Disunion: Southern Secession Commissioners and the Causes of the Civil War* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001).

grounded regional identity in white supremacy. From the wealth of black political activity, large and small, that burst to the surface at the close of the Civil War, to the activism of Latinx immigrants in the “Nuevo South,” people of color consistently challenged whitened definitions of regional identity.<sup>5</sup> However, white Southerners also defied the stereotype. While the Southern Agrarians in the 1930s wrote their forceful rejection of modernity from the comfort and protection of Vanderbilt’s urban camp in Nashville, a vibrant New South city, communities across the South vied to recruit new industries at any price.<sup>6</sup> As the rural-to-urban migration accelerated after World War II, working class Southerners left the uncertainty of rural production for the regularity of wage labor, often after negotiating uncertain benevolent protections within company towns. Some white Southerners joined their black neighbors in fighting against segregation.<sup>7</sup> In fact, historians have identified so many ways that people failed to conform to the associations of “Southerner” that it becomes reasonable to wonder who, exactly, remains to confirm the stereotype.

For whites, the stereotypical associations of the mountain South removed the fraught, racially-troubled aspects of “Southern” regional identity. Where “Southerner” invoked a regional identity predicated on white supremacy, the stereotypical mountain South invoked a people who were opposed to urbanization and dedicated to rural production, traditional

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<sup>5</sup> Susan O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2005); Leon Fink, *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Twelve Southerners [Donald Davidson, et al], *I’ll Make My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (New York: Harper, 1930); Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); James C. Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936 -1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> David L. Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996).

economies, and pre-modern lifeways, but who, supposedly, did not need to assert white supremacy because no people of color lived in the highlands (or were so few as to be inconsequential). As a result, mountaineers remained dedicated to the Union even as their states voted to secede. When the nation turned its focus to industry during the twentieth century, “these mountain people” retained a soul-deep preference for rural life that kept them “firmly rooted to the soil.”<sup>8</sup> Predictably, this stereotypical depiction of the mountain South cannot survive close examination. The geography of the highlands did not support plantations, but mountaineers owned and exploited enslaved people. The antebellum mountain economy depended on slavery just as surely as the shipping economy rested on cotton.<sup>9</sup> Mountain communities were as divided by the Civil War as the rest of the nation, with Confederate mountaineers waging informal wars against their Unionist neighbors long after the official end of combat.<sup>10</sup> Most importantly, throughout the Southern highlands, African Americans lived, worked, and built communities.<sup>11</sup>

Getting to the foundation of why regional identity retains such force in the face of conflicting evidence rests on recognition of the work that regional associations perform. Regional identities are not merely reductive stereotypes. They are expressions of belonging and place-claiming that identify which specific people have the economic, social, and cultural power

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<sup>8</sup> Frank L. Barton to Dr. John H. Goff, TVA Office Memorandum, May 4, 1939, TVA, Records of the General Manager's Office Administrative Files, 1933-1957, 092.1 Blount County, TN through 092.1 Giles County, TN, Box no. 357, Folder 092.1, TVA, RG 142, Cherokee County, North Carolina, National Archives and Records Administration – Southeast Region (Atlanta, Georgia) (hereafter cited as NARA-SE).

<sup>9</sup> John C. Inscoe, *Mountain Masters: Slavery and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Durwood Dunn, *Cades Cove: The Life and Death of a Southern Appalachian Community, 1818-1937* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988); Martin Crawford, *Ashe County's Civil War: Community and Society in the Appalachian South* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> William H. Turner, ed., *Blacks in Appalachia* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1985).

in a particular location. White people claimed that position throughout the South, but in the mountains they did so by embracing and helping create portrayals of the region as raceless despite the presence of a significant African American minority.

The Farmers' Federation agricultural cooperative did not fundamentally transform the regional economy or create ripple effects that spread across the Southern mountains, but it provides a lens into the real capital benefits that mountain Southerners accrued from the mythological racelessness associated with the Southern highlands. As a bridge between white mountain farmers and a racially-anxious nation, the Farmers' Federation simultaneously concerned itself with the rural production that dominated the day-to-day activities of its members, the expectations that outside tourists projected onto the Southern mountains, and the economic transformations of agriculture during the early twentieth century. The Farmers' Federation was an agricultural organization that packaged the racial elements of mountain identity as philanthropy and sold an artificially whitened region to wealthy white urbanites. From the 1920s until the late 1950s, Farmers' Federation fundraising brought in millions of dollars that eased economic pressure, mediated the demands of an increasingly standardized and competitive market, and helped families transition to new systems of production and labor organization. However, a successful local cooperative was not enough to prevent farm families from suffering from the stresses, failures, and economic losses that accompanied the transformations of agricultural production. For the co-op's farmer members, life remained hard and they believed that their ability to remain on the land depended on their own hard work and personal merits rather than the racial mythology of their region, which offered them a substantial economic subsidy. The Farmers' Federation itself was a small, regional organization, but examination of its practices reveals the mechanisms through which white mountaineers gained

economic (rather than simply social or cultural) benefits from exploiting a mythologically raceless regional identity on the national stage, while simultaneously overlooking their own exploitation of African Americans and identifying themselves as economic victims.

Chapter one, “Whitening the Mountains,” examines the creation of the racial mythology of the Southern mountains in local color fiction and mountain educators,’ sociologists,’ and missionaries’ use of this racial identity as a means to solicit philanthropic support. From its inception, educational and philanthropic boosters looking to reform the mountains identified highlanders’ supposed racial purity as the quality of most value to a national audience. In the language of eugenics and white supremacy, these boosters explicitly contrasted the mountaineers, who they sought to elevate, with the rising tide of immigrants and Catholics, who wealthy urbanites saw as increasingly threatening.

The second chapter, “Myths and the Market,” examines the role that mountain geography played in redeeming Southern mountaineers from the assumption that economic disadvantage reflected personal or racial failure. In promoting a false portrayal in which national markets had never reached into the Southern mountains, interpreters and regional promoters created a population who had remained racially isolated and blocked from entering national markets. Consequentially, in this interpretation, highlanders had never had the opportunity to claim the economic success assured by their racial superiority and, therefore, were not responsible for their economic condition. Maintaining this argument, however, required disappearing the plantation provisioning economy that linked the upcountry South to the plantation South prior to the Civil War, the New South focus on rail connections during the late nineteenth century, and farm families’ willingness to reorganize their methods of production and familial labor in service to new cash crops during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

“Transforming the Mountains,” the third chapter, looks at several of the Farmers’ Federations’ agricultural programs in order to demonstrate the extent to which the cooperative reached into the productive lives of its members and served to mediate some of the most disruptive aspects of transforming agricultural production in the region. The Farmers’ Federation was not simply a Progressive intervention aimed at teaching rural people their business. The organization and its leadership shaped its programs to accommodate the needs, capacities, and demands of the farmer members. Rather than determinedly imposing a pre-determined set of practices and products, the cooperative proved flexible in supporting the products its farmers could produce and aiding them in transitioning to new methods of production. This was perhaps most obvious in the organization’s poultry program, which aided farm families in altering the gendered responsibility for poultry. As a result, the economic agricultural transformations reached deep inside farm families’ homes, altering gender roles and familial systems of labor, and farm families understood these transformations as both personal and fundamental. As had been the case when farmers adopted bright tobacco, new products brought widespread changes that reached far beyond simply adding a new crop to the rotation.

“Living the Lie,” the fourth chapter, analyzes the Educational Development Fund of the Farmers’ Federation’s rhetoric and programs, including the ways in which the Educational Fund attached itself to the films and plays that defined Appalachia in popular culture. By presenting itself as a marketing organization that joined the racial promise of isolated white farmers with previously inaccessible modern market systems, the Farmers’ Federation garnered economic support from over 300 elite families, including lifelong supporters who expressly identified the preservation of white supremacy and opposition to immigration as a threat to the nation. With funds acquired from overt racial appeals that denied the existence of black Appalachians, the

Farmers' Federation built expensive agricultural facilities that farmers could not afford without external capital, including a poultry processing facility staffed by Asheville's African American community.

Finally, "Costs and Consequences" examines the relationship between white supremacy and economics, which linked the presumptions of white supremacy to the fundraising organization's need to demonstrate ongoing financial success. From 1928 until 1958, the Farmers' Federation and the Educational Fund blurred the lines between projects funded through agricultural cooperation and projects funded by external philanthropists. By instituting legal and financial divisions between the organizations, the leadership of the cooperative and the Educational Fund were able to manipulate financial reporting to farmer members and donors in a way that placed both organizations in the best possible financial light. However, this blurring of resources also served to reinforce farmer members' impression that the success and survival of their farm cooperative derived primarily from their own efforts rather than resting on substantial economic benefits they received as a result of their race.

Together, these chapters examine one instance in which Southern highlanders benefited from the wages of whiteness, in this case as direct economic benefits, while denying the white supremacist foundations of the identity they embraced and the economic support that whiteness granted them on the national stage. The intention is not to excuse Western North Carolina farmers' racial blindness or accuse them of racism outside the overall culture of the United States. Instead, in creating and perpetuating highland stereotypes, these Appalachian farmers existed within and interacted with national culture. It was, in fact, the national ubiquity of white supremacy that legitimated their rhetoric, allowed them to convert racial identity into donation



checks, and has kept alive a mythologically raceless regional identity that is demonstrably inaccurate.

## Chapter 1:

### Whitening the Mountains: Creating the Racial Mythology of the Southern Highlands

Contemporary depictions of the Southern mountains rest on a set of mischaracterizations that historian Elizabeth Catte summarizes as “Passive, poor, and white.”<sup>1</sup> Upon this foundation, Americans continue to construct Appalachia “as a living gauge upon which ‘progressive’ America [can] measure its progress.”<sup>2</sup> As such, during the fall of 2016, media attempts to decode Donald Trump’s appeal as a presidential candidate honed in on “Trump Country,” i.e. the Southern highlands.<sup>3</sup> As Catte explains, the media used the white working-class of a region long-defined by a national fascination with the entwining of whiteness, poverty, and isolation from a more progressive nation as a “symbol of political self-harm,” and “readers on both sides of the political aisle used a memoir (*Hillbilly Elegy*) written by a venture capitalist (J.D. Vance) to decode the political choices of the region’s poor.”<sup>4</sup> This tendency to paint Appalachians with a broad, white brush, as well as Vance’s assertions that Appalachians have nothing but their own culture to blame for their economic and social struggles, reflects long-standing stereotypes. In many ways, there is little new in the exaggerated misrepresentations that Catte combats; media depictions and questionable memoirs have guided the national image of the mountain South since the nineteenth century. However, studies conducted between 1991 and 2001 found that the

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Catte, “Passive, Poor and White? What People Keep Getting Wrong about Appalachia,” *The Guardian*, February 2, 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/feb/06/what-youre-getting-wrong-about-appalachia> (accessed March 21, 2019); c.f. J.D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir* (New York: Harper, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Brooks Blevins, *Hill Folks: A History of Arkansas Ozarkers and Their Image* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 2.

<sup>3</sup> For a few examples of this common portrayal see: Anne Hoel, “Trump Country: Why Democratic Strongholds are Turning Red,” *The Guardian*, October 2, 2016; Roger Cohen, “‘We Need ‘Somebody Spectacular:’ Views From Trump Country,” *New York Times*, September 9, 2016; Larissa MacFarquahar, “In the Heart of Trump Country: West Virginia Used to Vote Solidly Democratic,” *The New Yorker*, October 10, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Catte, “Passive, Poor and White?”

“Southern identities of white Appalachians today in particular, are racialized – that they are grounded in and assert whiteness.” Further, these studies found that this particular assertion of whiteness through place identity leads Appalachian Southerners to gravitate toward neo-Confederate imagery as easily legible symbols of white supremacy.<sup>5</sup> This twenty-first century embrace of neo-Confederate imagery, racist rhetoric, and overt place claiming may seem disconnected from the twentieth century meaning and mythology of the Southern mountains, which enthusiastically promoted the region as conspicuously raceless, but the contemporary regional associations derive from a long history of racializing the Southern mountains in service to national impulses. The mythological racelessness that lay at the foundation of the construction of the Southern mountains as a distinct subregion was always grounded in the logic of white supremacy and the language of eugenics. Contemporary expressions of racism simply represent an adaptation of the Southern mountain’s mythology, which originated in the popular fiction of nineteenth-century local color accounts, achieved widespread circulation when mountain missionaries transformed fictional images into fundraising tactics, and acquired the glamour of intellectual legitimacy from academic and nonacademic sources.

Recent recapitulations of mountain stereotypes reveal that scholarly calls for greater attention to the role of race in the Southern highlands have failed to alter popular perception. As sociologist Barbara Ellen Smith argues, “The contemporary predominance of whites in Appalachia becomes a benign demographic fact, rather than a product of active practices characterized in part by persistent white supremacy.”<sup>6</sup> This tendency is exaggerated even further

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<sup>5</sup> Larry Griffin, “Whiteness and Southern Identity in the Mountain and Lowland South,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, vol. 10, no ½ (Spring/Fall 2004): 27.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Ellen Smith, “De-Gradations of Whiteness: Appalachia and the Complexities of Race,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, vol. 10, no ½ (Spring/Fall 2004): 43.

by the misconception that race is only active when large numbers of people of color are present, the assumption that class persistently dominates caste in the Southern highlands, and intense academic and popular interest in the denigration of terms such as “hillbilly” without an accompanying consideration of larger racial power structures.<sup>7</sup> As Leon Williams suggested in 1985’s *Black Appalachians*, uncovering the extent to which the Southern highlands as a national region was built on a foundation of white supremacy can begin to “reveal, among other things, rampant ‘institutional’ forms of racism” within the region.<sup>8</sup>

The Farmers’ Federation cooperative in Western North Carolina provides a lens through which to examine the conjoined historical processes that transformed the non-plantation South during the twentieth century. Organized in 1920 by an evangelizing Northerner to increase farm profits through agricultural cooperation, the Farmers’ Federation linked agricultural production in the Southern mountains to the relatively new image of the Southern mountaineer via philanthropic appeals to Northern donors. The cooperative survived and served its farmer members until the early 1960s, providing Western North Carolina farmers access to bulk marketing, capital intensive facilities, and cooperative purchasing. Cooperation alone, however, was insufficient to fund their efforts. In soliciting funds, the organization embraced and helped create the national stereotype of the mountain South. Selling themselves as representatives of a raceless region did not preclude the Federation or its members from employing, living alongside, and even occasionally aiding black Appalachians. Although members could and likely did participate in explicit racial violence, the entwined networks of racial elevation and regional

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<sup>7</sup> Smith, “De-Gradations,” 38-39.

<sup>8</sup> Leon Williams, “The Vanishing Appalachian,” in *Blacks in Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 204.

denigration within which they operated meant that individual members need not be virulent racists in order to enact a nostalgic past of racial purity or offer the promise of an Anglo-Saxon resurgence to anxious whites outside the region. In linking the creation and perpetuation of mountain mythology to the challenges of agricultural production that non-plantation farmers faced during the early twentieth century, the Farmers' Federation can help uncover the ways in which the stereotypically pejorative depiction of Southern mountaineers provided direct economic benefits to mountain whites.

When the Farmers' Federation launched their appeals for aid, the southern mountaineer was already a well-recognized national character. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the reading public encountered the southern Appalachian Mountains through local color fiction, but unlike the characters in other local color stories, the inhabitants of the Southern Mountains were depicted as racially pure whites who were unsuited to modern civilization due to isolation. For example, Helen Hunt Jackson's popular 1888 novel *Ramona* supported a picturesque, romantic view of the Southwest, but her fictional heroine was Native American and therefore, in the logic of the late nineteenth century, destined to disappear as modernity enclosed her world. Mary Murfree (under the pen name Charles Egbert Craddock), on the other hand, introduced readers to the Southern mountains and a cast of mountaineers whose qualities might be "esteemed of late years in civilization, but in the mountains still accounted a capital deficit."<sup>9</sup> In other words, Murfree's white mountaineers were relics of the past, like Native American *Ramona*, but unlike *Ramona*, their anachronistic personal qualities would improve 'civilization'

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Egbert Caddock [pseud.], *In the Tennessee Mountains* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1885), 5, <https://archive.org/stream/intennesseemoun00cradgoog#page/n16/mode/2up> (accessed March 21, 2019).

while contact with ‘civilization’ would rectify the mountaineers’ failure to achieve economic success. In the pages of the *Atlantic Monthly*, Murfree created Southern mountain inhabitants who were as separated from civilization as those in other local color accounts, but her peculiar regional characters were also bastions of Anglo-Saxon whiteness. According to these local color accounts, mountaineers could survive, thrive, and even improve the nation through their supposed racial purity; Native Americans like Ramona would simply cease to exist. If readers overlooked the implications, William Goodell Frost, President of Berea College, made the argument explicit in a non-fiction essay for *Atlantic Monthly* in 1899. The poverty and ignorance of “our contemporary ancestors in the Southern mountains” might be shocking upon first encounter, Frost argued, but outsiders should note that there was “no foreign immigration” in the region, insuring that the population was “native born,” but nevertheless remained remarkably “prolific.” Having established the racial purity and reproductive enthusiasm of mountain people, Frost believed no further explanation was necessary: “The possible value of such a population is sufficiently evident.”<sup>10</sup> To a white, urban readership increasingly alarmed by the rising tide of Catholic and Eastern European immigration during the late nineteenth century, an enormous pool of prolific, native-born whites represented the soothing promise of a potential demographic counterweight.

Murfree, Frost, and other writers depicting the Southern mountains for a national readership built upon and transformed antebellum depictions of the non-plantation South within the sensibilities of the turn of the twentieth century. In so doing, they repackaged the perceptions

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<sup>10</sup> William Goodell Frost, “Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1899, 318, <http://www.unz.org/Pub/AtlanticMonthly-1899mar-00311> (accessed March 21, 2019).

of nineteenth-century Southern poverty for an increasingly urban, racially and economically anxious white audience. While antebellum visitors and travelers commented on the material conditions of poor Southern whites, they did not regard mountain poverty as substantially or culturally distinct from poverty as experienced by poor whites elsewhere in the South.<sup>11</sup>

However, antebellum attempts to account for white Southern poverty diverged depending on the viewpoint of the interpreter. For abolitionists, slavery imposed economic and social degradation onto poor whites. For slavery's supporters, white poverty revealed questionable 'familial stock' and personal deficiencies.<sup>12</sup> These oppositional interpretations survived throughout the nineteenth century. Both sides agreed that poor whites had failed to achieve all that their skin tone promised, but whether that failure arose from systematic victimization or inherent familial and personal failures depended on the interpreter.

In local color accounts such as Murfree's this potentially troubling class division was gathered into highlands and firmly planted in the mountains. In these depictions, civilization simply stopped where the foothills began, inexplicably marooning the vanguard of Anglo-Saxon advance in their mountain holdfasts. Geography guarded these fictional poor whites from accusations that they bore responsibility for their intellectual and economic condition, and, simultaneously, their alleged Anglo-Saxon purity granted them national value. Within this framework, even negative characteristics attributed to the mountain poor served as evidence of their pure Anglo-Saxon heritage. Writers presented regional dialects as evidence that Shakespearean English survived in an unbroken line within mountain hollers. They chronicled

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<sup>11</sup> C. Brenden Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South: A Double-Edged Sword* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 44-45.

<sup>12</sup> Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 18-19.

mountaineers whose social worlds were dominated by feuds and fighting, but simultaneously emphasized that these tendencies reflected the societies that produced Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett. Mountaineers were hot-tempered, honor-bound, and potentially irrational in the eyes of urban Americans, but those same characteristics preserved the revolutionary loyalty of the Overmountain Men and (despite the significant geographic confusion that the equivalence required) the heritage of Abraham Lincoln.

This newly created Anglo-Saxon purity required significant contemporary and historical re-imagining of the racial reality of the Southern highlands. In the decades immediately following the Civil War, Northern missionary societies sought to educate and advance freedmen throughout the South. African Americans and missionary support built black educational centers in the Southern mountains along with the rest of the region. In 1876, Quaker benefactor Yardley Warner provided the seed money for the Warner Institute for the Education of Freedmen in Jonesborough, Tennessee, a courthouse town located in the western Smoky Mountain foothills.<sup>13</sup> In Asheville, on the eastern side of the Smoky Mountains, the Women's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church established the Allen School for African Americans in 1887 - just seven years after the arrival of the railroad transformed a small mountain town into a regional market center. During the 1890s, the Allen School converted to female-only education, but both the Warner Institute and the Allen School operated as respected boarding schools throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For decades, both schools trained African American teachers for service in the surrounding area and proudly sent graduates

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<sup>13</sup> Angela Jones, *African American Civil Rights Early Activism and the Niagara Movement* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011), 228; Julia Wiech Lief, "A Woman of Purpose: Julia B. Nelson," *Minnesota History*, 47 (Winter, 1981): 302-314.



to higher education at prestigious institutes, including Tuskegee Institute and Howard University. The Warner Institute and the Allen School remained prominent educational and social fixtures in Jonesborough and Asheville well into the twentieth century, when both institutions were eventually absorbed into consolidated public school districts.<sup>14</sup>

William Goodell Frost evangelized the Anglo-Saxon purity of the mountains, but, as President of integrated Berea College, he understood that African American higher education predated the end of slavery in the Southern mountains and that black Appalachians comprised a substantial minority of the region's population. Seven years before Frost assured Northern readers of the Anglo-Saxon purity of their Southern ancestors, he had assumed the presidency of Berea, an integrated and co-educational college established in 1855 on the model of Oberlin College. For many of the school's early years, its biblical motto, "God has made of one blood all peoples of the earth," was reflected in the college's demographics, with African Americans constituting 60 percent of the student body between 1855 and 1870.<sup>15</sup> James Klotter and William Turner show how Frost remade Berea College in accord with the national impulses of the late nineteenth century. As Northern philanthropists and middle-class missionaries became disillusioned with efforts to educate and advance African Americans in the South, Southern highlanders emerged as a guilt-free alternative mission focus. Ignorant, impoverished, and degraded, but white, mountaineers provided a missionary demographic and a racial background

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<sup>14</sup> Tennessee Historic Marker, East Main Street, Jonesborough, TN.; "Mattie M. Hill, First Negro Home Agent Here, Dies," *Asheville Citizen*, November 30, 1935, 12; Biographical/Historical Note, Guide to the Allen High School Records, Special Collections at Belk Library, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC, <http://collections.library.appstate.edu/findingaids/ac278> (accessed March 21, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> William H. Turner, "Between Berea (1904) and Birmingham (1908): The Rock and Hard Place for Blacks in Appalachia," in *Blacks in Appalachia* eds. William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1985), 14; Berea College, "Our Motto," <https://www.berea.edu/about/our-motto> (accessed March 21, 2019).

that promised to bolster white supremacy. As increasing numbers of Eastern European immigrants landed on U.S. shores, ancestral societies formed to delineate the Daughters of the America Revolution and the Daughters of 1812 from the questionable racial designations and religious practices of new immigrants. In this climate, the missionary field of the Southern highlands did not just provide relief from frustration with aid efforts aimed at Southern blacks, it further promised to bring new recruits to Northern efforts to fend off the economic and political threats they perceived from increased immigration.<sup>16</sup>

“Who knows,” mused a writer for the *Missionary Review of the World* in 1895, “whether these people be not a reserve force that God will bring out of these mountains, saved by Christ, for the coming crisis of conflict, a stalwart band to stand with us in defense of Protestantism!”<sup>17</sup> According to this missionary, the men hankered for murder, the loose women were “worn-out hags at thirty,” and even the babies used tobacco. The mountain people lacked civility and morality, but their distaste for the papacy and the Catholic Church held firm and provided evidence of their value.<sup>18</sup> As a result, she concluded that the degraded and immoral condition of this population belied the fact that “of this same stock came *heroes* in the time of our civil war,” a Southern population with “*no complicity with slavery*,” comprised of women who were “identical with the woman of Queen Elizabeth’s era” and men “of the blood that gave us our Revolutionary heroes.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> James Klotter, “The Black South and White Appalachia,” *The Journal of American History*, vol. 66, no. 4 (March 1980), 832-849; Turner, “Between Berea and Birmingham”

<sup>17</sup> Mrs. S. M. Davis, “The ‘Mountain Whites’ of America,” *The Missionary Review of the World*, vol. 18, 1895, 423, [https://archive.org/stream/missionaryreview1868unse/missionaryreview1868unse\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/missionaryreview1868unse/missionaryreview1868unse_djvu.txt) (accessed March 29, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 426; 424; 425.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 424; 423; 426.

With their Anglo-Saxon blood and anti-Catholic bias, this newly discovered population offered a philanthropic target with the potential for future political and social payoffs for their urban benefactors. Klotter and Turner track the philanthropic turn that accompanied this national shift through the efforts of Oliver Otis (O. O.) Howard, former head of the Freedmen’s Bureau and president of Howard University, as well as William Goodell Frost’s tenure at Berea. After serving as the head of the Freedman’s Bureau, Howard returned to the military, serving in the Southwest before becoming the head of the military’s Department of the Columbia region in 1874. In this role, Howard oversaw negotiations with the Nez Percé, a group of Native Americans linked by language but organized into multiple, politically independent bands. After initially agreeing that an 1863 treaty granting the Nez Percé claim to their land also acknowledged the independence of each Nez Percé band, Howard sought to enforce a hardline position that would force all Nez Percé onto reservations under the signing authority of a single accommodationist leader, a man whose authority other bands did not recognize and who did not represent anyone living on the ceded land. During the Nez Percé War that followed, Howard pursued Chief Joseph and the Nez Percé as they fled across 1,700 miles of the West over three and a half months before General Nelson Miles finally forced their surrender just 40 miles from the relative safety of the Canadian border.<sup>20</sup>

“At no point did Howard hint of recognizing any contradiction between risking his own life to free southern slaves to live as they wished and forcing western Indians to live and work in a place and by customs of their new masters’ choosing,” but this apparent contradiction was not

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<sup>20</sup> Elliott West, *The Last Indian War: The Nez Perce Story* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 238-289.

as great as it initially seems.<sup>21</sup> In his military role in the American West, the zealously Christian Howard regarded himself as enforcing a national set of cultural norms that required Native Americans to “farm, speak English, worship Jesus, etc,” all of which were already common traits among freed people.<sup>22</sup> For Howard, “the death of indigenous lifeways was considered as inevitable as a sunset” and everyone in post-Civil War America “would have to meet on common cultural ground – aliens immigrating to it, slaves emancipated inside it, Indians having their lands forcibly taken into it.”<sup>23</sup> When Chief Joseph wrote Howard in 1880 to ask that Howard advocate for government recognition of his promise that the Nez Percé could return to their homeland if they surrendered, Howard replied that the Nez Percé desired their homeland “like children” and exhorted Chief Joseph to prove himself “a truly great man” by accepting Christianity and acculturating (actual) Nez Percé children according to white expectations.<sup>24</sup> In his earlier role at the Freedmans Bureau, Howard’s oversight of the effort to force public authorities to “treat the freedmen as part of the ‘people,’” was simply enacting this vision of a single, and shared, American culture.<sup>25</sup> In 1865 and 1866, that vision led him to issue Circular 13, which ordered the redistribution of confiscated Confederate lands to the freedmen, and to protest when President Andrew Johnson rescinded the order and required confiscated lands be returned to their prior Confederate owners.<sup>26</sup> However, by the end of the nineteenth century, Howard adopted a position in line with the paternalism expressed in his reply to Chief Joseph.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 317.

<sup>22</sup> Elliott West, “The Nez Perce and Their Trials: Rethinking America’s Indian Wars,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, vol. 60, no. 3 (Autumn 2010), 17.

<sup>23</sup> West, *The Last Indian War*, 238; 289.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 307.

<sup>25</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc, 2015), 164.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 171-177.

After “years of thinking and observation,” and his experiences in the American West, Howard came to believe “that restoration of their lands to the planters” offered a “future better for the negroes” than settlement on their own land.<sup>27</sup> Howard regarded himself as a modern-day Moses for the freedmen during his early years at the Bureau and saw the drive to Christianize Indians as a central justification for his pursuit of the Nez Percé, but like many other benevolent white supporters of the freedmen, he abandoned his earlier fervor for racial uplift in favor of racialized paternalism by the late nineteenth century.

When Howard visited the Cumberland Gap area, Congressionalist minister and mountain missionary A. A. Meyer easily convinced him that the Southern mountains offered all the challenges of cultural disconnection and poverty that he had fought against for decades, but in a population of lily-white Anglo-Saxons, whose racial heritage supposedly made them neither childlike nor untrustworthy without planter oversight. In 1896, Howard began a campaign to establish Lincoln Memorial University “for the sake of Abraham Lincoln” in a region where whites suffered in ways similar to black people even though they had “our best blood in their veins.”<sup>28</sup> Howard spent the last decade of his life in a “labor of love” on behalf of mountain whites, acting as managing director and president of the new school’s board of directors, and mounting philanthropic appeals that “essentially repeated words used in Reconstruction” on behalf of white mountaineers. Between 1895 and his death in 1909, Howard secured the financial support of notables including Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Henry Cabot Lodge.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> O. O. Howard, quoted in Foner, *Reconstruction*, 600.

<sup>28</sup> O. O. Howard, quoted in Klotter, “Black South and White Appalachia,” 843.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 843.

By the time Howard spread the tidings of Lincoln's new legacy among white mountaineers, William Goodell Frost had already begun advancing Berea College as a mountain mission rather than a model of integrated education. As Klotter explains, once "the Lincoln family became transposed into mountaineers" Frost enthusiastically linked Lincoln to Berea and Berea to the national battle to elevate those Americans who were "not Catholics, nor aliens, nor infidels."<sup>30</sup> Berea remained integrated as Frost shifted the college's focus, although he disallowed interracial dating and dramatically reduced the number of black students by limiting black enrollment to the percentage of African Americans in Kentucky's overall population. Berea, however, had transformed its public face, maintaining its biblical motto but placing "In Lincoln's State – For Lincoln's People" across its letterhead.<sup>31</sup> In 1904, Kentucky Representative Carl Day introduced an act to prohibit integrated education that directly targeted Berea and the mission it had carried since 1855. Frost led the school's fight against the law to the U.S. Supreme Court, where Berea lost the right to provide integrated education. However, by the time state law prohibited Berea from honoring its mission, Frost's energetic campaigning on behalf of mountain whites had transformed the school's character. Frost spent over half of the year traveling to recruit students and funds, espousing a message of retarded white development rather than interracial education. By 1903, he had successfully limited African Americans' enrollment to scarcely 16 percent of the student body. Black enrollment was falling, but the college's endowment was rising rapidly. During Frost's presidency he "raised the value

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<sup>30</sup> Klotter, "Black South and White Appalachia," 845-846.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 846.

of Berea's plant and endowment from \$200 thousand to \$12 million," largely through significant donations from philanthropists such as Andrew Carnegie and Daniel Kimball Pearsons.<sup>32</sup>

Frost's and Howard's appeals to donors legitimated fictional accounts originating in local color fiction, which in turn fueled tourists' interest in Southern mountain folk. As increased numbers of tourists traveled to the mountain in the hopes of seeing their own pioneer roots, tourism joined the existing regional economy of diverse rural production. Although Asheville and a few resorts had established a reputation as health retreats for the wealthy before the Civil War, prior to the penetration of the railroads, most other regional tourism was limited to hunters or explorers who paid locals as guides and often boarded in their homes. When the rail lines penetrated the mountains, extractive industries such as logging and mining expanded rapidly and spread new sources of low wage employment through the region. Despite the environmental devastation caused by extractive industries, rail-driven logging and mining were linked to tourism throughout the early twentieth century in the mountain South. In much the same way that Western railroads promoted the "See America First" campaign as a means to run full trains across the continent, mountain railroads developed a secondary market in mountain tourism, with trains delivering tourists to day resorts and logs or ore to regional rail centers.<sup>33</sup> As a result, interested parties, including The Little River Logging Company and Asheville's city boosters, regarded tourism as the natural replacement for industrial income derived from the Smoky Mountains' rapidly disappearing old growth forests.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 844.

<sup>33</sup> Martin, *Tourism*, 72-78; Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity 1880-1940* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> Martin, *Tourism*, 76-77.

Asheville's heritage as a health retreat led city leaders to discuss the potential of park tourism as early as 1899, but the effort stalled until the early 1910s, when the Appalachian National Park Association persuaded Congress to set aside Cherokee National Forest in Western North Carolina.<sup>35</sup> In 1913, North Carolinian Horace Kephart published *Our Southern Highlanders*. A conservationist and early advocate for the establishment of a national park in the Southern mountains, Kephart spent long periods of time exploring and documenting the region. Kephart's account was received as a compelling and accurate portrait of the region and its inhabitants, as opposed to the earlier local color pieces, which he criticized as overblown fiction. Nonetheless, his portrayal embraced and replicated the same caricatures of lily-white pioneers frozen in time by their environment.<sup>36</sup> A 1914 *Mississippi Historical Review* book review foreshadowed Kephart's long-lasting impact: "the historical student will have it forced upon him ... that life even today in those mountains is quite on the same plane as was true in the days of Boone and Sevier." The reviewer accurately predicted that Kephart's depiction would greatly influence "the future of the long-belated, quarter-civilized, royal-hearted people" of the region.<sup>37</sup> His work made him the historical authority within the park movement, which subsequently enabled his depiction of the people of the Southern mountains to prove remarkably durable in the historiography. Over fifty years after the publication of *Our Southern Highlanders*, historian Michael Frome gushed, "Kephart's nostrils were attuned to the smell" of the "Smoky Mountain wine [which] is reputed to awaken the dead and delight the angels."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 74-75.

<sup>36</sup> Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1913.)

<sup>37</sup> Archer B. Hulbert, review of *Our Southern Highlanders*, by Horace Kephart, *The Mississippi Historical Review* 1, no. 3 (December 1914): 470.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Frome, *Strangers in High Places: The Story of the Great Smoky Mountains* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1966), 147.



Although Kephart's version of the highlanders has proven most persistent, his was not the only imaginative work embraced as scholarly fact. In 1935, Muriel Earley Sheppard, the Northern wife of a mining engineer stationed near Asheville during the 1920s and 1930s, published *Cabins in the Laurel*. Bayard Wootten's carefully curated photographs of the region accompanied Sheppard's impressions of the mountain people. Sheppard's perceptions reflected the mythology and folklore she carried with her to her new mountain home, but her account, published by the University of North Carolina (UNC) Press, was received as a sociological study buttressed by photographic evidence. The photographs belied reality in predictable ways. The text showed log cabins against sweeping mountain backdrops even though the extractive logging of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries placed most mountain families within reach of a sawmill and insured that frame houses predominated in the region by the turn of the twentieth century. Such careful editing, however, failed to satisfy the New York ad agency in charge of promoting the book, and they pressed for photographic captions that further reinforced the popular image of mountaineers. William Terry Couch, Press Director at UNC Press, embraced Sheppard's depiction and Wootten's photographs, but insisted on some limits. For example, when the ad agency sought to append a caption that read, "Baptized with Corn Wiskey" [sic] to a photograph of George Queen, Couch pointed out that Queen was alive, awaiting publication of the book, and highly likely to sue the press in response to such a caption.<sup>39</sup> However, Couch understood that middle-class readers demanded peculiarity and, therefore, he followed the example of earlier publishers who sought authors willing "to ignore

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<sup>39</sup> Charles Alan Watkins, "Merchandising the Mountaineer: Photography, the Great Depression, and *The Cabins in the Laurel*," *Appalachian Journal*, vol. 12, no. 3. (Spring, 1985): 218.

the homogeneous features of American life” in mountain communities.<sup>40</sup> When local residents and scholars complained that the book misrepresented the region by depicting only the lowest-income levels as representative of the region, Couch replied that middle-class life in the mountains was so similar to life elsewhere that a work incorporating people of other economic levels would “have no interest as a mountain book.”<sup>41</sup> *Cabins in the Laurel*, on the other hand, made the *New Republic*’s list of the 100 best books of 1935 and was adopted by the Book of the Month Club.

While the mythology of the white mountaineer may seem strongly place dependent, the stereotypical Southern Appalachian, once created, proved so remarkably easy to transpose onto other highlands that Ozarks historian Brooks Blevins characterizes Appalachia as the mother region to “The Ozarks” as it developed in twentieth-century popular culture.<sup>42</sup> Local color author Harold Bell Wright first demonstrated the hillbilly’s easy mobility in his 1907 work of fiction *Shepherd of the Hills*, which placed Wright’s hillbillies in the Ozarks. Over the next ten years, Wright’s book fueled tourism into the Missouri mountains and “cemented the Ozark region’s identity in the American mind as identical to Southern Appalachia.”<sup>43</sup> During the mid-1930s, Charles Morrow Wilson’s *Backwoods America* further reinforced the transportability of Southern highlanders. *Backwoods America* was also set in the Ozarks and was published by UNC Press during the same period as *Cabins in the Laurel*. As a result, the press had access to Wootten’s photographs, taken exclusively in East Tennessee and Western North Carolina, and Couch regarded these pictures as artful illustrations that invoked the correct reader response to

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<sup>40</sup> Martin, *Tourism*, 47.

<sup>41</sup> Watkins, “Merchandising,” 220.

<sup>42</sup> Blevins, *Hill Folks*, 2; 19.

<sup>43</sup> Martin, *Tourism*, 52.

the text.<sup>44</sup> To Couch, the selling power of the photographs and the timelessness they conveyed were equally appropriate in the Appalachians or the Ozarks, regardless of the actual location. After all, by the 1930s the reading public understood the racial and economic subtext they should apply to images of highlanders in log cabins. When UNC Press published *Backwoods America*, Wooten's carefully curated Appalachian photographs illustrated Charles Morrow Wilson's account of the Ozarks. The interchangeability of the Appalachian Mountains and the Ozark Uplift erupted "in the Anglocentric days surrounding World War II" as white Americans found the same reassurance that "some sort of pure 'Anglo-Saxon' culture had been carefully preserved" in the Ozark highlands as well as the Appalachian Mountains.<sup>45</sup>

The depiction of the Southern mountains and mountaineers as universally white and isolated from the larger impulses of the South and the nation was not seriously challenged until the 1970s, when Appalachian historians began to question the stereotypes that had previously driven consideration of the area. Henry Shapiro's *Appalachia on Our Mind* demonstrated that the idea of Appalachia itself was a construct derived from fictional accounts and the benevolent responses they inspired. However, Shapiro maintained class focus on the mountaineer image without addressing the racial redemption that accompanied the characterization. Instead, he argued that missionaries set Appalachians apart "as a distinct people" and invoked images of log cabins and Abraham Lincoln simply to redeem the region of its poverty through emphasis on their loyalty during the Revolution and Civil War.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Watkins, "Merchandising," 218.

