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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

A “GOOD ANGRY MAN”: HARRY CAUDILL, THE FORMATIVE YEARS, 1922-1960

After the publication of Night Comes to the Cumberland: A Biography of a Depressed Area, Harry Caudill became a spokesperson for Appalachia. Throughout the 1960s, Caudill continued to challenge the corrupt political system of the Cumberland Valley. His indictment of the coal industry as a leading factor in the continual depression of the area led scholars and reformers to a better understanding of the interrelated dynamics affecting the region. Even though with the passage of time, scholars have rejected many of Caudill's ideas concerning the mountain people, few doubt that he led the challenge against the political, economic, and social domination of the region during the 1960s. Because he played such an important role in reforming the region, a better understanding of the people and events that shaped his thinking demand attention. In an effort to better understand the man, this paper traveled through the formative years that shaped a mature Harry Caudill.

Tylina Jo Mullins
13 April 2002

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A "GOOD ANGRY MAN": HARRY CAUDILL, THE FORMATIVE YEARS,
1922-1960

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THESIS

Tylina Jo Mullins

The Graduate School
University of Kentucky

2002

A "GOOD ANGRY MAN": HARRY CAUDILL, THE FORMATIVE YEARS,
1922-1960

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts from the College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By

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Prestonsburg, Kentucky

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Lexington, Kentucky

2002

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To Ron Eller
for generously sharing
the advice of a loving grandfather.
Yes, we must “read through them books.”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following thesis, while an individual work, benefited from the insights and direction of several people. First, the Director of the Thesis, Ronald Eller, spent numerous hours discussing my findings and even more time plying his generous but often painful pen to this work. I thank him for both. Next, I wish to thank the other two members of my Thesis Committee, Tracy Campbell and Kathy Kern. Both of these wonderful professors generously gave of their time and knowledge. The combined efforts of this committee guided me through the rigors of Graduate School and the exhausting yet rewarding experience of writing a Master's Thesis. Smile, you are appreciated.

In addition, I would like to thank my wonderful family, Dale, Rusty, Shay Navar, and Sabrina for graciously loving me. Thank you, Dad, Mom, and Pa for your love and encouragement. My deepest appreciation goes to my best friend, Sandi, who shared my laughter, tears, and ghosts without complaint. Thank you, George and Dottie Herring for opening the door and to Tina Hagee for keeping it open. Thanks to my friends on the 17th, your smiles are greatly appreciated. An expression of gratitude must be given to the mountain people whose dauntless spirit provides my courage and strength. Finally, to God for generously gifting me with all of the above.

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Introduction

Sitting quietly among the collection of Appalachian books, a worn copy of Harry Caudill's Night Comes to the Cumberlands beckons scholars to turn the dog-eared pages that once offered insight into a region long obscured behind the steep ridges of Pine Mountain. These days, few students do more than inattentively thumb through the tattered pages. Over the years, the single log cabin framed in darkness on the front cover has become symbolic of the angry words inside. The information that the coal industry and corrupt political system it spawned are responsible for "colonizing" the region is old news and only Caudill's death insulates him from the harsh accusation that he nationalized the Appalachian stereotype. It is a strangely sad and perhaps slightly bitter legacy for a man who spent his life trying to help the region.

Interestingly enough, it seems that the "real" Harry Caudill disappeared beneath a barrage of his own press. Sifting through three decades of news media and scholarly commentary presented an impressive list of adjectives to describe the tall mountain lawyer who turned the nation upside down by demanding accountability for the "plight" of Central Appalachia. On one hand, he is a "hero" that sparked a generation of scholars to discover their own identity. The poet of olden days, the sage, or the storyteller that enraptured the audiences with the soothing rise and fall of his deep mountain voice. On the other hand, he represented the derogatory image thrust upon the mountaineers and the land they loved. For some, he was the doomsday prophet who possessed little faith in the mountain region, a traitor to his own people. For others, he was a politician used to bending a story to fit his own agenda or the lawyer seeking only to fulfill his own ambitions. Sadly, even though the conflicting opinions reflect less of Caudill and more of the changing agendas of the subsequent generations of Appalachians, like any good stereotype, there still remains a small measure of truth in all of the descriptions.

Long before Caudill unwittingly assumed the role as a spokesperson for the Appalachian Mountains, he was a little boy growing to manhood on the steps of countless courthouses in Kentucky. Following in the footsteps of his father, a local politician, he watched the political system of the New Deal develop the "machines" that ruthlessly controlled the county courthouse gangs. During these years, a very young Caudill defined his own sense of power and powerlessness within the framework of the unscrupulous political culture of the New Deal Era.

Determined to remain free of the coal industry, Caudill singled out education as the most evident marker associated with a position of power. A law degree offered both freedom from the coal industry and a stepping stone to politics. While at the University of Kentucky, Caudill studied with many of his future colleagues and tested the skills of a political rebel. But it was World War II that formed his defining impression of right and wrong. On the battlefield of Europe the sense of social responsibility shared by fellow soldiers convinced Caudill that the nation needed to develop a social conscience and a land ethic as security for the future.

Back in Letcher County, Caudill entered politics after several years as a successful lawyer. With the intention of reclaiming his father's former position as the local political manager in the county, Caudill quickly bumped heads with the new directorate, Dr. B. F. Wright, whose power was based in the welfare system and the school system. Believing that his best position was on the state level, Caudill ran for the House of Representatives. Once in the legislature, he found that state and local politics went hand in hand. Bitterly, he relinquished his district seat after realizing that his position served only the power brokers.

After his father passed away, Caudill returned to politics determined to assume an important role in the development of Eastern Kentucky. Convinced that the newly elected governor, native Bert Combs, understood the region, he looked forward to enacting legislation designed to improve the valley. However before the 1960 legislature came to session, the conflict between differing ideologies concerning regional development created an environment burdened with coal patronage. Gradually, Caudill realized that the region would always hold a secondary position to the vanity and greed of those in charge. Angrily he put on paper the events he had witnessed in his lifetime.

Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area, recalled Tom Gish, "...painted a haunting picture of a rich land stripped of vast natural resources by corporate exploiters who universally failed to meet the needs of mountain people...."¹ Stewart Udall, Secretary of the Interior during the Kennedy Administration, stated, "President Kennedy and I do indeed have a deep interest in the problems of Kentucky and the rest of the Appalachian area.

¹ Tom Gish, "The Man Who Loved the Mountains," *Appalachia*, Vol. 24, No. 6 (Spring 1991): 14. The Anne and Harry Caudill Papers (AHCP), Special Collections, King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington. Box 2, Folder 17. Note: The Anne and Harry Caudill Papers hereafter cited as AHCP.