<sup>45</sup> Blevins, *Hill Folks*, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Henry Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 86.

As subsequent scholars looked critically at a region that had been largely defined by fiction, they uncovered an area that was neither as isolated nor as exceptional as stereotypes suggested. Ronald Eller found that, rather than being insulated from the industrial and economic trends of the nation, Appalachia was devastated by external capital investment in extractive industries, which reshaped the region during the first decades of the twentieth century. By the 1930s, the subsistence farming economy of the region had been transformed by low-wage lumber and mining operations that disrupted communities and destroyed the environment while funneling profits out of the region.<sup>47</sup> James Cobb proved that the Southern model for industrialization established in the 1880s specifically targeted low-wage industries. Southerners actively recruited industries and, in the interest of industrial expansion, fought forcefully to maintain low wages. As a result of this cycle, Southerners participated in creating the low-wage, resource and labor exploitive industries that “helped confirm the economic deficiencies they were supposed to remedy.”<sup>48</sup> Tom Lee found this general Southern pattern of economic development in community leaders’ efforts to recruit industry to the Appalachian Tri-Cities in Tennessee.<sup>49</sup> In re-examining the Appalachian region, historians extended the reach of regional forces to areas previously considered isolated islands and revealed the extent to which uncritical depictions had prevented the recognition of regional continuities.

The alleged timelessness that characterized highland agricultural practices in the American imagination drew on and enlarged a twentieth-century impulse to cast rural production

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<sup>47</sup> Ronald Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982).

<sup>48</sup> Cobb, *The Selling of the South*, 121.

<sup>49</sup> Tom Lee, *The Tennessee-Virginia Tri-Cities: Urbanization in Appalachia, 1900-1950* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005).

and life as fundamentally opposed to appropriate models of modernity and progress. Although the historiography of American agriculture emphasizes the 1930s as the first major agricultural transformation of the twentieth century, the fervor for efficiency and the industrial logic that lay behind that transformation predated that transition. Deborah Fitzgerald and James McWilliams identify the 1920s as the key decade during which experts, federal officials, and reformers adopted an ideology of systematic, scientific agricultural production derived from an industrial model of efficiency and control. Fitzgerald argues that the industrial agricultural ideal that came to dominate the agricultural landscape during the late twentieth century originated in a conceptual model that achieved dominance among experts and agribusiness representatives. Devotion to the image of efficient, industrial farming long predated the capacity to actually implement that vision, but proponents' faith in their vision of industrial production enabled it to survive despite failures. According to Fitzgerald, "individual technologies, particular pieces of legislation, new sorts of expertise" were all central components of twentieth-century agricultural transformation, but each of those individual pieces represented an effort to reify a cohesive vision of efficient, industrial production that was fully conceptualized by the 1920s.<sup>50</sup> McWilliams sees a similar process in his examination of American entomology. During the 1920s, economic entomologists rejected the longstanding agricultural assumption that farmers should anticipate some amount of loss to pests and take steps to manage this risk. Instead, economic entomologists classified any crop damage arising from pests as a loss of economic output arising from inefficient production and set their goal as the complete eradication of all

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<sup>50</sup> Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 4.

insect damage, despite the fact that effective chemicals that would enable them to do so did not yet exist.<sup>51</sup> According to both Fitzgerald and McWilliams, the vision, logic, and philosophy of industrial agricultural production predated most rural producers' abilities to actually translate those systems into efficient or even effective production. However, once experts and specialists adopted a vision of industrial agriculture, any practice that failed to conform was relegated to pejorative categories such as "pre-modern" or "inefficient" - even when the idealized industrial vision could not succeed in practice.

This tendency to artificially characterize all rural people as either modern or pre-modern proved very resilient in analyses of American agriculture, but historians Charles Postel and Connie Lester offer examinations that step beyond the false dichotomy of modernity/backwardness. In Postel's examination of Populism, he argues that farmers recognized the new economy of the late nineteenth century as a system that gave federal backing to capitalists and corporations at the expense of small producers like themselves. Railroads, bankers, and politicians portrayed modernity as a single, cohesive whole comprising a set of conditions that conveniently worked to their advantage. Populists did not seek to reject modernity but to alter the conditions under which the country modernized so that rural producers could claim a stake in the transforming economy. Populist reformers targeted railroads, banks, and the monetary system because they viewed these systems "as antiquated, premodern obstacles to progress."<sup>52</sup> Further, Postel argues that the historical tendency to depict racism within Populism as a breakdown of the Populist vision arises from a scholarly impulse to inaccurately

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<sup>51</sup> James McWilliams, *American Pests: The Losing War on Insects from Colonial Times to DDT* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>52</sup> Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 150.

characterize racism as antiquated when examining a period when many people regarded segregation as a profoundly modern reform. Lester points out that the agrarian reform impulse did not disappear following the national collapse of the Populist Party. Instead, agrarian activism fractured and transformed as rural people sought new methods to address their concerns. In some places, farmers organized new efforts around a particular crop or region, as occurred in the Black Patch tobacco region of Tennessee and Kentucky, where efforts to control prices erupted in night-riding and violence. In other places, farmers perceived the best possibility for stability and profitability in Progressive interest groups such as the Farmers' Union, which provided tangible benefits to members through a business-oriented approach to farming.<sup>53</sup> Both of these types of agricultural organization reflected the impulses of their time. Night-riding qualifies as "pre-modern" and the Farmers' Union as "modern" only when contemporary observers (or historians) accept "pre-modern" as a synonym for "bad" and "modern" as a synonym for "good." Ultimately, Postel and Lester argue that rural people's participation in some of the worst impulses of their time demonstrates, rather than disproves, farmers' full participation in the national trends of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

For early twentieth-century observers looking for a contrast to an idealized industrial agricultural aesthetic, the Southern highlands offered compelling visual evidence. As Blevins notes in regards to the Ozarks, for most highlanders "clinging to the tradition of animal and man power was a decision made of economic necessity, not from a stubborn disregard for modernity," but the imagery of these practices nonetheless affirmed a portrayal of highland farmers as

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<sup>53</sup> Connie Lester, *Up from the Mudsills of Hell: The Farmers' Alliance, Populism, and Progressive Agriculture in Tennessee, 1870-1915* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 249.

artifacts of the past.<sup>54</sup> Mountain urban centers and company towns provided a similar aesthetic message, as rural people migrating for wage opportunities brought along chickens and hogs or tilled yards in an effort to safeguard their new wage positions with supplementary rural production. Within an industrial aesthetic that equated modernity with visual legibility and the neat segregation of methods of production, people's efforts to protect their already fragile economic position in a cash poor economy transformed, instead, into evidence that highlanders were indeed living relics of a pre-modern America.

By stepping outside the mythology of Appalachian isolation, timelessness, and external denigration, scholars uncovered people and places striving, albeit often unsuccessfully, to harness modernity and achieve economic expansion. In this vein, Durwood Dunn's history of Cades Cove dispelled many of the enduring stereotypes established in *Our Southern Highlanders*. Rather than the "quarter-civilized" mountaineers depicted by Kephart, Dunn found that Cades Cove, like many Southern communities, suffered an economic collapse during the Civil War, but nonetheless remained connected to markets in Knoxville and Maryville, Tennessee. Although cove residents' resistance to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park became woven into park mythology as evidence of mountaineers' ornery nature and irrational opposition to modernization, Dunn argued that cove residents were not fighting against the park, but against a particular iteration of the park that barred them from reaping the economic benefits that would follow. Community leader John Oliver and other cove residents imagined that park boosters' assurances of increased income through tourism applied to themselves in equal measure to urban park supporters. Like those urban boosters, cove residents actively participated

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<sup>54</sup> Blevins, *Hill Folks*, 6.



in the effort to create a park that they believed would provide them with a new source of income. Their resistance arose only after it became clear that they would not share the economic benefits of park creation and that many residents would be removed from their lands. In place of Kephart's backwards isolates, Dunn found rural park boosters who embraced the possibilities of the new park industry and waged extended court battles against the national park only after it became clear that they were to be denied the benefits that would follow the scenic preservation of their own land.

In re-assessing the role that the people of the mountains played in creating mountain mythology and the region's tourist economy, Richard Starnes and C. Brenden Martin argue that tourism needs to be considered alongside industry and staple crop production as a primary economic focus of the New South. Starnes documents Asheville's long tradition as a health and tourist destination, which led residents to recognize the benefits of tourism to the local economy and cooperate with official projects in support of tourist development. This cooperation included local willingness to perpetuate stereotypes in order to match tourists' expectations of mountaineers. For Starnes, particularly irritating restrictions, such as the prohibition of farm machines on the hard-won Blue Ridge Parkway (which was lined with farms), indicated the depth of resident compliance.<sup>55</sup> Martin finds similar patterns in Tennessee, which lacked Asheville's resort reputation but eagerly joined the push for a national park during the 1920s and 1930s. As Tennessee's highway progressives advocated tourism as a "panacea to the region's economic deficiencies" local park supporters "dressed up like hillbillies and drove to Florida in a

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<sup>55</sup>Richard D. Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008).

caravan” in order to recruit potential vacationers.<sup>56</sup> As with other industries, mountain Southerners went to great lengths to recruit tourism and tourist dollars to their region and, in the process, they played an essential role in creating and perpetuating mountain caricatures for a national audience.

As Barbara Ellen Smith astutely pointed out, Appalachian Studies scholarship often omits racial analysis in areas without large numbers of people of color and persistently emphasizes the class denigration of the hillbilly image on the national stage.<sup>57</sup> However, understanding why Southern mountaineers proved so willing to costume themselves as hillbillies and sell their homes as bastions of ignorance and social retardation requires reversing this emphasis and instead considering class distinctions within Appalachia and national structures of racial power. The erasure of class within depictions of Appalachia that William Terry Couch regarded as so central to commanding the interest of national middle-class readers created a comfortable distance between the poorest whites, who most closely aligned with the stereotype, and middle-class mountain folk. As Tom Lee once jokingly observed, where the hillbillies actually lived became an ever-receding horizon. For all but the poorest mountain whites, the erasure of internal class divisions in national portrayals took the sting out of overblown portrayals of whiskey baptisms and infant snuff addicts; after all, those depictions were of other, poorer people, who surely lived farther up the mountain. Simultaneously, the image they adopted was explicitly and deliberately white and, therefore, valuable and redemptive in the eyes of whites outside the region.

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<sup>56</sup> Martin, *Tourism*, 108; 119.

<sup>57</sup> Smith, “De-Gradations,” 38.

Shapiro's assessment of Appalachian stereotypes downplayed the racial elements of the image by arguing that it was simply "almost inevitable that the language and concepts of 'social Darwinism' and popular genetic theory" would appear in the accounts that created the region, given the general "interest in the possibility of classifying populations on the basis of phenotype."<sup>58</sup> However, David Whisnant's examination of the White Top Folk Festival demonstrates that the connection between racial purity and regional stereotypes was far more laden than a simple habit of mind. Held between 1931-1939 in White Top, Virginia, the folk festival was largely a joint effort between Annabell Morris Buchanan and Richmond composer John Powell. The festival aimed to preserve traditional mountain folk music, which the organizers imagined as a uniquely American iteration of an Anglo-Saxon musical tradition stretching back to European origins.

For Powell, locating an unbroken Anglo-Saxon musical tradition filled a void in white supremacist ideology. As an organizing member of Richmond's Anglo-Saxon Club of America, he regarded the loss of Anglo-Saxon traditions, foreign immigration, and the "increase in the number of hybrids born to white women" as immediate threats that demanded social and legal action.<sup>59</sup> In 1924, he led the Anglo-Saxon Club's successful lobbying effort on behalf of the passage of Virginia's Racial Integrity Law, which made Virginia's existing antimiscegenation laws even stricter. Although Powell lobbied for a law that required everyone to register according to race, when the law passed, it limited the registration requirement to only those people who wanted to marry. Powell's own early compositions reflected jazz influences, but by

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<sup>58</sup> Shapiro, *Appalachia*, 85.

<sup>59</sup> David Whisnant, *All That Is Native & Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 240-241.

the 1930s he regarded racial and ethnic influences as unacceptable, particularly considering that a commensurate pure Anglo-Saxon musical tradition did not appear to exist in American music.

In the Southern mountains, Powell intended to find and preserve the untainted musical tradition that would fill this void; through the White Top Folk Festival he created the tradition he wanted to find. Organizers limited musical selections for the festival to songs they deemed appropriately traditional and untainted by other racial influences or the modern hillbilly music that had been popularized by radio programs during the 1920s. Although over three thousand black Appalachians lived in the county in which the folk festival was held and the area had a rich musical tradition among black residents, black performers were not permitted. During the festival's first years, contest participants misunderstood festival organizer's intentions, but they quickly learned that competing for the festival's prize money depended on adhering to a limited range of musical selections. In order to compete in the festival, local performers learned previously unknown songs that festival organizers deemed traditional.<sup>60</sup> As Powell learned, perpetuating the lily-white image of the region depended on the curated exclusion of the area's black population. The logic of William Frost's appeal for aid to the Southern mountains in 1899 held true decades later. The racial identity of the region's population was not incidental to the creation of Appalachia; it was the primary characteristic that gave the region national weight and meaning within the twentieth-century ideology of white supremacy.

Excellent historical work documenting African Americans' essential contributions to mountain life and culture have successfully dispelled the misconception of the Southern mountains as a preserve of whiteness. Sarah Gudger's Works Progress Administration (WPA)

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 244.

interview reveals that her enslavement in the mountains aligned closely with the dominant plantation experience, but making slavery profitable in the mountains required greater flexibility than in the plantation regions.<sup>61</sup> As John Inscoe found, slaveholding was essential to Western North Carolina's political economy. However, few slaveholders relied on enslaved people purely for agricultural production or identified themselves as primarily agricultural producers. Instead, both whites and blacks worked in a wide variety of mixed economic roles, with the majority of slaveholders identifying as doctors, professionals, or merchants while the people they enslaved worked in an array of productive activities including droving, railroad construction, and hired out service positions. Slavery tied the region socially and economically to the Southern plantation economy, but labor patterns for both blacks and whites were much more diverse in the mountains than on the plantations they supplied.<sup>62</sup> At the end of the Civil War, many black Appalachians remained in the area or migrated to the urban centers such as Asheville, which served as market, labor, and transportation centers for the mountain counties.

Asheville's population and regional significance expanded rapidly during the late nineteenth century, particularly with the arrival of railroad lines during the 1880s. From a tiny population of about 1,100 people in 1861, Asheville grew to a town of over 10,000 by 1890. As Asheville grew, African Americans in the surrounding region increasingly identified as service workers rather than farmers. However, Darin Waters' examination of Asheville's black community between 1865 and 1900 reveals that, even as Western North Carolina's black population moved toward urban job opportunities of service, rail, or construction work, their

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<sup>61</sup> Federal Writers' Project, *Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams – Hunter* (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress Project, Works Project Administration, 1941), 350-358, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn111/> (accessed May 24, 2017.)

<sup>62</sup> Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 69.

options remained limited and low paying. For Western North Carolina's black population, economic success depended on diverse economic pursuits within sharp racial constraints.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, Waters documents the centrality of black labor to the city's expansion and the success of the African American community in establishing regional social support networks despite political and economic oppression.

Although racial violence occurred less often in Appalachia than in the Deep South, historians have also rebutted the portrayal of the region as a place outside regional and national racial trends.<sup>64</sup> F. Fitzhugh Brundage argues that lynching and violence for social control conformed to the same patterns that prevailed across the South.<sup>65</sup> During the early decades of the twentieth century, whites responded violently to rapidly expanding black populations in Asheville, North Carolina and Knoxville, Tennessee. Until the mid-1920s, black and white residents shared a water fountain in Asheville's city square, but shortly after hosting a regional Ku Klux Klan convention in 1924, the city outlawed common water fountains. Blacks who were unaware of the change suffered savage beatings. The next year, widespread violence seemed likely but never occurred after a flurry of reports alleged that black men had assaulted white women. In response to the rising white anger, Asheville's black community argued that any such assaults originated with rail transients or tourists, not resident blacks.<sup>66</sup> In Knoxville, the population of African Americans more than quadrupled between 1870 and 1920. The new

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<sup>63</sup> Darin J. Waters, "Life Beneath the Veneer: The Black Community in Asheville, North Carolina from 1793 to 1900," (dissertation, UNC Chapel Hill, 2012), 75-78 <https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/record/uuid:3cb18a4b-3a75-419b-ba4b-d9f8a483af7f> (accessed May 24, 2017).

<sup>64</sup> c.f. Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South, 1877-1906*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.)

<sup>65</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Racial Violence, Lynchings, and Modernization in the Mountain South," in *Appalachians and Race*, ed. John Inscoe (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2001), 302-316.

<sup>66</sup> Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 85.

arrivals “competed with whites for the declining number of jobs in the economically troubled city while at the same time pressing against – and occasionally across – the boundaries of white working-class neighborhoods.”<sup>67</sup> Racial tensions erupted in a race riot in 1919. Although the official death toll was low, the *Chicago Defender* reported that as many as 1,500 blacks temporarily fled in the wake of attacks on black neighborhoods. Whites perpetuated stories of dumping the bodies of murdered African Americans in the Tennessee River. Despite city leaders’ insistence that the city was racially moderate, the Ku Klux Klan established a Klavern in 1921 that boasted 2,000 members two years later. In both Asheville and Knoxville, racial tensions simmered throughout the 1920s.<sup>68</sup> Despite the image of racelessness enacted by boosters hoping to attract tourists to the area, on both sides of the Smokys, the mountains of Western North Carolina and East Tennessee were entangled in the web of racial violence that blanketed the nation during the early twentieth century.

Scholars such as Inscoc, Waters, and Brundage have effectively reunited the mountains with the rest of the South and debunked the mythology of Appalachian racelessness, but geography and mythology insured that significant distinctions marked the highlands and the lowlands during the twentieth century. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Southern mountains faced daunting economic troubles. In a region with limited cropland and poor roads, rural producers had long relied on a mix of home agricultural production and off-farm work for survival. Amid the rapid agricultural transformations of the early twentieth century and the ongoing environmental consequences of extractive industries, mountain farmers found few

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<sup>67</sup> William Bruce Wheeler, *Knoxville, Tennessee: A Mountain City in the New South*, 2nd ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 34.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

options for improving their economic circumstances. The Farmers' Federation Cooperative sought to provide farmer members with a means to raise the profits of agricultural production. However, cooperation alone was insufficient to meet the economic demands of the early twentieth century, and the organization turned to Northern funders as a means to subsidize mountain agriculture.

Through the Farmers' Federation, mountain farmers wrapped themselves in the mythology of the mountain South in order to acquire the capital they needed to weather the challenges of changing agricultural production. Playing the hillbilly for Northern donors granted the members of the Farmers' Federation direct economic benefits, which the organization used to build capital-intensive agricultural facilities. The appeal they directed toward their supporters provided capital that helped address substantial economic threats and, although the cooperative's fundraising efforts rested solidly on a foundation of white supremacy, acquiring the capital support they sought required no overt act of violence or racism from any individual farmer member. In fact, the Federation and its members regularly interacted with, employed, and even occasionally supported the black community.

Like the religious and educational projects that developed across the Southern mountains, the Farmers' Federation emerged from the vision of a Northern religious transplant. When James and Elizabeth McClure arrived in the Western North Carolina mountains in 1916, they entered a rural community that seemed emblematic of the social and economic deficiencies that James' religious training in the social gospel had prepared him to reform. John Curtis Ager, a relative of James G. K. McClure, Jr., provides the only published account of the Farmers' Federation in his laudatory biography of McClure, *We Plow God's Fields*. A extensively researched but uncritical account of McClure's life, education, and work to create and maintain



the Farmers' Federation, Ager's biography nonetheless reveals the extent to which McClure was immersed in the Progressive reform impulses of the early twentieth century.<sup>69</sup> McClures's desire to make agriculture more efficient in order to increase production and create a vibrant rural culture through economic revitalization reflected the goals and assumptions of the Country Life Movement. However, where David Danbom found rural people resisting the denigrating implication that they needed urban outsiders to tell them how to do their jobs and live their lives, McClure seems to have worked with farmers who were eager to test new methods for achieving greater profits.<sup>70</sup> Although Ager credits the force of McClure's personality with breaking down stubborn mountaineer resistance to progress, it seems more likely that Western North Carolina farmers were simply eager to achieve increased profitability.

For rural producers looking for a way to reap expanded economic benefits, agricultural cooperatives offered a similar promise across the country during the 1920s. National fears that expanding urban populations would outpace food production, coupled with the emphasis on war production during World War I, produced federal legislation to support agricultural extension agents through the 1914 Smith Lever Act and agricultural education through the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act. When the post-war crisis struck farming, "cooperation became something of a mania."<sup>71</sup> Although buoyed by legislation in 1922 that exempted farm cooperatives from prosecution under anti-trust laws, most farm cooperatives that arose during this period failed rapidly. Those that survived typically aggregated a single, geographically restricted crop for

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<sup>69</sup> John Curtis Ager, *We Plow God's Fields: The Life of James G. K. McClure* (Boone: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1991), 1-137.

<sup>70</sup> David Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution: Urban America and the Industrialization of Agriculture, 1900-1930* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1979).

<sup>71</sup> David Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 191.

bulk production such as Sunkist oranges or Ocean Spray cranberries.<sup>72</sup> Despite the odds, the Farmers' Federation flourished and expanded during the 1920s, growing its membership, building new markets, and gradually expanding production in new areas such as poultry production.

Through the Farmers' Federation's gradually expanding network of agricultural warehouses, the cooperative offered hard-pressed farmers the opportunity to standardize production, pursue bulk marketing, and potentially assume a place within the emerging industrial agricultural order. Expanded services, including hatcheries and the eventual construction of an expensive poultry dressing plant in Asheville, enabled Federation members to test new agricultural opportunities without personally making expensive capital investments.<sup>73</sup> Farmers elsewhere in the upcountry South also transitioned to poultry production during the 1930s and 1940s, but Monica Gisolfi's examination of poultry production in northern Georgia reveals that Georgian farmers did so under far worse terms than the members of the Farmers' Federation. Gisolfi argues that, as the cotton market declined, small Georgia farmers turned to poultry production as an alternative cash crop, but found themselves dependent on credit from local merchants to buy chicks and feed. As farmers spent their capital investing in expanding chicken houses, furnishing merchants integrated every other aspect of the poultry industry. By the 1940s, the combination of farmers' dependence on merchant credit and vertical integration had produced a system in which poultry farmers signed contracts that assigned ownership of the birds to the creditor and paid the farmer based on how efficiently he converted feed and chicks into

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 191-192.

<sup>73</sup> Annie Fain Liden, "The Business of Taking the Egg and Turning it into the Baby Chick: The Farmers' Federation in Western North Carolina" (Honors Thesis, University of North Carolina at Asheville, 2003).

broilers.<sup>74</sup> The result was a system that sharply limited farmers' potential for profit, but left them responsible for the majority of the risks involved in production. Members of the Farmers' Federation, however, owned both the store where they acquired chicks and the plant where they were processed.

Farmers in Western North Carolina were not isolated from regional and national trends, but their method of agricultural production left them on the margins of a shifting agricultural economy that they were seemingly eager to join. In many respects, the farmers of Western North Carolina were no different from marginal farmers across the South, but the racial climate of the 1920s, and relatively new Appalachian racial stereotypes offered them an advantage that farmers elsewhere did not have. The creation of Appalachia as a reservoir of Anglo-Saxon purity, Southern enthusiasm for tourism as an alternative to industrial development, and the racially charged national climate of the 1920s came together to enable the Farmers' Federation to trade on its members' alleged racial purity as a means of recruiting capital in support of their agricultural efforts.

Direct personal connections tied McClure to wealthy families, the Progressive reform movement, and industrial agriculture, but he also understood how to move within and appeal to economic elites outside of his immediate circle. Beginning in 1927, he launched a separate fundraising organization to raise money in the North in support of the Farmers' Federation's efforts. The Federation's Educational Fund formed committees in major Northern cities to stage fundraising events for the amusement of wealthy donors. Fundraising dinners included

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<sup>74</sup> Monica Richmond Gisolfi, "From Crop Lien to Contract Farming: The Roots of Agribusiness in the American South," *Agricultural History*, 80, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 181.

demonstrations of mountain crafts, music, dancing, skits, and even livestock auctions, all selected to match Northern donors' image of Southern Appalachian mountaineers.<sup>75</sup>

Conditions in Western North Carolina were not unique, but, unlike other regions, white Appalachians could harness the hillbilly image in pursuit of their own vision of modernization. The cooperative and its farmer members deliberately traded on the national image of Appalachia as a reservoir of Anglo-Saxon purity in order to fund efforts to re-organize local production according to the expectations of modern, industrial agricultural production. The farmer members' ability to capitalize on to this benefit, however, depended on Asheville's African American population, who labored in the cooperative's poultry processing plant.

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<sup>75</sup> "The Forgotten Pioneer," 1928, James G. K. McClure Papers (hereafter cited as McClure Papers), Personal Papers, Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, The Ramsey Center Southern Appalachian Archives, Mars Hill University, Mars Hill, NC (hereafter cited as SAA).

## Chapter 2:

### Myths and the Market: Market Routes in the Southern Highlands

Geography played a critical role in the mythology of the mountain South, and some have argued that the mountains explain how a population of early Western European settlers remained racially isolated, and therefore racially pure. They further argue that this geographic isolation was responsible for the failure of mountain people to develop modern social and economic practices.<sup>1</sup> Within this narrative, the mountains' economic and social isolation accounted for both the region's problem and its potential value. Supposedly, the region's isolation and accompanying lack of market connections created a poor but racially pure population, who replicated their Revolutionary-era forefathers' economic and social practices. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, visitors and missionaries to the region found ample evidence of regional poverty and subsistence practices among farm families, who grew no significant cash crop and therefore struggled to stave off hunger and pay their taxes. To many observers and Appalachian missionaries, the economic and material conditions of poor mountaineers verified the region's isolation and timelessness. However, the fact is that the economic condition of the mountain South during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a product of mountain people's repeated involvement in national and international markets rather than a sign of their isolation. Geography set boundaries for profitable agricultural production, but within those boundaries, mountaineers developed markets and transportation

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<sup>1</sup> Although this argument originated in the fictional accounts examined in the preceding chapter and obtained academic legitimacy through works such as John C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1921), the portrayal persists in contemporary representations of the region. For examples, see Kevin D. Williamson, "The White Ghetto," *The New Republic*, January 9, 2014 and Alac MacGillis and ProPublica, "The Original Underclass," *The Atlantic*, September 2016.

routes that linked the region to national and international markets in livestock, crops, and resource extraction. Whites claimed the profits, but these mountain markets depended on the exploitation of black people and their labor. During the antebellum period, the Buncombe turnpike fed corn and hogs to lowland plantations. Following the Civil War, mountain producers turned to tobacco and a new rail connection as a replacement for slave provisions, but the tobacco market collapsed during the 1890s. Following this second market collapse, mountain farmers found no obvious replacement for tobacco, but wealthy investors rode the new rail line deep into the mountains, where they purchased enormous tracts for clear-cutting and resource extraction. These systems tied the region to national and international markets, exploited the labor of black Appalachians, and caused significant local economic strain when the economy collapsed.

As James McClure turned his attention to improving the conditions facing Western North Carolina farmers, he identified the lack of available markets as the primary difficulty facing mountain farmers. The region simply boasted no significant cash crop, which McClure interpreted as evidence that the region's geography had prevented farmers from joining and developing modern systems of agricultural production. Training Western North Carolina mountain farmers to adopt standardized systems of uniform production, therefore, became a central aspect of the Farmers' Federation's program and lamenting the region's geographic isolation and pre-modern production techniques became a central tenet of the organization's fundraising efforts. Actually, by the 1920s mountain farmers had remade their systems of production multiple times within the constraints of available market routes and national and international demand.

To acknowledge the connectedness of the mountain South to regional and national trends that predominated elsewhere need not discount the distinctions of geography, economy, and production that distinguished the mountains. In fact, the presumption of mutual exclusion arises largely from the false dichotomy of tradition and modernity that boosters of mountaineer mythology sought to promote and the fallacy of timelessness within depictions of the region as a reservoir of an earlier America. In both the early twentieth century and in many subsequent scholarly interpretations, “modernity” and “modernization” stood in for a package of ideas that demanded full conformity to a wide range of processes that included specialization, industrialized production, strict economic optimization, and even visual conformity to make large-scale production more easily legible.<sup>2</sup> Within this exceptionally narrow construct of “modernity,” the mountain South persistently seemed demonstrably unmodern. Thus, within the false dichotomy of modernity/tradition, the people of the mountains repeatedly provided evidence of their strict adherence to that which was not modern and was, therefore, presumably traditional. Whether social reformers sought to excise modern intrusions or introduce modern systems of production, they legitimated their goals within the region based on the mountain South’s failure to fully conform to either the package of ideas that represented “modernity” or that which represented “tradition.”

As John Powell learned during the creation of the White Top Folk Festival, locating the timeless traditionalism of the mountain South proved terribly frustrating. Just as black

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<sup>2</sup> Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory*; James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Inscoc. *Mountain Masters*; “Package of ideas” is borrowed from Virginia DeJohn Anderson, who used the terms to describe the property assumptions that English colonists attached to domestic animals: Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Appalachian performers, banjos, mail order guitars, and jazz rhythms had to be excised in order for mountain music to conform to Powell's racialized ideal, the ostensibly traditional mountain South was laced through with intrusions from the outside world. For example, musicians in Cades Cove performed English ballads, but these songs were played alongside popular new songs learned in Knoxville and ballads that local musicians had "written to commemorate some notable event which had only recently occurred, such as the sinking of the *Titanic*."<sup>3</sup>

No less than people of any time and place, the old and the new wove together in the lives of mountain people and, although new products or methods of production could prove disruptive, they could also enrich or support established practices and relationships. Without the artificial expectations of timelessness, mountain people incorporated dulcimers, banjos, and mail-order guitars into musical practices that brought families, communities, and churches together. For mountain people, "culture was not defined by its component parts, but rather by the collective use of these ingredients."<sup>4</sup> Mountain people did not always succeed in selecting the methods, tools, and pathways that provided positive outcomes for themselves or their region. However, specialists, experts, and later interpreters consistently misunderstood the relationship between the people of the mountains and technological, material, and organizational change. Where specialists saw a unified whole that required people to adopt every component piece in order to achieve idealized "modernity," mountain people saw an array of individual options which they could select or reject depending on need and circumstance.

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<sup>3</sup> Dunn, *Cades Cove*, 147.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.



Mountain people were not isolated from the times in which they lived, but geography, steep terrain, and poor roads posed significant challenges to market participation. In response, people identified products that could be profitably raised on mountain farms and built market routes that linked far-flung mountaineers to trading centers and ports. Although navigable water routes existed within the mountains, many farmers needed to move goods overland across long distances. These farmers needed products that could be raised in the varied conditions available on their farms and that were sufficiently high-value to offset the cost of transportation over long distances. Established market routes within the region solved these problems by providing farmers with a reliable means to transport goods across difficult terrain and known access to buyers. The principal market routes within the mountains shifted during the nineteenth century from slave provisions sent along turnpikes to cash crops shipped via rail, but both bound mountain farmers to national and international markets.

Geography set the boundaries of possible methods of production in the mountains, insuring important distinctions between the highlands and the lowlands, but during the antebellum period, the distinct production of the highlands tied the mountains to lowland plantation slavery. The opening of the Buncombe Turnpike in 1828 provided a reliable route to transport livestock from the mountains to markets in the south and east. Drovers led hundreds of thousands of hogs, turkey, and cattle along the turnpike, which ran through Asheville before continuing to markets such as those in Athens, Georgia or Charleston, South Carolina. Farmers who raised large quantities of livestock might opt to drive the stock themselves, pay an independent drover, or enslave a drover. Regardless of the organization of these large herds, the annual migration provided smaller farmers with a reliable yearly market for their own livestock. Drovers picked up animals along the way as smaller producers herded their own stock to sell to

drovers along the route, at drover's stations, or in Asheville. The turnpike also provided a reliable market in corn, as hogs move slowly and owners or drovers absorbed the costs of weight lost along the route. In the years leading up to the Civil War, mountain corn fed between 140,000 and 160,000 animals valued between two and three million dollars. Only the livestock, not the corn, were ultimately tallied in markets outside of the mountains, but lucrative markets in corn and hogs were directly linked to the lowland plantations that ultimately purchased mountain livestock. Furthermore, mountain residents were cognizant of the linkage between their own products and the cotton economy. Farmers knew that cotton set the price for their livestock, with a pound of pork selling for half the current price of a pound of cotton.<sup>5</sup>

The mountain market in corn reveals a critical distinction between the safety-first agricultural practices that predominated in the mountain South and the subsistence farming practices associated with the region in popular understanding. Subsistence farming suggests non-market production or, at most, limited engagement in a local exchange economy. The idea of small yeoman producing enough to insure familial survival and no more aligns with the characterization of mountain people as mythologically self-sufficient frontiersmen. Safety-first farming, however, gives priority to mixed production for home use while simultaneously producing for market. Large-scale livestock producers were clearly and directly engaged in regional and international cotton markets. Smaller, safety-first farmers produced corn for their own use and grew a significant excess to sell to the drovers along the turnpike. Farmers were not simply selling corn that they happened to produce over their own needs; they were deliberately producing for a known market. However, they did so by producing a crop that they used as well

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<sup>5</sup> Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 52; "Community and Commerce."

as sold, prioritizing their own need for that crop over market income, and engaging in a market inside the mountains rather than at the ports of Charleston or Savannah. Because these small farmers' primary market activity occurred at the local level and only registered in larger markets in terms of livestock poundage rather than direct product sales, observers could overlook the extent to which even relatively small farmers were linked to international economic trends. Participants in this market, however, understood the connections between the local market in corn, the regional market in livestock, and the international cotton economy. The farmers who lined up wagonloads of corn for sale at drover's stations along the turnpike understood that corn prices fluctuated based on the anticipated livestock drive which, in turn, depended on the anticipated cotton market.<sup>6</sup>

Safety-first farming meant that mountain producers were neither purely isolated from the market nor completely dependent on it. Mountain farmers, or their livestock, could and did eat their crops during years of unanticipated low production or market collapses, but drovers and their suppliers depended on local production. When an uncharacteristically cold spring hurt feed production in Buncombe County in the mid-1850s, farmers kept their corn for their own stock, and Asheville suppliers were forced to replace the local supply they anticipated with corn from McDowell and Rutherford Counties.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout the Southern highlands, geography, personal preferences, and shifting circumstances created a diverse regional economy in which people were involved in the market economy to varying degrees at any given time. Although the National Park Service memorializes

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<sup>6</sup> Inscoc, *Mountain Masters*, 51.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

Cades Cove as an example of an isolated mountain community, cove residents became isolated during the decades following the Civil War, when the collapse of the regional economy disrupted established trade routes and Unionist cove residents ran pro-Confederate families out of the community. Even during this period of relative isolation, however, “cove people continued to sell their crops in Knoxville, receive visitors from other sections of the country, and remain informed of major state, national, and international events ... Thus the cove people could develop their own body of shared traditions and experiences while at the same time they remained cognizant of changes and broad trends in the larger American culture.”<sup>8</sup> As is the case in many communities, “almost every mountain county had certain ‘hermits’ whose eccentric lifestyles, misanthropic characters, criminal pasts, or frustrated love-lives had driven them into seclusion,” but during the nineteenth century, people experienced true social and economic isolation in the Southern mountains by choice rather than lack of options.<sup>9</sup> This myth of “isolation” is critical to the creation of the Southern Appalachian mountains as a distinct region, but not reflective of the circumstances of the region in the decades prior to the Civil War. The tendency to focus on isolation within the region overlooks connectedness within the region, which created distinctive experiences within the mountains. Before the creation of the Buncombe Turnpike, waterways dictated market routes. Although cities and towns along the Holston and Watauga River Valleys on the western side of the mountains enjoyed relatively clear waterways that linked merchants and townsfolk to markets as far away as Philadelphia, settlers along smaller tributaries often found travel to market towns arduous and sometimes impossible.

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<sup>8</sup> Dunn, *Cades Cove*, 145.

<sup>9</sup> Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 54.