Your book is inspiring and significant...the problems you discuss...are a challenge to all of us.”² However, on the state and local level, both Harry Caudill and “the book” became “probably the most cussed and discussed subject...at the dinner table, in the newspaper, on radio and television, in the streets and in the offices of bureaucrats that the mountains have ever known.”³

Caudill wrote Night Comes to the Cumberlands after serving as commencement speaker for the eighth grade graduation in a local elementary school. He remembered the spring commencement of 1960 recorded seven graduates from the two-room school that battled to ward off the chill while fathers wheezed and gasped from the debilitating silicosis associated with the mining industry. Inspired by the graduates’ poignant rendition of “America the Beautiful” and yet struck by the ironic difference between the imagery invoked by the song and the reality of their harsh lives, Caudill committed to paper his impressions of the Eastern Kentucky coal fields. He hoped that his work would “...help a little to bring the sad reality and the splendid dream a little closer together, for my friends, my kinsmen, my fellow mountaineers.”⁴

Years later, standing before his class at the University of Kentucky, Professor Harry Caudill challenged his students to discover their past. Insisting that “you could not know where you were going if you did not know where you had been.”⁵

² Stewart Udall, Washington, DC to [Harry Monroe Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky] 8 February 1963, AHCP Box 48, Folder 3.

³ William T. Cornett, “Harry Caudill and wife Anne work for a Better East Kentucky: Book, Times shaped Each Other,” Whitesburg (KY) *The Mountain Eagle*, 12 April 1989. AHCP Box 2, Folder 24.

⁴ Caudill, Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area, (Atlanta: Little Brown, 1963) xiii.

⁵ Artie Anne Bates, “His Work Must be Carried on by Us,” Whitesburg, Kentucky to [Editor of the *Mountain Eagle*, Whitesburg, Kentucky] 15 December 1990. AHCP, Box 5, Folder 4.

Chapter One: A Crown of Sorrow

Coal has always cursed the land in which it lies. When men begin to wrest it from the earth it leaves a legacy of foul streams, hideous slag heaps and polluted air. It peoples this transformed land with blind and crippled men and with widows and orphans. It is an extractive industry which takes all away and restores nothing. It mars but never beautifies. It corrupts but never purifies. ...the curse of coal [is] a crown of sorrow.⁶

Harry Monroe Caudill

Born on May 3, 1922 in Letcher County to Cro Carr and Martha Victoria Blair Caudill, Harry Monroe Caudill came to age as the Cumberland Valley became trapped between the old and new ways of life and as the nation struggled to understand how the prosperous 1920s dissolved into the Great Depression.

Most Americans mentally associate the photographic image of ticker tape parades, flapper girls, and nightclub dancing with the “roaring” 1920s. The energetic sounds of Jazz that signaled the arrival of the Big Band Era, the symbolic purr of the automobile, and the crackle of the radio which reinforced the impression that throughout America the economy thrived in the wake of World War I are familiar hallmarks of the decade even to those who were born long after the “roar” had quieted. However, the reality of the 1920s is more complicated than the image. As Historian T. H. Watkins has pointed out “ordinary people” simply did not have the time or money to gaily dance the night away. The truth was most Americans married, spent forty hours a week at work for a \$26.00 paycheck, and attended church on Sunday. Their only connection to the media created idealism of the 1920s was the fact that they dreamed of prosperity.⁷

The stark contrast between the popular image and reality also symbolized the socio-economic conditions of Letcher County at the turn of the century. Like many other counties in Appalachia, Letcher reflected both the old and the new. Indeed, the roar of the 1920s rendered

⁶ Caudill, Night Comes to the Cumberlands. x.

⁷ T. H. Watkins, The Great Depression: America in the 1930s, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1993). 23-26.

barely a growl in the communities where the traditional patterns of planting and harvesting continued unimpeded by the pageantry and consumerism that was infecting the rest of America. However, while the western portion of the county remained predominately a land of farmers without roads or electricity; the northeastern portion had been transformed to a “model company town” fully equipped with the modern facilities enjoyed by most urbanites. For the vast majority of the locals, King Coal had made his mark. The farmer had been removed from the land, separated in both mind and deed from the mule and plow, and refitted with a miner’s cap, pick, and shovel. Similar to their northern counterparts, the mountaineers became captivated with a “cash” economy as consumer goods such as radios and kitchen appliances readily became available at the “company store.”⁸ Gradually the county began to demonstrate the friction between traditionalism and modernism as two totally different ways of life competed for dominance in the social, economic, and political arena.⁹

Harry Monroe Caudill was born in the “little holler” of Long Branch located just below Whitesburg in Letcher County, Kentucky. The area was typical for rural Appalachia at the turn of the century since the county remained almost entirely without electricity or paved roads. However, by the time of Caudill’s birth, the families “old fashioned and altogether modest” home used electricity for lighting and his mother owned the second Maytag washing machine in the area.¹⁰ Although, transportation to the county seat was limited to mules and horses for a large portion of the county, Caudill claimed cars were becoming more common and improvement of county roads was progressing because the populace had “caught the highway fever.”¹¹ Indeed, the road to Improvement Branch photographed in 1912 demonstrated that the county was making progress while the 1922 opening of the Maxwell-Chalmer Dealership at McRoberts indicated that the locals had begun to purchase automobiles.¹² These dramatic changes were taking place as a consequence of the transformation brought on by the coal industry in the mountains.

⁸ Roy Fleming said that Consolidated Coal Company paid only in script until after the 1930s. See: Roy Fleming, “Interview with Roy Fleming,” in The History of Jenkins, G-35.

⁹ See also: Ronald D Eller, Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930, 4th ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983).

¹⁰ Harry Monroe Caudill, “An Interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Mary Ellen Elsbernd & James C. Claypool, *Journal of Kentucky Studies* Vol. 7 (September 1990) AHCP Box 2, Folder 27.; “They Built a Town,” The History of Jenkins, Kentucky, compiled by The Jenkins Area Jaycees (Jenkins: North Star Marketing, n.d.), C-1-2.; Harry Caudill, The Mountains, the Miner, and the Lord, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1980).

¹¹ Caudill, The Mountains, the Miners, and the Lord, vii.

¹² Photograph inserts in The History of Jenkins, Kentucky, compiled by The Jenkins Area Jaycees (Jenkins: North Star Marketing, n.d.). n.p.

In 1911, Consolidation Coal Company built a “model company town” at the base of Pine Mountain in Letcher County, Kentucky. The town of Jenkins, which formerly included McRoberts, Burdine, and Durham, was situated upon “coal lands” originally purchased from local farmers by John C. C. Mayo for Northern Coal and Coke Company.¹³ By 1910 the smaller land companies and their respective mineral rights were *consolidated* into the Consolidation Coal Corporation. Aware of the national demand for fossil fuel the company rapidly began the necessary extension of the Lexington and Eastern Railroad from Jackson, Kentucky to McRoberts, Kentucky. Meanwhile, the company sublet and lengthened a “temporary narrow gauged railroad” from Wise County, Virginia. The interim system combined with a wagon road across the “five miles” of mountainous terrain to provide a transportation network for the vast amount of food and materials necessary to supply the builders. As many as twenty oxen attached to specially designed wagons pulled massive equipment including “twelve [boilers], weighing 16,000 pounds each, one 40,000 and one 26,000 pound locomotives” over the mountain road. Simultaneously, Consolidation installed a brick factory and several huge band saws to utilize the abundance of natural resources for the construction of company buildings and over “600 double-sided houses” equipped with water, toilets, and electricity.¹⁴

The owners of the model town spared no expense in the beginning and by 1912, the newly established Jenkins Independent School boasted 490 enrolled students. The number of students increased as the high coal demand drove Consolidation to develop a “transportation system” that brought in miners from outside the region.¹⁵ Consequently, by the time the Lexington and Eastern Railroad completed the extension to McRoberts, 1600 men worked at the mines. The total of employed men increased to 2500 by 1916 and held steady throughout the 1920s.¹⁶

¹³ See Also: Carolyn Clay Turner and Carolyn Hay Traum, John C. C. Mayo: Cumberland Capitalist, (Pikeville; Pikeville College Press, 1983).