Although the principle market routes shifted over time, the same pattern endured throughout the nineteenth century, with distance between farm and market route determining the degree of relative market isolation of households rather than the overall geography of the region. As a result, “the region may be more isolated in one dimension (such as political structure) and more integrated in others (such as economy or transportation). Therefore, the region may be both isolated and integrated during the same time period.”<sup>10</sup>

Alongside the market linkages that tied the region to lowland plantations, the Southern mountains developed systems of racial labor exploitation in line with the economies of the highlands. Across Southern Appalachia, African Americans constituted approximately 14 percent of the population between 1860 and 1900. Although enslaved people were not exclusively employed in agriculture in the mountains, they were essential workers in the economy of mixed rural production. Enslaved people worked in droving, mining, and rail construction across the Southern highlands. The drover’s stations built along the Buncombe Turnpike provided the foundation for the mountain tourist economy that would blossom in Asheville following the arrival of the railroad in 1880. Entrepreneur James Patton invested the income of his drover’s station near Asheville to build a tourist resort at Warm Springs, on the Buncombe Turnpike near the Tennessee line. Patton’s elegant hotel hosted drovers and their herds alongside wealthy tourists drawn by the comforts of natural hot springs and cool mountain air. At this and other such antebellum mountain resorts, African Americans worked in service,

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<sup>10</sup> David Hsiung, *Two Worlds in the Tennessee Mountains: Exploring the Origins of Appalachia Stereotypes* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 4.

providing visitors to the South with the personal service and attention that slaveholders routinely commanded.<sup>11</sup>

In the years following the Civil War, the Southern mountains experienced economic collapse, internal conflicts, and an unprecedented degree of relative isolation from the larger region. The Buncombe Turnpike, the market in corn and hogs, and the exploitation of enslaved labor along the route developed to provision enslaved workers in the cotton South. With emancipation, that market collapsed. In some mountain communities, including Cades Cove in Tennessee and Ashe County in North Carolina, local Unionists and Confederates continued fighting a local war long after the war's official end.<sup>12</sup> In addition, by the 1860s the region also faced national markets increasingly tied to rail lines and rail connections rather than waterways and turnpikes. In the western foothills of the Smoky Mountains, Knoxville, Tennessee had acquired a rail connection in 1855. North Carolina subsidized the construction of a railroad into the western mountains during the 1860s, but in 1863 the line stalled in the foothills sixty miles east of Asheville at Morganton and advanced no farther into the mountains. In the 1870s, the rail terminuses in Knoxville and Morganton reshaped market routes as people drove wagonloads of goods in for shipment and unloaded carloads of merchandise for transport into the mountains.

Whereas antebellum roadways, turnpikes, and water routes tied the mountains directly to major markets, the rail transportation lines pushed important market centers into the foothills, where geography posed fewer challenges to rail construction. The North Carolina General Assembly chartered the Western North Carolina Railroad in 1854, but line construction ceased

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<sup>11</sup> Inscoc, *Mountain Masters*, 47-48.

<sup>12</sup> Dunn, *Cades Cove*; Crawford, *Ashe County's Civil War*.

five and a half miles outside of Morganton when the Civil War broke out. Construction resumed after the Civil War, and the Western North Carolina rail line crept slowly toward Asheville throughout the late 1860s before stalling at Old Fort, where the eastern continental divide posed a steep, solid rock obstacle. Prior to the war, the Buncombe Turnpike moved livestock and goods from across the region over a transportation route that stretched across the mountains. As such, the turnpike connected market centers within the mountains and spread demand for goods and services to provision the drovers along the routes between those market towns, making it possible for many far-flung farmers to join the market all along the turnpike during the annual droves. In the 1860s and 1870s, many mountain producers moved their primary market activities out of the mountains by transporting their goods to the rail centers in the western foothills. Meanwhile, goods destined for the eastern markets previously served by the turnpike were shipped by cart to the rail terminus at Old Fort, where merchandise and supplies were unloaded onto carts for transport into Asheville.<sup>13</sup>

Western North Carolinians and Asheville's boosters understood that a rail line was necessary to rebuild market routes within the region, but the mythical whiteness of the Southern mountains obscures the essential role of exploited black laborers in building that rail line. Asheville's population and economy expanded dramatically during the closing decades of the nineteenth century; every success that Asheville could claim in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries derived from the exploitative labor of black convicts. Despite Asheville

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<sup>13</sup> Homer Carson III, "Penal Reform and Construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad, 1875 – 1892," in *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, 11, no. ½ (spring/fall 2005), 209-210; For a close examination of the political and economic fights that slowed the construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad, see: Steven E. Nash, *Reconstruction's Ragged Edge: The Politics of Postwar Life in the Southern Mountains* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), Chapter 6: "The Beginning of a 'New Mountain South.'"

businessmen's consistent appeals for a rail line, certain impediments developed: political corruption, railroad mismanagement, and the sheer stone face of the eastern divide held the railroad at Old Fort until 1879. When the railroad company went bankrupt in 1872, the North Carolina General Assembly moved to acquire the railroad and assume control of the completion of the western rail line. In 1875, the General Assembly authorized the purchase of the railroad and affirmed state commitment to provide as many convict laborers as necessary to complete the project. Prior to the Civil War, counties in North Carolina were largely responsible for prisoners. Counties pushed for increased state control of incarceration following the passage of an 1866 law requiring counties to "establish houses of correction that many of them felt they could not afford" and the sharp increase of prisoners that followed the use of criminalization as a way to control African Americans.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the state and county systems of incarceration and exploitation of prisoner labor were enmeshed in North Carolina. Between 1875 and 1892, a period when 85 percent of North Carolina's prison population was African American, at least 3,644 of the 7,852 people (46.4 percent) entering North Carolina's penitentiary system labored on the Western North Carolina Railroad. In 1877, Governor Zebulon Vance called for "the entire available force of the penitentiary be sent to the railroad" during his inaugural address.<sup>15</sup> Although the total number of deaths is uncertain, official records tally at least 461 deaths among the laborers who blasted out the seven tunnels that ultimately pushed the Western North Carolina Railroad through the center of the Smokies and into Asheville.<sup>16</sup> In the words of local historian

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew Mancini, *One Dies, Get Another: Convict Leasing in the American South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 201; Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 30-35; 219.

<sup>15</sup> Carson, "Penal Reform," 210.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 205; Nan Chase, *Asheville: A History* (Jefferson, N.C.:McFarland & Co., 2007), 28-29.



Stephen Little, “There have got to be graves galore out there. Only God knows where they are.”<sup>17</sup>

Those unmarked rail workers’ graves underscore the centrality of African American labor, life, and death in a region where demographics are too often held up in justification of a whitened narrative. When the slave economy that the mountain South provisioned collapsed and new economic aspirations demanded a rail line, white North Carolinians built their hopes on the corpses of forced black labor. Male and female convict laborers populated work camps tasked with using nitroglycerin to blast tunnels through the solid rock of Ridgecrest at Old Fort.<sup>18</sup> As Scott Reynolds Nelson details in his examination of the legend of John Henry, nitroglycerin blasts created poisonous clouds of dust and silica that shredded the lungs and choked workers. Experienced miners refused to enter the deadly tunnels. In late 1868, when Virginia’s state assembly granted Collis P. Huntington “a state-funded system of railroads that stretched from Richmond to the Allegheny Mountains,” the only provision attached was that Huntington must complete the Chesapeake & Ohio line (C&O) across the Appalachian Mountains to the Ohio River within six years. Huntington’s new method of planting nitroglycerin charges, rather than gunpowder, in bore holes significantly increased the efficiency of blasting through solid rock. However, when Huntington used this process in the construction of the Central Pacific rail line during the Civil War, he found that only deeply indebted and heavily exploited Chinese workers could be compelled to do the work. Irish rail workers simply refused. Huntington knew that blasting the C&O to the Ohio within the time allotted required an exploitable labor force that

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<sup>17</sup> Mike Conley, “New Book Tells History of ‘Railroad that Couldn’t Be Built,” *McDowell News*, December 23, 2010 [https://www.mcdowellnews.com/news/new-book-tells-history-of-railroad-that-couldn-t-be/article\\_234bfb0b-fb9d-5b30-b25e-f78e8f5a3b2c.html](https://www.mcdowellnews.com/news/new-book-tells-history-of-railroad-that-couldn-t-be/article_234bfb0b-fb9d-5b30-b25e-f78e8f5a3b2c.html) (accessed on March 21, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> Carson, “Penal Reform,” 205 and 212.

could be driven into dangerous tunnels where free laborers would not go. Virginia's convict laborers provided Huntington with that labor force, and among the hundreds of bodies shipped back for anonymous burial at the Virginia state penitentiary, Nelson located the real man behind the John Henry legend.<sup>19</sup> Virginia's convict lease terms demanded a \$100 payment for any convict who was not returned dead or alive to the Virginia penitentiary, a provision that aimed not to protect the lives of convicts but to punish companies that permitted leased convicts to escape. The workers who died blasting through the Virginia mountains were drawn from prisoners convicted of minor offenses from across the state and, to insure that their deaths cost C&O nothing, the company shipped their bodies to Richmond for anonymous burial on the grounds outside the Virginia State Penitentiary, inadvertently creating an archive of the dead in the process.<sup>20</sup>

As Stephen Little's assessment suggests, North Carolina had no provision demanding the return of dead convicts, which allowed the Western North Carolina railroad to simply bury dead workers along the tracks and continue blasting. Official records indicate that deaths among convict laborers working on the Western North Carolina rail line averaged between 9 and 12 percent of workers, which was not significantly higher than death rates among all North Carolina convict laborers. Numerous factors call into question the validity of the numbers provided in official documents, including reported deaths not included in the official reports, local observers who directly contradict official reports, and officials' persistent efforts to rationalize increased death rates among mountain railroad workers in their official reports and requests for additional

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<sup>19</sup> Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man: The Untold Story of an American Legend* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 66-72.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-92.

workers. For example, official reports consistently claimed that convicts received adequate housing and sufficiently nutritional food. However, a local writer who visited the camp described prisoners being tightly boxed in railroad cars without access to either light or air. If the prisoners were receiving the rations that officials reported, they would not have suffered from the summer scurvy outbreaks that swept through work camps. Camp overseers, however, attributed it to the severe cold of the previous winter and the inability of black laborers to remain healthy in a mountain climate.<sup>21</sup>

The total number of black North Carolinians who died building the Western North Carolina Railroad will likely never be certain, but convict leasing was critical to North Carolina rail and road construction during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. From the 1870s through the end of the century, “North Carolina concentrated more of its convict labor” in rail “than any other state.”<sup>22</sup> In 1877, the year nitroglycerin blasting began at Old Fort, North Carolina transferred 200 convict laborers from Asheville and Spartanburg to the Western North Carolina Railroad.<sup>23</sup> From 1877 “until 1891, 65 percent, on yearly average, of North Carolina’s prisoners would be laboring as railroad construction hands.”<sup>24</sup> These men, women, and children built the Western North Carolina Railroad in inhumane and seemingly impossible conditions, nineteen of them starved in an 1885 winter snowstorm before supplies arrived, but the tunnels they built were regarded as a technological marvel. In order to build those tunnels as quickly as possible, they were forced to drag a seventeen-ton locomotive over the crest of the Appalachian Mountains with nothing but ropes and their own strength so that a locomotive could work tunnel

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<sup>21</sup> Carson, “Penal Reform,” 215-216.

<sup>22</sup> Mancini, *One Dies*, 207.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 207; Chase, *Asheville*, 29.

<sup>24</sup> Mancini, *One Dies*, 207.

construction on both sides of the mountain simultaneously.<sup>25</sup> The designer of the route, Major James W. Wilson, continues to receive credit as the “engineering genius” who planned a rail line through the Eastern Continental Divide, but it was the unnamed black convict laborers whose labor and loss of life delivered Asheville its long-awaited rail connection in 1880.<sup>26</sup>

Asheville was an important location along the Buncombe Turnpike during the early nineteenth century, but it was one of many. The rail connection made it the region’s primary market town. However, as careful historical analyses of areas across the Southern mountains demonstrate, market centers and “mountain towns exerted an influence far in excess of their size.”<sup>27</sup> Mountain life consisted of both towns and the hinterlands they served and the two remained mutually dependent. Once urban market towns and market activities are incorporated into consideration of the Southern mountains, Asheville looks far more representative of overall regional forces.

In the effort to identify a new market to replace slave provisioning, bright tobacco emerged as a cash crop that could be grown in the region and that offered a reliable market. Boosters in Asheville even went so far as to argue that tobacco was particularly well-suited to the region and vibrant tobacco markets would speed the rail line’s advance through the pass at Old Fort. Samuel Shelton, a bright tobacco booster from Virginia, planted a three-acre crop outside of Asheville in 1869 and, year later, opened the first tobacco warehouse in the city. Mountain tobacco first took root in Buncombe County, but the profitable new cash crop quickly spread throughout Western North Carolina counties and across the state line into Northeast Tennessee.

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<sup>25</sup> Carson, “Penal Reform,” 212; Conley, “New Book.”

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Inscoc, *Mountain Masters*, 36.

Western North Carolina would never outpace Eastern North Carolina in tobacco production, but mountain tobacco nonetheless became an important mountain cash crop. As the first city to open mountain tobacco warehouses, Asheville dominated the tobacco trade throughout the 1870s and 1880s. By 1883, Asheville's four tobacco warehouses sold "1.5 million pounds sold at an average price of \$11.75 per hundred" to buyers from Lynchburg, Winston, and Durham.<sup>28</sup> Even at the height of bright tobacco production, Western North Carolina produced just over 12 percent of North Carolina's tobacco crop with the balance originating in the east of the state, where falling cotton prices led farmers to abandon cotton in favor of tobacco. Nonetheless, Asheville city boosters and Western North Carolina farmers regarded bright tobacco as the foundation on which the city would build its New South future.

For farmers, the decision to adopt bright tobacco required a great deal more commitment than simply introducing a new crop into the existing system of diversified crop production. Tobacco of any variety is a notoriously labor-intensive crop, requiring liberal applications of newly available chemical fertilizer and a minimum of 13 months from plot preparation to curing in order to bring a crop to market. Even in ideal conditions, early frosts threatened mountain farmers with crop failure. Bright tobacco production, therefore, depended on access to fertilizer, labor, and land.

For farm families, growing bright tobacco required altering labor and cultural practices in service to the new crop. Tobacco cultivation demanded a readjustment of seasonal tasks; family dedication to raising, tending, and curing the crop; and participation in a new tobacco culture

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<sup>28</sup> Tom Lee, "Southern Appalachia's Nineteenth-Century Bright Tobacco Boom: Industrialization, Urbanization, and the Culture of Tobacco," in *Agricultural History* 88, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 180.

centered on the yearly tobacco warehouse sales. The preparation of new crop beds, careful selection of plants from seedlings, constant hoeing, hand removal of hornworms, and long curing process demanded that every member of the family participate in the cultivation of the tobacco crop. Tobacco culture drew rural producers and urban marketers together at yearly auctions, where buyers publicly bid for individual crop lots. Along with the crop, a farmer's reputation was on display at the tobacco auctions - but the labor intensity of tobacco production meant that quality tobacco depended on the labor of wives and children as well. Few black farmers grew tobacco but the tobacco industry relied on the labor of black men and women in other kinds of tobacco related employment, and these jobs were delineated by race and gender. In freedom, mountain African Americans conformed to a pattern common across the South as they gravitated to urban centers in the mountains or the surrounding foothills in search of family members, friends, and opportunities for labor. The urban, mixed labor nature of mountain enslavement, however, meant that African Americans as a percentage of the population did not increase between 1860 and 1870. In 1860, African Americans constituted slightly over 16 percent of Buncombe County's overall population. In 1861, around 1,100 people lived in Asheville, but by 1890 the population reached 10,000 as profits from a tobacco market drawn from the surrounding area and tourism drew people and money into the previously small mountain town. Asheville's tobacco factories employed a mixed labor force, but nonetheless reflected the gendered and racialized positions that were common in tobacco factories elsewhere. At the A. D. Reynolds factory in Asheville, several African American men held positions as "skilled workers or tobacconists," while African American women held eight of the nine positions as

stemmers, a low-wage position that paid fifty cents a day for nine to ten-hour days.<sup>29</sup> Factory owners promoted their own paternalism and “civic-minded Southerners praised them for cultivating lady-like attainments in the young women who worked in their factories and for employing African Americans who would have, in the thinking of the New South, otherwise been idle.”<sup>30</sup> Despite urban enthusiasm for these jobs for African American men and women, white tobacco workers were “held in low esteem” and hastened to escape the dust, nicotine, and low wages of tobacco factories.<sup>31</sup> White mountain men risked shame from working in the factories that processed tobacco, but they could earn both cash and community recognition at the annual tobacco auctions from a fine crop.

Tobacco production exploded in the late nineteenth century, growing from 23,000 pounds in 1860 to over a million pounds in 1890, but the promising new market collapsed by the turn of the century. Initially, tobacco seemed likely to bear out agricultural boosters’ promises. By the end of the 1880s, over 80 percent of Western North Carolina’s tobacco crop was marketed through Asheville. Over the course of the 1890s, national and international market forces destroyed Asheville’s booming new crop. The pressures of credit, production, and cash flow that precipitated the agrarian revolt throughout the South also hit farmers in the tobacco region of Western North Carolina. Alongside the tobacco boom, Asheville experienced a construction boom following the arrival of the rail line in 1880. Construction and the expansion of the existing hospitality industry offered labor opportunities that drew African American workers from throughout the region to Asheville as the city grew to accommodate new markets and rail

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

tourists. The region's major banks hastened to profit from the region's boom in land and agriculture, fueling local real estate speculation that crashed spectacularly with the panic of 1893. Within four years, three of the four banks failed that funded Asheville and its new tobacco markets. With only one bank remaining in operation, dealers and farmers found it virtually impossible to obtain credit. In addition to the financial collapse of the 1890s, mountain tobacco farmers faced rising competition from eastern North Carolina farmers, who turned to tobacco when cotton fell below the price of production, and Middle Tennessee and Kentucky farmers, who were raising increasing quantities of Burley tobacco. Finally, James Buchanan Duke organized the American Tobacco Company in 1890, creating a tobacco trust that exerted control over 90 percent of the market for cigarette tobacco. With producers and sellers unable to acquire credit, competition rising in both the east and west, and market prices subject to the manipulation of a powerful trust, Asheville's tobacco markets collapsed. During the 1899-1900 season, Buncombe County's acreage in tobacco fell by 61.4 percent and decreases were even larger in other counties that had turned to tobacco production during the 1870s and 1880s. Asheville's last tobacco warehouse closed its doors in 1897. By 1910, the county that had commanded the market in mountain bright tobacco had only 44 acres planted in tobacco.<sup>32</sup>

Like their white neighbors, black farmers in the region grew a combination of corn, wheat, buckwheat, potatoes, beans, and sweet potatoes. In addition, four of the twenty black farm owners in Buncombe County grew tobacco during the boom. Since these farmers owned their land outright, their participation in the tobacco market indicates willing market involvement rather than production of a market crop at the behest of a landlord. Black farm owners

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 194-198.



represented about 19 percent of the people identified as black farmers or farm labor in the 1880 census. Increasingly, however, black Western North Carolinians identified with urban, rather than rural, production. Asheville's rapid growth spurred demand for construction workers and road workers, two sectors where enslaved workers had provided essential labor during the antebellum period and that remained open to blacks after the war. When the railroad made Asheville highly accessible to wealthy tourists, African Americans moved into service positions in the expanding health tourism industry. By 1886, more than 35 percent of the African Americans who lived in and around Asheville worked in service. The lure of wage labor drew black Western North Carolinians into Asheville, but social and political threats likely increased the appeal of urban black community.<sup>33</sup>

As was the case in much of the non-plantation South, Western North Carolina whites were divided in their sympathy for the Union or the Confederacy, but the Unionism of the mountains was the racist "white man's country" Unionism of Andrew Johnson, not the Radical Republicanism of Thaddeus Stevens. Western North Carolinians resented the region's small population of free blacks prior to the war, petitioned the North Carolina Assembly to legislate mandatory colonization of freed slaves in 1865, and locked the black population into a narrow subset of predominately low wage positions throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Allowable jobs included work that had previously been performed by enslaved people (as was the case for construction and service), a select few professional service positions such as barbering, and professional services to the black community that were not otherwise commanded by whites. Consequently, most people did not find significant economic opportunities in the

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<sup>33</sup> Waters, "Life Beneath the Veneer," 67-69; 76-80.

racialized wage labor available in mountain towns. They did, however, find a supportive community through which they created social networks and institutions that drew together African Americans across the region. During the political and social upheavals of the late nineteenth century, the insulation of these networks likely offered significant appeal.<sup>34</sup>

Allegiance to the Republican Party remained strong in the western section of North Carolina throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but mountain Republicans sought to distance themselves from the class and racial political uprisings that threatened white Democratic control at the state level. With larger concentrations of African Americans in the eastern portion of the state, political fusion worked in North Carolina politics – at least briefly. In 1894 and 1896 Populists and Republicans unseated the Democratic majority in North Carolina state politics and returned local elections to home rule rather than state appointment, allowing African Americans to gain political positions in many eastern counties with large black populations. However, fusion politics died in North Carolina in the ashes of Wilmington, when an organized mob of thousands of angry whites overthrew the democratically elected local government, slaughtered an unknown number of black people, and expelled their legally elected political opponents. The coup in Wilmington marked the height of violence galvanized by the Democratic Party's White Supremacy campaign, which accused white voters of sacrificing the supposed sanctity of white womanhood through their votes for Republicans or Populists. Democratic leaders seeded false stories of white women raped by black men whose sudden elevation to political power emboldened them to claim sexual access to white women by force. Through the White Supremacy Campaign, the Democratic Party sought to regain control of

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 176-177.

North Carolina politics through rhetorical attacks that sought to “license people to do evil in the name of good.”<sup>35</sup> Through this campaign, “the Populist white man who had valued his farm above his race discovered with a shock that he had opened the gates of hell for some distant white woman.” In November of 1898, the organized white mob in Wilmington acted on racial resentments and political rhetoric that encouraged violence and inaugurated the political disenfranchisement of black North Carolinians. With the Democratic Party returned to power, the state general assembly formalized disenfranchisement through amended voter registration laws, poll taxes, and literacy tests.<sup>36</sup>

Mountain Republicans whitened their political party decades prior to the fall of Wilmington’s elected government. In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, Republicans in the region embraced black voters while refusing to permit them representation or voice within the party. Mountain blacks, whose population was insufficiently large to pose a significant political threat to the Democratic Party on their own, appeared to acquiesce to this arrangement. Meanwhile, conservative Democrats in the western mountains resented any degree of black political participation and praised the Ku Klux Klan as a reasonable counterbalance to the Union League that organized in Asheville. Elsewhere in North Carolina, however, demographic strength enabled new black voters to demand full inclusion within the Republican Party, which led to the frequent election of blacks to local offices in eastern North Carolina between 1867 and 1900. At the same time, the national Republican Party advanced legislation such as the Ku Klux Klan bill in 1871 and the Civil Rights Bill in 1875. The North Carolina Republican Party needed

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<sup>35</sup> Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 92.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-126.

eastern black voters to compete in statewide elections, but mountain Republicans needed to recruit white voters to win local elections. African Americans commanded no significant voting influence anywhere in Western North Carolina. Even in local Asheville elections, the black community lived in scattered homes interspersed throughout the city's election wards, making it impossible for black voters to exert significant influence in any single voting district. For white mountain Republicans, both the full political incorporation of blacks in eastern North Carolina and national Republican policies represented political radicalism that undermined their goals. Republican percentages in regional elections began a steady decline in the 1870s as mountain voters moved to the Democratic Party and Republican leaders met the discomfort of voters by embracing a lily-white Republicanism that emphasized local development.<sup>37</sup>

With few allies and little political leverage, leaders in Asheville's black community promoted apolitical organizations aimed at fostering community, social, and economic uplift rather than political incorporation. Even before statewide efforts disenfranchised black voters, Asheville's black residents had little power in local politics. With African Americans scattered throughout the city, they were unable to leverage their collective voting power into a viable political challenge. Instead, Asheville's black community focused on building social and cultural institutions that acted as community centers for African Americans throughout the region, including churches, schools, and the Young Men's Institute (YMI). Together these people and institutions built a black mountain community that insured that Asheville exerted an influence beyond its size in the lives of mountain blacks as well as whites. While the core economic and social strength of that community resided in the black business district south of

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<sup>37</sup> Waters, "Life Beneath the Veneer," 193-206.

Asheville's central square, the support and influence that community offered radiated far beyond the confines of the city and provided a cultural center for black Appalachians spread throughout the region.<sup>38</sup>

Even as the region's African American population increasingly gravitated to the city, many people retained connections to rural family members and rural production. Although Asheville's black population identified as urban, Asheville's black elites sponsored a black Agricultural Fair for decades during the early twentieth century, consistently lobbied for agricultural programs, and responded enthusiastically to the few agricultural education programs that were opened to the black community. In the mixed economy of the Southern mountains, many families, regardless of race, depended on a combination of wage labor and rural production. However, urban interest in rural production suggests that supplemental rural income was even more important for hard-pressed black families. Nonetheless, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, all mountaineers, regardless of race, faced mountains that were changing amid a constellation of environmental pressures.<sup>39</sup>

Rural producers in the mountains had long relied on mixed rural production that joined livestock and crops with mountain products ranging from tannin bark to chestnuts. Mountain farms typically divided land use according to topography, with croplands nestled in fertile valleys and over half of total lands maintained in woodlands on the slopes above. Although

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> L. Dale Thrash, Annual Report of County Agent, Buncombe County, December 1, 1926 through December 1, 1927, Cooperative Extension Service. Annual Reports (UA102.002), Special Collections at North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina (hereafter cited as NCSU); Mattie M. Hill, North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service Report of Home Demonstration Work for Negroes, Buncombe County, February 15, 1933 through November 30, 1933, Cooperative Extension Service. Annual Reports (UA102.002), NCSU; Mattie M. Hill, Annual Report, Home Demonstration Work, Buncombe County, 1934, Cooperative Extension Service. Annual Reports (UA102.002), NCSU <https://d.lib.ncsu.edu/collections/> (accessed on March 21, 2019).

property owners claimed the exclusive right to harvest timber from those wooded slopes, most communities recognized common access to graze, forage, and wild game. The combination of the survival of the open range in Western North Carolina counties throughout the nineteenth century and the wealth of natural forage that mature chestnut trees provided to free-ranging stock meant that even the landless poor were often able to achieve economic subsistence, if not prosperity, from mountain resources. Although the poorest mountain residents were most reliant on the open range and access to common resources, support for open range laws and shared access to game and forage was widespread among mountain people, who regarded these rights as existing outside the boundaries of private property and understood access to natural resources as offering poorer people legitimate means to improve their circumstances. In Western North Carolina, the forest commons enabled people at various social and economic levels to engage in market production to some degree. From offering one of the few ways unwed mothers could successfully support children to fattening the vast herds that enriched the largest livestock producers of the nineteenth century, the mountains themselves provided a conduit through which mountain people engaged in regional and national markets.<sup>40</sup>

When Western North Carolina's tobacco boom ended, mountain farmers were left with both the debts accrued to facilitate tobacco production and significant environmental damage caused by tobacco cultivation. Agricultural boosters promoted bright tobacco as the perfect crop for mountain slopes, but the crop and curing practices for bright tobacco damaged land throughout the region. Unlike the Burley tobacco grown farther to the west, which could be air

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<sup>40</sup> Kathy Newfont, *Blue Ridge Commons: Environmental Activism and Forest History in Western North Carolina*, (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2012), 32-35.

cured, bright tobacco required long exposure to constant heat in order to obtain the desired color and flavor. The furnaces and flues necessary to produce the best bright tobacco were expensive and fuel-hungry. As farmers cleared mountain slopes to plant new tobacco beds and felled trees to feed the curing furnaces, they left steep mountain slopes denuded of nutrients and deprived of the canopy that protected the topsoil from erosion. Some large landowners could afford to plant tobacco on a plot for only a single season before clearing new land and seeding old tobacco beds in grass, but most small mountain farmers could not. When the tobacco market collapsed, many farmers were in debt for equipment that was now useless and owned farming land that was less able to sustain agricultural production than it had been prior to tobacco cultivation.<sup>41</sup>

By the 1890s, rail penetration into the Southern mountains had also opened the region's vast forest commons to logging operations. The first train arrived in Asheville at about the same time that industrial logging operations depleted the timber resources of the northeast. Technological advances pushed railways into the mountains and thus enabled the large-scale extraction of timber and mineral resources, while the region's rising reputation as a health resort for the wealthy brought potential investors into contact with a relatively untouched wealth of old growth forest. Millionaires arrived in the region for their health and returned with the funds to purchase vast tracts of mountain land for tannin production, mineral extraction, or logging. Following a health trip to Transylvania County, Joseph Silverstein organized both a lumber and tanning company and leased several thousand acres of woodland. Pennsylvanian tourists purchased 50,000 acres of timberland in Buncombe County in 1895. Visitors from Ohio and Michigan later followed suit. Both George Vanderbilt and Edwin Wiley (E. W.) Grove initially

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<sup>41</sup> Lee, "Tobacco Boom," 191-197.

came to Asheville for their health and stayed to invest heavily in land, construction, and their own palatial estates.<sup>42</sup> The logging industry dramatically altered land ownership patterns in Western North Carolina. During the timber boom, “over 75 percent of the land [that would eventually become part of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park] came under the control of thirteen corporations, and one timber company alone owned over a third of the total acreage.”<sup>43</sup> The capitalists who followed the railways into the region offered mountain farmers land prices that seemed generous given the agricultural situation and the promise of employment in the burgeoning lumber industry. However, like the tobacco boom, the timber boom proved rapid and environmentally devastating. The technological advances that enabled logging to reach deep into the mountains also permitted destructive clear-cutting to proceed at an alarming rate. Skidders drug downed trees across mountain slopes to waiting railcars, destroying trees too small for harvest, ripping up the topsoil, and leaving bare earth in their wake. By 1909, the lumber industry was already in decline in the Southern mountains. In less than thirty years, the old growth canopy had been destroyed across large swaths of the southern mountains and land ownership patterns had transformed dramatically.

The remaining canopy suffered a further blow in 1917, when the chestnut blight appeared in trees around Mount Mitchell. By 1925, one in five chestnut trees in Buncombe County suffered from blight. Trees across the region crashed to the ground throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Mountain people hastened to harvest the valuable trees before they disappeared entirely, and even created a specialized market for worm-eaten chestnut wood. The chestnuts, however,

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<sup>42</sup> Eller, *Miners*, 101-102.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi.



disappeared. With the enormous trees gone, mountain people lost a free, high-calorie source of livestock feed; a critical component of the remaining old growth tree canopy; and a profitable form of supplemental income.<sup>44</sup>

When James and Elizabeth McClure arrived at Hickory Nut Gap during the mid-1910s, they found an agricultural region facing economic struggles with no discernable market for a cash crop. To McClure, the region reflected the national narrative of the Southern mountains as a timeless and pre-industrial region where no such market had penetrated, but “the traditional image of the preindustrial mountain farm” that McClure encountered “was in fact a product of modernization.”<sup>45</sup> His training in the social gospel suggested that the social and economic shortcomings he saw in the region could be resolved through the creation of modern, national markets for agricultural produce. However, he had not moved to a timeless region that had no prior exposure to national and international market forces. Instead, he had arrived in a region where markets for livestock, tobacco, and timber had boomed and collapsed in the space of less than 60 years and left dramatic environmental damage in their wake. The tobacco boom in Western North Carolina lasted scarcely three decades, but in that time, mountain families reordered their farms, systems of family labor, and market connections to accommodate the new tobacco culture. In the process, they participated in a new system of hierarchical production that placed white male farmers at the apex of both earning and recognition while consigning black women to the least desirable and most often overlooked jobs. The white mountain farmers who McClure met when he moved to Western North Carolina had not only already encountered

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<sup>44</sup> Newfont, *Blueridge Commons*, 38-40.

<sup>45</sup> Eller, *Miners*, xx.

modern, national systems of agricultural marketing, they had also learned how quickly previously promising markets could evaporate and leave debt, denuded land, and economic devastation in the void of market collapse. Furthermore, white mountaineers had already practiced how to order agricultural, industrial, and tourist economic opportunities along easily legible racial and gender lines that conformed to the expectations of a modern region on the rise.

### **Chapter 3:**

#### **Transforming the Mountains: Farmers' Federation Programs**

When the Farmers' Federation launched its newsletter in mid-1920, the leadership advocated a broad network of Progressive reforms for hard-pressed mountain farmers. Despite struggling to realize many of its initial visions, the fledging cooperative proved remarkably persistent, surviving and serving Western North Carolina farmers until the 1960s. Having emerged during the post-World War I scramble to find ways to survive the agricultural depression, the cooperative persisted long after other such efforts faded, developing new commercial products during the Great Depression, and building cooperative-owned processing facilities that enabled farmers to shift production toward produce and poultry during the 1940s. Although the Federation served a small region, the cooperative attempted to mitigate challenges that poor farmers faced in non-plantation regions across the South during the early twentieth century. The organization achieved uncommon success at mediating the demands of increasingly capital-intensive, scientific farming and the needs of cash-poor small farmers facing a variety of market conditions. Western North Carolina farm families understood market demands and the cultural transformations that could accompany shifting production; the region experienced both during the nineteenth century tobacco boom. Contrary to the regional stereotype, the cooperative's members were enthusiastic, not resistant, to adopting improved methods of agricultural production, but doing so remained difficult. In accommodating the needs and limitations of farm families, the Farmers' Federation became a component of its members' lives and labor practices, helping to alleviate new cultural and economic stresses that reached deep within family structures and reshaped day-to-day activities. The Farmers' Federation served as a bridge between some Western North Carolina farmers and the emerging

market demands of industrial agriculture, but in reshaping production according to the demands of bulk marketing, the cooperative transformed the gendering of rural work along with allocations of time and labor.

The presumed deficiency of rural production and efforts to reform farming according to a modern vision of agricultural production runs throughout the historiography of agriculture. For much of the twentieth century, national attitudes concerning agricultural production regarded farming as a problem to be solved rather than as a resource to be developed.<sup>1</sup> However, even within this framework, Southern Appalachia represented a particularly vexing problem. Despite a national fascination with the region's poverty throughout the twentieth century, the Southern mountains remained stubbornly impoverished. Capital poor and geographically unsuited to large-scale monocrop production, the Southern Appalachian Mountains did not align with the national model of agricultural development. By the time Lyndon Johnson used the region as a photo opportunity to promote his War on Poverty, the region's location outside the influences of national trends seemed solidly established.<sup>2</sup>

For the farmers who joined the Farmers' Federation, the cooperative offered the possibility of benefiting from expanded market production while maintaining a degree of protection from the main rush of economic currents that characterized the early twentieth century. Farmers in Western North Carolina lived on the margins of national agricultural transformations that held both promise and danger. Although new fertilizers lured farmers in other areas of the upcountry South to expand market production through cotton during the

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<sup>1</sup> Danbom, *Born*, 197.

<sup>2</sup> Randall Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 455.

decades following the Civil War, this was not the case in most of North Carolina's highlands.<sup>3</sup> Nationwide, farmers saw farm income double in the years leading up to World War I, but farmers in Western North Carolina remained on the economic fringes during this golden age of agriculture.<sup>4</sup> During the first years of the 1920s, as farmers who had belatedly invested in land and machinery to expand production encountered the painful consequences of over-extended credit, farmers in Western North Carolina remained less invested in market production than other farmers in the state. With no dominant cash crop replacing the nineteenth century collapse of tobacco, mountain farmers practiced a form of safety-first, mixed agricultural production that meant they produced more of what they used and less for market than farmers in other regions of the state.<sup>5</sup> Unlike in the coastal region or the Piedmont, virtually every mountain farmer produced potatoes, eggs, and chickens, but they produced these items in relatively small quantities and sold any overage in Asheville, the area's primary urban market.<sup>6</sup> These products, however, represented excess home production that was selected for reliable yield rather than marketable bulk produce.<sup>7</sup>

In the lives of Western North Carolina farmers, mixed production led to mixed economic consequences. The farmers who suffered the most from the agricultural depression of the 1920s were those who attempted to expand production on medium-sized farms through credit, but who

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<sup>3</sup> Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> Danbom, *Born*, 161.

<sup>5</sup> Carl C. Taylor and C.C. Zimmerman, *Economic and Social Conditions of North Carolina Farmers* ([Raleigh?]: State Board of Agriculture, 1922), 19, <https://archive.org/details/economicsocialco00nort> (accessed March 21, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25; A. M. Moser, ed. *Buncombe County: Economic and Social* (Asheville: The Central Bank and Trust Co., 1923), 47, <https://archive.org/details/buncombecountyec00univ> (accessed March 21, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Moser, *Buncombe County*, 47.

did not achieve sufficient economies of scale to remain profitable when agricultural prices fell.<sup>8</sup> With market production retaining secondary importance on mountain farms, farm families in Western North Carolina were less buffeted by the market fluctuations of the 1910s and 1920s. However, they were also more limited in their ability to take advantage of the high prices of the war years, which allowed farmers elsewhere to improve farm operations and invest in amenities that eased the isolation and hard work of rural life.<sup>9</sup> From its inception, the Farmers' Federation promoted itself as an organization of progressive, scientific farmers who were interested in acquiring those benefits through modern production and marketing tactics.

President of the Farmers' Federation James G. K. McClure, Jr. arrived in Western North Carolina after spending years traveling, studying at elite institutions in the U.S. and Europe, and developing a devotion to Progressive reform and the Social Gospel. The son of Dr. James McClure, beloved pastor of the Lake Forest Presbyterian Church in a wealthy suburb of Chicago, young James was raised to every social advantage that his parents and his father's devoted congregation could provide. That congregation included wealthy parishioner Nettie McCormick, widow of Cyrus McCormick, who saw to it that James' teenage years mirrored elite Chicago's vision of how to properly launch a boy into manhood at the turn of the twentieth century. He earned the nickname "Chicago Jim" at the Texas ranch where he broke broncos and rounded cattle before following his father to Yale and into the Skull and Bones society. He performed poorly at college, but made many friends. At Yale, he saw Theodore Roosevelt inaugurated and imagined serving as a missionary to China while he developed his dedication to the Social

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<sup>8</sup> Danbom, *Born*, 196.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

Gospel. By the time he graduated, his father was president of McCormick Theological Seminary, but Mrs. McCormick sent him to study in Scotland and Germany before he returned to Chicago and graduated from McCormick Seminary in 1910. After graduation, James suffered from a powerful malaise. For three years, he managed Mrs. McCormick's summer estate and toured the world on her money, while quoting the Social Gospel and railing against unjust wealth distribution. He served as a minister for ten months in a small mining boomtown before retreating into retirement and diligently pursuing a cure that consisted primarily of rest and a great deal of golf.<sup>10</sup>

In 1916, James married Elizabeth Cramer, the daughter of a Chicago businessman, and they headed to Asheville for an indefinite gypsy honeymoon that would not tax James's ongoing recovery. When the couple explained their plan to get "a little place somewhere in the mountains of Carolina," their friends and family were not surprised.<sup>11</sup> James' illness and his proposed treatment fit nicely with Asheville's reputation as a curative retreat for members of the upper class. He needed rest and, together, the couple had \$8,000 in yearly income. Asheville, meanwhile, offered the dual attractions of the elegant Grove Park Inn and the adventure of rejecting extravagance in favor of a simple, rustic existence. Elizabeth's friend Beth gleefully wrote, "I can't imagine anything more fun than your slum existence."<sup>12</sup> When the newlyweds rented a cottage near Asheville, Elizabeth became fast friends with Frances Herbert, an elite Virginian who had also retreated to North Carolina with her husband. To others of their class, their plan to roam the mountains, car camp, and look for the perfect long-term retreat, seemed

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<sup>10</sup> Ager, *We Plow*, 1-137.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

reasonable and romantic. The McClures found an old house at Hickory Nut Gap in the Fairview community of Buncombe County, moved in, and never left.<sup>13</sup>

Their life in Fairview was not typical of Western North Carolina farm families; they had a great deal of help on the farm. To put the old apple orchard in order, they hired James Davidson, an orchard specialist with a college degree in agriculture and experience as superintendent of two state test farms. After returning from World War I, Davidson, took over farm management entirely, including hiring and managing the laborers who lived on and farmed the McClure's property.<sup>14</sup> John and Esther Shorter, a local African American couple, agreed to "do all the work about the house and in the garden" for \$8 a week, a sum that Elizabeth found shockingly low. The position at Hickory Nut Gap kept John Shorter close to home. The Shorter family had farmed in Fairview since at least the 1880s. His Uncle Bill and Aunt Amanda Shorter owned their farm outright as early as 1900 and, for the next forty years, their home served as an anchor point for both the Shorter family and their cousins, the Egertons. When they began working for the McClures, John and Esther maintained their own farm. However, Esther died in 1923 and John and his second wife, Matilda, ceased farming their own land in favor of wage work on the McClure farm.<sup>15</sup> Until the losses of the Great Depression forced the family to make

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 195; 283.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 202; Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920: Buncombe County, NC, Fairview, District 0025, Population Schedule, National Archives, Washington DC (hereafter cited as NARA-DC) (Ancestry.com, 1920 United States Federal Census [database on-line] Provo, UT), 16. James Huntley and his wife Belle likely rented from the McClures, as their family matches Elizabeth's description of the new farm family in Ager, *We Plow*, 202.

<sup>15</sup> John Shorter, Certificate of Death, North Carolina State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics. *North Carolina Death Certificates*. Microfilm S.123. Rolls 19-242, 280, 313-682, 1040-1297. North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina; Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Buncombe County, NC, Population Schedule, NARA-DC (Ancestry.com, 1880 United States Federal Census [database on-line] Provo, UT); Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Buncombe County, NC, Population Schedule, NARA-DC (Ancestry.com, 1900 United States Federal Census [database on-line] Provo, UT); Fourteenth Census, 1920; Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Buncombe County, NC, Population Schedule, NARA-DC (Ancestry.com, 1930 United States Federal Census [database on-line] Provo, UT); Sixteenth Census of the United



reductions, Elizabeth also oversaw an upstairs maid, a downstairs maid, a cook, and a nurse for the children.<sup>16</sup> Eva Toms, an African American woman who the McClures hired as a live-in servant, had roots in the Fairview community that may have stretched even farther back than the Shorter family. Like many of the African Americans living near Asheville in the 1920s (including John Shorter's Egerton cousins) Eva Toms' last name linked her to a slaveholding family from Rutherford County.<sup>17</sup>

As the McClures assembled the farm's workforce, they also set to work on renovations of the house and farm. Elizabeth, an artist, oversaw the remodeling and painting with a firm eye to maintaining the historic air of an old stagecoach stop, which had first attracted the McClures to Hickory Nut Gap. Writing to her mother, Elizabeth bragged, "We've built the tenant house so that it looks as old as the rest of the place. The roof has a fine sway."<sup>18</sup> The main house remodel, however, boasted a flat gray roof, a new steam heat system, a new water system, and wood paneled ivory interiors. Family members funded further expansions and improvements to the house. The picturesque life that James and Elizabeth built at Hickory Nut Gap was far from hardscrabble. During 1917, James stayed in bed until after lunch. Nonetheless, as James began to take an interest in the farming community where they lived, he increasingly saw mountain farming as the perfect opportunity to put his faith in Progressive reform and social uplift into action.<sup>19</sup>

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States, 1940: Buncombe County, NC, Population Schedule, NARA-DC (Ancestry.com, 1940 United States Federal Census [database on-line] Provo, UT).

<sup>16</sup> Ager, *We Plow*, 197; Liden, "The Business," 10; Ager, *We Plow*, 196; 202; 277.

<sup>17</sup> Fourteenth Census, 1920; Sixth Census of the United States, 1840: Population Schedule, NARA-DC (Ancestry.com, 1840 United States Federal Census [database on-line] Provo, UT).

<sup>18</sup> Ager, *We Plow*, 196.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

James McClure imagined his rural retreat in terms of both James Davidson's training in scientific management and his own impulse toward Progressive social reform. In April of 1918, McClure summoned Davidson and Shorter and outlined a plan to share farm profits with its primary employees. The plan was abandoned when no farm profits materialized.<sup>20</sup> Two year later, McClure tried again. In 1920, he gathered a small group of neighbors and sold them on a plan to raise farm profits through cooperative buying and marketing. Once James McClure turned his attention to reforming mountain agriculture, he was relentless. His charisma, connections, and dedication proved phenomenal assets. To fellow Appalachian reformer Olive Dame Campbell, successful agricultural cooperation in the mountains required a leader with characteristics that mountain farmers were not trained or able to offer, such as financial independence, business acumen, and idealism. In Campbell's assessment, McClure's background was critical to the organization's success.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the personal qualities that Campbell admired, James and Elizabeth remained part of elite society while they lived full time on a working farm in Fairview, North Carolina. With between twelve and fifteen millionaires living in Asheville by the turn of the twentieth century, the city's reputation as a curative retreat gave the McClures ready access to elite society.<sup>22</sup>

James, who reveled in crossing the social divide between North Carolina's mountain farmers and America's elites, found the situation ideal. When Mrs. Vanderbilt invited them to Biltmore for a dance, James bragged to his sister, but complained that he felt uncomfortable

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<sup>20</sup> Ager, *We Plow*, 210.

<sup>21</sup> Olive Dame Campbell, "Agricultural Cooperation in the Southern Highlands of the United States," *World Agriculture* 2, no. 4. (August 1922), 190, Google Books (accessed March 21, 2019).

<sup>22</sup> Nan Chase, *Asheville: A History* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2007), 98.

away from his farmhands.<sup>23</sup> Mrs. Vanderbilt, however, was quite interested in farming, and McClure recruited her as a personal and financial supporter of the Farmers' Federation. Edwin Grove, who built the Grove Park Inn after coming to Asheville for his own health, made generous cash contributions and worked to build business relationships for the Federation. James drew on familial connections to recruit supporters from around the country as well. Louis Swift took him through the Swift stockyards in Chicago. He also toured Mount Hope Farm, a Progressive experiment farm where Elizabeth's cousin, E. Parmalee Prentice, was funding research into increasing farm yields through selective stockbreeding.<sup>24</sup> His sister Harriet married an executive at Quaker Oats, which provided the Farmers' Federation with livestock feed and agricultural experts to lecture on modern farming practices.<sup>25</sup> Once McClure embraced improving agriculture in the mountains of Western North Carolina as his calling, he recruited support for his mission in North Carolina and across the nation.

From the beginning, McClure envisioned the cooperative as an organization of Progressive farmers pursuing economic advancement in order to achieve social reforms ranging from household modernization to school reform. The Farmers' Federation aimed "to see more money turned into life. Turn it into water systems, into schools, into churches, or telephones, or farmers' warehouses ... We want it as a means to a nobler and fuller life for ourselves and especially for our children."<sup>26</sup> Achieving social reform through economics, however, required that farmers adopt new methods. As the first issue of the cooperative's newsletter explained, farming was a business and "the farmer, if he would succeed, must apply the same business

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<sup>23</sup> Ager, *We Plow*, 282.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 224-5; "N.H. Farmers Bus Trip to Williamstown," *The Telegraph* (Nassau), October 8, 1930, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Ager, *We Plow*, 259.

<sup>26</sup> "Greatest Need of Day Money! Money," *Asheville Citizen*, November 22, 1920, 12, col. 3.

principles that are necessary in any other line of work.”<sup>27</sup> As a result, the Federation aligned with state agricultural agencies in encouraging farmers to adopt the methods being promoted by agricultural extension agents and demonstrated at the state agricultural test farm.<sup>28</sup>

The *Asheville Citizen*'s editors quickly adopted this vision of agricultural cooperation as a regional economic engine and invited McClure and J. M. Gray, Western North Carolina District Farm Agent, to write a series of articles outlining the philosophy and potential benefits of cooperation.<sup>29</sup> This shared vision of agricultural reform became even more tightly knit in 1921, when the new agricultural extension agent for Buncombe County, C. C. Proffitt, also became the editor of the *Farmers' Federation News* and the chairman of the Federation's Marketing Committee.<sup>30</sup> “The Farmers' Federation stands square behind my work,” Proffitt reported. Through his association with the Federation, he held “a constructive agricultural program before the organization, which gives special emphasis to standardization and quality.”<sup>31</sup> To present this program to as many farmers as possible, Proffitt and McClure canvassed the county throughout 1921, explaining the Farmers' Federation's goals and recruiting new shareholders. At the beginning of 1921, the Farmers' Federation claimed almost 150 members drawn primarily from McClure's neighboring farmers in Fairview, but also including members such as James G. K. McClure III, who was scarcely two years old.<sup>32</sup> By the end of 1921, the organization had 650

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<sup>27</sup> Untitled, *Fairview Farmer's News Sheet*, July 15, 1920, 2.

<sup>28</sup> “How About 1922?,” *Fairview Farmer's News Sheet*, July 15, 1920, 2; “Watch Prof. Clapp,” *The Farmers' Federation News*, November 15, 1920, 4.

<sup>29</sup> “Articles on Farm Bureaus Next Week,” *Asheville Citizen*, November 29, 1920, 9, col. 6.

<sup>30</sup> “Big Things,” *The Farmers' Federation News*, March 15, 1921, 1; untitled, *The Farmers' Federation News*, March 15, 1921, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Carl C. Proffitt, “Report of the Work of the County Agent, Buncombe County, Calendar Year 1921,” 5, Cooperative Extension Service, Annual Reports (UA102.002), NCSU.

<sup>32</sup> “The Roll Call. Are You There?,” *Farmers' Federation News Sheet*, November 15, 1920, 2; “Meeting at Haw Creek,” *Asheville Citizen*, March 8, 1921, 11; “Farmers' Federation Meets at Swannanoa,” *Asheville Citizen*,

members from across the county and was pursuing standardization projects targeting Irish potatoes, hogs, and poultry.<sup>33</sup> Originally named The Fairview Farmers' Federation, the expanded membership prompted the organization to drop "Fairview" from its name.<sup>34</sup>

In the vision of the Farmers' Federation leadership and state agricultural agencies, standardized production and establishing new markets were the keys to advancing agriculture in Western North Carolina. The Farmers' Federation saw modern agricultural marketing as essential to increasing profits. Both the Federation's leadership and C. C. Proffitt saw standardization as necessary to "enable farmers to produce products of quality and uniformity which the Federation will have no trouble in marketing to advantage."<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, McClure and Proffitt saw agricultural progress as predicated on farm production that farmers in the region did not practice. With no single cash crop in the region around Asheville, both the Farmers' Federation and state agricultural agents saw standardization as the first step in increasing farm productivity and income. No individual farmer could produce in bulk quantities, but if farmers restricted production to standard breeds or varieties, then the Federation could gather and grade produce at the warehouse that the organization was building and market the accumulated goods. The diversity problem applied to virtually every marketable farm product, including cabbage, chickens, hogs, and apples, but the variation in potatoes was so irksome that the cooperative

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March 28, 1921, 9; "Leicester to Organize a Community Fair," *Asheville Citizen*, May 7, 1921, 3; "To Hold Federation Meeting at Chandler," *Asheville Citizen*, July 26, 1921, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Proffitt, Annual Report, 1921, 6-7; 7; 24; 32.

<sup>34</sup> Untitled, *The Farmers' Federation News*, March 21, 1921, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Proffitt, Annual Report, 1921, 5.

formed a potato committee to investigate varieties before the first newsletter was even published.<sup>36</sup>

In mid-1920, the Farmers' Federation leadership urged readers to bring a peck of potatoes to the upcoming fair so the cooperative's leaders could begin to solve the vexing persistence of nonstandard crops sold in the Asheville market. Freight shipments from Northern producers would not arrive until September, which left local farmers supplying the market during Asheville's lucrative summer tourist season. Batches of nonstandard produce lowered prices, the editors contended, but farmers could command the market if they would only offer uniform crops.<sup>37</sup> The transformation of diverse country products into local, uniform agricultural commodities suited to bulk marketing allowed some farmers to compete with producers shipping to Asheville by rail – a prospect many farmers found appealing during the 1920s.

From the perspective of business-minded scientific farming, there were excellent reasons to make seed potatoes the opening wedge in the push for standardization. Unlike other garden produce, potatoes would store well while supplies accumulated. Since virtually everyone already grew potatoes, farmers just needed to modify the variety of potatoes they grew to facilitate bulk marketing. Even more importantly, eastern North Carolina farmers purchased large quantities of seed potatoes via rail from Northern growers. The state agricultural experiment farms had determined that seed potatoes grown in Western North Carolina performed at least as well as seed potatoes freighted in from Northern growers. Consequently, state scientists and agricultural extension agents regarded the establishment of Irish seed potato production in the western

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<sup>36</sup> "The Federation Potato," *Fairview Farmer's News Sheet*, July 15, 1920, 1; "Will One Egg Do for the Federation?," *Farmers' Federation News*, November 15, 1920, 1; "Get a Red Hog," *Farmers' Federation News*, March 15, 1921, 3; "Market Notes," *Farmers' Federation News*, February 1925, 9.

<sup>37</sup> "Our Community Fair" and "The Federation Potato," *Fairview Farmer's News Sheet*, July 15, 1920, 1.

counties as a way to keep agricultural expenditures within the state while establishing a new cash crop in the mountain region. “Irish seed potatoes can be made one of the leading money crops of this section,” Proffitt declared, “and it is our plan to produce them this coming year in much larger quantities than ever before, and through the Federation, grade and pack some in a way that they will satisfy the demands of the best markets.”<sup>38</sup> In the logic of business-based, scientific farming, the emphasis on potatoes made a great deal of sense, but the idea ran into difficulty in practice.<sup>39</sup>

After repeatedly emphasizing the benefits of uniformity, the Federation assured members that “a standardized product of any kind sells on the market” and announced the committee’s selection of the Green Mountain or Rural New Yorker for the main potato crop and the Irish Cobbler for the early potato crop.<sup>40</sup> The Federation set an initial goal of securing signed assurances from twenty-five farmers that they would grow a minimum of one acre of Irish potatoes; over fifty farmers signed up.<sup>41</sup> However, Federation bulk sales of potatoes brought lower prices than individual farmers could get in the Asheville market and increased freight costs cut into already meager profits. With the Federation’s warehouse still under construction, the organization had no way to store potatoes until prices rose. Instead, the *News* advised members that current market conditions called for the “guerilla methods” of individual peddling in the Asheville market.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Proffitt, Annual Report, 1921, 24.

<sup>39</sup> “A Good Suggestion,” *Farmers’ Federation News*, November 15, 1920, 2; “Fine Opening for Men who Will Grow Seed Potatoes,” *Farmers’ Federation News*, March 15, 1921, 2.

<sup>40</sup> “Beg, Borrow, or Steal a Federation Potato,” *Farmers’ Federation News*, March 15, 1921, 1.

<sup>41</sup> “Farmers’ Federation to Build Warehouse,” *Asheville Citizen*, April 20, 1920, 3.

<sup>42</sup> “A Word to the Wise,” *Farmers’ Federation News*, November 15, 1920, 1.

The previous year's low prices made farmers reticent to plant Irish potatoes in the next season, but the Federation's business agent argued that the only way to make money was to commit to a large crop of seed potatoes. The organization simply could not sell what the farmers did not grow, he argued.<sup>43</sup> Farmers who followed the advice to grow Irish seed potatoes had to pass inspection to receive certification. In 1922, the first inspection of certified seed potatoes found almost all growers producing diseased plants that had to be destroyed. County Agent Proffitt admonished farmers that the blight arose from dusting the plants rather than spraying them thoroughly. He warned, "Growers who persist in being careless with this work will be disappointed ... when their crop is refused."<sup>44</sup> Undoubtedly, many growers were.

Despite difficulties, the Federation continued to push for potatoes. In 1920, the *News* had advised farmers that profitable potato farming required two years of planning, but by 1923 the paper promoted a five-year plan that required manure, lime, fertilizer, and rotational plantings of rye, soy beans, and several crops of clover.<sup>45</sup> Avoiding the diseases that prevented certification required a minimum of a four-year field rotation and extensive spraying.<sup>46</sup> Even when farmers succeeded, the market remained dull.<sup>47</sup> In 1923, the Federation got good prices for potatoes during September and excellent prices for one shipment of certified seed potatoes. Despite the high prices, the Federation could not fulfill the seed potato order "because many [farmers] failed to spray sufficiently and many others have sold their crops as eating potatoes."<sup>48</sup> Not all potatoes

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<sup>43</sup> "Plant Potatoes," *Farmers' Federation News*, March 15, 1921, 2; "Farmers Lost Six Millions Last Year," *Farmers' Federation News*, July 1922, 1.

<sup>44</sup> "Attention Potato Growers," *Farmers' Federation News*, July 1922, 6.

<sup>45</sup> "How About 1922,?" *Fairview Farmer's News Sheet*, July 15, 1920, 2.

<sup>46</sup> "Wants Mountain Seed," *Farmers' Federation News*, December 1923, 4.

<sup>47</sup> "The Potato Market," *Farmers' Federation News*, October 1923, 4.

<sup>48</sup> "Potatoes Now," *Farmers' Federation News*, September 1923, 4; "Federation Pays \$1.75 Certified Potatoes Sell Well," *Farmers' Federation News*, November 1923, 4.



were a disaster, of course. Some growers did quite well. One young lady proudly paid her own tuition to Mars Hill College with her potato money and the Federation shipped carloads of potatoes to Knoxville and New Orleans with good reports.<sup>49</sup> However, many farmers found that growing seed potatoes proved expensive, time-consuming, and uncertain. By 1924, C. C. Proffitt, admitted that even those “growers [who] practice the best methods known for growing potatoes” often failed to achieve certification on their crops.<sup>50</sup>

With the economic benefits of the potato market proving difficult to realize, the Federation touted the discovery of a profitable window for local produce in the Asheville market between July and September, when Northern suppliers did not ship due to heat. In 1923, the *News* labeled the discovery a great achievement and McClure proudly claimed, “This one fact would have been worth the united effort.”<sup>51</sup> However, despite the enthusiasm, everyone else already knew what the Federation claimed to have only recently discovered. In fact, the *News* had reported as much in its inaugural issue. Local farmers certainly did not need to be told about the summer opening in the Asheville market; it was their willingness to take advantage of that opening to unload small lots of excess, irregular potatoes that had first spurred the effort to standardize potato production.

Despite the alignment between the goals of the Federation and the support of state agricultural experts, Irish potatoes never lived up to the Federation’s early expectations. The Federation continued to encourage farmers to sign contracts to market their potatoes through the

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<sup>49</sup> Untitled, *Farmers’ Federation News*, November 1923, 10; Untitled editorial, *Farmers’ Federation News*, September 1923, 5.

<sup>50</sup> C. C. Proffitt, “Report of the Work of the County Agent, Buncombe County, Calendar Year 1924,” 5. Cooperative Extension Service, Annual Reports (UA102.002), NCSU.

<sup>51</sup> “Director’s Re-elected,” *Farmers’ Federation News*, December 1923, 1; “A Great Achievement,” *Farmers’ Federation News*, December 1923, 4.

organization and quantities expanded over the course of the decade, but standardization did not work for many farmers.<sup>52</sup> Only growers who were willing and able to commit to a heavy investment in potato farming benefitted from standardized, year-round, bulk sales. C. C. Proffitt continued to push seed potatoes until he was promoted to district farm agent. L. Dale (L. D.) Thrash, his successor as Buncombe county farm agent, finally dropped the program emphasis on seed potatoes in 1927. Some farmers did successfully adopt Irish potatoes and even achieved certification. However, seed potatoes never developed into a major cash crop in the Western counties or displaced Northern growers as the suppliers to eastern Carolina farmers. By 1931, the Farmers' Federation paid around \$20,000 for Irish seed potatoes, which the co-op sold during a brief market lull before seed potatoes from New Jersey became available. The once promising potential cash crop accounted for about 5 percent of the value of farm products that the Farmers' Federation handled that year. In value to farmers, poultry, sweet potatoes, and forest products far outpaced seed potatoes. At the Federation's cannery, the operating season had scarcely begun and already garden produce looked likely to outperform seed potatoes.<sup>53</sup> For families who grew potatoes primarily for home use, standardization and certification required that they either concede an established supplemental income source, or that they devote significant resources to a single crop in order to retain access to a market that had previously welcomed small lots of excess crops.

While the cooperative never abandoned its dedication to scientific farming, the Federation was not blindly loyal to a single vision of agricultural production. In the wake of this

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<sup>52</sup> "Wants Mountain Seed," *Farmers' Federation News*, December 1923, 4.

<sup>53</sup> "Thousands of Dollars Paid to Producers By Farmers' Federation," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, Sec D, 5.

early miscalculation, members stopped growing seed potatoes, but they did not abandon the Federation or its vision of standardizing and modernizing production. From the earliest years of the Federation, members took an active hand in shaping the cooperative's programs, and the leadership proved remarkably willing to pursue projects originating with the farmers themselves and to adapt methods to the capital and labor limitations of its members. Even as the market for potatoes proved difficult to develop, the Federation successfully developed standardized, bulk markets for poultry, sweet potatoes, and garden produce. In the effort to standardize potato production, the Federation asked a great deal of farmers before crops turned a profit. Even farmers who did everything correctly risked the possibility that they had limed too lightly, sprayed too little, or dug too late. However, in poultry, sweet potatoes, and garden produce, the Federation adopted methods that guaranteed farmers a way to convert excess farm production into cash without requiring a significant investment of time or capital.

Like potatoes, poultry, sweet potatoes, and garden produce were already widespread farm products in Western North Carolina. However, unlike seed potatoes, the Federation adapted its marketing techniques to the needs of cash poor farmers rather than requiring that farmers conform to the capital and labor demands of bulk production when marketing these agricultural products. By doing so, the Federation facilitated standardization and the establishment and growth of some of the region's most profitable agricultural products.

With chickens on practically every farm, the Federation began handling poultry in small quantities in 1921. Within ten months the co-op handled about 6,000 pounds of chicken per week and 15 crates of eggs per day. While farmers elsewhere faced an increasingly integrated supply chain that substantially reduced profits, the Federation offered farmers bulk prices on chicks and feed (often Ful-O-Pep, a Quaker Oats product acquired at a discount through

McClure's family connections). Two years later, the co-op began running a poultry car along the rail line every week. The car made designated stops and paid farmers cash for live birds, which were then shipped to Northern processors. Initially, the car ran at a loss. Farmers used the poultry cars as a way to turn unwanted birds into ready cash in much the same way they turned to Asheville's market as a way to quickly sell excess home produce. According to McClure, the Federation's first shipment "was said to be the worst that had ever come upon the New York market," because farmers brought "an assortment of fighting game cocks, bantam hens, and scrubs of every kind."<sup>54</sup> Even so, the Federation continued to buy worn out fighting cocks and scraggly yard birds while pushing standardized breeds by offering chicks for sale through the warehouse. As the cooperative hoped, regular access to the railcars encouraged farmers to buy chicks, set hens, and gradually increase production in an area that guaranteed cash payments. With cash in hand and assurance that increased poultry production would pay, farmers proved perfectly willing to invest in purebred chicks for meat and eggs. By 1925, poultry profits had risen to \$50,000 and continued to expand. In 1928, poultry brought in \$3,000,000 to the mountain counties. This was a large enough profit to attract competing commercial poultry buyers, who set up alongside the Federation cars and offered inflated prices in an attempt to seize the market.<sup>55</sup> Federation buyers opted to match their prices, the commercial dealers eventually gave up, and the poultry market continued to expand.

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<sup>54</sup> "What We are Doing About that Mountain Farm," 1929, James G. K. McClure Papers, Personal Papers, Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, SAA.

<sup>55</sup> "Farmers' Federation in Western North Carolina Salvation to Farmers," E. M. Ball Photographic Collection (1918-1969), D. H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville 28804.

“Chickens are a lot like people,” George Wright Jr., chairman of Asheville’s Agricultural Development Council’s poultry commission explained in 1953 while reflecting on the dramatic growth of the poultry industry in Western North Carolina. “They don’t work or eat well in hot weather.”<sup>56</sup> The same cool mountain air that wealthy invalids found so curative proved ideal for raising poultry and, by 1953, poultry was the largest source of cash income for Western North Carolina farmers, with cash sales exceeding \$12,500,000. The birds themselves were not new to the region, but transforming farm wives’ flocks of yard birds into a 12 million dollar poultryman’s industry required the remaking of the flocks and the labor force that tended them.

Men may have delivered chickens to the Farmers’ Federation railcar and registered their names to the stamps and cartons that individually identified eggs within the lot, but farmwives managed eggs, milk, butter, and cream.<sup>57</sup> The Federation ran truck routes throughout its service area, in order to make deliveries of warehouse goods and collect eggs, milk, cream, and butter for bulk marketing. Asheville’s hotels and hospitals offered a potential market for fresh eggs, while the Biltmore Dairy provided a ready market for milk and cream. However, “institutions will not bother with the man who brings in a few dozen eggs” and Biltmore Dairy demanded “A-1 quality” on all deliveries, a standard of quality and consistency far beyond that required for home use.<sup>58</sup> For the Farmers’ Federation, all of these products represented opportunities for standardization and bulk marketing, but doing so successfully required that the Federation sell standardization to women as well as men. Miss Annie Lee Rankin, Home Demonstration Agent

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<sup>56</sup> “Dairying, Beef Cattle Net Farmers 10 Million in WNC Counties,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, October 25, 1953, Review of WNC Agriculture, 1.

<sup>57</sup> “Federation Meeting and Big Hog Sale,” *Asheville Citizen*, August 25, 1921, 8.

<sup>58</sup> “The Federation Starts Another Department,” *Farmers’ Federation News*, March 15, 1921, 6; “Federation Meeting and Big Hog Sale.”

for Buncombe County, oversaw both poultry and dairy work in Buncombe County. In partnership with the Federation, Agent Rankin launched a "Better Butter" campaign, which recruited farm wives to see state dairy expert J. A. Arey demonstrate proper butter making.<sup>59</sup> Sarah Porter Ellis, who replaced Rankin as Home Demonstration Agent, conducted her home visits with the farm agent so they could present the benefits of "standardization of products and grading for market" to both men and women and attempt "to influence the women to market their products through the Farmers' Federation."<sup>60</sup>

To encourage families to police the quality and consistency of their own products, the Federation joined educational programs, infrastructure and facility support, and the threat of public shaming. In addition to regular demonstrations such as those organized by the Home Demonstration Agents, the co-op worked with the Buncombe County Dairymen's Association to set up skimming stations around the county, thereby "eliminating the necessity for cream separators in the home and make the work of handling milk much lighter on the housewife."<sup>61</sup> To insure that deliveries arrived fresh at Biltmore Dairies, the Federation began establishing cream routes throughout the county, which Agent Ellis promoted on her visits to area homes.<sup>62</sup>

From the beginning, Farmers' Federation gatherings served as educational opportunities, business meetings, and social affairs. As the organization expanded beyond Buncombe County, the Federation picnics evolved into yearly, daylong celebrations, but during the early years, farm

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<sup>59</sup> "The Federation Truck," *Asheville Citizen*, April 25, 1921, 6; "Farmers' Federation Meet Tomorrow," *Asheville Citizen*, April 29, 1921, 16.

<sup>60</sup> Sarah Porter Ellis, "Annual Report of County Extension Workers, Home Demonstration Work, Buncombe County, 1923," 28. Cooperative Extension Service, Annual Reports (UA102.002), NCSU.

<sup>61</sup> "Skimming Stations to be Established," *Asheville Citizen*, August 15, 1921, 9.

<sup>62</sup> Ellis, "Annual Report," 1923, 26; "Third Cream Route Established," *Farmers' Federation News*, October 1923, 4.

families gathered every quarter. In 1921, the quarterly summer meeting ended with John B. Merrill shaking in feigned terror as a jury of randomly selected Farmers' Federation members read the verdict in his trial. Prosecutor C. C. Proffitt called witnesses who accused Merrill of selling butter that was so full of milk that a half-cup of milk poured out when it was cut, old eggs, and rotten potatoes. To the delight of the crowd, the jury declared Merrill "Guilty of selling rotten potatoes about the size of a bantam egg, butter that looked like axel grease and eggs so old they had the appearance of being in an incubator, thereby damaging the reputation of the Farmers' Federation."<sup>63</sup>

For the Farmers' Federation, the standardization of dairy that enabled bulk marketing required that farmwomen transfer their responsibilities for home processing to male industrial agricultural experts. Although Buncombe County's Home Demonstration Agents sought to have a male expert teach women how to make butter, the Federation's ideal solution removed women from every aspect of dairy except for care of the stock at home. The Federation promoted purebred livestock; designated breeds; held stock sales; and once again tried John Merrill for supposedly maintaining a scrub bull, which dishonored the community's cows. Ideally, once appropriate breeds were in place on farms, families would simply deliver milk to the Buncombe County Dairymen's Association skimming stations, the Biltmore Dairies cream routes, or both. Women may have maintained responsibility for the care of dairy cows at home, but men oversaw and managed the final market product.

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<sup>63</sup> "Farmer Convicted of Selling Spoiled Potatoes, Aged Eggs and Old Butter in Mock Trial," *Asheville Citizen*, July 30, 1921, 5.

A similar transition from female home labor to male industrial labor began in poultry during the 1920s. As Farm Agent for Buncombe County in 1921, C. C. Proffitt dismissed poultry as the sole responsibility of the county Home Agent. Ten years later, he managed the Federation's poultry department, overseeing hatcheries in Buncombe, Rutherford, and Jackson Counties and organizing a weekly railcar shipment of birds for processing.<sup>64</sup> The county transferred responsibility for poultry work to the farm agents in 1925, at the request of Home Demonstration Agent Ellis. She argued that poultry occupied much of her time and the farm agents were better equipped to manage it since the county paid both a farm agent and an assistant.<sup>65</sup> With poultry and dairy proving profitable, Farm Agent L. Dale Thrash and his assistant, J. R. Brown, adopted both as central programs during the late 1920s and 1930s. Once poultry was targeted as a potential source of future economic growth, both Thrash and Brown treated it as male labor. Thrash and his assistant launched adult training programs to introduce farmers to production methods and, in 1931, when "the only farm commodity bringing a good price" was eggs, they addressed their advice to farmers, rather than their wives.<sup>66</sup>

Despite agents' emphasis on men, in most families in Buncombe, farmwomen retained control over the family chickens. Unlike other youth programs overseen by the farm agents, as agents expanded youth programming on poultry, girls enrolled in numbers almost equal to boys.<sup>67</sup>

The *Farmers' Federation News* recognized the role farmwives played in a family's decision to

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<sup>64</sup> Proffitt, Annual Report, 1921; "Thousands Paid."

<sup>65</sup> Sarah Porter Ellis, "Annual Report of County Extension Workers, Home Demonstration Work, Buncombe County, 1925," 20, Cooperative Extension Service, Annual Reports (UA102.002), NCSU.

<sup>66</sup> L. D. Thrash, County Agent, "Annual Report of County Extension Workers, Buncombe County, 1927," 2, Cooperative Extension Service, Annual Reports (UA102.002), NCSU; J. R. Brown, Assistant Agent, "Annual Report of County Extension Workers, Buncombe County, 1926-1927," 6, Cooperative Extension Service, Annual Reports (UA102.002), NCSU.

<sup>67</sup> N. C. Branson, Assistant County Agent, "Annual Report of County Extension Workers, Buncombe County, 1929-1930," Cooperative Extension Service, Annual Reports (UA102.002), NCSU.



move away from scrub birds and toward standard breeds. Both the farm agents and the Farmers' Federation advised Buncombe County farmers to expand chicken flocks to a minimum of 50 birds in order to insure a reliable supply of fresh eggs.<sup>68</sup> However, while the farm agents spoke to the farmers, the Farmers' Federation profiled women's successes. Mrs. John M. James followed all current advice in the maintenance of her flock of 75 White Leghorns, but other farm wives were growing their flocks more slowly and working with little to no capital.<sup>69</sup> In Madison County, north of Asheville, Mrs. S. B. Tweed grew her flock of Silver-laced Wyandottes from her own carefully culled birds and made a profit of \$3.11 per hen in the process. She and several other women formed an informal association to share information and track their earnings. Mrs. Tweed grew her own grain to avoid the costs of chicken feed. Mrs. Stroupe tore down an unused building and reassembled the material into a 10'x14' brooder house for her growing flock. Mrs. Dotson was still tending a mixed flock of 58 yard birds. All of the women had achieved profits of over \$200 from flocks of fewer than 100 birds. Their operations were small and capital and labor limitations prevented them from adopting all of the current recommendations, but they were committed to expanding flocks in the interest of uniform market production. As Mrs. Stroupe explained, "Considering effort and capital put into it, this pays better than any other line of farm work."<sup>70</sup>

A profitable, low investment farm product appealed to mountain farmers like cool mountain air appealed to wealthy invalids and chickens. The low initial costs of maintaining a flock enabled farmwomen to demonstrate the profitability of poultry without diverting resources

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<sup>68</sup> L. D. Thrash, "Annual Report of County Extension Workers, Buncombe County, 1931-1932," Cooperative Extension Service, Annual Reports (UA102.002), NCSU.

<sup>69</sup> [Untitled photo], *Farmers' Federation News*, June 15, 1925, 1;

<sup>70</sup> Miles E. Marsh, "Vocational Agriculture," *Farmers' Federation News*, May 1925, 6.

from elsewhere on farms, but it also provided a way for new farmers to get started without accruing huge amounts of debt. By 1949, Haywood County poultry farmer Hilliard Moody was completing work on a five-story chicken house that would hold 40,000 chickens, but he entered poultry in the late 1920s with a \$46 investment in chicks. Moody entered poultry production when the industry first began its rise to profitability in Haywood County, but Glenn Buchanan of Buncombe County found similar success in the late 1940s. Returning from World War II with little capital, Buchanan invested what little money he had in chickens. In 1951, he brought in \$7,000 from four lots of broilers.<sup>71</sup>

As hundreds of birds became thousands and home coops expanded into chicken houses built according to blueprints distributed by county Farm Agents, poultrymen replaced farm wives in Western North Carolina. In Buncombe County, the Farmers' Federation facilitated this process by involving farmwomen in poultry standardization and marketing. In other counties the Federation served, however, it simply facilitated agricultural transformations that were already underway. When farmers assembled in 1926 to organize a unit of the Federation in Rutherford County, there were over forty commercial chicken houses operating in the county and poultry farmers had already begun to organize cooperative poultry shipments. Farmers had demonstrated profits of over \$4 per hen from White Leghorn flocks, and over 190,000 pounds of poultry was shipping out of Rutherfordton.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> "5-Story Broiler House Nearing Completion in Waynesville," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, May 23, 1949, 10; "Federation Has 2-Way Plan on Poultry," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, October 28, 1951, 25.

<sup>72</sup> "Rutherford County Organize FF," *Farmers' Federation News*, October 1926; (F. E.?) Patton, "County Agent Work Report, Rutherford County, NC, 1926," 5, Cooperative Extension Service, Annual Reports (UA102.002), NCSU; (F. E. ?) Patton, "County Agent Work Report, Rutherford County, NC, 1939," Cooperative Extension Service, Annual Reports (UA102.002), NCSU.

Rutherford County was distinct from Buncombe County in other ways as well. While Buncombe County sits across the crest of the Smoky Mountains, Rutherford County borders Buncombe on the southeast and spreads toward the South Carolina border. Buncombe straddles the Appalachian Mountains, but most of Rutherford merely approaches the mountains. As such, Rutherford farmers practiced less diverse production than Buncombe farmers and were more deeply invested in cash crops than farmers in the other areas the Federation served. Cotton was the largest crop in Rutherford County, but low prices had already prompted farmers to expand dairy production. Cream lines ran to the Mooresboro Creamery in neighboring Cleveland County and farmers were buying Jersey cows. Regardless of local circumstances, the Farmers' Federation continually emphasized that creating markets was the greatest challenge facing Western North Carolina farmers. In Buncombe County, the cooperative set out to reform agricultural production in line with market expectations. In Rutherford County, the organization largely facilitated transformations that predated its establishment in the area.