¹⁴ “They Built a Town” in A History of Jenkins, C-1.

¹⁵ Ibid.; Ruby Zidaroff & Flora Scott “McRoberts, Kentucky,” in A History of Jenkins, C-5-8. Across Appalachia, coal companies used the “transportation system” to bring in workers from beyond the mountains. Because of the high labor demand, company agents secured passage for migrating workers. In return, the workers agreed to work for the companies until the transportation cost were paid. See Also: Maude Flint, “Interview with Maude Flint,” in The History of Jenkins, G-21.

¹⁶ Ibid. C-5-8. Note: Although this number seems to be linked to the McRoberts mines alone, it is more likely that it included all of the mines operated by Consolidated Coal Company at Jenkins, McRoberts, Burdine, and Dunham in Letcher County, Kentucky.

The Caudill family avoided the unpleasantness of the dust-ridden company towns. For them, the steep ridges of Pine Mountain were home. Here, Cro Caudill farmed the land “where the ground was sweetened by the dissolving limestone” like his father had done before him.¹⁷ During the day, he worked for Consolidation Coal Company at the McRoberts coal tippie but the summer evenings were reserved for the succession of planting and harvesting of the crops needed to tide a family through the winter. The orchard of peach and apple trees that later provided a teenage Harry Caudill with a lesson in compassion, now were reserved for the pleasure of homemade apple pies and peach cobbler.

On a bitterly cold day in the winter of 1918, Cro Caudill began his shift at the tippie just as he had on previous days. However, this day would be different. The roar of machinery and the continual “twang” of coal striking the metal tippie were overridden by his screams when his fingers got caught in a wheel that pulled him toward the turning mechanism. His cries of pain alerted a foreman to turn off the motor but the wheels kept rotating. Fortunately, Will Williams, a “big black man” working directly above him heard the commotion and jammed the wheel with a crowbar and saved his life. The company awarded Cro Caudill a stipend of \$1710.00 for the loss of his arm. Harry Caudill recalled, for his trouble, “Will Williams from Alabama” suffered with a hernia for the duration of his life.¹⁸ However, his noble feat gained him a longtime friend and helped to shape Harry Caudill’s impression of African Americans throughout his entire life.¹⁹ A mature Caudill later commented, “Seeing him and hundreds of other crippled men gave me a very staunch feeling that I was not going to fool with that kind of industry to make a living.”²⁰

Caudill learned the value of a good education at an early age. To him education represented a way to avoid the dangerous coal industry while fulfilling his thirst for knowledge. Fortunately, his mother, Victoria Blair Caudill supported his desire to learn and secured books for the family to read. She had benefited from a few years of education at Berea College when she was orphaned at the tender age of eleven and taken by Professor James Raine to live with the

¹⁷ Caudill, “An Interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Elsbernd and Claypool, 75.

¹⁸ John G. Mitchell, “The Mountains, The Miners, and Mister Caudill,” *Audubon* (November 1988) 90. AHCP, Box 2, Folder 23. Note: In a similar incident, Caudill’s older brother, Truman, also was injured in a tippie accident. He wore a leg brace for the remainder of his life.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* According to Caudill, his family always drove to Jenkins for Will William’s birthday celebration. Williams’s remained a friend of the Caudill family for the rest of his life. See also; Harry M. Caudill, “The Mountains, The Miners, and the Lord,” in *The Mountains, The Miners, and the Lord*, 34-49.

²⁰ Caudill, “An Interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Elsbernd and Claypool, 75.

missionaries. She remembered these years, noted Harry Caudill, with great “...pleasure...gratitude and pride.”²¹ The effort to educate her children paid off when years later, Caudill’s fellow students at a local grade school in the county seat of Whitesburg, Kentucky, remembered him as a “bookish” youth that possessed “a certain degree of shyness but also a quick mind and even quicker wit.”²² Caudill expressed gratitude for his parent’s educational support understanding that for most youths coming of age during the “Great Depression” the simple pleasure of a book was a rarity.²³

The depression came early to most of the mountain communities dependent upon the coal industry. Between 1923 and 1927 the readily available supply of synthetic fuels along with a flooded coal market and heavy mechanization combined to push the coal industry into a rapid decline that would continue until World War II.²⁴ The parallel decline in agriculture caused by massive “clear cutting” that created problems of soil erosion, the sale of farmland through “fee simple” to outland buyers, and generations of land division, left the mountaineer with little hope of returning to the hillside farms.²⁵ By this time, unhealthy topsoil reduced the average yield of corn per acre to sixteen bushels, hardly the amount necessary to supply a family through the winter months.²⁶ Although the towns built by Consolidation escaped the initial shocks of the depression felt by the rest of the Appalachian coal industry, by 1929 the McRoberts mines began a massive lay-off that lasted for five years.²⁷ Then, as Ruby Zidaroff and Flora Scott remembered, “McRoberts, like the rest of the country, was in a desperate condition.”²⁸

By the time Harry Caudill reached adolescence, the mountain communities had undergone a series of dramatic changes as the depression gained a complete hold over the nation. The years of the depression were, according to T. H. Watkins:

...the worst of times, a terrible, scarring experience that changed this country and its people forever. Even if they did not lose their jobs or go hungry themselves, even if the

²¹ Harry M. Caudill, Acceptance speech for the Weatherford Literary Award, 3 May 1977. AHCP, Box 3, Folder 2.

²² William T. Cornett, “Harry Caudill and wife Anne work for a Better East Kentucky: Book, Times shaped each other,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 12 April 1989. AHCP, Box 2, Folder 24.

²³ Caudill, “An Interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Elsbernd and Claypool.

²⁴ Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 225-238.

²⁵ Boles, *The South through Time: A History of the Region Vol. II*, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1995) 410.

²⁶ Harry M. Caudill, *My Land is Dying*, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., INC., 1971) 33. See Also: Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

²⁷ Flint, “Interview with Mrs. Maude Flint” in *The History of Jenkins*, G-19

²⁸ Zidaroff, “McRoberts Kentucky,” in *The History of Jenkins*, C-6.

terror of want passed over them...most Americans felt its passage like a cold, unforgettable wind. Driven by terrible imperatives of economic disaster, fear combined with anger to produce perhaps the truest expression of grass roots activism in American history...the story of the Great Depression is punctuated by moments when ‘the people’ in one incarnation or another seized and validated their own measure of hope.²⁹

Although somewhat insulated from the harsh realities of the coal town experience, Caudill’s lasting impressions of these years mimicked the times. Like many youths that came to adulthood during the period, his description of the 1930s reflected the confusion and fear associated with the Depression.