Farmers in Rutherford County knew agricultural production methods in the county needed to change. Low cotton prices hurt their profits, but the crop itself was also destroying their land. When 16 farmers traveled across the mountains to tour farms in the mountain areas of Western North Carolina and East Tennessee, "the hardest thing for the party to grasp was the fact that they saw no terraces and on land much steeper than in our own county, still no erosion of the soil."<sup>73</sup> County Farm Agent Patton was already promoting poultry and dairy diversification in line with a long-term plan of work that wrapped Rutherford County into programs encompassing

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<sup>73</sup> F. E. Patton, "County Agent Work Report, Rutherford County, NC, 1925," 7, Cooperative Extension Service, Annual Reports (UA102.002), NCSU.

several Piedmont counties to the east. With Rutherford's farmers and businesses hammered by crop failure and low prices in the mid-1920s, they began to explore other opportunities to diversify and reduce cotton acreage.<sup>74</sup> Sixteen farmers cooperatively grew, packed, and shipped tomatoes to Jacksonville, Florida, where they earned \$2.50 per bushel above local market price.<sup>75</sup> In November 1926, the Kiwanis Club sponsored a farm school that selected sweet potatoes for diversification, identified varieties, and began building a curing facility in Forest City that could hold 12,000 bushels. With Agent Patton distributing free blueprints for chicken houses, a poultry association formed to cooperatively buy and sell with Polk County poultry producers. Despite the interest in diversification, the county lacked the infrastructure and facilities to expand these efforts. There was no permanent produce canning facility. Poultry producers had to individually arrange each cooperative purchase or sale. The Kiwanis Club successfully raised the money for a 12,000-bushel sweet potato curing facility at Forest City, but only the largest farmers had the capital available to build additional facilities. Sweet potato farmers who could not access a curing facility cured their produce in earthen banks over the winter, digging them in and simply accepting that this method of storage and curing produced a large amount of crop loss and lowered the overall value of sweet potatoes as a market crop. Farmers in Rutherford were testing diversification, but they simply did not have the infrastructure to make significant changes to existing practices.

In October of 1926, Rutherford farmer O. J. Holler joined four other farmers in organizing a Rutherford branch of the Farmers' Federation and recruiting members in the county.

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<sup>74</sup> F. E. Patton, "County Agent Work Report, Rutherford County, NC, 1927," 1, Cooperative Extension Service, Annual Reports (UA102.002), NCSU.

<sup>75</sup> F. E. Patton, "County Agent Work Report, Rutherford County, NC, 1924," 6, Cooperative Extension Service, Annual Reports (UA102.002), NCSU.

Holler strived to run a standardized, diversified farm. He and his wife helped to organize the community agricultural fairs in their home community of Union Mills, where his purebred livestock and her chickens and garden produce regularly won prizes. He conducted a demonstration program of clover as a cover crop for soil improvement and conducted tours of his results. To help develop sweet potatoes into a cash crop, he led the Kiwanis Club fundraising effort for the curing facility in Forest City.<sup>76</sup> For Holler, the Farmers' Federation offered a new tool in a years-long effort to promote progressive, scientific farming and cooperative marketing.

The new Rutherford branch of the Farmers' Federation assumed management of the Forest City curing facility, storing 6,000 bushels of sweet potatoes at a service charge of 10 cents a bushel.<sup>77</sup> Taking this produce off the market raised prices and enabled all producers to earn more. Farmers who stored their crop until spring did even better, earning 46 cents per bushel over the increased local market price. Holler, speaking as the President of the Rutherford Farmers' Federation, estimated that 4,000 of that initial deposit of 6,000 bushels of potatoes would have rotted in the ground had farmers banked them rather than warehousing them in a proper facility.<sup>78</sup> Prior to the Federation forming in Rutherford County, Rutherford farmers selected standard varieties of tomatoes and cantaloupes. The Farmers' Federation contracted 85 farmers for the tomatoes and paid 62 farmers commission for the cantaloupe crop.<sup>79</sup> Once in place, the Rutherford Federation quickly erected additional infrastructure to facilitate

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<sup>76</sup> "Rutherford County Organizes Unit of Farmers' Federation," *Farmers' Federation News*, October 1926, 1; "Fairs Were Great Success," *The Sun* (Rutherfordton, NC), October 23, 1919; "Many Prizes Are Awarded at Fairs," *The Sun*, November 4, 1920, 3; (untitled), *The Sun*, February 23, 1922, 7; "Grow Crimson Clover," *The Sun*, May 27, 1920, 3; "Rutherford County," *Forest City Courier*, July 13, 1922, 4; Patton, "County Agent Work Report," 1927, 3.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>78</sup> "Thousands of Dollars Paid to Producers By Farmers' Federation," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 12, 1931, Sec D, 5.

<sup>79</sup> Patton, "County Agent Work Report," 1926.

diversification. Within a year, an additional warehouse and storage facility went up west of Forest City in Spindale, which boasted “the only cold storage plant of the kind between Charlotte and Asheville.”<sup>80</sup> By 1931, President Holler’s home community of Union Mills had a warehouse and curing facility and the Federation ran one of its three poultry hatcheries out of Spindale.<sup>81</sup> With the market for poultry and sweet potatoes continuing to expand, the co-op erected an additional storage warehouse at Tryon, southwest of Forest City near the border with South Carolina.

Although the effects of the Great Depression struck throughout the Farmers’ Federation service area, farm families were more protected in areas where diverse production and safety-first agriculture persisted even as farmers adopted new market crops. Rutherford County was harder hit. The crop losses and low prices of cotton in the mid-1920s raised concerns about Rutherford’s reliance on cotton, but it remained the dominant cash crop. In 1932 and 1933, cotton yields per acre fell and farmers were only able to get about 5 cents a pound for what they did produce. Facing the possibility of losing their farms, Rutherford farmers turned to their home gardens, grains followed by cover crops, poultry, and sweet potatoes. With families dependent on home gardens to stave off hunger, the Farmers’ Federation rolled its portable cannery through eight Rutherford communities. The recent donation from Henry Ford was “fitted out with the latest equipment for canning all kinds of vegetables and fruits and prepared for a two hundred can per hour rate of canning.”<sup>82</sup> To raise cash, farmers reverted to horses and

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<sup>80</sup> Patton, “County Agent Work Report,” 1927.

<sup>81</sup> “Thousands of Dollars Paid to Producers By Farmers’ Federation,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 12, 1931, Sec D, 5.

<sup>82</sup> F. E. Patton, “County Agent Work Report, Rutherford County, NC, 1932,” 6, Cooperative Extension Service, Annual Reports (UA102.002), NCSU.

wagons to transport poultry to the Farmers' Federation rail cars, which, by 1932, sent the birds to a Federation-owned poultry dressing plant in Asheville. Increased storage capacity for sweet potatoes enabled farmers to more than double both acres planted and yield between 1929 and 1932, producing a 248,000-bushel harvest.<sup>83</sup> By 1936, conditions in the county were improving. Farmers had reduced cotton acres by 40 percent, and the new Federation hatchery near Spindale offered Rutherford poultry farmers the opportunity to sell hatching eggs from blood-tested flocks for higher than market prices.<sup>84</sup> The next year, Rutherford County was among the fifty highest sweet potato producing counties in the nation and the seventh in North Carolina.

When James McClure launched the Farmers' Federation in Buncombe County, he envisioned an organization that would create markets for mountain farmers. However, market demands for standard, uniform produce required that the cooperative first reform farm production among farmers whose safety-first practices bent toward reliability rather than marketability. Farmers in Rutherford County, however, were already deeply linked to the cotton economy and looking for an escape route when farmers and businessmen such as O. J. Holler recruited the Federation to the county. In Buncombe County, the cooperative preached standardization and modified its programs in accordance with the capital and labor limitations of its members. However, in Rutherford County, farmers developed market alternatives prior to the establishment of the Federation, but lacked necessary capital and infrastructural support. In the Federation's home county, McClure's vision of regional economic and social transformation through the development of agricultural markets required that farm families implement a

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> F. E. Patton, "County Agent Work Report, Rutherford County, NC, 1937," 9, Cooperative Extension Service, Annual Reports (UA102.002), NCSU.

network of changes that encompassed the reallocation of capital, labor, and familial gender responsibilities. For farmers in Buncombe County, market production represented the promise of economic advancement, and the Federation had to learn to adapt that promise to the limitations and abilities of small-scale, capital-poor farmers. Rutherford County farmers, on the other hand, lived with the risks of market production. In Buncombe County, the Federation attempted a top-down approach to reorganize production and modified its programs in response to the demands of its members. In Rutherford, the Federation built the infrastructure to support diversification projects that had already formed on the ground. If the Farmers' Federation provided Buncombe County farmers an entryway into bulk market production, it offered Rutherford's farmers a potential exit from the cotton economy.

Although the Federation served different purposes for farmers depending on local market conditions, all of the cooperative's programs reflected its central mission of fostering new markets in Western North Carolina. Like the Federation's poultry railcars, the cannery the Federation opened in Henderson County encouraged increased production by guaranteeing farmers cash payments for produce even when local markets were poor. According to Federation lore, the cannery was scheduled to open on August 1, but three farmers arrived on July 12 with a load of produce they had tried, and failed, to sell in Asheville, Hendersonville, and Tryon. Rather than allow the produce to spoil because of a market glut, the Federation opened the cannery ahead of schedule. Having found a way to sell their produce, the farmers immediately purchased seed in anticipation of expanding their gardens.<sup>85</sup> The story may well be apocryphal, but it reflects the logic behind the establishment of the cannery. As farmers in

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<sup>85</sup> "Constructive Accomplishments during 1928," 1928, McClure Papers, SAA.



Rutherford County also knew, Western North Carolina tomatoes ripened when Florida had no local crop available, opening a market opportunity for rail shipments.<sup>86</sup> The cannery allowed the Federation to organize fresh shipments when possible and process excess produce for sale elsewhere. The cannery was slow to produce significant profits, but McClure argued that the facility's value could not be measured purely in returns. He characterized the operation as a form of "crop insurance" that absorbed excess production and held prices steady in the local market.<sup>87</sup>

Farmers contracted with the cannery to grow yellow tomatoes under the Federation's label, but the facility bought red tomatoes and beans during the season and could also package a variety of produce including blackberries, apples, and jams. When the Depression forced many other canneries in the area to close, the Federation's cannery increased production, adopted National Recovery Administration (NRA) codes for employees, and expanded distribution. Women remained the primary workforce as the cannery expanded, with 76 female and 14 male employees at the height of the 1936 season. The men handled buying, selling, management, and training four young men who were employed as part of a Federation business-training program. Clad in matching uniforms created by other farmwomen at the Federation's Home Industries Department in Asheville, the women processed the vegetables. However, the machinery that enabled the plant to process thousands of pounds of produce a day and a 100 gallons of tomato juice each hour meant that the Federation Cannery was not a simple extension of home canning.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> "Southern Farmers Find New Markets," *Indiana Gazette*, January 11, 1927, 7.

<sup>87</sup> "90 Are Employed at Tomato Juice Cannery," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 31, 1936.

<sup>88</sup> "Cannery Speeds Truck Farming Industry and Creates a Large Market," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 4, 1933, 6; "90 Are Employed at Tomato Juice Cannery," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 31, 1936, 8.

Initially the cannery absorbed local production and distributed canned goods within the Western North Carolina region, but by 1936 the Farmers' Federation was marketing and distributing its "Carolina Sunshine" brand of yellow tomato juice in Northern markets as well. The Federation's Marketing Department sold the story of the juice along with the product itself. As the name suggested, "Carolina Sunshine" was packed with wholesome mountain-grown vitamins, but it was also "one step in solving the severe economic problems of the south." The juice was good for invalids, McClure assured reporters, as it had a lower acid content than red tomato juice. In markets where the juice was sold, the Federation provided newspapers with helpful recipes for women's interest pages, enticing women to try the new product in yellow tomato cream soup and yellow aspic.<sup>89</sup>

The Federation cannery grew out of the same impulse that prompted farmers throughout the region to hastily assemble temporary canning stations in an effort to save crops that were more like to rot than to sell. However, the Federation cannery was a permanent facility that expanded and professionalized over time. Unlike in poultry, women remained the primary labor force as the process industrialized. In the logic of the Federation, it was right that they should. The primary goal of establishing a cannery was to facilitate the emergence of truck farming and vegetable production, not to process and distribute produce. When McClure reflected on the Federation's successes in Henderson County, he spoke of the cannery in terms of fostering the county's million-dollar vegetable market. As poultry grew into the primary means of economic production, men assumed control of the flocks, but as "crop insurance" for the primary work of

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<sup>89</sup> "New Tomato Juice Rich in Vitamins," *The News-Palladium* (Benton Harbor, MI), January 13, 1939, 7; "New Yellow Tomato Juice Full of Golden Vitamins," *The Indiana Gazette* (Indiana, PA), January 5, 1939.

farming, the cannery remained a secondary, and therefore female, service. By 1950, Henderson farmers no longer required the price support that the plant had provided.

From its inception, the Farmers' Federation recognized that cooperation organized around a single market crop would not work in the mountains of North Carolina. Instead, the Federation pursued myriad projects and programs during its existence. Many of the Federation's efforts were not actually funneled through the cooperative itself. For instance, the co-op was responsible for re-introducing tobacco markets to Asheville, but tobacco buyers paid farmers directly in those markets. On a much smaller scale, they encouraged farmers to call local warehouses and tell them when crops would be available so the warehouse managers could act as intermediaries between farmers and buyers for products the warehouse could not buy directly. Other programs were short lived or conceived as ways to take advantage of a unique market opportunity. When World War II shut down rug shipments from Asia, the Farmers' Federation put mountain women to work hooking rugs in the popular designs. The Federation occasionally stumbled, but its projects genuinely aimed to broaden market access for Western North Carolina families.

In doing so, the Farmers' Federation mediated between capital-poor farmers and the markets they sought to navigate. As the examples of Buncombe and Rutherford County show, mediating those conditions assumed different forms depending on local conditions. Nonetheless, in every instance, the Farmers' Federation provided the communities it served with access to capital and capital-intensive facilities that most local farmers could not afford on their own. Even as the Federation recognized that mountainside farms could not become large-scale agricultural factories, the cooperative approached its work through the logic and lens of bulk marketing and business agriculture.

They were remarkably successful. By the 1950s, the Farmers' Federation handled between seven to eight million dollars in farm products annually and paid five to six million directly to Western North Carolina farmers. The Federation managed 26 stores and warehouses spread across 18 Western North Carolina counties, eight freezer locker plants, one of highest rated hatcheries in the Southeast, and a poultry processing facility capable of handling 40,000 broilers each week. The Federation continued to look for new opportunities to serve its farmer members, but poultry was the largest source of farm income in Western North Carolina and the cooperative's primary focus.<sup>90</sup>

Since the 1920s, the Federation had enabled farmers to access resources they could not afford themselves or to invest their available capital into expanding or improving other aspects of their farms. That remained the case in the 1950s. Transitioning to poultry farming enabled many farmers to survive the hard years of the 1920s and 1930s, but while the Farmers' Federation enabled farmers to effect that transition without accruing debt, farmers elsewhere remained dependent on merchant credit. Monica Gisolfi argues that, as the cotton market declined, upcountry Georgia farmers turned to poultry production as an alternative cash crop, but found themselves dependent on credit from local merchants to buy chicks and feed. As farmers invested in expanding chicken houses, furnishing merchants integrated every other aspect of the poultry industry. By the 1940s, the combination of farmers' dependence on merchant credit and vertical integration produced a system in which poultry farmers signed contracts that assigned

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<sup>90</sup> "36<sup>th</sup> Dividend Declared by Federation," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, December 16, 1951, 1.

ownership of the birds to the creditor and left farmers responsible for primary economic risks associated with production.<sup>91</sup>

In contrast, the Farmers' Federation insulated local producers from the cycle of vertical integration and indebtedness throughout the 1940s. Glenn Buchanan returned from World War II and turned a \$46 investment into a livelihood by buying his chickens from the Federation and selling his broilers to the plant in Asheville. Hilliard Moody built his five-story chicken house over the course of twenty years, but he saw no reason that new producers could not make money in 1949. "People are either eating a lot more chickens, or there are a lot more people. Maybe its both, for there seems to be plenty of markets for good broilers," Moody said. He cautioned new producers to start with no more than 500 chicks purchased from a reliable hatchery since diseases such as pullorum, an extremely infectious bacterial disease, could wipe out a flock in days. For farmers who were willing to learn as they went, Moody assured, "The chicken business is pretty money." On his own farm, Moody intended to put in a dressing plant in 1950, once his renovated chicken house was stocked to capacity with 40,000 broilers. Dressing plants, after all, were "where you make money in chickens."<sup>92</sup>

Moody did not follow through on the dressing plant. Ready access to the Federation's Asheville facility meant he did not need to. The Federation continued to modernize its Asheville facility throughout the 1940s. By the 1950s, a live bird could enter the plant and be iced for market in less than eight minutes. Thanks to the endless moving chain that birds were mounted on before their throat was cut, the birds never paused as they passed through scalding, gizzard-

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<sup>91</sup> Gisolfi, "From Crop Lien," 181.

<sup>92</sup> "Federation Has 2-Way Plan on Poultry," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, October 28, 1951, F25; "5-Story Broiler House Nearing Completion in Waynesville," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, May 23, 1949, 10.

cleaning, butchering, and packing. An industrial storage freezer enabled the plant to accumulate large shipments by warehousing birds after processing. The Federation was so proud of the facility that they offered tours of it during their annual picnics.<sup>93</sup>

By the 1950s, the Federation's foundation was teetering, but members did not yet know it. President McClure confidently assured members that, although it may have taken twenty years to build it, Western North Carolina farmers had a permanent and reliable market for broilers.<sup>94</sup> With the co-op reliably paying hundreds of thousands of dollars for poultry and eggs every month, farmers believed it. In 1954, the Federation invested over two million dollars in facility improvements and still paid over five million dollars to farmers.<sup>95</sup> In 1956, James McClure died and, although the Federation mourned, his organization seemed to forge ahead with his son-in-law Jamie Clarke as Federation president. The Federation continued to pay out millions to farmers, so many were stunned when Jamie Clarke told them that the Federation had been suffering from a lack of operating capital. "For some time," Clarke explained "there has been apparent a rapid trend toward bigness in agriculture. The growth of the broiler business has been accompanied by large-scale 'vertical integration' whereby large companies own their own feed mills, hatcheries, and poultry dressing plants, and finance all broiler and turkey flocks." As a result, the Federation was at a competitive disadvantage that made it "almost impossible for us to carry on." Clarke estimated that, in order to remain competitive in a field of vertically integrated poultry, the Federation needed a capital investment of approximately \$750,000, which

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<sup>93</sup> "Federation Has 2-Way Plan on Poultry;" "Farmers' Federation Plans Annual Meet," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, March 20, 1949, 14.

<sup>94</sup> "Farm Co-Op Seeks to Create More Markets, McClure Says," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 3, 1950, 26.

<sup>95</sup> "Farmers' Federation Reelects Directors; Hears Speakers," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, March 28, 1954, 4.

the Federation did not have. He advised stockholders to vote to sell the Federation to a larger, statewide cooperative, Farmers' Cooperative Exchange (FCX).<sup>96</sup>

Clarke's announcement precipitated a fight within the Federation that stretched into the 1960s. On the surface, the Farmers' Federation was simply a victim of its own success. Having grown sufficiently large to insulate its members from the economic transformations of the 1930s and 1940s, the Federation found itself outpaced by larger producers in the 1950s. Too deeply invested to shift focus and too poor to expand, the Federation was finally undone by the market forces that it had previously mediated on behalf of its members. On the ground, however, the situation was more complex.

The Farmers' Federation's ability to funnel capital into Western North Carolina had never depended solely on the economic strength of cooperative agriculture. From the organization's founding, McClure had recruited wealthy donors to support the Federation. Beginning in 1927, he launched a separate fundraising organization to raise money in the North in support of the Farmers' Federation's efforts. The Federation's Educational Fund formed committees in major Northern cities to stage fundraising events for the amusement of wealthy donors. Fundraising dinners included demonstrations of mountain crafts, music, dancing, skits, and even livestock auctions, all selected to match Northern donors' image of Southern Appalachian mountaineers.<sup>97</sup> In Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York, North Carolina mountaineers entertained wealthy donors with their folksy ways at hoedown fundraisers in ritzy hotels. Funds from these campaigns built the organization's most expensive facilities, including

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<sup>96</sup> "The Era of 'The Federation' Is Grinding to A Close," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 20, 1959, 1.

<sup>97</sup> "The Forgotten Pioneer," 1928.

sweet potato curing houses, the canning facility, hatcheries, and, eventually, the remarkably efficient poultry processing facility in Asheville.<sup>98</sup>

The Educational Fund was legally organized as a separate organization with its own mission and board of directors, but it had always functioned as the philanthropic fundraising arm of the Farmers' Federation. As Jamie Clarke said, it was unlikely that any bank would lend the cooperative the money it needed and the Federation did not have \$750,000. The Educational Fund, however, did. The Farmers' Federation was James G. K. McClure's life's work and passion and, while he lived, the cooperative and the Educational Fund functioned as a single organization. Following his death, some members of the two organizations surveyed the agricultural landscape and determined that the time for facilitating social reform through agricultural development had passed. The cooperative struggled on for several years before collapsing, but the Farmers' Federation had always depended on external, philanthropic funding. The division between the Educational Fund and the cooperative spelled the end of the agricultural organization.

The Farmers' Federation's ability to accrue capital and develop successful economic conditions for its members depended on exploiting and perpetuating the racial mythology of the Southern mountains even as they hired black workers. The cooperative's embrace of Appalachian stereotypes was both blatant and lucrative. In an interview with John Ager, Farmers' Federation member Bill Francis of Hendersonville laughingly explained that McClure would go north with "two or three of these cross-eyed boys, a banjo or two, and come back with

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<sup>98</sup> "The Hand of McClure," E. M. Ball Photographic Collection (1918-1969), D. H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville 28804; Liden, "The Business," 10.



thousands of dollars.”<sup>99</sup> When McClure trotted out those cross-eyed banjo players to amuse wealthy Northern philanthropists, he pointed to poultry as among the organization’s proudest achievements. For the farm wives who slowly culled yard birds into profitable flocks or built coops from castoff materials, the men who stepped into roles formerly regarded as women’s work, and the farmers who raised the funds to build a curing house within their own community, their own choices and hard work enabled them to successfully navigate shifting and often uncomfortable circumstances rather than economic boons intended to buttress white supremacy. In truth, the success of the Farmers’ Federation depended on both. Whether or not white farm families acknowledged it, racial appeals within a national climate of white supremacy offered them economic opportunities that their labor alone could not provide. At fundraising events, Farmers’ Federation members joyfully assured Northern philanthropists that the Southern mountains represented a bastion of racial purity, took the money they collected, and built expensive facilities where African American labor enabled capital-poor farmers to profitably expand market production. The members who went to New York on behalf of the Federation were not simply playing the hillbilly for Northerners’ amusement; they were deliberately trading on white supremacy for capital advantage in a tough economic climate.

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<sup>99</sup> Ager, *We Plow*, 271.

## Chapter 4:

### Living the Lie: Farmers' Federation Rhetoric and Reality

From 1928 through 1958, the bulk of the Farmers' Federation's existence, the cooperative could count on regular cash infusions from the Educational and Development Fund, an organization established first as a trust and later as an independent corporation that was devoted to raising money on behalf of the Farmers' Federation. Throughout, the Educational and Development Fund maintained the same mission: "To develop agricultural industries and markets so that the mountain people of the Southern Appalachians may increase their own income by their own efforts."<sup>1</sup> In pursuit of this goal, the Educational Fund's philanthropic campaigns selectively drew on stereotypes of the Southern mountains that already existed in popular culture, including plays and movies. During the 1920s, popular depictions diverged in emphasizing either the troubling possibility that poor white mountaineers reflected white racial degeneracy or the promise of national revitalization from incorporating the mountain poor's pure Anglo-Saxon traits into urban society. The Educational Fund attached the cooperative and its membership to the set of popular associations that most closely identified mountaineers as a population with the power to affirm the ideology of white supremacy, an idea that was rapidly gaining academic and intellectual reinforcement during the era, rather than a population of poor whites whose economic failures needed to be explained away through racial degeneracy lest they challenge the presumptions of white supremacy. In plying Northern whites with appeals on

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<sup>1</sup> "What We are Doing About that Mountain Farm: Report of 1930 Expenditures, Educational and Development Fund of the Farmers' Federation," James G. K. McClure Family Papers, A. Personal Papers, Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, SAA, 3; "What We are Doing About that Mountain Farm, 1953," James G. K. McClure Family Papers, A. Personal Papers, Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, SAA.

behalf of ignorant, Anglo-Saxon mountaineers, the Educational and Development Fund's philanthropy campaigns raised significant funds on behalf of the Farmers' Federation and its members while also shaping, perpetuating, and reinforcing the racial foundations of mountaineer stereotypes.

The Educational and Development Fund was not organized until 1927, but it attached its message to depictions of mountain culture that emerged earlier in the decade, most notably Lula Vollmer's 1923 play, *Sun-Up*. Vollmer's play debuted at the Provincetown Theatre in New York, with established character actress Lucille LaVerne in the starring role of North Carolina mountain widow Liza Cagle. Vollmer was born in Moore County, North Carolina in a region where the Carolina piedmont meets the coastal plains, and she lived there until she began boarding school at eight years old. Her father, however, was a lumberman and his business took him deep into the western Carolina mountains, where timber was booming during the first two decades of the twentieth century. After boarding school, Vollmer moved to Asheville and graduated from the Normal and Collegiate Institute of Asheville, a college established during the late nineteenth century for training young women of Southern Appalachia as teachers. She worked in Atlanta after graduation before resolving that any serious playwright needed to live in New York. Vollmer's first play was based on an anecdote she had heard of a mountain boy who, upon arriving at Army camp, asked, "Air this hyar France?" She was working the box office of a different theater when she succeeded in getting her tale of a Southern mountaineer family staged at the Provincetown Theatre.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Arthur Hobson Quinn, *Representative American Plays: From 1767 to the Present Day*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1957) Original edition published 1917 by The Century Co, 983.

*Sun-Up* crowded a veritable avalanche of mountain stereotypes into three short acts. The play opens during the summer of 1917 and is set entirely within the two-room mountain cabin of the Cagle family, somewhere outside of Asheville in the North Carolina mountains. The stern and illiterate Widow Cagle has conducted a feud with “the law” and the family of revenue agent Zeb Turner ever since Turner shot her husband in the back as he attempted to protect the family’s still. Her world centers on her son Rufe, who she carried through the snow on her back so he could attend the missionary school down in town when he was a boy. Rufe respects his father’s death in defense of his own beliefs but dislikes whiskey and its effects on otherwise good men. Instead of following his father as a moonshiner, he toils endlessly to raise a crop and support his family until the Selective Service Act of 1917 pushes the world inside their mountain holler. Although none of the characters have ever been to Asheville, they have heard of it. When the call for men comes, they presume they are needed to once again put down the Yankees and that the fight in France must be taking place far away, “‘bout forty miles ‘t’ other side o’ Asheville.” Rufe signs up, convinced that he has “to go help defend my hills, and my home, and my wimen folks” in the interest of country and “God A’mighty.”<sup>3</sup> His actions stir mountain belle Emmy, a beauty of the type “who keep men from being afraid,” to marry him before he departs. As a pastor, described in the casting notes as “of the rugged Abe Lincoln type,” weds the young couple, Widow Cagle stoically cooks a pot of beans.<sup>4</sup> As the vows end, The Star-Spangled Banner rises from the Army camp waiting at the edge of the cove to escort the new recruits. The Cagles rise to their feet “without any knowledge, or intent, of patriotism” since

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<sup>3</sup> Quinn, *Representative Plays*, 998.

<sup>4</sup> Leon Blunt, “‘Sun-Up’ by Lula Vollmer: A Study of the Historical and Sociological Background for the Play with a Prompt Book” (Thesis, Department of Speech, University of Southern California, May 30, 1930), 48.

they imagine the unfamiliar song must be some new, previously unknown hymn. They “know not why,” but “the music strikes their stoic souls”<sup>5</sup>

The patriotic bean wedding was, for theater critic Heywood Broun, “rich in observation of native American life,” but the play fell in his esteem during the third act, when he argued, “friends of the author should have rushed the stage and nailed down the curtain” before the author introduced a spirit voice as a plot device.<sup>6</sup> The third act opens with literate Emmy away, nursing her father, who has been struck low by bad moonshine. Emmy’s absence leaves Widow Cagle alone, ignorantly clutching a telegram that she cannot know contains the news of Rufe’s death in France. Shortly after, a young deserter arrives begging shelter from the weather and the law. Given her ongoing feud with the law, Widow Cagle agrees and the deserter hides beneath a pile of potatoes as the suspicious sheriff searches the cabin. The sheriff returns the next day, certain that Cagle is sheltering the deserter. However, in the meantime, Emmy has returned and deciphered the telegram. Rufe’s death shames the deserter, but fuels Widow Cagle’s hatred of the law. When the sheriff returns with deputies, Widow Cagle resolves that she, the deserter, Emmy, and Emmy’s half-witted brother (who has come by to milk the cow) will shoot it out in a glorious final stand. The sheriff, however, tells Widow Cagle that the deserter is the son of the revenue agent Zeb Turner. The unexpected news precipitates a conflict between Cagle’s feud with the law and her feud with the Turners, during which she attempts to force the resistant young Turner into a fast-draw style shootout across the breakfast dishes. Just as she is about to impose the life-for-a-life justice of the feud onto Zeb Turner’s son, Rufe’s spirit speaks to

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<sup>5</sup> Quinn, *Representative Plays*, 998.

<sup>6</sup> Heywood Broun, “Season of 1922 -1923 Saw American Stage at Best,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 3, 1923, 15.

Widow Cagle from beyond the grave, counseling her of the values that he learned as a child at the mission school and that drove him to give his life in France. Like Saul on the road to Damascus, Widow Cagle is reborn, declaring, “The hate of the feud air gone our of me.”<sup>7</sup> She helps young Turner evade the sheriff, but only so he may fulfill his patriotic duty of his own will, and afterwards she submits herself to the rightful punishment of the law.

It was the spiritual intervention of departed Rufe that offended theater critic Heywood Broun, but audiences could not get enough. The play remained in front of audiences in one form or another from the time it opened in New York in 1923 until it toured the Southwest in 1938. In 1925, MGM released a film version of the play, which proved so popular that theaters held over showings to accommodate crowds. During the 1927-1929 theater seasons, *Sun-Up* was the most popular play other than works by Shakespeare performed in little theaters across the United States.

*Sun-Up* transformed Lula Vollmer from an unknown box office attendant to a rising star on the American literary scene. As a North Carolinian, reviewers lauded Vollmer’s “intimate knowledge” of the mountain folk and her unique qualifications to present the nation with “what is probably the greatest native folk play that has come to the American stage.”<sup>8</sup> In these assessments, Vollmer’s brilliance arose not from her skill as a storyteller but in her ability to harness a “story [that] was taken, not from a source in literature, but from the actual life of its people.”<sup>9</sup> Critics lauded Vollmer as the rising playwright of her generation, her “subject fit for Shakespeare, and the overall play “as striking a creation as anything that the Russian stage has

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<sup>7</sup> Quinn, *Representative Plays*, 1008.

<sup>8</sup> James W. Dean, “American Folk Play, Once Scorned, Forces Itself Into Broadway,” *Muncie Evening Press*, September 1, 1923, 8.

<sup>9</sup> “S.Z. Poli’s Theaters,” *The Bridgeport Telegram*, September 18, 1925, 18; Blunt, “Sun-Up,” 5.

evolved.”<sup>10</sup> One reviewer insisted, “‘Sun-Up’ stamps Miss Vollmer, its author, as one of the foremost writers of the American stage. As a realist she seriously threatens Eugene O’Neill’s honors.”<sup>11</sup>

The praise for Lucille LaVerne’s depiction of Widow Cagle was equally exuberant and even longer-lived, as LaVerne stretched her mountain widow into the role of her lifetime. Through her portrayal of Cagle, LaVerne transformed from a character actress best known for portraying a Southern mammy in blackface, into “one of America’s foremost actresses.”<sup>12</sup> LaVerne acquired the rights to the play when it moved to the Princess Theater on Broadway and kept it in constant production from 1923 until 1938. She travelled with the show to Chicago following its initial Broadway run, starred in the MGM picture, launched a New York revival in 1928, took the play on a world tour in 1929, and adapted and performed a version for the Vaudeville circuit that became one of Vaudeville’s longest-running features. Her portrayal of Cagle was regarded as so emotionally effective that, Walt Disney was reportedly “in despair” of finding an actress with sufficient range to portray the witch in 1937’s *Snow White* until “someone mentioned Lucille LaVerne and her immortal characterization of the ‘Widow Cagle’” and he realized she offered “all and more than he had ever hoped to find.” She accepted other roles, but Cagle remained her defining performance. She was still touring as Cagle in 1938, when she performed the full-length play at theaters in New Mexico and Arizona.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Blunt, “Sun-Up,” 15 [mis-numbered duplicate page 15].

<sup>11</sup> “Untitled,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, September 7, 1924, sec 2, 1.

<sup>12</sup> “Noted Actress Visits Minneapolis, Daughter Assists Her on Stage,” *The Minneapolis Star*, March 8, 1928, 4.

<sup>13</sup> “Lucille LaVerne to Play Here in ‘Sun Up’ Monday: ‘Sun Up’ Star is Witch of ‘Snow White’” *The Casa Grande Dispatch (AZ)*, April 22, 1938, 7; “Only Human in Disney Film to Appear on Local Stage,” *Arizona Republic (Phoenix)*, April 24, 1938, sec 3, 10; Quinn, 984; “Noted Actress Visits Minneapolis, Daughter Assists Her on Stage,” *The Minneapolis Star*, March 8, 1928, 4; “Laverne Plays ‘Sun Up’ Role,” *Arizona Daily Star (Tucson)*, April 26, 1938, 7; “Lucille Laverne Featured Star in Cast Coming Here,” *The Gallup Independent*, May 2, 1938, 2.

LaVerne quickly converted *Sun-Up*'s narrative call to missionary education among the Southern mountaineers into direct fundraising efforts. As a Tennessean born on a plantation 100 miles outside of Memphis, LeVerne, like Vollmer, leveraged her Southern roots into the authority to serve as an emissary of the Southern mountains on the national stage. During the summer of 1924, the Federated Club Women of Georgia launched a fundraising campaign to expand the Tallulah Falls Industrial School, a mountain missionary school that the Federated Women owned and operated in North Georgia. LaVerne offered to hold a benefit showing of *Sun-Up* in Chicago in the hopes of raising \$20,000 for the effort. As part of a campaign to revitalize the women's local fundraising efforts, 11-year-old Grace Taylor, an orphan from the school, traveled to Atlanta to talk about her life "in the straightforward manner that is the charm of these sturdy offspring of pure Anglo-Saxon." Atlanta newspaper writer Lily Futrelle, whose husband purportedly went down with the Titanic while smoking cigarettes with John Jacob Astor IV, heard young Grace speak and described her so movingly that the account prompted LaVerne to adopt Grace and have Futrelle deliver the child to New York. In the fall of 1924, LaVerne staged a benefit show in Pittsburgh on behalf of the Pi Beta Phi Sorority's mountain mission school in Gatlinburg, Tennessee.<sup>14</sup> LaVerne's portrayal of Cagle, birth in Tennessee, "first-hand knowledge of the subject," and "study of literature" reinforced the authority of her "declaration that the conditions are not overdrawn in the least in the play."<sup>15</sup> In addition to fundraising

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<sup>14</sup> The Pi Beta Phi Settlement School in Gatlinburg first opened in 1912, making Pi Beta Phi the first National Panhellenic Conference member to establish a philanthropic project. The sorority continued to support the school until 1967, when their philanthropic interest transferred from general mountain education to the promotion of mountain crafts through the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts. For more information about Pi Beta Phi and their philanthropic interests, see Pi Beta Phi, "Settlement School" (2019) at <https://history.pibetaphi.org/exhibits/pi-phi-firsts> and Pi Beta Phi, "At the Forefront of History" (2019) at <https://history.pibetaphi.org/exhibits/settlement-school> (accessed March 21, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> "Our Southern Mountaineers," *The Pittsburgh Daily Post*, September 10, 1924, 6.



through her character, LaVerne became an activist herself, adopting eleven children at mountain mission schools and accepting engagements to educate society clubs in the North and the West on the plight of the mountaineers.<sup>16</sup>

Vollmer's depiction and LaVerne's portrayal offered white audiences a powerful tonic of schadenfreude and reassurance that invited them to wonder at the Cagles' ignorance while simultaneously noting their potential for redeeming the city from the rising foreign influence just outside the theater doors. As the sisters of Pi Beta Phi explained, *Sun-Up* "shows the ignorance prevailing in the section, it at the same time exhibits the admirable traits of character that are there to develop. [sic]" Alongside the familiar invocation of the mountaineers as "purest Anglo-Saxon stock," the sorority also quoted Franklin K. Lane, Secretary of the Interior under Woodrow Wilson, who argued that "Men who speak the language of Shakespeare ... have not had their chance. Their condition is a reproach to a republic."<sup>17</sup> However, the sisters of Pi Beta Phi, Lucille LaVerne, and former Secretary Lane agreed that, with the appropriate education, the Southern mountaineers could assume their rightful place within the nation. The ignorance of the characters in *Sun-Up* was indeed stunning; they had never heard of Virginia. Nevertheless, throughout the 1920s and 1930s scholars agreed with mountain missionaries and theater audiences that the play was both sociologically and historically accurate.

The popular portrayal of the Southern mountains aligned with both academic and sociological analyses circulating in the mid-1920s. William Frost's nineteenth century assessment of the Southern mountains as a preserve of the "contemporary ancestors" of urban

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<sup>16</sup> "Actress to Speak," *The San Francisco Examiner*, April 7, 1927, 10; "Play Revived to Aid Southern Hill Folk," (AP release, also in *The Boston Globe*, November 22, 1928, 33); *Asheville Citizen-Times*, November 25, 1928, 4C; untitled, *The Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), November 19, 1928, 12.

<sup>17</sup> "Our Southern Mountaineers," *The Pittsburgh Daily Post*, September 10, 1924, 6.

whites found revitalized expression among academics and reformers during the 1910s and 1920s. Berea Professor James Watt Raine argued that mountain speech was not simply a regional dialect but a direct survival of the old English of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and King James. Historian Frederic L. Paxson, whose *History of the American Frontier, 1763-1893* won the Pulitzer prize in 1925, echoed Frost's assessment that progress and racial background stood frozen in time in the Southern mountains.<sup>18</sup>

Within the language and logic of eugenics, the framework of "Anglo-Saxon but ignorant" conveyed both the mountaineers' racial promise and the route through which other whites could harness that promise. As a result, missionary efforts and philanthropic requests in the mountain South centered on education, with missionary projects of all denominations joining established schools such as Berea and mountain industrial schools such as those sponsored by Georgia's Federated Women and Pi Beta Phi. In 1908, academic, missionary, and Appalachian reformer John C. Campbell petitioned the Russell Sage Foundation for a commission to travel through the Southern Appalachians and document the conditions among its people, who held "qualities that we need in our national character."<sup>19</sup> The Russell Sage Foundation approved Campbell's request in the hopes that his study would help "standardize work in the mountains and lead to more intelligent giving."<sup>20</sup> The original commission expanded into the Southern Highlands Division of the Russell Sage Foundation, which Campbell headed until his death in 1919. His wife, folklorist and Appalachian reformer Olive Dame Campbell, assembled his writing and notes for

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<sup>18</sup> Blunt, "Sun-Up," 17-20, The Pulitzer Prizes, "1925 Prizes," <https://www.pulitzer.org/prize-winners-by-year/1925> (accessed March 21, 2019).

<sup>19</sup> Olive Dame Campbell, "Teaching Years: Pleasant Hill and Demorest: Grant for Study of Mountain Region, 1898-1908," in *The Life and Work of John C. Campbell*, edited by Elizabeth Williams McCutchen, (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2017), 118.

<sup>20</sup> Olive Dame Campbell, "Teaching Years," 120.

publication in 1921. The Campbells deviated slightly from the popular portrayal of “Anglo-Saxon” stock in order to accommodate Scots-Irish and German influences. However, they made clear that the distinction was merely semantic and need not alter the prevailing understanding of Southern mountaineers. An extended quotation by English folk music revivalist Cecil J. Sharp explained, “whatever may be the racial origin of the mountaineers, their predominant culture is overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon, or, perhaps, to be more accurate, Anglo-Celtic.”<sup>21</sup> Although the Campbells concluded that it was impossible to deduce with certainty the precise mixture of Scottish, Irish, English, or German that comprised the Southern highlands, they took pains to demonstrate that the mountains were populated prior to 1830. The published work meticulously detailed the linkage between 1,200 common mountain surnames and the 1790 census or Revolutionary War pension records. After spending considerable effort establishing the western European background and patriotic heritage of the mountaineers, the Campbells concluded, “The vast majority of the Highlanders are descendants of settlers who were native born, and who, by their common interests, hardships, and struggles, were blended into a homogeneous people – the type which has come to be called ‘American.’”<sup>22</sup>

The Campbells’ parsing of “stock” and point of immigration reflected demographic anxieties that had been rising among statisticians for decades. Frances A. Walker, superintendent of the 1870 and 1880 censuses and a prominent academic, advanced the theory that, by the 1880s, “vast masses of peasantry, degraded below our utmost conceptions” were overwhelming the native population and fueling a decline in birthrates among native-born

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<sup>21</sup> Cecil J. Sharp, quoted in Olive Dame Campbell, “Teaching Years,” 70.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

Americans.<sup>23</sup> As immigration from eastern Europe continued to rise after 1890, Walker's theory became the intellectual foundation on which nativists rested their arguments for restricting entry into the United States. When restrictionists achieved passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, supporters argued that quotas based on "national origin" and "native born" were objectively fair. Historians have long criticized the racist intent of the act, which dramatically reduced the number of immigrants from Greece, Italy, Poland, Russia, and Yugoslavia by basing initial quotas on the 1890 census rather than more recent data.<sup>24</sup> The use of the 1890 census was a blatant effort to block southeastern European immigrants, but it was also a temporary quota assignment. The law required that permanent quotas based on the 1920 census be established by 1927. Although politicians argued that the law based immigration on the census, and "few people doubted ... the weight of official statistics," the actual census records did not contain the information necessary to make the statistical projections required under the law.<sup>25</sup> The 1790 census did not record nation of origin, and immigration or place of birth data was variable and irregular on censuses throughout the nineteenth century. To produce the immigration quotas required by the law, chief statistician Joseph Hill turned to a combination of historical and genealogical research similar to John C. Campbell's methodology for connecting the southern highlanders to the Revolution through the persistence of family names.

Historian Mae Ngai has demonstrated census statisticians interpreted inadequate historical census data within the highly politicized language of the new immigration law through

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<sup>23</sup> Mae M. Ngai, "The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924," *The Journal of American History*, 68, no 1 (June 1999), 75.

<sup>24</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 84.

<sup>25</sup> Ngai, "Architecture," 73.

a methodologically rigorous scientific racism. Ultimately, the Census Quota Board “defined ‘native stock,’ not as persons born in the United States, but as persons who descended from the white population of the United States in 1790” and ‘foreign stock’ as the descendants of anyone who immigrated later.<sup>26</sup> Statisticians, politicians, and the public continued to debate national origins, foreign “stock,” and the threat immigration posed to the national character throughout the 1920s. After a two-year delay in implementing the new quotas, Herbert Hoover finally signed Hill’s methodology into law on March 22, 1929. The approved statistical procedure was not only “intended principally to restrict immigration from the nations of southern and eastern Europe,” it also falsely exaggerated the proportion of population derived from western and northern Europe by “giving each earlier decade greater numerical importance than the succeeding one” and applying the same rates of natural increase to all groups across time.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the political and social implications of Anglo-Saxon ignorance had moved beyond academic theories and popular culture and into national policy when Lucille LaVerne announced in 1928 that she planned to raise one million dollars to educate mountaineers, beginning with a revival of *Sun-Up* to benefit the Educational Fund. LaVerne’s plans were lofty. She had returned to New York and was mounting the revival, with its original cast, at the Princess Theater - now renamed The Lucille LaVerne Theater. The inaugural run would feature two shows to benefit the Educational Fund of the Farmers’ Federation, but LaVerne intended to donate all proceeds above operating costs to the mountaineers until she achieved her goal. LaVerne likely fell far short of her goal. The Farmers’ Federation raised more than \$3,300 in

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 73, 80.

one week from the initial benefit shows.<sup>28</sup> LaVerne publicized the relaunch herself, writing articles for distribution and even holding a special performance for the press. Despite her efforts, the Lucille LaVerne Theater did not transform into a permanent vehicle for mountain fundraising on Broadway. The newly renamed theater closed within a year and LaVerne hired an agent to book road performances of *Sun-Up*.<sup>29</sup>

The overall returns may have been disappointing, but the relatively new Educational and Development Fund of the Farmers' Federation had succeeded in joining themselves to a popular and profitable national interest in alleviating the plight of white mountaineers. From its inception, the Educational and Development Fund raised money to support agricultural research, marketing, and the construction of facilities to support mountain farmers. Even generously interpreted, the educational aspect of the Fund was informal at best. William Goodell Frost, O. O. Howard and other evangelists for mountain schools created a narrative that identified education as critical to enabling Anglo-Saxon mountaineers to realize the potential of their inborn virtues. In the early twentieth century, mountain settlement schools like Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School and Tallulah Falls Industrial School demonstrated an ongoing public interest in supporting educational efforts targeting Southern highlanders. The Educational and Development Fund supported virtually no formal educational projects, but including "educational" in the organization's name linked the Fund to an existing strain of successful

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<sup>28</sup> New York Picnics Scrapbook clipping, "Noted Actress to Raise Fund with 'Sun-Up,'" James G. K. McClure Family Papers, SAA.

<sup>29</sup> New York Picnics Scrapbook clipping, Lucille LaVerne, "'Sun-Up' and the Mountain Folk," James G. K. McClure Family Papers, SAA; "'Sun-Up' World Tour," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 26, 1929, 38.

philanthropic appeals.<sup>30</sup> The misleading name occasionally sparked confusion. Newspaper articles misidentified the *Sun-Up* performance as a benefit to build schools.<sup>31</sup> Years later, Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) officials advised each other to disregard “Educational” in the organization’s name as an inaccurate depiction of the Fund’s agricultural work. Nonetheless, with Northern donors clamoring to relieve ignorance in the mountains, the Farmers’ Federation’s fundraising arm put education at the forefront of their public image.

Arthur W. Page, Director of the Educational and Development Fund and a marketing and public relations genius, was likely responsible for the savvy marketing decision to inaccurately represent the Farmers’ Federation’s projects as educational rather than agricultural or economic in naming the cooperative’s fundraising arm. McClure had solicited support, stock-purchases, and assistance since the founding of the Farmers’ Federation, but Arthur W. Page initiated and oversaw the formal fundraising organization, first as a trust and later as a corporation. Page first met McClure while in Asheville to address the Rotary Club and quickly joined McClure’s effort to reform the Southern mountains through agricultural production. Page and McClure set about creating a fundraising structure that would enable the Farmers’ Federation to appeal to wealthy donors outside of McClure’s immediate social circle. The Fund itself consisted of several directors, including Page and McClure, who oversaw the fundraising and designated which Farmers’ Federation projects received financial support. A volunteer fundraising committee organized affluent urban supporters to plan and implement fundraising events. Page organized the first of these local committees in New York City, but over time local fundraising committees

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<sup>30</sup> The Farmers’ Federation did eventually establish a training school for young farm men through a designated gift to the Educational and Development Fund, but throughout the organization’s existence most funding went toward straightforward agricultural programs.

<sup>31</sup> Len G. Shaw, “The Theater,” *Detroit Free Press*, 6.

formed in several other cities as well. Each local committee was divided into a men's committee and a women's committee, who worked together to plan events and solicit funds from wealthy donors. Fundraising efforts included direct solicitations from committee members to friends and past donors, intimate demonstrations of mountain music or crafts at the homes of supporters or their country clubs, talks by McClure or mountain representatives, and large-scale fundraising events or dinners. During the early years of the Educational Fund's existence, Mrs. Henry P. Davison, chairwoman of the Educational Fund's New York Women's Committee, may have handled event arrangements and issued invitations for Educational Fund activities, but Arthur W. Page defined the messaging.<sup>32</sup>

As the grandson of a wealthy North Carolinian Whig and the son of a bitter North Carolinian émigré, Arthur W. Page encountered the conflicting strains of Southern white stereotyping within his own family and thus understood that Educational Fund materials needed to clearly designate white mountain farmers as pure Anglo-Saxons rather than poor whites whose economic failures suggested racial degeneration. Prior to the Civil War, the Page family made a fortune through construction and logging in the North Carolina piedmont. Arthur Page's father, Walter Page, inherited the conviction that slavery's greatest ill was the lack of social mobility it imposed on ambitious white men such as himself. Convinced that the "mummies" of North Carolina's slaveholding class deliberately blocked the best men in the state from obtaining the educational and economic opportunities that would allow them to threaten former slaveholders' political and social control, Walter Page fled his piedmont home for opportunities in the North as

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas Watson, Proceedings of the Farmers' Federation Picnic, The Waldorf-Astoria, New York, NY, November 17, 1947, McClure Papers, Personal Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, b. Fundraising, 1. NY, SAA; Invitation, Through the courtesy of Mrs. George B. Case and Mrs. August Belmont, November 14, 1927, James G. K. McClure Family Papers, SAA.



a newspaperman and publisher.<sup>33</sup> Walter Page's critiques rang with personal bitterness at being rejected by a land he loved, but he remained a vocal advocate of education and New South economic transformation throughout his life.

In the 1890s Walter Page joined the growing chorus of voices calling Americans to recognize that the "foremost patriotic duty of our time" was the education and development of "their 'contemporary ancestors'" who offered "the purest American stock we have."<sup>34</sup> For Walter Page, however, this promising pure American stock existed in the Southern piedmont, where he had been denied opportunities, as well as the mountain highlands. In Walter Page's assessment, it was not geography that prevented "the purest American stock" from attaining the birthright of their race. It was, instead, entrenched Southern politicians and the persistence of a white social hierarchy built under slavery. With ignorance and poverty evident among Southern whites, Walter Page concluded, "One of two things is true – either these forgotten men and women are incapable of development, and belong to a lower order of intelligence than any other people of Anglo-Saxon stock; or our civilization, so far as they are concerned, has been a failure. Of course there is no doubt which of these suppositions is true."<sup>35</sup> As a native of the North Carolina piedmont, Walter Page trusted that readers would not attribute racial failure to men such as himself. Decades later, his New Yorker son Arthur Page was not willing to trust his audience to arrive at the correct conclusion without the geographic explanation of mountain isolation.

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<sup>33</sup> Noel Griese, *Arthur W. Page: Publisher, Public Relations Pioneer, Patriot* (Atlanta: Anvil Pub, 2001), 67.

<sup>34</sup> Walter Hines Page, *The Rebuilding of the Commonwealth: Being Essays towards the Training of the Forgotten Man in the Southern States* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1926), 123; 152-153.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

Arthur Page began his career working under the guidance and direction of his father, who bought into Doubleday Publishing and launched a new magazine called *World's Work*. Walter Page began grooming Arthur to take over his role in Doubleday, Page, & Co. and the editorship of the *World's Work* while Arthur was still in college. Arthur began work in the summer of 1903, when the weekly railed against the corrupting influence of Jewish and non-English immigrants on American Anglo-Saxon stock.<sup>36</sup> When Woodrow Wilson offered Walter Page a diplomatic appointment in England in 1913, Arthur Page officially assumed his father's role at Doubleday, Page & Co.<sup>37</sup> From 1913 until he sold his shares in 1926, Arthur oversaw *World's Work's* editorial attacks on "hyphenate" Americans and support for immigration restrictions on non-Anglo-Saxons. Between 1923 and 1924, he printed a series of articles that "attacked minority populations for failing to integrate into Anglo-Saxon mainstream America, for refusing to admit the superiority of the English 'old stock' and for failing to recognize the inherent superiority of England in America."<sup>38</sup> Page was not merely latching onto a popular political debate to sell magazines. In 1927 Arthur Page wrote to a friend, "If it comes to a choice between Al Smith and a Republican who will stick by the old stock, I am for him."<sup>39</sup> When the Catholic, Irish-American, pro-immigrant politician won the Democratic nomination in 1928, Arthur Page permanently abandoned the party that had made his father an ambassador.

When Arthur W. Page met James G. K. McClure and launched the Educational and Development Fund in 1927, he was personally invested in the maintenance of Anglo-Saxon white supremacy and professionally practiced in transforming popular opinion into action. After

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<sup>36</sup> Greise, *Page*, 24.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

splitting with Doubleday in 1926, Page accepted a position as Vice President of Public Relations at AT&T, which was looking to improve its largely negative public perception. At AT&T, Page “built the nation’s most sophisticated and complete public relations program” and outlined a series of principles for shaping public perception that remains foundational in the field.<sup>40</sup> Page carried the lessons of his editorial days at the *World’s Work* into his new role in public relations, advising others to remember that, “Public opinion may at any time be translated into law.”<sup>41</sup> Page remained at AT&T until 1947, transforming both the company’s image and the field of public relations. He remained the President of the Board of Trustees of the Educational and Development Fund from its founding in 1927 until his own death in 1960.<sup>42</sup> Although Arthur W. Page is remembered for his career at AT&T, his work with the Farmers’ Federation was a lifelong, personal opportunity to put his skills to work on behalf of his politics.

In 1927, Arthur Page had not yet honed the Educational Fund’s public relations message, and early fundraising events risked suggesting to potential donors that mountaineers might be personally responsible for their own circumstances. The Women’s Committee sent invitations featuring log cabin line art to New York society women inviting them to an “afternoon with the North Carolina mountaineers in the Ballroom of the Colony Club,” a women’s only social club for New York’s wealthiest families. Attendees were treated to the performance of mountain ballads, music that was popularly perceived as a sure indication of Anglo-Saxon survival, and a showing of the film *Stark Love*.<sup>43</sup> The 1927 Paramount silent picture told the story of Rob

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<sup>40</sup> Scott Cutlip, *The Unseen Power: Public Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2009), xvii.

<sup>41</sup> Arthur W. Page Society, “About Us,” Philosophy, <https://page.org/site/vision-mission-goals> (accessed March 21, 2019).

<sup>42</sup> The Educational Fund changed its name twice during this time, once when the Trust incorporated in 1944 and again in 1959, when it ceased funding agricultural business projects.

<sup>43</sup> Mrs. Henry Davison, unaddressed invitation, 1927, James G. K. McClure Family Papers, SAA.

Warwick, a lone “white sheep among mountain wolves.” Unlike the other men in his North Carolina mountain community, he had learned to read and thus understood the rules of chivalry and proper behavior toward women. The men around him however lived by “the cruel principle MAN IS THE ABSOLUTE RULER – WOMAN IS THE WORKING SLAVE.” Audiences watched as white mountaineer women worked themselves literally to death as their husbands and fathers drank moonshine and napped in the garden rows. The story hinged on Rob’s effort to save himself and the woman he loved from the ignorance of those around them.<sup>44</sup>

Director Karl Brown drew his story from Horace Kephart’s *Our Southern Highlanders*, a work that so engrossed Brown that he read it in one sitting. The film was shot on a shoestring budget and cast largely with amateur actors. The studio promoted the cast as made up of true mountaineers depicting themselves, even going so far as to insist that leading man Forest James had vanished into the mountains after filming. In truth, the leading lady was discovered at a soda fountain in downtown Knoxville and had prior show business experience, while the leading man returned to Auburn University after filming, where he was a sophomore and a member of the baseball team. Although some reviewers suggested the casting might not be as authentic as the studio suggested, most praised the film’s authenticity.<sup>45</sup>

Except for Forest James’ character, Rob Warwick, the film emphasized white mountain men’s abuse of white women, who were effectively held captive on isolated farms. The New York Women’s Committee’s all-female screenings of *Stark Love* for New York society women targeted the group of donors most likely to sympathize with a depiction of women trapped by

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<sup>44</sup> *Stark Love*, a Karl Brown production, Paramount Pictures, 1927.

<sup>45</sup> John White, “Myth and Movie Making: Karl Brown and the Making of *Stark Love*.” *Film History: An International Journal* 19, no. 1 (2007): 51-55.

marriage and children in a life of drudgery and ignorance. However, a story in which lazy white men victimized white women did not promote sympathy for mountain people as a whole or send the message that white mountain men were worthy of philanthropy. The message in *Stark Love* aligned closely with Walter Page's nineteenth-century complaint that the South purged its best men, leaving ignorant and degenerate men to dominate in the region. Arthur Page and the Educational and Development Fund were not interested in damning Southern elites but in garnering public sympathy and financial support for white mountaineers of both genders. Instead, the popular perception conveyed in *Stark Love* reflected the earlier logic in which mountain whites differed little from poor whites across the South. Without the protective explanation of geographic isolation, their economic failures suggested personal or biologic deficiencies of the sort that would lead a man to nap in cornrows while his wife died from overwork. During the 1920s, this popular representation endured alongside *Sun-Up*'s soothing message of inherent racial value and potential for development among both white men and women in the mountains. *Sun-Up* was far better suited to imagery and message that Arthur Page and the Educational Fund sought to promote and *Stark Love* quickly fell out of the society women's rotation of events.

Women and children as powerful symbolic victims nonetheless remained an important component of Educational Fund materials, although the Fund's depictions blamed geography and economics for women's plight rather than white men. James McClure was fairly obsessed with the distance that mountain women traveled between house and well on farms that did not have piped water. He counted the steps from door to pump so as to calculate the distance farm wives walked during their lifetimes just to supply their families with water. Educational Fund brochures insisted:

there is no figure on the American scene that compels sympathy more than that of the pioneer woman. She bakes the bread and carries the water, she milks the cow and churns the butter, she splits the wood and feeds the chickens and hoes the corn; she is old by the time she is 35.

The lack of income...is hardest on the mother of the family, for it means endless trudging to a spring that might be piped to the kitchen sink, and it means no doctor at childbirth, no medical service in time of illness

For potential supporters who lacked the imagination to trace the life trajectory of such women, the brochure contrasted two photos. The first showed a lovely, young mountain woman above the caption: “‘Old man, old man, I want your daughter, T’ bake me bread and carry me water’ - Mountain Ballad.” The other photo showed an elderly mountain farmwife with a caption that explained that she had carried water from her spring to her house for 70 years, walking 172 miles per year.<sup>46</sup>

Educational Fund materials made clear that, among the many virtues of white mountain women, the greatest was perhaps their ability to birth large numbers of promising Anglo-Saxon children. The committee materials insured that urban supporters understood the large white families of the mountains as a solution to their own urban anxieties. Potential donors concerned that demographic changes foretold a looming ‘race suicide’ among white Americans, found the Educational Fund ready to address both the problem and the solution: “Did you know that today our cities in America are not reproducing themselves; that is, there are not enough children born in our great cities to maintain our population? ... Where are the boys and girls coming from to maintain American institutions? ... The most precious product of the U.S.A. is the American child.” Fortunately, “the only large group in the United States of this original pioneer stock”

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<sup>46</sup> “The Forgotten Pioneer: A New Chance for the Mountain People” [n.d], McClure Papers, Personal Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, b. Fundraising, 3. Brochures, SAA.

remained alive and fertile in the Southern Appalachians. Donors were admonished that “books are very scarce in many sections and children are very plentiful,” which could only be expected in a region where “the best stock in America” have the lowest incomes and “the largest number of children to educate.”<sup>47</sup> The rugged descendants of Sam Houston, Daniel Boone, Andrew Jackson, and Abraham Lincoln had “the inheritance and qualities to carry the American tradition forward,” but they needed help to overcome the geographic isolation that had protected their Anglo-Saxon purity but also denied them access to markets and economic development.<sup>48</sup> Contributing to their support would represent more than philanthropic sentimentality, the committee insisted, “It will mean the Rebuilding of a Race and ultimately a gain to the Nation.”<sup>49</sup>

Lest supporters imagine that white mountain farmers bore responsibility for the plight facing their families, Education Committees argued that the financial growth of the Farmers’ Federation arose from mountain farmers’ efforts and demonstrated their earnest desire to help themselves if given the opportunity. This theme predominated in the Educational Fund’s 1927 brochure “The Forgotten Pioneer,” which became a yearly publication. Amongst line art depicting a log cabin, a long rifle, a covered wagon, and a cauldron, “The Forgotten Pioneer” informed supporters that mountain farmers faced “deadening poverty [that] kills the soul of a people that have historically shown themselves capable of making great contributions to the

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<sup>47</sup> “What We are Doing About that Mountain Farm, Report of 1936 Expenditures,” 1936, McClure Papers, A. Personal Papers, Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, Folder 1; SAA; “What We are Doing About that Mountain Farm, Report of 1937 Expenditures” 1937, McClure Papers, A. Personal Papers, Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, Folder 1, SAA.

<sup>48</sup> “What We are Doing About that Mountain Farm, Report of 1939 Expenditures” 1939, McClure Papers, Personal Papers, Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, SAA.

<sup>49</sup> “Will You Help Us?,” McClure Papers, Personal Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, b. Fundraising, 1. Scrapbook (unbound), (1 of 6 folders), SAA.

onward march of mankind.”<sup>50</sup> Using data drawn from Chatham county, North Carolina, a piedmont county far outside the mountain region, the brochure emphasized that “white farm owners,” “white farm renters,” and “white farm croppers” could expect to earn as little as eight to thirty-four cents per day. To demonstrate white farmers’ efforts to help themselves despite their meager incomes, the brochure tracked the steady growth of Farmers’ Federation stock from \$7,000 in January of 1922 to \$1,284,000 in 1926. The organization had shown its promise and that of its members through rising stock value despite, the committee guaranteed, the fact that even “a ten-dollar investment often strains a mountain farmer to the limit.”<sup>51</sup>

The New York Educational Fund Committee’s publication implied that the Farmers’ Federation’s capital stock purchases originated from Western North Carolina farmers, but the majority of this value came from businessmen in and around Asheville. The Federation permitted farmers to purchase stock through cash, trade, or labor and the farmer members of the organization rose steadily throughout the 1920s. However, the Federation offered common and preferred stock, both of which offered 6 percent dividends on profits. Common stock conferred voting rights to the owner and carried the possibility that, if profits existed above the 6 percent dividend, they would be returned through patronage benefits in proportion to business conducted through the Federation warehouse. This type of stock was also available to farmers through trade or labor in kind rather than cash purchase. Farmer members typically owned common stock. Preferred stock conveyed no voting rights to the holder but guaranteed that dividend payments on preferred stock would be distributed before payments on common stock.

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<sup>50</sup>, “The Forgotten Pioneer” 1927, McClure Papers, Personal Papers, Educational and Development Fund, b. Fundraising, 1. Scrapbook (unbound) (1 of 6 folders), SAA.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.



Businessmen bought preferred stock. Accumulating sufficient capital to pursue both sales to farmers and marketing on behalf of farmers was difficult, leading the cooperative to warn members in 1922, “Our capital is very limited and we must needs go slowly.”<sup>52</sup> The situation improved when Asheville developer Edwin W. Grove promised to buy \$5,000 in stock if the Farmers’ Federation could sell \$15,000 elsewhere. The civic clubs in Asheville pounded the pavement and insured that the Federation oversubscribed Grove’s offer by \$1,900.<sup>53</sup> Grove became a dedicated supporter, arranging marketing meetings with Floridian produce dealers, repeating his initial stock challenge in 1923, and issuing an even larger challenge of \$25,000 on \$75,000 of stock sales in 1925. In urging Asheville’s businessmen to meet this challenge, Grove published an open letter explaining that he regarded the Farmers’ Federation as “the best means of awakening Western North Carolina to its agricultural possibilities” and “a sound investment, yielding a good return.”<sup>54</sup> When he died in 1927, he left the organization a bequest in his will.<sup>55</sup> In addition, McClure garnered contributions from his sister and recruited Edith Vanderbilt to his cause.<sup>56</sup>

Despite McClure’s efforts, cash remained tight during the 1920s. The cooperative asked its members to accept a 60-day note on produce brought to the warehouse in 1923 in lieu of cash so the cooperative could build “capital on which to operate.”<sup>57</sup> In both 1924 and 1925, the Farmers’ Federation paid the 6 percent dividend on preferred stock, but with the dividend on

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<sup>52</sup> “Do Not Expect To Much at First From Federation,” *Farmers’ Federation News*, April 22, 4.

<sup>53</sup> “Asheville and the Farmers’ Federation,” *Farmers’ Federation News*, August 1922, 1; “Asheville clinches Dr. Grove’s offer,” *Farmers’ Federation News*, September 1922, 4, Ager, *We Plow*, 263.

<sup>54</sup> E. W. Grove to James G. K. McClure, “Mr. Grove’s Subscription Letter,” *The Asheville Citizen*, August 4, 1925, 1.

<sup>55</sup> “Final Campaign for Funds will soon be Started,” *Farmers’ Federation News*, August 1925; “The Stamp of Approval,” *Farmers’ Federation News*, October 1925, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Ager, *We Plow*, 257- 259.

<sup>57</sup> “Financing Our Marketing Department,” *Farmers’ Federation News*, January 1923, 4.

common stock totaling \$5,000 the organization won approval from common stock holders to retain the dividend payments so the cooperative could maintain a \$10,000 capital reserve.<sup>58</sup> By August of 1925, the Farmers' Federation commanded \$161,000 in total assets, about half of which was in real estate.<sup>59</sup> The cooperative had sufficient money to operate on a cash basis with its members and had acquired financing to build a new, fireproof headquarters in downtown Asheville. In December of 1925, the new headquarters burned to the ground, destroying the cooperative's stock and capital surplus and leaving the organization \$90,000 in debt. As a result, dividend payments on all stock were suspended and did not resume until 1934.<sup>60</sup>

Initially, Arthur Page and the New York committees of the Educational and Development Fund intended to alleviate the cooperative's economic concerns by raising \$250,000. The funds would be used to establish new projects such as canneries and hatcheries and "hold them together until they have been placed on a self-sustaining basis."<sup>61</sup> The original New York Committee raised \$138,000 during the 1927 campaign and aimed to raise the remaining \$112,000 during 1928.<sup>62</sup> The next year, men's and women's cooperating committees formed in Detroit, with Edsel Ford and several other members of the Ford family participating. In 1930, committees formed in Philadelphia. Committees operated in Cleveland during 1931 and in Pittsburgh in 1941, but did not persist over time. The New York Committee remained the most active group of volunteers, even organizing a Junior Auxiliary in 1935 to train young men for

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<sup>58</sup> "The Small Reserve," *Farmers' Federation News*, November 1924, 4; "What Shall We Do with the Surplus?" *Farmers' Federation News*, October 1925, 4.

<sup>59</sup> "Final Campaign for Funds Will Soon be Started," *Farmers' Federation News*, August 1925, 1.

<sup>60</sup> Blackburn W. Johnson, "Farmers' Federation," February 1938, McClure Papers, 2. The Farmers' Federation, a by document type, 7. Newspaper clippings, 3.

<sup>61</sup> Scrapbook clipping from *New York Herald*, "Eastern Fund Aids Carolina Farm Project," January 15, 1928, James G. K. McClure Family Papers, SAA.

<sup>62</sup> Mrs. Henry P. Davison to Mrs. Young, November 20, 1928, McClure Papers, *Sun-Up* Scrapbook, SAA.

service in the Men's Committee when they came of age. Over 300 of America's urban elite joined the committees involved in active fundraising on behalf of the Farmers' Federation. The Biddle family of Philadelphia, who proudly traced their genealogy to before the Revolution, and the Brown family of Cleveland, whose cantilevered hoists revolutionized shipping, joined Clara Ford and Mrs. Kermit Roosevelt in soliciting funds for the Farmers' Federation Cooperative.<sup>63</sup> In addition to mailings, personal solicitations, and yearly brochures such as "The Forgotten Pioneer" and "What We are Doing About that Mountain Farm," the committees hosted talks by James McClure and accompanying entertainment that included stereoscopic slides, a mountaineer string band, and folk dancing.<sup>64</sup> In 1936, Sherman Pratt, grandson of Standard Oil founder Charles Pratt, sportsman, and occasional film-maker "took some very interesting motion pictures of mountain life and of the activities of the Farmers' Federation."<sup>65</sup> Although the film itself does not appear to survive, this movie joined the Educational Fund committees' rotation of presentations and entertainment.

For many of the most prominent members of the fundraising committees, their work on behalf of the Farmers' Federation went far beyond simply lending their name for inclusion on letters or brochures. Clara Ford opened her home for luncheons.<sup>66</sup> Edsel Ford personally donated \$10,000.<sup>67</sup> When the Farmers' Federation launched a livestock improvement campaign aimed at breeding and improving the work stock of horses and mules, Alfred A. Biddle took

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<sup>63</sup> "What We are Doing," 1929 (Ford); "What We are Doing," 1930 (Biddle); "What We are Doing About that Mountain Farm," 1931, McClure Papers, Personal Papers, Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, SAA (Brown).

<sup>64</sup> Mrs. Henry Davison, "Invitation to hear McClure," September 1932, McClure Papers, Personal Papers, Educational and Development Fund, b. Fundraising, 2. New York Picnics, b. Correspondence, SAA.

<sup>65</sup> "What We are Doing," 1936.

<sup>66</sup> Untitled, *Detroit Free Press*, June 17, 1947, 10.

<sup>67</sup> Ager, *We Plow*, 275.

charge of the evaluation of stallions and jacks. Thoroughbred horse breeder Walter Jeffords donated a three-year-old son of Man O'War.<sup>68</sup> The Educational Fund offered "mountain picnics" at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York as society fundraising events. Waiters decked out in straw hats and overalls served as New York's elite dined on gingham tablecloths, listened to songs that McClure claimed were "played when George Washington was inaugurated President," and learned to square dance.<sup>69</sup> During the 1940s, Thomas J. Watson, CEO of International Business Machines (IBM), served as the master of ceremonies. In 1941, he took the Farmers' Federation string band on a tour of IBM's headquarters while they were in town for the event.<sup>70</sup>

Typically, the rhetoric in the Educational Fund's materials and repeated by its representatives focused on the elevation of the Anglo-Saxon virtues of the mountains rather than the denigration of immigrants or people of color. The language of eugenics, nativism, and white supremacy during the early twentieth century was so pervasively understood that effusive praise for Anglo-Saxons sufficiently conveyed disdain for everyone else. Occasionally though, representatives of the Educational Fund or the group's printed materials offered more overt racial appeals. The 1930 brochure "The Forgotten Frontier" invoked the Educational Fund's standard appeals of timelessness and pure American stock but ended with a more direct reference to the urban situation than solicitations typically employed: "The folk you will be helping are actually nearer kin to you than the many in the city about you ... for they are the last great reservoir of the pure Anglo-Saxon stock left in America."<sup>71</sup> During a speech for donors, McClure related a

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<sup>68</sup> "What We are Doing About that Mountain Farm, Report of 1939 Expenditures," 1939, McClure Papers, Personal Papers, Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, SAA.

<sup>69</sup> Watson, Proceedings of the Farmers' Federation Picnic, November 17, 1947.

<sup>70</sup> *Business Machines*, "Business and Social Leaders Enjoy a North Carolina "Picnic," January 16, 1941, 6-7, McClure Papers, SAA.

<sup>71</sup> "The Forgotten Frontier," [n.d.].

conversation he had with Henry Ford and Robert Wood, chief executive of Sears, Roebuck and Company. McClure first emphasized their agreement that the children of North Carolina represented “America’s most precious resource.” He went on, however, to explain, “A large population of negroes deteriorates and holds back a community ... Here in Western North Carolina we have this precious asset, the children, growing up in a section where there are no negroes to speak of – a very great opportunity for development.”<sup>72</sup>

Although the population of African Americans was thinner in the southern mountains than in plantation regions, the region was not nearly so white as the Fund’s rhetoric insisted. Despite the power and persistence of the erasure of black Appalachians, historians such as David Whisnant, John Inscoe, and Darin Waters have demonstrated that African Americans and their labor played instrumental roles in the economic, cultural, and social development of the mountain South.<sup>73</sup> Some places, such as North Carolina’s tiny Graham County, appeared to justify the region’s reputation for whiteness. In 1900, Graham County had only 153 African American residents, scarcely 3.5 percent of the county’s population. The county’s population of African Americans fell throughout the following decades, with the state counting only one black person in all of Graham during 1930. Islands of whiteness such as Graham County, however, were not the norm in either Appalachia or Western North Carolina.

Between 1865 and 1900, African Americans constituted around 14 percent of the population of southern Appalachia. In Buncombe County and the counties southeast of Asheville, the percentage of African Americans varied between 15 percent and 25 percent during

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<sup>72</sup> James G. K. McClure, undated speech, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative , 2. Minutes, a. Minute Book, SAA.

<sup>73</sup> Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*.

the last half of the nineteenth century. Even as the population of African Americans as a proportion of the population fell between 1900 and 1940, African Americans continued to comprise between 13 percent to 17 percent of the population in Buncombe, McDowell, Polk, and Rutherford Counties.<sup>74</sup> Although small in relation to the black population of the lowland South, African Americans consistently represented a substantial minority in the Western North Carolina mountains. The Farmers' Federation enthusiastically adopted the rhetoric and imagery of Anglo-Saxon whiteness, but their local market area consisted of the counties with the highest proportion of African Americans in Western North Carolina.

Furthermore, the Farmers' Federation Cooperative and its members knew full well that African Americans and African American labor were essential to their region, their work, and their organization. Despite McClure's assertion that Western North Carolina had no black people to speak of, John Shorter and his wife tended James McClure's Hickory Nut Gap farm; Effie Thomas nursed his children. The African American community in Western North Carolina was small compared to the plantation belt, but it was deeply woven into mountain life. As Darin Waters' analysis of the black community in Asheville shows, mountain African Americans tended to migrate toward urban centers such as Asheville, where wage labor was available and community networks offered both social opportunities and a degree of protection. However, many urban African Americans, like their poor white counterparts, relied on a combination of wage labor and rural production, and black farmers persisted.

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<sup>74</sup> U. S. Bureau of Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1910-1940* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census); Waters, "Life Beneath the Veneer, 2-3; Appendix I-V.

Black farmers in Rutherford County approached the Farmers' Federation about joining the cooperative in 1921, five years before white farmers in the county organized under the leadership of O. J. Holler. The Farmers' Federation was ill-prepared for the request and hastily organized a committee "to report on the colored farmer problem." In keeping with the practice of similar organizations of the time, the committee recommended that the co-op "adopt a by-law granting the right to the colored farmers to form an auxiliary, with its own officers." Membership in the auxiliary, however, would depend on each member buying stock in the Farmers' Federation but would limit voting rights among the entire auxiliary membership to two delegates. The black farmers would be allowed to join, but they would not be included in the one-man/one-vote governance that the organization pointed to as evidence of cooperative democracy in action.<sup>75</sup> The Farmers' Federation and the cooperative's boosters argued that including black farmers served to further the organization's goal of raising local prices through control of farm produce. The editor of the *Asheville Citizen-Times* even argued that the Farmers' Federation was answering President Harding's call "for a greater measure of economic opportunity for the colored man" and that a small number of home or farm owning African Americans helped to limit social and political agitation among the rest of the black community.<sup>76</sup> The Farmers' Federation opened the door to Rutherford's black farmers, but held firm to the color line.

The Farmers' Federation Colored Auxiliary officially formed in 1922 and remained active until at least 1924. The short existence of the Colored Auxiliary seems to reflect the

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<sup>75</sup> "Extension to Include Colored Farmers Planned by Farmers' Federation in Annual Meeting," *Asheville Citizen Times*, October 31, 1921, 9.