Neither the safety of the family farm nor the comfort of the mountains could completely hide Caudill from the harsh realities of the 1930s. Consolidation had succumbed to the depression. At the payroll office in Jenkins, desperate men constantly lined the boardwalks hoping for a few hours of work or a “handout” of script to spend at the company store.³⁰ However, as company paternalism ceased and no alternative means of support became available, men, women, and children were reduced to total poverty. The image of families, hard pressed to stay the hand of starvation, became an important part of Caudill’s environment and later he remembered their gaunt faces and haunted eyes as if it was yesterday.

The peach orchard on the family farm presented an opportunity to make some money to a teenage Caudill and his friend. Together they gathered the ripe fruit in the back of a pick-up truck in hope of selling them in the coal camps. However, their excursion ended without the jingle of change in their pockets but with a lesson in compassion. “I never saw such starvation in my life,” Caudill remarked as he described their arrival in the coal camps where the two boys touched by the blatant poverty, decided to give their cargo away. “I shall never forget it. I wish everybody could have a memory like this, what it was like when those poor, frail, thin women handed up their basket to get a dozen or so peaches. It was a sad time to grow up.”³¹ At this interval in his life, Caudill walked the edge between the activist ideology of the New Deal era when a “person did not have to rot” to the brutal reality of the depression. Caudill never forgot

²⁹ Watkins, *The Great Depression*, 12, 15.

³⁰ Ransom Jordon, “Interview with Ransom Jordon,” in *The History of Jenkins*, G-27.; James Jackson, “Interview with James Jackson,” in *The History of Jenkins*, G-48.

³¹ Caudill, “Interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Elsbernd and Claypool, 78

the powerlessness he felt during these years. These haunting images in sharp contrast with the beautiful mountains helped to shape his attitudes toward the land and the people of Appalachia. Testifying before the White House Conference on Natural Beauty in 1965, Caudill asserted “the southern Appalachians are so beautiful that they mask the poverty of their inhabitants.”³²

Very few things in Caudill’s life took precedence over his concern for the environment. He believed, “To know the ancient mountain range that parallels our Atlantic Coast is to love it.”³³ For a young Caudill store-bought toys provided little entertainment when compared with the adventures played on moss covered forest floors beneath a canopy of towering trees that rustled to the tune of the wind. These adventures stirred a boy’s imagination and developed a bond between him and the land that carried into adulthood.

Caudill learned to love the mountains as a child but it was a high school vocational teacher that “sparked” his commitment to protecting them.³⁴ Jerry Montgomery taught soil conservation at Letcher County High School. Sponsored by the federal government under New Deal programming, he and other county agents educated mountain communities about combating “the industry instigated” soil erosion by replanting trees and practicing responsible farming methods.³⁵ Clearly most locals realized that the timber boom of the late 19th Century had created serious problems of erosion. They understood the use of “clear cutting techniques” had eliminated the root systems necessary to retain the soil on steep hillsides.³⁶ The tremendous floods of 1927 demonstrated the catastrophic environmental consequences of an entire generation of land negligence. Still, Caudill remembered that his father continued to plant row crops on ridges so steep that he dug ditches to support him while he hoed. He insisted that even though his father knew this method caused further loss of topsoil, he refused to listen to the county agents.³⁷ Nevertheless, by 1941 the agricultural agent’s lessons began to take root in the mountain communities as locals began to plant cover crops and trees to hold the soil.

³² Harry M. Caudill, “Who Would Wreck a Valley for a Bit of Cheap Fuel?” Remarks by Harry Caudill at the White House Conference on Natural Beauty, 24 May 1965, published in *Mountain Life & Work* Vol. 40, No. 3 (Fall 1965). AHCP, Box 63, Folder 17.

³³ Caudill, *My Land is Dying*, 33.

³⁴ Lee Mueller, “Harry Caudill Still Beating the Drum for Appalachia,” *Lexington Sunday Herald Leader*, 8 March 1981. AHCP, Box. 2, Folder 9.

³⁵ Caudill, “Interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Elsbernd and Claypool, 79.

³⁶ Boles, *The South through Time*, 409-410.

³⁷ Harry Caudill, “Beyond the Minimum: History of Education in Kentucky,” interview by Richard Royster, [cassette recording] 24 July 1990, Oral History Project, Special Collection, King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington.

Unfortunately, World War II prevented any accurate measurement of the improvements as the coal industry regained momentum using the new technique of strip mining. However, an adult Caudill took Montgomery's lessons to heart, continuously insisting that the mountaineer replant the forest. Both the forest and people benefited from reforestation, he insisted, because "a healing land can be therapeutic in the treatment of many human ills."³⁸

"Harry's interest in conservation really begins with people," concluded longtime friend and scholar Wendel Berry. For Caudill the "land and the people are inseparable."³⁹ Similarly, David McCullough observed that all of Caudill's ideas are "...related to land. For it would be hard for Caudill or almost anyone from this section of Kentucky...to imagine the course of human affairs irrespective..." of the land. McCullough believed this attachment to the land lent a "special significance" to his environmental concerns. "For him, the scenic wonders, the ecology, the people and their stories, are all part of the land..."⁴⁰ Growing up in a small town, Caudill formed early impressions of how people related to each other and to the land.

Like most school age children living in a rural community, Caudill walked a mile to and from school. But his friend Bill Shephard, the son of a coal miner, had to walk five miles in both directions. Every morning, Shepherd promptly arrived before classes began to voluntarily sweep the walkway free of snow.

During an especially harsh winter, the principal, Mr. Squires, traveled through a heavy snowfall to the school grounds. Squires said that parents had been "calling" throughout the morning, requesting that school be called off due to the bad weather. However, when he arrived at the schoolhouse, he found Bill Shephard already at the school with the snow faithfully swept from the steps and walkway. Consequently, Squires decided to hold classes despite the protesting parents. However, Caudill noted that the "town children did not come..." The town children resided in the county seat of Whitesburg and represented the professional class. Their lack of attendance compared to his friends' early morning walk to school became to him "an interesting illustration" of how little they valued education. Moreover, it was evidence of Bill Shephard's determination to get an education despite the adverse circumstances confronting him. Like

³⁸ Mitchell, "The Mountains, the Miners, and Mister Caudill," 82-83.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ David G. McCullough, "The Lonely War of a Good Angry Man," *American Heritage*, Vol. xxi, No. 1, (December 1969) AHCP, Box 1, Folder 7.