<sup>76</sup> "A Negro Farmers Auxiliary," *Asheville Citizen Times*, November 1, 1921, 4.

willingness of African Americans in Western North Carolina to take advantage of any opportunity for economic improvement. No Western North Carolina county had a black farm or home agricultural extension agent during the 1920s. With no formal resources and rural African Americans scattered across the mountains, organization in the region centered on the black community leadership in and near Asheville. Edward W. (E. W.) Pearson, an African American real estate and insurance agent in Asheville, founded a yearly African American Agricultural Fair in 1913 and organized the event each year until his death in 1945. The fair featured invited speakers on topics of interest to farmers, prizes for farm products, a midway, and entertainment. Thousands of participants flowed into Asheville from Buncombe and the surrounding counties every year. This agricultural event depended largely on the organization and resources of Asheville's urban black elite. The principal of Shiloh School, Charles E. Saxon, served as treasurer, while Asheville real estate salesman Alonzo McCoy served as President. While the Farmers' Federation Colored Auxiliary existed, Rutherford county farm owner Watson Freeman served as an executive for both the Auxiliary and the Western North Carolina Agricultural Fair. In 1924, the Western North Carolina Agricultural Fair and the annual meeting of the Colored Farmers' Federation occurred simultaneously, with Freeman serving as both the President of the Colored Auxiliary and Vice-President of the Agricultural Fair.<sup>77</sup>

The Colored Auxiliary seems to have faded away after 1924, but the Western North Carolina Agricultural Fair continued. In July of 1924, the Ku Klux Klan held a regional rally in downtown Asheville and the county commissioners instituted segregation in downtown Asheville's public square. The next fall, whites increasingly threatened Asheville's African

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<sup>77</sup> "Colored Fair to Draw Large Crowd," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, September 7, 1924, 12.



American community following a series of rape accusations against black men. Perhaps rising racial tensions led to the collapse of the Colored Auxiliary or perhaps the tough economic climate of the 1920s simply convinced African American farmers that membership in the cooperative did not offer sufficient benefits to justify the cost or trouble. Although it is unclear what happened, in subsequent years, the Farmers' Federation was only listed as a sponsor of the African American Agricultural Fair alongside other businesses.<sup>78</sup>

Nonetheless, the black community consistently took advantage of any opportunity for increasing rural production. Black farmers in Rutherford, who had been paying 12 to 15 percent on loans, sought help from the county farm agent in applying for a farm loan instead.<sup>79</sup> When a state-wide campaign required county farm agents to encourage and support garden production among African American communities, E. W. Pearson leapt at the opportunity. Working primarily through schools and churches in African American communities, Pearson organized over 150 participants in seven communities with plans to reach more. As part of the project, each participant grew at least six different vegetables, with the county agents charged with providing as much assistance as possible. Along with the organization effort, Pearson recruited speakers from the Farmers' Federation to visit the newly organized garden communities.<sup>80</sup>

The farm agent in Rutherford County, which had a larger percentage of black farmers, offered at least some support to the African American community, but farm and home agents in Buncombe County did not. No Western North Carolina county had an assigned African

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<sup>78</sup> Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 85; Program for the 1947 Buncombe County District Agricultural Fair, September 1947, North Carolina Room, Item L923-DS, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, NC.

<sup>79</sup> Untitled, *Farmers' Federation News*, December 1925, 5.

<sup>80</sup> "Negroes Rallying to Call of Garden Campaign," *Farmers' Federation News*, May 1923, 1; "Negroes Enroll in Garden Campaign," *Farmers' Federation News*, 10.

American farm agent during the period, leaving the white agent to serve both black and white farmers. In Rutherford County, farm agents appear to have offered service to farmers of both races, although they seemed to restrict their services to the largest and most progressive black farmers. Rutherford County farm agent reports included African American farmers' projects alongside white farmers and incorporated the results of soil improvement demonstrations on a black farmer's land.<sup>81</sup> Buncombe County's farm agents reported no such projects. Outside of the state-wide garden project, African Americans in Buncombe County garnered little notice from the county agents.

Despite the dearth of services, evidence from both the 1920s and 1930s suggests that African Americans in Western North Carolina made the most of limited opportunities. The African American Agricultural Fair continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s, but the black community had few other agricultural extension services until 1932. For a brief period between 1932 and 1934, the Women's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which ran the Allen School for African American women in Asheville, partnered with the Extension Division of the State College at Raleigh to fund a black Home Extension Agent in Buncombe County. Mattie Mae Hill was employed by the North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service but, since the Women's Missionary Society supported her work, she maintained her office at the Allen School. A graduate of the Allen School, the Tuskegee Institute, and the American School of Home Economics at Chicago, Hill was highly qualified for

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<sup>81</sup> "Negro Farmer in Rutherford Grows Berries," *Asheville Citizen Times*, August 30, 1937; "Seeding Grains in Rutherford Reported," *Asheville Citizen Times*, February 13, 1938, 8.

home extension work, but she understood immediately that she needed to serve as both home and farm agent.<sup>82</sup>

In much the same way that successful black businessmen provided the resources behind the Western North Carolina Agricultural Fair, the enthusiastic attendance at Hill's events suggests that her home extension projects drew both urban and rural participants. In a region where virtually all farmers, regardless of race, relied on some combination of rural production and wage labor, Western North Carolina's hard-pressed black population appear to blur the lines between urban and rural even more than their white counterparts. Hill believed that effective demonstration work could be conducted in 18 communities, but she hoped to consolidate programs in "many of the little communities that are scattered over the mountains" in order to reach as many people as possible.<sup>83</sup> She was remarkably successful. The 1930 census recorded a total of 643 rural blacks in Buncombe County; in nine months during 1933 over 2,000 people attended Hill's county meetings. The urban nature of the Western North Carolina Agricultural Fair's leadership, Pearson's ability to recruit participants in the garden project, and community enthusiasm for Hill's rural outreach suggest the extent to which Western North Carolina's African American community moved between rural production and urban wage labor. The move could occur almost seamlessly. So long as he worked his own land, John Shorter considered himself a farmer. When he moved with his second wife into a house on the McClure's property,

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<sup>82</sup> "Mattie Mae Hill, First Negro Home Agent Here, Dies," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, November 30, 1935, 12; Mattie Hill, Report of Home Demonstration Work, 1933.

<sup>83</sup> Mattie Mae Hill, North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service Report of Home Demonstration Work, Buncombe County, NC," 1932, Cooperative Extension Service Annual Reports, (UA102.002), NCSU; Hill, Report, 1933; Hill, Report of Home Demonstration, 1934.

he became a wage labor gardener.<sup>84</sup> The work he did changed very little, but his classification transformed along with his relation to the land and labor. Asheville's African American community was not alone in moving between rural production and urban wage labor, but their personal safety and restricted economic security was consistently more precarious than was the case for poor mountain whites.

Like Pearson, Hill found that schools and churches offered the best opportunities for organizing and, through these existing community resources, she offered programs that reflected the opportunities and limited resources of the people who she served. For example, Buncombe County's white home demonstration agent conducted programs on home beautification that guided girls through creating models of appropriate room design. Hill, on the other hand, held workshops that taught girls to repurpose old clothing into useable designs. White women watched demonstrations of appropriate canning procedures; Hill set up community canning stations that ran from morning to twilight where women learned to safely put up their excess garden produce without dedicated equipment or running water. The programs Hill offered were pragmatic, popular, and geared toward the needs of the community. She was funded by a private organization and had "no direct contact with county officials" in her work, but her position was nevertheless eliminated when the county pulled support for home extension work in 1934-1935.<sup>85</sup> Unlike the white home demonstration agent position, Hill's position was not restored

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<sup>84</sup> Tenth Census, 1880; Twelfth Census, 1900; Fourteenth Census, 1920; Fifteenth Census, 1930; Sixteenth Census, 1940, Fairview, Buncombe County, North Carolina.

<sup>85</sup> "Mattie Hill to Take Post in Bertie County," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, November 30, 1935, 12.

when economic conditions improved. Buncombe County's remaining African American farmers were still petitioning for the county to support a black home demonstration agent in 1954.<sup>86</sup>

Despite the lack of services to the black community and the image promoted by the Educational and Development Fund, members of the Farmers' Federation knew that African American labor was critical to regional agricultural production and their own organization. Aside from the thousands of African American farmers who poured into Asheville each year for the agricultural fair, members of the Federation constantly worked with and relied on black labor. In considering the admission of black farmers into the cooperative, white members admitted that black farmers in Rutherford were among the best truck farmers in the area – an admission that also marked them as potentially dangerous market competition. Throughout its existence the Farmers' Federation touted its warehouse trucks as the primary means through which the organization connected with far-flung farmers. For farms scattered across the mountains, the truck represented their primary interaction with the cooperative. In 1925, the Federation paid for life insurance for employees. The first payout went to African American widow Ollie Shelton, upon the death of her husband Henry Shelton, the driver of the Hendersonville Farmers' Federation warehouse truck.<sup>87</sup>

The racialization and gendering of agricultural work insured that African Americans held other vital agricultural jobs as well. For instance, the Farmers' Federation played an important role in re-launching tobacco auctions in Asheville. White men gathered on the tobacco floors to display their products and jostle for bragging rights, while black men shifted and gathered the

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<sup>86</sup> "Negroes Seek Consideration for Governmental Employment," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, March 5, 1954, sec 2, 1.

<sup>87</sup> "First Insurance Claim is Promptly Paid by Company," *Farmers' Federation News*, December 1925, 1.

products during tobacco sales. The opening of the tobacco market was a social event, insuring that African American men performed their work in front of an audience. Racial lines were even more stark in poultry processing. The filth, danger, and discomfort of the work made it one of the few jobs reserved for African Americans. Where mountain poultry processing plants could not hire enough black workers to fill the jobs, the least employable whites filled the positions and left as soon as they could acquire work in a better industry. Asheville's black community, however, offered the Farmers' Federation an ample supply of black workers who faced a labor market largely restricted to dangerous or uncomfortable low-wage positions. When the Farmers' Federation opened its poultry dressing plant, subsidized by funds raised through the Educational and Development Fund, it turned to Asheville's black community to do the work. Black men unloaded the poultry, slaughtered the birds, plucked the carcasses, and sent them to the processing room, where black women cut and carved the birds.<sup>88</sup> To avoid even considering white labor for this employment, the Federation advertised specifically for "Colored help wanted" in its facility.<sup>89</sup>

From McClure's workforce at Hickory Nut Gap Farm to the far-flung farmer members who depended on Henry Shelton to deliver fertilizer or transport milk to market, members of the Farmers' Federation knew that African American agricultural labor was critical to rural production in Western North Carolina. This dependence on African American labor was not obscured or invisible to farmers or cooperative leadership and became even more crucial as the

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<sup>88</sup> E. M. Ball, record # N3077, photographic negative, "Poultry arriving at Farmers' Federation;" record #3077.1, photograph, "Men plucking chickens;" record #3077.2, photograph, "Plucked chickens with women," August 14, 1951, E. M. Ball Photographic Collection (1918-1969), D. H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville 28804.

<sup>89</sup> "Colored Help Wanted," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, December 21, 1947.

Federation built the expensive poultry processing facility that depended on a black workforce. As Western North Carolina's black population pieced together survival through a mix of limited urban and rural opportunities, the agricultural exploitation of black labor proceeded as a matter of course. On the national stage, however, the Educational and Development Fund and its supporters disappeared Western North Carolina's African American population entirely. Arthur Page saw a national threat arising not primarily from the African American population, who had long been subject to rigorous social controls, but from a rising population of foreign immigration, whom he regarded as a crisis-level threat to national identity. The mythological Anglo-Saxon purity of the Southern mountains that the Educational Fund sold to donors required white mountaineers exist in utter racial isolation lest the presence of African Americans risk raising the specter of racial mixing and racial degeneration. The logic of the mountaineer stereotype that the Educational Fund and the Farmers' Federation promoted required the absolute of geographic isolation, the disappearance of African American mountaineers, and assurances that donors who helped mountaineers enter the modern world could expect these "forgotten pioneers" to affirm (rather than call into question) the ideology of white supremacy. In selectively publicizing and enacting this particular set of racial assumptions during the early twentieth century, the Educational Fund and participating members of the Farmers' Federation shaped stereotypes of Southern mountaineers to emphasize highlanders' supposed racial value, a quality that had served as the foundation of regional stereotypes since nineteenth-century fiction writers first created a mythological mountain preserve of racially pure Anglo-Saxons.

## **Chapter 5:**

### **Costs and Consequences: Accounting for the Value of Whiteness**

The Farmers' Federation Cooperative maintained a vibrant and visible presence across Western North Carolina. To the farmer members and the general public, the myriad of projects, programs, and campaigns launched under the auspices of the Farmers' Federation were simply efforts of the agricultural cooperative. Legally, however, the Farmers' Federation Cooperative and the Educational Development Fund of the Farmers' Federation existed as two distinct organizations, with incestuous leadership but separate finances. This structure enabled the Educational Fund and the Farmers' Federation to pass income and debt across organizations, spin off enterprises into new cooperatives and foundations, and build a substantial endowment that provided significant subsidies to the co-op. The Educational Fund enabled the Farmers' Federation to survive financial catastrophes that would have otherwise forced the cooperative to close, subsidized the Federation's most expensive investments, and guaranteed payment to the organization's creditors. On the ground in North Carolina, however, Educational Fund and Farmers' Federation programs functioned as one and the same. The Educational Fund's appeal to racial anxiety funneled tens of thousands of dollars each year into the Farmers' Federation. With this substantial subsidy in the background, the Farmers' Federation reported success after success despite daunting agricultural and economic challenges. Understandably, farmers struggling to survive in an agricultural economy increasingly dominated by industrial-style production, the Great Depression, and the stresses of World War II attributed their ability to maneuver within this shifting landscape to their own hard work, ingenuity, and cooperation. In fact, the area that the Farmers' Federation served benefitted from millions of dollars of donations



acquired through appeals to white supremacy and invested in buoying Western North Carolina agriculture.

The Educational Fund's fundraising efforts ran from the 1920s until the 1950s and, although the flavor of campaigns transformed across the decades, the racial foundation remained constant. The Educational Fund's appeal depended on popular acceptance of both the mythological whiteness of the Southern mountains and the mythological isolation of the region from national market trends. Together, these false portrayals of the region redeemed mountaineers from their own economic circumstances and designated them as worthy of charitable support. As Herbert Hoover wrote to James G. K. McClure in 1930, "The economic backwardness of their condition is not due to lack of native ability, but chiefly to the fact that they live in a section of the United States where because of isolation and neglect no markets for agricultural products have been organized."<sup>1</sup> Even with the mountaineers thus redeemed from their poverty, the Educational Fund insisted that it was not funding charity. Instead, it was only seeking to aid mountain farmers in improving their own conditions.<sup>2</sup> The Educational Fund offered donors an opportunity to shape the racial future of America through a marketing project that would expand economic return on donations and report outcomes in the language of businessmen.

The Educational and Development Fund appealed explicitly to donors' racial anxieties during the fundraising campaigns conducted during the 1930s. As the 1930 version of "The Forgotten Pioneer" explained:

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Hoover to James G. K. McClure, Jr., June 6, 1930, McClure Papers, Personal Papers, 3. Correspondence, SAA.

<sup>2</sup> "What We are Doing About that Mountain Farm, Report of 1932 Expenditures," 1932, McClure Papers, Personal Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, SAA.

Only the Boones and the Crocketts, and the Kentons and the Lincolns knew that there were also fertile valleys, fine timber, and the independence that these staunch Anglo-Saxons had for centuries considered their rightful heritage ... America has left *five million* of the descendants of these people ... more than ninety-eight per cent *per American pioneer stock* ... untouched by the economic and social opportunity shared by the humblest immigrant to our shores ... Complete poverty marks them ... but it is poverty without starvation, for these people, through long years of want, have learned to care for one another in a way that civilization in cities has long forgotten ... Yet these mountain people do not need charity ... nor would they accept it. The idea is as intolerable to them as it is to you.<sup>3</sup>

The Educational Fund argued that wealthy whites could rectify a situation in which native-born whites were denied opportunities available to recent immigrants by providing the seed money that would launch white mountaineers out of the mountains and into mainstream America. Donations to the Fund were, therefore, not charity but “opening up *permanent* opportunity for a people who have been denied even the privilege of helping themselves.” Potential donors were assured that the results would be far-reaching: “He is, you will remember, a pure Anglo-Saxon and his first thought on receiving a few dollars is to improve the lot of his wife and family.” Given the opportunity to work for profit, white mountaineers would raise themselves out of poverty.<sup>4</sup> In the circular logic of the Educational Fund, mountaineers’ mythological whiteness not only legitimated the philanthropic value of Southern highlanders, it also assured donors that their funds would be used in worthy and appropriate ways.

Although the Educational Fund adjusted this argument over the following decades, the basic framework remained intact. As the nation struggled through 1931, the Educational Fund referred to economic support of the Farmers’ Federation as “a unique experiment in a

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<sup>3</sup> “The Forgotten Pioneer: The Most Amazing and Least-Known Story of American Life,” 1930, McClure Papers, B. Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, b. Fundraising, 1. Scrapbook (unbound), 1 of 6, SAA.

<sup>4</sup> “The Forgotten Pioneer,” 1930.

constructive type of relief.”<sup>5</sup> As conservative criticism of New Deal programs expanded during the runup to the 1936 election, the Educational Fund assured donors, “no people in a low income bracket can be permanently helped by Relief ... It takes the fight out of people, and people in a low income bracket have to have a lot of fight instilled in them.” The Educational Fund supported programs that created income arising “by hard work and not by fiat” and thus enabled the pioneers of the Southern mountains to raise their children “in independence and not on relief.”<sup>6</sup> As international tensions rose during the fall of 1941, the “forgotten pioneer” in the Southern mountains became the “foundations of American Democracy” and the Farmers’ Federation Cooperative an example of “democracy in action.”<sup>7</sup> When war broke out, Southern farmers demonstrated their national value by overcoming their own poverty and the scarcity of wartime labor to “develop as much production of foodstuff as possible for the war program,” with every county served by the Farmers’ Federation surpassing its goal for war production.<sup>8</sup> As the Educational Fund moved into funding new, post-war projects, including health insurance enrollments in rural communities, it emphasized that such interventions were necessary to preserve the “qualities out of which America was created.”<sup>9</sup> Through each of these rhetorical realignments, the Educational Fund retained its emphasis on the national value that race granted to mountain whites.

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<sup>5</sup> “What We are Doing,” 1931.

<sup>6</sup> “The Forgotten Pioneer Living in the Southern Mountains,” 1935, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, b. Fundraising, 3. Brochures, SAA.

<sup>7</sup> “The Forgotten Pioneer: A New Chance for Mountain People,” 1941, McClure Papers, A. Personal Papers, Philadelphia, SAA.

<sup>8</sup> “What We are Doing About that Mountain Farm,” Report of 1944 Expenditures, McClure Papers, A. Personal Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, SAA.

<sup>9</sup> “What We are Doing,” 1953.

The Educational Fund's emphasis on whiteness and poverty navigated a thin line between racial elevation and class disparity that has led many subsequent interpreters to incorrectly link the hillbilly or mountaineer image with racialization and denigration in a national context.<sup>10</sup> This confusion arises, at least in part, from white supremacist society's presumption that racial background ought to translate into social, cultural, and economic success. Whites who fail to live up to those assumptions thus threaten the ideology of white supremacy. As a result, these poor whites must be compartmentalized in some way that rationalizes their apparent failures despite their supposed racial advantages. Ignorance, degeneracy, pathology, addiction, or racial impurity might account for individuals' failure to realize the expectations of racial superiority. Ignorance could be rectified, while degeneracy or racial impurity were regarded as inherent, but all such efforts to rationalize white poverty held individuals responsible for their circumstances and thus carved them out of consideration within the larger racialized social hierarchy. The racially laden concept of "poor white trash" traffics in this logic by implying that whiteness ought not equate with poverty.<sup>11</sup> Within this ideology, a population of over five million pure Anglo-Saxons living in abject poverty in the Southern mountains, as the Educational and Development Fund claimed, could pose a significant challenge to white supremacy and, potentially, subject mountaineers to disdain and prejudice akin to racialization. Those who subscribe to this interpretation, however, overlook the role that mountains and geographic isolation played in the popular portrayal of mountaineers during the twentieth century.

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<sup>10</sup> For an example of a well-researched work that nonetheless mischaracterizes mountain stereotyping as racialization, see Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Annalee Newton and Matthew Wray, "What is 'White Trash'? Stereotypes and Economic Conditions of Poor Whites in the United States," in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York: New York University Press, 1997): 168-186.

As Herbert Hoover insisted, the mountains and the accompanying presumption of isolation from modern markets saved mountaineers from class denigration on the national stage. Geography, and the supposed failure of national markets to penetrate the mountains, redeemed white mountain farmers from the implication that their economic circumstances arose from either a personal or racial failure. Rather, Southern mountaineers had simply never had the opportunity to live up to the potential of their rightful racial heritage. So long as mountaineers remained in the mountains, it was their race, not their class, that mattered.

Farmer members understood themselves as hard-pressed, but certainly not anti-modern. After all, they joined an organization that explicitly supported standardized bulk production, adopted new crops, new livestock breeds, and new systems of familial labor in order to expand their market production. The distinction between outside caricatures and internal perceptions meant that the Educational and Development Fund and the Farmers' Federation presented the same information differently within the region than they did when addressing donors - and each audience interpreted the same information through their own assumptions. Within Western North Carolina, McClure presented himself as a Fairview farmer with a personal interest in local agricultural conditions. To donors, he was a "man from the outside world" who was leading pioneers into the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> Both farmer members and donors received the *Farmers' Federation News*. To farmers, the newsletter was billed as a means for business-minded farmers to remain apprised of the latest practices relevant in the mountains. To donors, it was the opening wedge for replacing backwards practices with standardized agricultural production and

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<sup>12</sup> "The Forgotten Pioneer," 1930.

an “advance agent for the Federation.”<sup>13</sup> The enormously popular Farmers’ Federation annual picnics regularly drew thousands of participants to hear speakers, participate in contests, enjoy local talent, and indulge in seemingly unlimited lemonade and watermelon. Locally, farm families understood these events as social and cultural celebrations where farm communities came together at events akin to county fairs. To the donors whose contributions funded these annual picnics, these were educational events where backwards farmers learned scientific practices.<sup>14</sup>

While the fundraising portrayal of mountain farmers would have garnered few friends had the Farmers’ Federation insisted on applying that characterization to its own members at home, the ability to slide seamlessly between the popularly understood mountain stereotype and aspiring progressive businessmen was critical to the Educational Fund’s fundraising efforts. After all, the dual emphasis on mountain isolation and racial purity suggested that, if the limitations of geography were conquered, mountaineers would become slightly folksier versions of their benefactors. The Farmers’ Federation performers brought mountain stereotypes to life at fundraising events, but when Thomas Watson took Farmers’ Federation performers to tour IBM

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<sup>13</sup> “What We are Doing,” 1931.

<sup>14</sup> “What We are Doing,” 1936; “What We are Doing About that Mountain Farm,” Report of 1938 Expenditures, 1938, McClure Papers, Personal Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, SAA; “What We are Doing,” 1939; “What We are Doing About that Mountain Farm,” Report of 1940 Expenditures, 1940, McClure Papers, Personal Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, SAA; “What We are Doing About that Mountain Farm,” Report of 1941 Expenditures, 1941, McClure Papers, Personal Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, SAA; “What We are Doing,” 1944; Trustees of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes of the Trustees, September 26, 1945, McClure Papers, B. Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, 2. Minutes, 1. Minute Book, SAA; Report of Audit of Accounts for period January 1, 1942 – December 31, 1947, McClure Papers, B. Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative, 4. Audit of Reports, SAA; Trustees of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes of the Trustees, May 10, 1948, McClure Papers, B. Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, 2. Minutes, 1. Minute Book, SAA; “Foundation Founded to Develop Markets,” [undated clipping, sales through 1951,] McClure Papers, B. Business Papers, a By document type, Publications, SAA; “What We are Doing,” 1953.

headquarters, they traded straw hats for business suits. Watson was not trotting out irredeemable rubes for the amusement of his more sophisticated urban employees. Instead, he was introducing the rising mountaineers to the modern world in which they were expected to demonstrate the value of their Anglo-Saxon character traits.<sup>15</sup> The overblown images of highland peculiarity, mythological purity of mountain inhabitants, and their utter isolation from modernity were widely accepted as accurate portrayals of the Southern mountains. Once mountaineers had access to national markets, the Educational Fund promised, they would lose the negative aspects of their mountaineer peculiarity and step into their rightful roles as social, cultural, and business leaders.

In portraying mountaineers as future Anglo-Saxon elite in the making, the Educational Fund set up the expectation among donors that contributions toward the alleviation of market isolation in the Southern mountains would rapidly improve economic conditions in the region. After eleven years of fundraising based on the alleviation of market isolation as a means to enable mountaineers to achieve their racial potential, the Educational Fund addressed this criticism directly in 1939:

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<sup>15</sup> “North Carolina ‘Picnic’ Enjoyed at the Waldorf,” *Business Machines*, January 16, 1941, vol 4, 1; Watson, “Proceedings of the Farmers’ Federation Picnic,” November 17, 1947.

We realize that perhaps some of our contributors, without analyzing the situation, feel that the need of contributions should be less because we are developing self-sustaining services. We should like to point out that this very achievement almost constitutes a compulsion to go into the "lost areas," where the problem is tougher ... to develop self-sustaining enterprises in these remote counties that will give these children a chance to develop the kind of life which will allow them to play their part in America.<sup>16</sup>

There were always more mountain children, but the Educational Fund promised economic advancement and argued that it funded the establishment of self-sustaining business enterprises rather than charity or relief for farmers. This meant that the Fund needed to demonstrate positive economic outcomes for the projects it supported in the region. The division of finances between the Educational Fund and the Farmers' Federation Cooperative enabled both organizations to paint their financial circumstances in the best possible light.

Most often, the Educational Fund presented its projects as seed funding for marketing efforts that could not be sufficiently funded by local farmers' resources alone. Under this model, the Educational Fund provided start-up costs for a project that then became self-supporting. Although the Educational Fund presented self-sufficiency within three to four years as the goal for all projects, most projects did not become self-sufficient - and all Farmers' Federation projects benefited from economic subsidies provided through the Educational Fund and the financial safety net of philanthropic dollars. Throughout the Farmers' Federation service area, however, local warehouses were almost universally self-sufficient within a year of establishment.<sup>17</sup> Local warehouses provided the primary point of interaction for most farmer

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<sup>16</sup> "What We are Doing," 1939.

<sup>17</sup> "What We are Doing," 1931; "What We are Doing About that Mountain Farm," Report of 1935 Expenditures, McClure Papers, Personal Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, SAA; "The Forgotten Pioneer," 1935; "What We are Doing," 1936; "What We are Doing," 1937; "What We are Doing," 1938; "What We are Doing," 1944; "Over 1000 Attend Waynesville Stockholders Meeting," Press



members and thus, their primary point of contact with the organization was largely supported through local cooperative efforts. This apparent self-sufficiency belied the cooperative's actual financial situation.

From the time the Educational Fund was established, it subsidized significant aspects of the Farmers' Federation. The Fund identified the sweet potato curing house in Rutherford County as a successful example of a self-sustaining operation that required virtually no on-going investment. Although accurate when applied strictly to the sweet potato curing house itself, this characterization elided the connection between the sweet potato curing house, which was conceived, funded, and managed by Rutherford farmer O. J. Holler, and the Educational Fund's employment of Holler as a full-time field agent responsible for running the sweet potato curing houses and working on behalf of the Farmers' Federation outside of Buncombe County. The Educational Fund paid Farmers' Federation Field Agent Holler's salary for at least 16 years. Meanwhile, the Educational Fund characterized the sweet potato curing facility as self-supporting aside from occasional small yearly losses. The distinction between self-supported projects and donor-supported projects and the fluidity between Educational Fund programs and Farmers' Federation programs existed throughout both organizations.<sup>18</sup>

Fortunately for the Farmers' Federation, the Educational Fund had already conducted successful fundraising campaigns before the Great Depression hit. Donor funds kept the

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Release, [1954?], McClure Papers, Business Papers, 2. The Farmers' Federation, a. by document type, 9. Press Releases, SAA.

<sup>18</sup> "What We are Doing About that Mountain Farm," 1928, McClure Papers, Personal Papers, Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, SAA; "What We are Doing," 1929; "What We are Doing," 1930; "What We are Doing," 1931; "What We are Doing About that Mountain Farm," Report of 1933 Expenditures, McClure Papers, Personal Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, SAA; "What We are Doing About that Mountain Farm," 1934, McClure Papers, Personal Papers, Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, SAA; "What We are Doing," 1935; "What We are Doing," 1936; "What We are Doing," 1937; Trustees, Minutes, 1944.

cooperative in business and expanding despite agricultural and economic catastrophes. By 1929, buying and selling poultry generated \$490,000 in cash flow through the Farmers' Federation. However, maintaining that market depended on the Educational Fund. The Fund provided significant startup funding, including \$30,000 in 1929 for the establishment of hatcheries. When the Federation ran poultry cars at a loss in 1929 and 1930 in order to fend off the incursion of commercial poultry buyers, the Educational Fund covered those losses, which amounted to just under \$14,000. In 1930, a brooder house at the hatchery exploded and \$2,000 worth of chickens died in the ensuing fire. In addition, the Fund provided funding for developing poultry marketing and covered the salary of a poultry specialist. On the eve of the Great Depression, the Educational Fund had spent \$50,000 to build and hold a poultry market.<sup>19</sup>

When twelve banks failed in Western North Carolina during 1930, the Farmers' Federation lost its entire deposit of cash on hand, leaving the cooperative unable to cover expenses incurred during the last quarter of 1930. In addition to the bank losses, the cannery, which the Educational Fund had provided \$10,000 to build, also suffered a business loss. Combined, the Educational Fund covered almost \$22,000 of the Farmers' Federation operating losses at the beginning of 1931. Although substantial in terms of maintaining the operations of the Farmers' Federation, it was a relatively small expenditure for the Educational Fund.<sup>20</sup>

Philanthropic dollars kept the Farmers' Federation afloat over the next several years. It is unclear how much the Educational Fund collected from fundraising campaigns between 1928 and 1931, but the amount was considerable. In the first four years of operation, the Educational

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<sup>19</sup> "What We are Doing," 1929; "What We are Doing," 1930.

<sup>20</sup> "What We are Doing," 1931.

Fund provided over \$219,000 in financial support for projects through the Farmers' Federation. Some of this money paid for property and assets, such as the \$10,000 to build the cannery, but over \$190,000 was spent on programs and operations that provided the Fund with no durable assets. This external funding enabled the Farmers' Federation to expand services into Burke and Haywood Counties even as farm prices continued to fall. In 1932, poultry prices, which had been as high as 28 cents a pound, plummeted to 8 cents a pound. Low prices meant farmers had no interest in expanding their flocks through the hatchery program, but the Educational Fund judged that it was worth maintaining the hatchery in the hopes of improving poultry quality in the future. Farm prices fell even lower in 1933. The Educational Fund cut one of the salaried positions it funded from full time to part time, but maintained O. J. Holler as a full time employee.<sup>21</sup>

Educational Fund monies were critical to keeping the Federation in business through the Depression, but the cooperative and its members also worked tirelessly and endured significant hardship during the economic crisis. Every department within the Farmers' Federation worked to attain self-sufficiency or keep losses as low as possible. Immediately after the banking collapse, Farmers' Federation members voted to reduce the value of their own stock. Farmers' Federation employees volunteered to accept a pay-cut.<sup>22</sup> Despite consistently falling values on farm products, Farmers' Federation warehouses eked out small profits while buying and selling an increased quantity of farm products brought in by members. The Educational Fund, the Farmers' Federation, and farm families attempted a wide range of rural production in the hopes of raising

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<sup>21</sup> "What We are Doing," 1931; "What We are Doing," 1933.

<sup>22</sup> Blackburn, "Farmers' Federation," 2; "What We are Doing," 1933.

a little cash. The Educational Fund supported efforts to market foraged goods including walnuts, wild strawberries, and blackberries and to expand the sale of pulpwood from mountain farms to the Champion Paper Mill in Canton, seventeen miles from Asheville.<sup>23</sup> Before the provisions of the NRA raised the price for piecework beyond profitability, the Educational Fund initiated a piecework project in which farm families made paper fillers for apple packing baskets and containers for small fruits.<sup>24</sup> The cash crisis on Western North Carolina farms was severe, but diversified production meant few farm families went hungry and, as a result, urban relatives sought food security with rural relatives. In the spring of 1930, the Farmers' Federation initiated the Lord's Acre Movement, a religious project aimed at accommodating this capacity for diverse farm production in a cash poor economy. Participants in the Lord's Acre program designated an acre of farmland or specific livestock to the church. This farm produce was then collected and sold through the Farmers' Federation. Despite the stresses of the Depression, the program expanded every year. By 1935, the Lord's Acre movement encompassed over 300 churches and drew Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace as the speaker at the Lord's Acre annual meeting.<sup>25</sup> Western North Carolina farm families benefited from the distant financial contributions of wealthy donors, but they were also striving to combat an unprecedented economic crisis with the resources at hand.

Educational Fund reports to donors during the 1930s emphasized low agricultural prices, a poor business climate, and "nationwide demoralization," but the fundraising organization nonetheless cast its expenditures as profitable investments.<sup>26</sup> The Educational Fund dutifully

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<sup>23</sup> "What We are Doing," 1931.

<sup>24</sup> "What We are Doing," 1933.

<sup>25</sup> "What We are Doing," 1935.

<sup>26</sup> "What We are Doing," 1933.

reported the particular set-backs that major initiatives faced each year, but framed ongoing funding for these projects in terms of the total amount paid to regional farmers through the Farmers' Federation in relation to each dollar contributed to the Educational Fund. For example, in 1931 the Educational Fund reported that "for every dollar received by the Trustees of the Fund during these four years [1928, 1929, 1930, 1931], the mountain people have received \$8.20."<sup>27</sup> To arrive at this figure, the Trustees totaled the cumulative business of the Farmers' Federation programs for the past four years and divided the total by the donations provided by the Educational Fund during the same period. This method of calculation enabled the Trustees to report returns based on the overall cash flow handled through all Farmers' Federation warehouses and projects, instead of net profit or loss. As a result, the Educational Fund could report significant multiplication of the money it provided to the Federation even during years when funded projects, or the entire Farmers' Federation, lost money. The Educational Fund Trustees adapted this method of reporting returns on donations twice during the 1930s. In 1932, they added the total amount paid to farmers through Asheville's burley tobacco markets into the total cash flow in their calculation, which raised the amount received by mountain farmers to \$12.33 for each dollar contributed to the Educational Fund.<sup>28</sup> The Trustees again expanded the total cash flow in this calculation during 1938 to include wages and salaries paid to employees of the Farmers' Federation and its associated industries.<sup>29</sup>

The Trustees' decision to incorporate monies paid to farmers through the tobacco auctions reflected the Educational Fund's identification of tobacco as an example of the Fund's

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<sup>27</sup> "What We are Doing," 1931.

<sup>28</sup> "What We are Doing," 1932.

<sup>29</sup> "What We are Doing," 1938.

overall goal for developing markets in the Southern mountains. The Farmers' Federation initiated the return of tobacco markets to Asheville in 1930 with \$3,500 in financial support from the Educational Fund. Western North Carolina abandoned tobacco by the turn of the twentieth century, following the collapse of the flue-cured bright tobacco markets. The Farmers' Federation identified air-cured burley tobacco as a promising cash crop for the region. The Federation pushed farmers to grow between a half acre and two acres of air-cured burley as a supplemental cash crop, convinced the Asheville Civic Club to fund and oversee the construction of a tobacco auction house in Asheville, and recruited buyers. During December 1930 and January 1931, growers sold more than 3,600,000 pounds of tobacco for just over \$600,000 during the first tobacco auction conducted in Asheville's new, 60,000-foot tobacco warehouse. The Farmers' Federation managed the tobacco auctions at this warehouse and another warehouse that was built later, but they were only responsible for facilitating sales.<sup>30</sup>

The Farmers' Federation remained involved in tobacco marketing throughout the following decades. When the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) instituted curtailments on tobacco, the cooperative lobbied unsuccessfully for expanded acreage.<sup>31</sup> Beginning with the 1941 crop year, The Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), a New Deal financial institution charged with carrying out federal agricultural price support programs, contracted the Federation as the local agent for federal parity payments for burley tobacco, which assured growers they would receive at least 85 percent of government parity pricing.<sup>32</sup> Although the Farmers' Federation was heavily involved in tobacco sales, the co-op did not directly buy or

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<sup>30</sup> "What We are Doing," 1930.

<sup>31</sup> "What We are Doing," 1936.

<sup>32</sup> "Federation Founded to Develop Markets," undated article, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 2. The Farmers' Federation, a. by document type, Publications, SAA.

sell tobacco until the 1940s, when the Farmers' Federation spent just under \$1,000 of Educational Fund money to erect their own tobacco warehouse and provide Asheville's tobacco auctions with more space. The Federation managed all of Asheville's tobacco houses, but even after the co-op's warehouse opened in 1944, the Federation merely facilitated sales between buyers and producers rather than purchasing crops directly.<sup>33</sup> The annual burley tobacco markets reliably generated hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash flow each year with little or no monetary investment from either the Farmers' Federation or the Educational Fund. The lucrative and self-sustaining burley tobacco market was a point of pride for both organizations, and local farmers identified the return of tobacco markets to Asheville as among the Farmers' Federation's most significant contributions to regional agriculture. The Educational Fund argued that its donors should rightly consider funds flowing through the tobacco market when assessing the overall value of their contributions.<sup>34</sup>

All funded projects would have ideally functioned along the same lines as tobacco, but very few projects so effectively converted a small amount of initial funding into a profitable, independent business. Despite the Educational Fund's aspirations to establish self-sustaining markets, most projects required various degrees of ongoing financial support and occasional substantial investment. Even successful projects such as poultry required ongoing investment to remain in operation. Occasionally, an unexpected crisis arose that demanded significant funding, as was the case when the Federation's carefully cultivated, USDA-certified pullorum-free

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> "What We are Doing," 1930; "What We are Doing," 1932; "Federation Founded," [n.d.]; "What We are Doing," 1953. By 1953, poultry had far outpaced tobacco in both sales and production and only two sets of buyers attended Asheville's tobacco auctions. Nonetheless, the Educational Fund operated one sales floor and dutifully reported sale prices to its donors.

hatchery experienced an outbreak of pullorum, or white diarrhea, that wiped out all the chicks and forced the Federation to rebuild its hard-fought reputation for quality.<sup>35</sup> The Educational Fund accounted for predictable expenses in its annual budget. Budgeted funding from the Educational Fund rose over time from an average of around \$50,000 a year during the Fund's first four years to over \$125,000 a year by the mid-1940s. This funding paid for an assortment of ongoing Federation expenses and new projects. In addition to paying the salary for O. J. Holler, the Educational Fund paid the salaries of other field agents and occasional specialty agents, as well as providing funds for secretarial services and rental of office space. The costs of the Federation's annual picnics were covered as expenses of the education department, as was the salary of the employee responsible for organizing picnics and other community events. Poultry, dairy, forest products, and various women's industrial work projects each received regular support. New programs regularly funded by the Educational Fund included expansion into new counties, exploration of possible new markets, and subsidizing the costs of building or expanding expensive facilities.<sup>36</sup> Frequently, Fund Trustees established yearly budgetary appropriations

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<sup>35</sup> "What We are Doing," 1944.