Shepherd, Caudill was “proud” of the fact that for a five-year period, he never missed a single day of school.⁴¹

At Letcher County High School, Caudill started to lose his shyness and began to “excel in public speaking and essay writing.”⁴² In the classroom of the formidable Mr. Herbert Haynes, he mastered the art of literary drama and good memorization. As part of the curriculum, Haynes demanded that his students learn and recite “a great number of poems.” The assignments included the Shakespearean Classics such as Horatius at the Bridge, Thanatopsis, along with other well-known poets. Caudill, a very diligent student, proved up to the task and successfully memorized as many as “sixteen” poems per day. Years later, Caudill contended that Haynes’ yardstick was a constant source of inspiration to those who thought to neglect their studies.⁴³

There is little doubt that it was under the tutelage of Herbert Haynes where Caudill developed his flair for antiquated phraseology that commanded the attention of national reporters. John G. Mitchell recalled that when “he speaks—an anecdote, an allusion, a quote from some lion of literature...you recognize the rhetorical delivery.”⁴⁴ In succeeding years, his mental catalogue of literary knowledge became the fodder for numerous articles.⁴⁵ His ability to eloquently illustrate a “truth that went beyond words” gained national attention for the plight of the mountains. “He was a reporters dream,” commented Phil Primack, “a veritable mine of information communicated in the form of great quotes. The marvelous sound of his words...had the sound of the Appalachian hills that shaped his views” and his prose.⁴⁶

Caudill’s love of drama and storytelling helped others relive the “colorful” politics of his adolescent years. “He was a masterful storyteller,” claimed Wendell Berry, “...a master of the subtle art of lawyerly overstatement. Strangers impressed by the gravity of Harry’s argument undoubtedly were surprised by his utter glee in the storytelling...by the delighted laughter that floated the stories along. When Harry got started there was nothing to do but listen, and hope he would not stop.”⁴⁷ Since politics were an important part of Caudill’s youth, he spent a great deal

⁴¹ Harry Monroe Caudill, “An Interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Stephen L. Fisher and J. W. Williams, *Appalachian Journal* Vol. 8, No. 4 (Summer 1981) 289. AHCP, Box 2, Folder 13. Note: Harry remembered that Bill Shepherd migrated out of the region. See also; Photograph inserts in *The History of Jenkins*, n.d. Phone service was available in 1915 at the towns owned by Consolidated Coal Company.

⁴² Cornett, “Harry Caudill and his wife Anne,” (12 April 1989).

⁴³ Caudill, “An Interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Fisher and Williams, 288.

⁴⁴ Mitchell, “The Mountains, The Miners, and Mister Caudill,” 83.

⁴⁵ McCullough, “The Lonely War of a Good Angry Man,” 107.

⁴⁶ Phil Primack, “A ‘Humane well of Teaching,’” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 5 May 1990.

⁴⁷ Wendell Berry, Eulogy at the funeral of Harry Caudill, printed in the *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 5 May 1990.

of time writing down his impressions of the Kentucky political system. The main thrust of his argument was that “in Kentucky, elections are only as honest as circumstances require.”⁴⁸

During the early 1900’s, “courthouse rings” operated on a grand scale in the mountains. From the state capital in Frankfort, Kentucky officials chose county leaders for their ability to *deliver* the county to the *chosen* candidate and political party. Indeed, “county offices such as clerk, deputy sheriff, and constable were effectively sold to the highest bidder.”⁴⁹ When control of the political process shifted from local patriarchs to an externally selected leadership with the arrival of coal mining, local county seats spawned a “managerial class” subordinate both “financially and politically to the outside corporations.”⁵⁰ Caudill believed these “little kingdoms” in Eastern Kentucky operated under a feudal system wrought with state-supported nepotism and political dominance by the coal industry.⁵¹

In the late 1920s, the voting “polls” in the mountains usually resembled a community gathering as the local patriarchs assembled to cast their votes and socialize. After all, in Appalachia, the company was the government and by the time the polls opened, the vote was all but cast in the ballot box.⁵² Lester Able remembered that the “company owned everything. They were in charge of everything,” and the men protected their jobs by doing what the company expected of them.⁵³ No recourse was available to them even among those sworn to lawfully protect them. Out of the eight officials that Roy Fleming worked for as a policeman in McRoberts from 1936 to 1938, only one was not simultaneously a superintendent or mine manager for Consolidation. His recollection of company power was that “they would fire people on the spot. Consol would fire at the drop of a hat.”⁵⁴

In addition to the fear of being fired, Consolidation applied to the town ordinance a poll tax of one dollar. Ordinance No. 44 stated, “For the year of 1913, a poll tax of \$1 placed on our male citizens of 21 years of age and a residence of the corporation and a 35 cents tax upon each \$100 of taxable property in the town. This tax [is] to pay salary officers, debts of the town, and

⁴⁸ Caudill, *Slender is the Thread: Tales From a County Law Office*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987). 101.

⁴⁹ Tracy Campbell, *Short of the Glory: The Fall and Redemption of Edward F. Prichard Jr.*, (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1998). p. 9.

⁵⁰ Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 234.

⁵¹ Harry M. Caudill, interview by Charles P. Roland, [cassette recording] 1 April 1981, Special Collections, King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington.

⁵² Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 210-219.

⁵³ Lester Able, “Interview with Lester Able,” in *The History of Jenkins*, G-65-66.

⁵⁴ Roy Fleming, “Interview with Roy Fleming,” in *The History of Jenkins*, G-35.

for improvement of the city streets.”⁵⁵ Since the company paid in script, a poll tax assessed at one dollar informally guaranteed that the company power structure remained politically dominant. It is a safe bet that few voters disobeyed company policy. The mountain electoral process, as described, was familiar to Harry Caudill since his father had entered local politics soon after his birth.

Shortly before the election year of 1924, Tom Hammonds, the general manager of Consolidation Coal Company, summoned Cro Caudill to his office.⁵⁶ Hammonds informed Caudill that the company intended to select the “slate” for the upcoming election. The company wanted him to run for County Court Clerk.⁵⁷ When Caudill contended that he lacked the necessary funding to make a bid for office, the company agreed to support the campaign and he decided to run.⁵⁸ A few days later the company printed up a slate identifying the selected candidates and left it on the porch of every family dependent upon Consolidation for a job.⁵⁹

Cro Caudill ran on the Democratic ticket in Letcher County, Kentucky when the county held a three-fourths majority of strong Republicans. Harry Caudill later noted that “the granitic adherence to the Grand Old Party was a living legacy of ‘the [Civil] War.’ Few Democrats had made a successful bid for any county office prior to this time.”⁶⁰ But Caudill senior had several things in his favor. First, he was running with the approval of the company and had been a coal miner himself. Secondly, he was a native of Letcher County with deep ties to the local community. But most importantly, Cro Caudill had an imaginative and likable personality that appealed to the community residents. “Cro Caudill?” one elderly mountaineer recalled to David McCullough, “Sure, I remember him. He only had one arm, but he’d sure give you a good big hug with it---especially when he was lookin’ for a vote.”⁶¹

The 1924 election was a hard fought campaign in Letcher County. Company support insured the votes of the northeastern portion of the county controlled by Consolidation but the other precincts were filled primarily with farmers who felt no loyalty to the company. Luckily, Harry Caudill noted “My father was inventive and played on the mountaineer’s tendency to

⁵⁵ “Ordinances,” in *The History of Jenkins, Kentucky*, C-10.

⁵⁶ The town of Hammonds, Kentucky was named after Tom Hammonds. See: Caudill, “An Interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Fisher and Williams, 286.

⁵⁷ Caudill, “An Interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Fisher and Williams, 285-287.

⁵⁸ Mitchell, “The Mountains, The Miners, and Mister Caudill,” 90.

⁵⁹ Caudill, “An Interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Fisher and Williams, 286.

⁶⁰ Harry M. Caudill, *Slender is the Thread*, 98-99.

⁶¹ McCullough, “The Lonely War of a Good Angry Man,” 104.

sympathize with the unfortunate and the handicapped.” Cro Caudill hired Ed Thomas, a local woodcarver, to craft “hundreds of wooden” statues in the figure of a one winged crow. These statues were painted white to visually illuminate the fact that the crow extended only one wing. The missing left wing represented “a poignant reminder to coal miners, moonshiners, farmers, and housewives,” that he was handicapped and unable to “fly” like the other birds. The poem, *The White Crow is Back Again*, billed Caudill as political candidate of the people.

Gird Your Loins around about you, for that near Election Day:
For its time to show your feathers, and get busy in the fray
Its no matter who you’re out for, it’s a duty and a debt,
That we owe to all the faithful what a shame if we forget

I don’t care about your party, or your color, or your sect:
The important thing is voting---and the man that we elect:
There’s a certain “bird” a runnin’—he is white and he’s a Cro,
He’s the bird that humbly asked you, for your vote four years ago

With the plan, and with the promise, that he’s guard our trust with care;
Let’s concede that he has done it: let’s admit that been fair
When he came that time before you, just plain ‘Cro’ in private life,
Telling you the whys and wherefores, of his struggles and his strife

You perhaps were moved to pity—deemed him worthy of support;
And you helped him into office—made him Clerk of County Court;
We have but to pause a moment, view the Cro of now and then,
And we know that he proved worthy, and is due the job again.

For the same, “White Cro” is smilin’, rich in friends and memories;
Same old empty sleeve a swingin’ same old challenge to the breeze

Same old cares and same old reasons that he had four years ago;
Let us rally to his banner, lets elect the “smilin’ Cro.”⁶²

The public warmed to the message with a little help from Consolidation since any person that did not support the company politician was viewed as unappreciative or worse as an “undependable” person.⁶³ Because of his cleverness, Cro Carr Caudill became known as the “one-winged white crow” in the colorful political arena of the late 1920s and the early 1930s. He successfully turned the loss of his arm into a symbol that represented him to the community as “one of them.”

The general election of 1929 pitted Democrat Cro Carr Caudill and Republican Amanda Gibson against each other for the position of Letcher County Court Clerk. Amanda Gibson, well known in the community as a “court reporter, stenographer” and an upstanding woman, proved a challenging opponent. Her home territory of Sugar Grove was especially troubling to the Caudill campaign since not a single Democrat voted in the precinct. However, two roguish individuals, “Lilley and Major” both staunch Republicans owed Cro Caudill a favor. The payback would be the awarding of the Sugar Grove precinct to the Caudill ticket.⁶⁴

Lilley and Major told Caudill to purchase “two gallons of good moonshine” and then leave, because “the very sight of a Democrat [would] make these Republicans mad.” Although doubtful that the voters would receive the whiskey in return for their vote, Caudill “wasted the eight dollars” necessary to buy the moonshine and left the polls. All day, the rascally twosome informed the incoming voters that they were “treating for Mandy Gibson” behind the schoolhouse. However, as each prospective voter came for his little tip of the crystal clear moonshine, Lilly and Major explained that their benefactor would not award a “sip” to a man already voting for her. “You don’t get any ‘cause we know you are already fer her and will vote fer her whether you git a dram or not!” Unfortunately for Amanda Gibson, their ploy worked as voters indignantly cast their votes for Cro Caudill. As predicted by morning the Sugar Grove precinct reported a victory of “four to one” in favor of the Caudill ticket.⁶⁵

⁶² *The White Crow is Back Again, Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 17 June 1937.

⁶³ Caudill, *Slender is the Thread*, 99.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 100-101.

The “Democrat precinct,” so named much to the distress of the local republicans by the postmaster general during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, was located in the Republican dominion of Rock House Creek in Letcher County. Like the Sugar Grove Precinct, “Democrat” would require a little outside assistance to insure Cro Caudill a victory over Amanda Gibson in 1929. “Ticket-scratching” was the chosen method. On the night of the election, Harry Caudill explained, the four election officers stopped at a friend’s house for dinner with the ballot box in tow as “a display of their awesome official responsibility.” When the weather turned bad, the four *Republican* officials decided to “safely keep” the ballot box with them until the following morning.

During the after dinner conversation, one of their companions remembered that “Saint Paul” was against women speaking out in public. The four Republicans and their host pondered how Amanda Gibson was “goin’ agin” the Bible by disregarding the divine scriptures. “God, it appeared needed a little help, so they provided it.” The next morning the election commissioner “counted and certified” the election returns to the tune of two votes for Amanda Gibson and the rest for Cro Caudill. Although voters swore they faithfully cast their votes for the Republican candidate, the precinct fell to Caudill on the grounds of “biblic[al]-inspirat[ion].” In later years, Harry Caudill asked one of the “biblically inspired” officials for the “book, chapter, and verse” of the Bible that had been used as reference that night. The man responded that he had never read the section himself but had been told that it was located “somewhere between the covers of that Good Book.”⁶⁶

Cro Caudill’s political machine was firmly in place by the time a newly licensed Harry Caudill became his father’s principal driver along the winding hollow roads. By February of 1938, Cro Caudill accepted an engineering position for Kentucky and West Virginia Power Company.⁶⁷ Although he never held another political office, he continued to manage the campaigns of state level politicians such as Ruby Laffoon and Tom Rhea in the Letcher County. Locals described him as an “old time campaigner. He knows the ins and outs of the political game from every angle. Cro is as busy as the proverbial bee every day gathering in votes while the sun shines.”⁶⁸ In the 1938 election, Caudill senior managed Kentucky Senator Alben W. Barkley’s bid for reelection in Letcher County. Barkley, as the Senate Majority Leader, was a

⁶⁶ Ibid. 101-102.

⁶⁷ “Cro C. Working for Ky. & W.Va. P. Co.,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle* 3 February 1938.

⁶⁸ “New Announcements Hasten Election Fires in Letcher Co.,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 13 May 1937.

strong supporter of the New Deal Programs and President Roosevelt. As a New Deal Democrat, Barkley's re-election should have been insured. However, the Governor of Kentucky, Albert Benjamin "Happy" Chandler decided to challenge Barkley for the senate.

"Happy" Chandler was a formidable opponent on the campaign trail. A "colorful character" that was well liked by his constituents, he remained undefeated in politics. Although not an opponent of New Deal ideologies, he represented a challenge to the elected officials that benefited from New Deal patronage when he ran against Barkley. Therefore, prominent "New Deal" officials decided to take the necessary steps to secure Kentucky for the Barkley ticket. Caudill noted this idea was supported from the local courthouses to the Whitehouse in Washington, DC.⁶⁹

The Presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt changed the way government functioned in support of the average citizen. He understood the need for an active governmental role during the depression. In Appalachia, the Federal Emergency Relief Programs and especially the Works Progress Administration (WPA) were a welcome addition to the New Deal programs of the Roosevelt Administration.