<sup>36</sup> "What We are Doing," 1928; "What We are Doing," 1929; "What We are Doing," 1931; "What We are Doing," 1935; "What We are Doing," 1936; "What We are Doing," 1940; "What We are Doing," 1944; Directors of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes, September 26, 1944, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative, 2. Minutes, a. Minute Book, SAA; Directors of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes, November 25, 1944, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative, 2. Minutes, a. Minute Book, SAA; Directors of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes, [n.d., November or December 1945], McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative, 2. Minutes, a. Minute Book, SAA; Directors of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes, January 6, 1947, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative, 2. Minutes, a. Minute Book, SAA; Directors of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes, November 10 1947, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative, 2. Minutes, a. Minute Book, SAA; Directors of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes, May 10, 1948, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative, 2. Minutes, a. Minute Book, SAA; Directors of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes, December 2, 1948, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative, 2. Minutes, a. Minute Book, SAA; Directors of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes, May 2, 1949, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative, 2.



and then contracted the Farmers' Federation to implement the projects designated as Educational Fund programs. Such contracts could be substantial - the Farmers' Federation was contracted to implement over \$56,000 of Educational Fund expenses in 1945 - and this process further erased any real-world distinction between the Educational Fund and the Farmers' Federation.<sup>37</sup>

New projects also included special projects arising from designated funds, institutional grants, or particular donor interest. These programs assumed a variety of forms. The Charles Lathrop Pack Forestry Foundation funded the experimental use of power saws for pulpwood operations, a program that aligned with the Fund's interest in harvesting pulpwood from the forested acres on mountain farms.<sup>38</sup> Virtually all mountain farms included at least one family member who supplemented farm income through off-farm employment. The Educational Fund and Farmers' Federation sought to increase overall family income by creating small-scale industrial employment opportunities in each county the co-op served. The Farmers' Federation targeted light industrial efforts at farm women through the Home Industries Department, which

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Minutes, a. Minute Book, SAA; Directors of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes, December 12, 1949, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative, 2. Minutes, a. Minute Book, SAA; Directors of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes, April 29, 1950, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative, 2. Minutes, a. Minute Book, SAA; Directors of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes, January 18, 1951, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative, 2. Minutes, a. Minute Book, SAA; Directors of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes, January 8, 1952, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative, 2. Minutes, a. Minute Book, SAA; Directors of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes, December 5, 1952, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative, 2. Minutes, a. Minute Book, SAA; Directors of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes, December 13, 1953, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative, 2. Minutes, a. Minute Book, SAA; Directors of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes, January 6, 1956, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative, 2. Minutes, a. Minute Book, SAA; Directors of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes, January 23, 1957, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative, 2. Minutes, a. Minute Book, SAA.

<sup>37</sup> Directors, Minutes, [n.d. November or December? 1945].

<sup>38</sup> "What We are Doing About that Mountain Farm," 1945, McClure Papers, Personal Papers, Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, SAA.

attempted sewing, woodworking, hooked rugs, and knitting projects with various degrees of success. The Ford Foundation provided a multi-year grant to cover the salary of an employee to investigate products that could be produced by mountain women.<sup>39</sup> The survival of new projects often depended on donor enthusiasm to provide or solicit ongoing support.

Attempts to initiate an artificial breeding program and a proposed expansion of service into the Cherokee nation, both introduced as new programs in the mid-1940s, demonstrate donors' influence in defining services. In 1944, Alta Rockefeller Prentice provided a substantial donation of stocks and bonds, with which the Educational Fund funded the purchase and outfitting of an experimental dairy farm. The daughter of John D. Rockefeller and the owner (with her husband) of Mount Hope Farm, an experimental farm dedicated to developing scientifically-based livestock breeding programs, Prentice designated the gift "to further a dairy cattle improvement program based on the principles worked on at Mount Hope Farm."<sup>40</sup> Alta Prentice remained in close contact with the Educational Fund's Directors regarding the creation of the demonstration breeding farm. In 1947, the Educational Fund contracted her son, J. Rockefeller Prentice to run the new breeding farm under the name of the Southeastern Artificial Breeding Association, with the understanding that the Fund would purchase and outfit the farm and breeding laboratories and Prentice would subsequently lease the facilities from the Fund.<sup>41</sup> The Prentices dictated the terms of this gift so completely that when J. Rockefeller Prentice requested a third substantial outlay to expand and equip the demonstration farm, McClure wrote to fellow Fund Trustee Jack Robertson, "The Southeastern Artificial Breeding

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<sup>39</sup> Directors, Minutes, September 26, 1944.

<sup>40</sup> Directors of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes, April 13, 1946, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative, 2. Minutes, a. Minute Book, SAA.

<sup>41</sup> Directors, Minutes, November 10, 1947.

Association, which we are financing for Rocky Prentice is taking more money than originally contemplated.”<sup>42</sup> The Fund may only have been financing the project on behalf of Rocky Prentice, but he nonetheless received the \$16,000 he requested. The project ultimately proved even more expensive. The Southeast Breeding program began operation in 1948. By 1952, J. Rockefeller Prentice was \$295,000 in debt to the Educational Fund. The Trustees offered to accept \$150,000 in stock in his artificial breeding program against this debt with the provision that he pay the remaining balance in installments over the next four years.<sup>43</sup>

In 1943, just one year after Alta Prentice initiated funding for the breeding program, Principal Chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee, Jarrett Blytte, and the Council of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation approached the Farmers’ Federation about opening a warehouse and extending service to the Cherokee nation. The members of the Educational Fund approved the project, with the stipulation that “the money for this project is not to come from our regular budget, but to be solicited for this particular cause.”<sup>44</sup> The Educational Fund estimated that the Cherokee warehouse, staffing, and associated facilities would cost \$60,000 and included this amount in their projected budget for 1944. After accruing \$3,762 during 1944, the Educational Fund asked donors if “any of our subscribers know people especially interested in Indians.”<sup>45</sup> Evidently, no one did.

Despite the Cherokee leadership’s request for services, the Educational Fund never funded an extension into the Cherokee nation. Nothing in the available documentation

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<sup>42</sup> McClure to Roberson, March 5, 1948.

<sup>43</sup> Directors of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes, May 30, 1952, McClure Papers, Business Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, a. Administrative, 2. Minutes, a. Minute Book, SAA.

<sup>44</sup> Directors, Minutes, January 8, 1952; “What We are Doing,” 1944.

<sup>45</sup> “What We are Doing,” 1944.

concerning the Cherokee project offers the sort of clear link between philanthropy, agricultural programs, and race that permeates the Educational Fund's efforts on behalf of white farmers, but the Fund's apathy toward the project suggests that neither the Fund nor its donors saw the Cherokee as appropriate recipients of their efforts or funds. Available funding for the Cherokee project increased slowly in 1945 and 1946 before plateauing at \$6,000. Every year between 1944 and 1957, the Educational Fund included the total estimated cost of \$60,000 in their projected annual budget. Between 1946 and 1949, the Fund spent nothing to promote the project or solicit donations. By 1950, members of the Educational Fund reported, "the Superintendent and the Indian Service are all anxious to have this project actualized" but the annual budget nonetheless re-emphasized that the hypothetical \$60,000 line item was only included "with the provision that an effort be made to raise funds for this project and it be carried on without impairing our Sustaining Fund."<sup>46</sup> In 1950, the Educational Fund finally spent some money on the project, accruing just under \$2,000 in expenditures related to the Cherokee expansion during a budget year when the Fund's overall expenditures exceeded \$125,000. They spent more on the "Miscellaneous" budgetary category that year, which accounted for assorted telephone, telegraph, postage, and other such fees not included elsewhere. Nonetheless, 1950 represented the peak of Fund investment in the Cherokee project. That year, they achieved Congressional approval to purchase reservation land. The next year they spent just under \$500 on the project. No other advances followed. For every other line item in the Educational Fund's yearly budget projection, budgeted amounts for predictable expenses adhered closely to final yearly expenditures, but the \$60,000 budget line for the Cherokee project never reflected actual

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<sup>46</sup> Directors, Minutes, December 12, 1949.

expenditures or efforts to raise funds. The unrealized line item remained in the Educational Fund's yearly budget projection for over 10 years.<sup>47</sup>

The stagnation of the Cherokee project in no way reflected Fund reticence to expand services into other new or challenging areas. The Fund repeatedly funded such expansions. However, in no instance, regardless of the challenges of transportation or infrastructure, did the Fund set the economic bar for inclusion as high as it was set for the Cherokee expansion. Between 1933 and 1940, the Educational Fund provided the Farmers' Federation with at least seven separate disbursements to support expansion into new counties. This funding ranged from a low of \$3,653.97 for expansion into Transylvania County in 1940 to a high of \$35,973.76 for a multicounty expansion in 1939 that encompassed Swain and Yancey Counties. During this period, the Educational Fund provided the Farmers' Federation with direct contributions for expansion into other areas of Swain and Jackson Counties, both of which include portions of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians reservation land.<sup>48</sup> These expansions reached into areas where Trustees acknowledged that "transportation is expensive, the county is none too accessible," and overall business prospects were poor in comparison to existing service areas. Nonetheless, the Fund's leadership assured donors that "we will use our very best efforts to try and develop an economy" in these portions of the state, which the WPA identified as "the

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<sup>47</sup> Directors, Minutes, November 25, 1944; Directors, Minutes, [n.d. November or December 1945]; Directors, Minutes, January 6, 1947; Directors, Minutes, November 10, 1947; Directors, Minutes, May 10, 1948; Directors, Minutes, December 2, 1948; Directors, Minutes, May 2, 1949; Directors, Minutes, December 12, 1949; Directors, Minutes, April 29, 1950; Directors, Minutes, January 18, 1951; Directors, Minutes, January 8, 1952; Directors, Minutes, December 5, 1952; Directors, Minutes, December 13, 1953; Directors, Minutes, January 6, 1956; Directors, Minutes, January 23, 1957.

<sup>48</sup> "What We are Doing," 1933; "What We are Doing," 1934; "What We are Doing," 1935; "What We are Doing," 1936; "What We are Doing," 1937; "What We are Doing," 1938; "What We are Doing," 1939; "What We are Doing," 1940.

nation's economic problem no. 1."<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, in 1934 two representatives from the Farmers' Federation joined representatives from the extension service, the state Grange, the North Carolina Cotton Growers Co-operative, the state Department of Vocational Agriculture, and the state Department of Agriculture on a planning committee to organize a new, statewide Farmers' Co-operative Exchange (FCX). This group of agricultural experts determined that it required \$3,000 in capital to establish a new local exchange and stock it with the necessary seeds, fertilizer, and materials.<sup>50</sup> The cost of launching a new warehouse in a supportive community likely increased between 1934 and 1944, but the Educational Fund had a minimum of \$4,000 on hand to fund the Cherokee expansion for all ten years that the project remained budgeted and unrealized. The Fund likely would have supported the expansion had a donor stepped forward to provide the full \$60,000 budget estimate or spearhead a new fundraising campaign independent of the organization's existing fundraising. However, as a fundraising organization that consistently exhorted donors to remember that even small cash requirements could serve as significant barriers to white farmers, it is hard to imagine that the members of the Educational Fund failed to appreciate the smothering effect of requiring the Cherokee to provide a \$60,000 buy-in before receiving services. When no donor so "especially interested in Indians" appeared, Trustee disinterest and an exaggerated economic entry point left the proposed Cherokee expansion to languish as nothing more than an empty line item.

The contrast between the Southeastern Artificial Breeding Program and the proposed expansion into the Cherokee nation also highlights the difficulty in tracking donations and

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<sup>49</sup> "What We are Doing," 1939.

<sup>50</sup> North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Annual Report of the Agricultural Extension Work in North Carolina of the NC State College of Agriculture and Engineering and USDA, Cooperating 1934, November 5, 1934, Cooperative Extension Service Annual Reports (UA102.002), NCSU, 10.

funding between organizations. Over time, the Farmers' Federation and the Educational Fund developed a dizzying array of associated industries, wholly owned corporations, and subsidiary cooperatives that passed funds, debt, and shares of stock from hand to hand. Until 1942, the Educational Fund was organized as an unincorporated trust in service to the Farmers' Federation. Between 1942 and 1944, the Fund reorganized as a corporation and initiated a sustaining fund in addition to the yearly budget solicitation. The Educational Fund conceived of its new sustaining fund as "something like an endowment," but with the flexibility of a slush fund. In the language of war, the Educational Fund explained to donors, "It will be like a mobile reserve ready to be moved to any part of our attacking line which needs additional pressure."<sup>51</sup> From 1942 on, the Educational Fund solicited funds for both the yearly budget and the sustaining fund. Projects funded through yearly budgetary appropriations were clearly defined at the beginning of the year and typically covered salaries, the ongoing maintenance of existing projects, and funding acquired through grants and designated gifts. Sustaining funds, on the other hand, were entirely in the hands of the new corporate officers and were often distributed in large amounts.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Farmers' Federations' most expensive facilities were heavily subsidized through the sustaining fund. When the contractor in charge of a forestry project went bankrupt after the Farmers' Federation paid for services, the Educational Fund bought 2,000 shares of Federation stock with money from the sustaining fund in order to provide the co-op with \$27,000 to cover the loss.<sup>52</sup> During the war, the TVA and other governmental agencies identified community freezer facilities as an important, but lacking,

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<sup>51</sup> "What We are Doing," 1944.

<sup>52</sup> Directors, Minutes, [n.d. November or December 1945?].

regional service.<sup>53</sup> The Farmers' Federation invested heavily in eight freezer facilities only to find that four of the eight were so unprofitable that they were forced to characterize them as "promotion enterprises" that were lucky to ever break even, much less turn a profit.<sup>54</sup> The Farmers' Federation had also incurred significant expense in the construction of the assembly line poultry processing plant in Asheville. In 1948, 1949, 1950, and 1951 the Educational Fund reimbursed the Federation between \$36,000 and \$59,000 every year for depreciation in order to offset expenses arising from these facilities.<sup>55</sup>

The sustaining fund also enabled the Farmers' Federation to transfer, and eventually disappear, valueless stocks related to Federation projects spun off as independent cooperatives. For example, during the 1930s the Educational Fund designated \$10,000 as a revolving fund intended to provide small-scale loans to farmers seeking farm improvements. When the Great Depression hit, the money went to fund the Federation's operating expenses.<sup>56</sup> Later, the revolving fund was legally organized as the Farm Loan Corporation, a corporation wholly owned by the Farmers' Federation and Educational Fund that could fund either small loans or Federation expenses at the discretion of its owners.<sup>57</sup> Following a failed foray into woodcrafts, the Educational Fund determined that support for mountain industry might best be accomplished through an existing outlet. As a result, they purchased a 60 percent share in The Treasure Chest

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<sup>53</sup> Arthur S. Jandrey, Acting General Manger, to Alva H. Benton, Assistant Head, Division of Program Study and Discussion, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, September 19, 1944, TVA, Ag Dev and Ag Relations, Correspondence and Report 1933-1948, Coded by Departmental Classification System, File: 100 B 10 Postwar Planning General, 100 B 10 Postwar Planning Southeast Region, 1944-1945, Box 67, RG 142, NARA – SE.

<sup>54</sup> Directors, Minutes, May 2, 1949.

<sup>55</sup> Directors, Minutes, January 6, 1947; Directors, Minutes, November 10, 1947; Directors, Minutes, May 10, 1948; Directors, Minutes, December 2, 1948; Directors, Minutes, May 2, 1949; Directors, Minutes, December 12, 1949; Directors, Minutes, April 29, 1950; Directors, Minutes, January 18, 1951; Directors, Minutes, January 8, 1952; Directors, Minutes, December 5, 1952.

<sup>56</sup> "What We are Doing," 1931.

<sup>57</sup> "What We are Doing," 1935.



in Asheville, which was engaged in selling hooked and rag rugs. The Treasure Chest was eventually established as its own cooperative, as was the Biltmore Spinning Company, which the Federation organized to provide low cost materials to the Treasure Chest. What began as the Federation's Women's Home Industry Department became its own cooperative when it appeared that independence might aid the effort to secure funding for the project through the TVA. In 1946, the Federation spun off its dairy programs into the Skyline Cooperative Dairies. Also in 1946, these various cooperatives and corporations joined other projects spun off of Educational Fund or Farmers' Federation programs under the umbrella of the newly created Development Foundation of Western North Carolina, Inc. The name changes and reorganizations alone could not disguise the fact that the Farmers' Federation remained heavily invested in these small projects, many of which were essentially valueless. In 1948, the Educational Fund used \$93,594 from the sustaining fund to purchase all of the Federation's shares in the Development Foundation of Western North Carolina. In 1950, the Educational Fund revised the value of these shares as shown on their books to \$50,000. Finally, in 1956, the Fund wrote off the entire value of these failed investments.<sup>58</sup>

By the 1950s, the agricultural landscape in Western North Carolina had shifted. Although the Farmers' Federation initially saw the new federal programs in the region as potential funding sources, it became apparent that the Federation's vision of agricultural support misaligned with those programs. The Federation secured a small grant and loan from the Tennessee Valley Associated Co-operatives in support of the Home Industries Department, but

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<sup>58</sup> Directors, Minutes, April 13, 1946; Directors, Minutes, December 12, 1948; "Federation Founded;" Directors, Minutes, May 10, 1948; Directors, Minutes, April 29, 1950; Directors, Minutes, December 5, 1952; Directors, Minutes, January 5, 1956.

when McClure lobbied for additional support, the Federation's programs were deemed unsuitable for funding. The Tennessee Valley Associated Co-operatives and later the Tennessee Valley Authority made a distinction between small industry and mountain crafts. The products of small industry were uniform and often machine made. Mountain crafts, however, were rough and bore imperfections that spoke to the hand of the maker, a "distinctive Anglo-Saxon" who, according to one TVA official, might best be attired in a "garb or uniform [that] might be produced from homespun material."<sup>59</sup> The Farmers' Federation happily played the hillbilly for fundraisers and performances, but the organization prided itself on the quality, uniformity, and standardization of its products. When women completed Home Industries sewing projects at home, they returned garments of varying quality. In response, the Federation established sewing rooms where quality could be monitored. When the Federation requested funding from TVA Associated Cooperatives (TVAC) to support this project, TVAC sent a representative to evaluate the sewing center. She reported, "The products as developed to date by the Home Industries Department would not make an outstanding contribution to our handicraft program."<sup>60</sup> The Federation's small industry was not making the mountain crafts that the TVA hoped to encourage. Instead, the cooperative's sewing rooms produced industrial uniforms and smocks.<sup>61</sup>

During the 1940s, USDA regional post-war planning had already identified small farms such as those in Western North Carolina and farmers with off-farm income as a regional

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<sup>59</sup> Loran Baker, "Recreation Facilities and Employment Program as Works Relief Project," May 31, 1935, TVA, Records of the Gen Mrg's Office, Admin Files, 1933-1957, (Decimal Classification System), 612 Opportunities for Development Negro Recreation – Norris – 618.1 Forest Resources Experimental Program 1946, Box no. 914, RG 142, NARA-SE.

<sup>60</sup> Clemantine Douglas to J. Ed Campbell, Administrator, TVAC, Office Memorandum, July 2, 1935, TVA, Records of the General Manager's Office, Administrative Files, 1933-1957, Decimal Classification System, McCl thru McG, Box No 137. RG 142, NARA-SE.

<sup>61</sup> "What We are Doing," 1940.

problem. These farms were not only deemed economically unsustainable but were also identified as an obstacle to developing a large and efficient industrial workforce in that they permitted people to remain in rural areas instead of forcing them to seek full-time industrial wage labor in cities. In this analysis of the region, officials argued that the “land resources of the Appalachia region are overpopulated now” and, rather than seeking to improve conditions for rural people, every effort should be made to encourage them to abandon farms that were not commercially viable.<sup>62</sup> There were exceptions, of course, for the elderly, infirm, and “those incapable of greater entrepreneurial responsibilities,” but otherwise mountain farming should disappear.<sup>63</sup> By the 1950s, the TVA argued that small and part-time farmers simply did not contribute a large enough percentage of farm products to justify public interest in their productive labor. Instead “the public’s interest in part-time farming should be directed more toward the question of land use and soil conservation practices” than consideration of the “dubious question of increasing farm surpluses.” Such part-time farmers might damage the land and public interest through ignorance, incompetence, and poor practices, but small farmers did not command enough market share to matter in federal evaluation of post-World War II agriculture.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> John E. Mason, Bureau of Ag Economies for the Appalachian Regional Committee on Post-War Programs, Land Development and Settlement in the Appalachia Region, report no. 6 (for review purposes only) , TVA, Ag Dev and Ag Relations, Correspondence and Report 1933-1948, Coded by Departmental Classification System, File: 100 B 10 Postwar Planning General, 100 B 10 Postwar Planning Southeast Region, 1944-1945, Box 67, RG 142, NARA-SE.

<sup>63</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of USDA Post-War Planning Committee for Appalachian Region, Raleigh, North Carolina, July 29, 1942, TVA, Ag Dev and Ag Relations, Correspondence and Report 1933-1948, Coded by Departmental Classification System, File: 100 B 10 Postwar Planning General, 100 B 10 Postwar Planning Southeast Region, 1944-1945, Box 67, RG 142, NARA-SE, 28.

<sup>64</sup> J. G. Hardee, “Part-Time Farming in North Carolina,” April 9, 1959, TVA, Resource Group, Environmental Research Center, Valley Agricultural Program Files of AC Davis, Various Reports, Historical Information, Surveys 1930-1960, 4DO0142-95-0-14, Test Demo Farm Records: Fertilizer Demonstrations thru Part Time Farming Newsletters, Annual Reports, etc, Box 3, RG 142, NARA-SE, 7.

In the post-war years, the Farmers' Federation vision of agricultural development in Western North Carolina was simultaneously too industrial for mountain crafts and too backwards for industrial agriculture. The cooperative and its fundraising arm remained active throughout James McClure's life, but when James McClure Clarke assumed leadership following McClure's death in 1956, the younger man quickly accepted that the new scale of industrial agriculture was simply beyond the means of the Farmers' Federation. When the cooperative requested \$200,000 to finance the construction of a feed mill to lower production costs for poultry, the board of the Educational Fund balked. The costs were not justified by earnings, they argued, and the fundamental logic behind supporting agriculture as a means to alleviate mountaineers' plight did not make sense in the new economic climate. Markets existed now. At Jamie Clarke's request the other directors of the Fund agreed to provide \$16,000 to help the Federation meet its dividend payment to members for 1958, but only in the hopes that doing so would encourage farmer members to vote in line with Clarke's suggestion that the Federation merge with FCX. The Fund stressed, however, that following this payment any cooperation with the Farmers' Federation would be on "the non-commercial aspects of serving the mountain farmers."<sup>65</sup>

The movement of money between the Educational Fund and the Farmers' Federation makes it difficult to determine precisely how much money the Fund secured from wealthy donors through its racially loaded fundraising. The financial situation of the Federation and the Fund was even more befuddling to farmer members in 1958 and 1959. After decades of deliberately moving funds seamlessly between the co-op and the Fund, funding Federation

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<sup>65</sup> Arthur Page to Hulbert S. Aldrich, September 22, 1958, McClure Papers, Personal Papers, 1. Educational and Development Fund, b. Fundraising, 2. New York Picnics, b. Correspondence, SAA.

programs with Educational Fund money, providing Educational Fund services through Federation resources, reporting local initiatives as self-supporting while philanthropic dollars paid the salaries of the agents who worked with farmers, and conducting yearly fundraising campaigns on behalf of mountain farmers, James Clarke told the farmer members that their organization was broke and too unprofitable to secure a \$200,000 loan. Instead, Clarke advised that the farmer members join the FCX, a statewide cooperative that the Farmers' Federation had helped to establish but that primarily served eastern North Carolina cotton producers. Meanwhile, the Educational Fund had over a million dollars in cash deposits and likely more in investment income.<sup>66</sup>

It is impossible to determine exactly how many philanthropic dollars flowed into Western North Carolina through the fundraising efforts of the Educational Fund and the Farmers' Federation between 1927 and 1958, but between yearly payments, the sustaining fund, facilities, and the endowment retained by the Educational Fund after 1958, the total exceeded several million dollars. These fundraising efforts converted racial social capital into real and significant economic benefits during some of the most trying years for agricultural production. In a region characterized by small farms, diverse production, and modest economic returns, twentieth-century racial mythologies translated into economic advantages for white mountain farmers. However, on farms during the Great Depression and the rapid transformation of agricultural markets that dominated the early twentieth century, mountain farmers did not understand their day-to-day lives in terms of racial privilege. Instead, they saw themselves as struggling against

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<sup>66</sup> Directors, Minutes, January 23, 1957; Page to Aldrich, September 22, 1958; Doug Reid, "Era of 'The Federation' is Grinding to a Close," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 20, 1959, 1.

economic disadvantage and the racial privilege they commanded on the national stage fell beneath their notice.

## Conclusion

Certainly, the members of the Farmers' Federation worked hard, suffered the wrenching readjustments that disrupted farm life across the country, and realigned their lives and their work around new cultures of rural production. The Farmers' Federation played a critical role in mediating the challenges that accompanied those changes and, in the process, wove itself into their understanding of themselves and their relation to the land and labor. White mountain farmers – and the Farmers' Federation – dug their claim into the earth of Western North Carolina, but in the process, they also shaped, propagated, and profited from a particular regional identity that denied the right to claim that identity to the region's people of color, who they continued to exploit as agricultural labor.

Like the ridiculousness of the overblown stereotypes brought to the stage in *Sun-Up*, the contemporary comic hillbillies who draw tourists to the Great Smoky Mountains and the Ozark Uplift may seem inconsequential at first glance, but these caricatures retain the power to brand places as uniquely and exclusively white. The Farmers' Federation represents only one iteration of this process in the Southern highlands. The Educational and Development Fund joined a stream of missionaries, mountain evangelists, and highland boosters who sought to funnel money into the region during a time when the nation's wealthy regarded the promise of an enlarged Anglo-Saxon population as something worth buying.

When the Board of Directors of the Educational and Development Fund adopted the position that the national push toward industrial agriculture had grown to a point where further investment in Western North Carolina agriculture was no longer sound, the Fund ceased funding farmers, but it did not cease operations. Instead, the Board renamed the Fund the James G. K. McClure Educational and Development Fund and shifted their philanthropic focus away from

agriculture and toward scholarships, health care, and support for regional music – all of which had previously received some degree of funding in conjunction with the Farmers’ Federation. The newly organized James G. K. McClure Fund ceased active fundraising in 1960 and subsequently limited charitable giving to the yearly investment income generated by the Fund’s principle.<sup>1</sup> The McClure Fund persisted as an independent charitable corporation until 2004, when the Board of Directors dissolved the corporation and transferred over 2.7 million dollars to the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, Inc. for the establishment of the James G. K. McClure Educational and Development Fund. That fund remains active, distributing scholarships for Western North Carolina students pursuing careers in health care.<sup>2</sup>

The McClure family also remains devoted to improving life in Western North Carolina. James G. K. McClure, Jr. may have arrived in Fairview as a Northern transplant, but he and his family developed deep attachments to the region. Hickory Nut Gap Farm remains a working farm and an active participant in the local and organic food movement that has joined agritourism to Asheville’s heritage of cultural and scenic tourism. Jamie McClure Clarke won election to the United States Congress in 1982 as the Democratic representative of North Carolina’s 11<sup>th</sup> District. During political campaigns leading up to his election, his Republican opponent alleged that the Jamie McClure Clarke dissolved the Farmers’ Federation Educational and Development Fund so he could profit from the fund’s assets.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Trustees of the Educational and Development Fund, Minutes of the Trustees, June 1, 1959; James G. K. McClure Educational and Development Fund, Inc: Report of Expenditures January 1959 through June 1960, McClure Papers, Personal Papers, Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, SAA.

<sup>2</sup> 990 PF, Return of Private Foundation, JGK McClure Fund, 2003, GuideStar.org (accessed March 21, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> “Flyer Campaign Stirs 30-Year-Old Controversy,” *Asheville Citizen Times*, October 30, 1982, 17.



This allegation sought to turn hazy memories of the Farmers' Federation's collapse into a political critique. When Jamie Clarke told the co-op's membership that the Farmers' Federation could not survive as an independent organization, the farmer members split. The dissenters organized a push against the leadership's recommendation and, under the one man/one vote structure of cooperative governance, the vote to join the FCX failed. In the wake of the vote, the Educational and Development Fund followed through on their promise to no longer fund agricultural business projects and left the Farmers' Federation Cooperative to fend for itself. By 1961, the Farmers' Federation's creditors sued for forcible dissolution of the cooperative for nonpayment of debt. The court appointed a trustee and permitted reorganization efforts to continue for over a year, but finally ordered the forced liquidation of all remaining Farmers' Federation assets.<sup>4</sup> In addition to losing the benefits of the cooperative, farmer members also lost the value of any stock they had purchased, which could be significant.<sup>5</sup>

The political accusation that Jamie Clarke led the Educational Fund to break with the Farmers' Federation for personal economic reasons was completely unsupported. Although the Federation declaration transferring the assets of the original trust to an independent corporation indicated that those funds had been raised in service to the Farmers' Federation, the Directors of the Educational Fund argued that the Federation was only ever the mechanism for the larger goal of improving life in Western North Carolina, and a North Carolina court agreed.<sup>6</sup> In adopting the position that non-industrial, mixed production mountain farms were no longer economically

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<sup>4</sup> "Federation Decision is Delayed," *Asheville Citizen Times*, July 12, 1962, 32; "Lee is Named FFC Trustee," *Asheville Citizen Times*, March 27, 1963, 16; "Federation Declared Bankrupt," *Asheville Citizen Times*, February 16, 1963, 2; Auction ad, *Asheville Citizen Times*, September 13, 1964, 23.

<sup>5</sup> "Flyer Campaign."

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

viable and, therefore, not a reasonable mechanism for regional improvement, the Directors of the Fund were merely assuming a position that had been developed by federal agencies during the war years and subsequently disseminated through regional agencies, including the TVA and North Carolina farm agents, who by the 1950s were openly questioning whether they were even still expected to serve part-time farmers given those farmers' recognized lack of commercial viability.<sup>7</sup> Further, Arthur W. Page, who had dedicated over 30 years to the Educational Fund in support of the Farmers' Federation, advocated for Jamie Clarke's recommendation to other Educational Fund board members and supported efforts to lobby for farmer members to vote on behalf of joining FCX.<sup>8</sup> By the late 1950s, progressive farming had transformed to industrial farming on such a scale that the Educational Fund directors no longer believed that agriculture held any promise in the mountains. The dissenting farmers won the right to remain independent of the FCX, but they rapidly learned that the Federation had never been economically independent. The Educational Fund, meanwhile, quickly converted to supporting other, non-agricultural projects. Before his death in 1960, Arthur W. Page convinced the other directors of the Educational Fund to hold one final fundraising campaign prior to permanently ceasing active fundraising efforts.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of USDA Post-War Planning Committee for Appalachian Region, July 29, 1942; Leland G. Allbaugh, Director of Agricultural Relations, Memo Part-Time Farming Research Project—North Carolina, February 1, 1961, TVA, Resource Group, Environmental Research Center, Valley Agricultural Program Files of AC Davis, Various Reports, Historical Information, Surveys 1930-1960, 4DO0142-95-0-14, Test Demo Farm Records: Fertilizer Demonstrations thru Part Time Farming Newsletters, Annual Reports, etc, RG 142, Box 3, NARA – SE.

<sup>8</sup> Page to Aldrich, September 22, 1958.

<sup>9</sup> James G. K. McClure Educational and Development Fund, Inc: Report of Expenditures July 1, 1960 through June 30, 1961, McClure Papers, Personal Papers, Educational and Development Fund, Administrative, Annual Reports, SAA, 4.

In 1969, the former Farmers' Federation building on Roberts Street in the Southside of Asheville once again became the site of a community economic initiative supported by stock sales, but in this iteration, the building served as the home to Afram, Inc., an industrial sewing operation and a pilot program to "utilize black capital, management, and employees" to recruit new industries to Asheville. The project was organized with the support of the Asheville Chamber of Commerce, and white city leader Robert V. Mathison acted as chairman through May of 1969, but Afram was envisioned, promoted, funded, and eventually run as an African American enterprise.<sup>10</sup> Selling stock at \$15 a share in Asheville's black community, black business leaders raised over \$7,500, a sum sufficient to enable Afram, Inc. to borrow an additional \$15,000 from Asheville's new industrial financing corporation, the Share Development Corp. The Share loan, in turn, opened the door to \$180,000 in financing from the Small Business Association. Representatives from the Chamber of Commerce recruited the Kimberly-Clark Corp. to sign a contract for the manufacture of lab coats and Asheville's first black-owned industry was born. The Dave Steel Co., which owned the former Farmers' Federation building, had been attempting to rent the structure throughout 1968. When the black community raised the necessary funds to secure financing through Share Development Corp, Dave Steel Co. offered Afram free rent for the first year of operation and a guaranteed rental rate of \$150 a month during its second year.<sup>11</sup>

"This is a black company," Mathison admonished Afram's African American stockholders when he stepped down as acting chairman. "You bought it. You had some help,

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<sup>10</sup> "Afram, Share Kick Off Stock Sale," *Asheville Citizen Times*, March 13, 1969, 24.

<sup>11</sup> "Asheville Started First Black Owned Industry in U.S.," *Asheville Citizen Times*, January 25, 1970, E-6; "Non-profit Group Planning New Industry for Southside," *Asheville Citizen Times*, March 8, 1969, 11; "For Rent," *Asheville Citizen Times*, July 21, 1968, 51.

but now you are going to build it.”<sup>12</sup> Despite Mathison’s condescending exit, the black stockholders of Afram had nothing approaching the economic support that Farmers’ Federation members had previously commanded. Nonetheless, the new industry garnered praise from Roy Wilkins of the NAACP and Billy Graham, both of whom lauded the enterprise as a model in racial cooperation. Afram faced potential collapse in mid-November of 1970, when Kimberly-Clarke cancelled its contract and Dave Steel Co. volunteered to sacrifice Afram’s building in the interest of new bridge construction if doing so would protect the company’s other properties from a State Highway Commission plan that pinned the firm’s other property against new highway construction. In the face of these challenges, Afram’s employees and stockholders launched a door-to-door sales campaign that asked residents to “buy a white coat and help a black industry.”<sup>13</sup> Afram survived. Matthew Bacoate, Jr., who led stock sales during the initial sales campaign, went on to serve as general manager of Afram and then the owner of the business as it transitioned to ACE (Asheville Community Enterprise) and later MB Disposables. In recognition of his skill at developing a company that remains the largest African American owned industry in Asheville’s history, Matthew Bacoate, Jr. was invited to the White House to speak with Presidents Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter about economic development and job creation.<sup>14</sup>

Despite Mathison’s insistence on acknowledging the white community’s participation in launching Afram, Inc., the black businessmen who coordinated the effort, the shareholders who

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<sup>12</sup> “Afram, Inc. of Asheville Receives International Praise,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, May 25, 1969, 48.

<sup>13</sup> “New Bridge Subject of SHC Hearing,” *Asheville Citizen Times*, November 14, 1970, 9; “Effort to Help Afram is Undertaken Here,” *Asheville Citizen Times*, December 6, 1970, 10.

<sup>14</sup> “Living Treasure: Matthew Bacoate,” *The Urban News: Gateway to the Multicultural Community*, May 11, 2012, <https://theurbannews.com/our-town/2012/living-treasure-matthew-bacoate/> (accessed March 22, 2019).

bought stock, the women who ran the sewing machines, and the men (including Matthew Bacoate) who managed the business came far closer to actualizing the idealized vision of staunch individualism and undaunting work ethic that popular representations of the “forgotten pioneer” intended to invoke than the Farmers’ Federation ever did. Yet, these pioneers continue to fight for full incorporation into Southern highland regional identity.

The James G. K. McClure Educational and Development Fund continues to enrich the region through scholarships, symphony support, and healthcare initiatives. However, contemporary appreciation of those benefits does not justify disregarding the rotten foundation upon which twentieth century mountain stereotypes and benevolent appeals were erected. Appreciation for the hard work and suffering of mountain whites does not demand the exclusion of people of color from highland regional identity. Nonetheless, the Farmers’ Federation suggests that mountaineer stereotypes took the particular form they did because the larger national culture paid real economic dividends to poorer whites who promised to prop up white supremacy. The Farmers’ Federation selectively adopted and disseminated stereotypes and rhetoric that artificially whitened Southern mountain folk, but they were not alone. They did so alongside mountain missions, regional industrial schools, folk art projects, and a burgeoning tourist economy. The funds that flowed into the Southern mountains as a result did not simply disappear from the region when the fervor to pay Anglo-Saxons to join national life subsided. Instead, that money transformed into infrastructure, schools, and endowments that continue to shape and define the institutions, social structures, and economic possibilities of the region.

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