The collapse of the coal industry placed thousands of mountain families on the brink of starvation. Gradually, the much-anticipated belief in the revival of the coal industry faded into the sad realization that the King was doomed. Realizing the only hope of survival was located outside the mountains, families followed the roads northward and began the first phases of the Great Appalachian Out-Migration.⁷⁰ For the remainder of the mountaineers, the federal government became their employer when it provided the "absolutely essential wages that literally saw many families through the nadir of the Great Depression."⁷¹

In Kentucky, the WPA initially operated simply to employ men in projects such as road and school construction. Nonetheless, by 1938 the Federal Relief Programs in Appalachia became the tools used by corrupt politicians to formally cement the power of their "little kingdoms."⁷² From this point onward, according to Harry Caudill, the federal programs

⁶⁹ Caudill, Night Comes to the Cumberlands, 207-208; Caudill, Slender is the Thread, 108-109; Caudill, "An Interview with Harry Caudill," interview by Fisher and Williams, 287.

⁷⁰ See Also: Kirby, Rural Worlds Lost; Carl E. Feather, Mountain People In A Flat Land, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1998); Harry K. Schwarzweller and James S. Brown and J.J. Mangalam, Mountain Families in Transition, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971); Chad Berry, Northern Migrant, Southern Exile. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

⁷¹ Boles, The South Through Time, 418.

⁷² Caudill, interview by Roland, 1 April 1981.

operating in the mountains moved from an agency that concentrated on “relief” for the people to the formidable role of “relief politics.” The entire program was turned over to the “political directorate” selected in each county to represent the dominant Democratic Party. It was during this period, Harry Caudill believed the “present political system in the mountains was born.”⁷³

Prior to the 1938 election, Harry Caudill drove his father to the Barkley Campaign headquarters in Louisville to meet with Selmon R. Glenn, the director of the Internal Revenue Service. Glenn discussed the new role of the WPA as a voter management tool tacitly reorganized to successfully reelect Barkley to the Senate. The idea was that the coveted WPA jobs increasingly would employ those loyal to Barkley. Chandler supporters, on the other hand, would find their applications delayed until “they came around.”⁷⁴

In 1981, Caudill explained that he wrote a fictional novel based on the “valuable experience” that he witnessed when the Roosevelt Administration surrendered the Federal Relief Programs to local directorates in order to rebuild the Democratic Party. In The Senator from Slaughter County, Doctor Bonham, the chosen fictitious local leader, explained that jobs were what the people wanted in exchange for their loyalty. “To put it sweet and simple,” Bonham claimed, “we need what the coal association has had for years and to use it the same way: the stick and the carrot---temptation and chastisement.”⁷⁵

After returning from the meeting with Glenn in Louisville, Cro Caudill secured total control of the federal relief programs in Letcher County. Harry Caudill recalled “nobody could get a job, nobody could get relief food, nobody could get anything without my father’s approval.” As he remembered loyal Democrats were employed while those hostile to the party were laid off. “They had that total control. You didn’t have any appeal.” Of course, it didn’t take long for these men to come around once they learned who controlled the WPA. Almost overnight, Harry Caudill contended, Letcher transformed from a predominately Republican County to a Democratic stronghold. By the end of the campaign, nearly seventeen hundred men owed their jobs to the Democratic political machine. It is not clear whether local voters were reregistered as Democrats in order to guarantee the vote. However, in Letcher County, Barkley and the well-oiled wheels of the political machine defeated “Happy” Chandler. Caudill recalled that Chandler did not stand a chance against the “gigantic political structure” built during those

⁷³Caudill, “An Interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Fisher and Williams, 287.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵ Harry M. Caudill, The Senator from Slaughter County, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973). 144.

years. “They swamped him. It was a very graphic experience for me because...it was a turning point in Kentucky politics. The New Deal, politically, was merciless. Roosevelt was merciless, and yet he was very adroit.”⁷⁶ Ironically, Caudill later remarked that by the end of the campaign, despite his father’s support of Barkley, he became a youthful supporter of “Happy” Chandler.⁷⁷

Despite the corruption associated with the 1938 campaign, Caudill admired the “colorful characters” involved in the election. He remembered that Alben Barkley admitted, “The public is not interested in issues and is bored by a discussion of them. My policy is to entertain the people by telling them jokes, and stories, and to educate them by raising hell with the Republican Party.”⁷⁸ Likewise, “Happy” Chandler entertained the audience, but the tactic he employed made the crowd think that he was “one of them.”

During the campaign, Barkley informed the locals that Chandler used state funds desperately needed by them to build an “executive bathroom.” Not content with a regular toilet seat, Barkley claimed Chandler “sent a ship all the way across the ocean...to Bombay for a fragment of scented wood” to make a toilet seat. However, Caudill laughingly remarked that the governor ignored Barkley’s petty tales and launched into a ridiculous rendition of “Dear Alben” as the president’s “yesman.”⁷⁹ The ploy served the governor well since the crowd *quickly forgot* the tax dollars wasted on a toilet seat carved from scented wood.⁸⁰ From these “colorful characters,” Caudill mastered the art of dramatic emphasis necessary to make a point that otherwise would be impossible to achieve. Although many later criticized Caudill’s use of drama to get attention for the region, Loyal Jones observed, “Harry speaks to sway people and to get at a kind of truth that is beyond facts.”⁸¹

The childhood of Harry Caudill molded the man that evolved into a leading social critic and national spokesperson for the Appalachian Mountains. Because he was born at a time of change Letcher County, his lifelong ideas concerning education, the environment, and politics symbolized the transitional period between 1920-1940 in the region. Accordingly, the defining characteristics of power and powerlessness became the cornerstone of his thinking.

⁷⁶Caudill, Night, 207-208.; Caudill, Slender is the Thread, 108-109; Caudill, “An Interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Fisher and Williams, 287. Quote from “An Interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Fisher and Williams, 287.

⁷⁷ Caudill, interview by Roland, 1 April 1981.

⁷⁸ Caudill, Slender is the Thread, 108.

⁷⁹ James K. Libbey, Dear Alben: Mr. Barkley of Kentucky, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1979). 77-81

⁸⁰ Caudill, interview by Roland, 1 April 1981.

⁸¹ McCullough, “The Lonely War of a Good Angry Man,” 107.

For Harry Caudill, the security of the family farm and his father's political career barred the door against the hunger endured by his neighbors. Nonetheless as a youthful bystander, he watched the collapse of Consolidation's model coal town and the inevitable disintegration of company paternalism. Mentally, he recorded the crippled limbs and hacking coughs of the men who made their living from the mountain's belly then layered these images with the haunted eyes and gaunt faces of the women and children that quickly had been forgotten by the King. To him, the towns built for the King became "magnificent, enduring, and absurd" representations of the cost of modernity and the only definite in his world became the land.⁸²

Caudill viewed the "land and people" of the Appalachian Mountains as a single entity. To him, environmental protection embodied the full scope of things contained within the region. Therefore, protection for one insured protection for both. As a youth, he marked the toppling of the coal empire, finding comfort in the fact that the mountains remained strong against the forceful winds of the depression as traditional farming communities vigorously denied the hand of starvation. The land symbolized a source of security and power while the coal industry epitomized instability and powerlessness. Consequently, his views mirrored the confusion and fear of the "Great Depression" felt by most people that lived during the period. Education, as he understood it, provided the only escape route available to a boy determined to avoid an occupation in the coal industry.

Caudill's determination to acquire an education increased as he realized that those who held power escaped the worst of the depression while the powerless grappled for a foothold in the panic sweeping the nation. From this viewpoint, education represented power---the ability to make or change the rules in accordance with your needs. To a mountain youth, only the certainty of academic achievement blocked the fear of being powerless and insured a future outside the coal industry. Unfortunately, his determination and ultimately successful completion of his educational dream became an illustration of the "passive" acceptance of the system by others. Adolescent determination hid the truth that for those facing starvation, the cost of an education simply was beyond their reach.

The political arena of the 1930s reinforced Caudill's definition of power and powerlessness and from his youthful viewpoint validated his attitudes toward the passivity of the mountaineer. At the side of New Deal politicians, Caudill witnessed the power and ruthlessness

⁸² Caudill, Theirs Be The Power: The Moguls of Eastern Kentucky, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983).

of the political machine. Although he always acknowledged the total control the political directorate exercised over the general population, from inside the “machine,” Caudill discovered the opposite side of paternalism. The once feared paternalism of the coal industry became acceptable on the campaign trail. The humorous memory of vote buying and the selling of a vote for a “dram” of whiskey unrealistically demonstrated to a *youthful* Caudill what little value the mountaineer placed on the electoral process. As a result, the unethical political mechanisms of “ticket-scratching” and job manipulation became justifiable under the ideology of political paternalism. He learned at the heels of the “colorful [political] characters” of the 1930s that the mountaineer cared nothing for the issues. Entertainment, they scrupulously asserted, held the keys to political success and storytelling, jokes, and the general policy of “raising hell” with the opposing party insured the vote. Youthful innocence worked to obscure the reality of political domination and corruption of the politicians and what that meant to those powerless to stop its progression. In a boy’s mind, the total ruthlessness of the “machine” simply got lost in the pleasure of the campaign and the “roar of the crowd.”

The tools of success, according to the Harry Caudill who grew up during the “roaring” 1920s and the Great Depression of the 1930s, were the power that accompanied education and the ability to successfully communicate a “truth” that went beyond the facts. As he understood the system, under the informal laws of paternalism, an educated person could provide for the powerless and insure that both the land and the people thrived despite the circumstances stacked against them. For Caudill, the harsh reality that defined power and powerlessness would be a long time in coming. For now, he simply understood that they existed.

Chapter Two: Great Cycles of Change

Times Change. I believe...if you don't prepare for the great cycles of change, prepare in advance before they get here, you're going to be overwhelmed by them.⁸³

Harry Monroe Caudill

In the fall of 1940, an excited Harry Caudill journeyed to the University of Kentucky to study for a law degree. The colorful ridges of Pine Mountain faded into memory as the flatlands of Lexington, Kentucky spread across the horizon. In record time, the miles ticked away until nothing stood between Caudill and his educational goals. Grasping the handles of his battered suitcase, Caudill stepped from the car and confidently walked toward the red brick buildings. Never dreaming that before the year fell away, he would embark upon an eight-year journey that crossed three continents and introduced him to several foreign cultures, before depositing him back in the Commonwealth to finish his education.

Caudill's enrollment at the University of Kentucky sparked a confrontation between his family and the traditional community. As word of his departure spread, "two town ministers, one Presbyterian, [and] one Baptist," traveled to the Caudill home on Long Branch. They protested his soul would be lost if he was exposed to the teachings of the Darwin's Theory of Evolution.⁸⁴ Although courteous and respectful of their concerns, Caudill refused to switch to a more conservative institution. Even then walking on the edge of tradition and modernity was a distinctive characteristic of his identity. His high school classmates remembered him as a high achiever "often embroiled in controversy."⁸⁵

During the depression, it was rare for a "mountain kid from Letcher" to enter college. The cost of living on campus combined with regular educational expenses required them to procure outside financial support. Usually, they accepted loans guaranteed by citizens of Letcher County. Most locals gladly supported the education of a hometown kid. Nevertheless, some supporters based their decision on the lucrative prospective of securing an advantageous "IOU."

⁸³, Caudill, "An interview with Harry Caudill," interview by Elsbernd and Claypool. 82.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 75-76.

⁸⁵ Cornett, "Harry Caudill and wife Anne work for Better East Kentucky," 12 April 1989.

Among Caudill's many benefactors was a "colorful character" from Letcher County known as Samuel "Sam" Bates. The distinguished career of this illustrious criminal and coal entrepreneur included three murder convictions and a "three page" long criminal record of lesser offenses. Among the murder victims was his brother who refused to "sensibly" settle a dispute over their father's will. For this crime and others, Bates served in the state penitentiary while the rest of his "petty" charges were commuted or conspicuously pardoned on the grounds of good behavior.⁸⁶

Sam Bates akas *Sam Tate* owned and operated a roadhouse on the outskirts of Whitesburg. The "Bloody Bucket Inn" was the prime financial resource of his venture into the profitable world of the coal industry. Shortly after World War II, a very astute Tate opened a coal dock where hundreds of small, "truck mines" sold the spoils of their labors. While coal prices soared in the fuel-starved nation, Sam reaped the monetary rewards from the congressional decision to abolish price controls on coal. Meanwhile, the local constituents decision to prohibit the sale or distribution of whiskey in Letcher County offered a second income. In due course, Bates reigned as a local coal baron and the county's "head bootlegger." His coal ramps loaded out the county's black wealth while his "twenty-two licensed taxicabs" became the sole source of whiskey to those who could afford the price and who remembered to "pay tribute" to their leader.⁸⁷

Although, Sam had been indicted for "practically everything," Caudill said the majority of the populace *appreciated* his "generosity." His attention to the town folk insured that he emerged unscathed in later years as a rich and well-respected citizen of the community. "If a man was jobless and penniless, a load of groceries might be received *compliments of Sam.*" Elderly ladies with flu symptoms were often delivered the "makings of a hot toddy" while a family with children or grandchildren discovered that their long over-due grocery bill had been

⁸⁶ Caudill, *Slender is the Thread*, 31-33.

⁸⁷ Ibid; Caudill, "The Marriage of Samuel Tate," in *The Mountain, The Miner, and The Lord*, 83-92. Note: The story of Sam Bates continued in "The Marriage of Sam Tate" published by Harry Caudill in *The Mountain, the Miner, and the Lord*. Although, Caudill never stated that Samuel Bates and Samuel Tate are the same person, it is easily surmised that they are the same person since both were tried and convicted three times for murder (both killed their brothers over their father's will) and both made a fortune in the truck mine industry. Another commonality is that Caudill claimed both as his clients for many years before a "well-aimed bullet ended [their] careers in 1963." See Also: "Circuit Court Convenes in New Year Session," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 5 January 1956; "Letcher Suspect in Tax Case Guilty of Liquor Count," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 3 May 1956; "Two draw sentences on bootlegging charges," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 8 January 1959; "Bates case dismissed," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 21 January 1960.

paid in full—*compliments of Sam*. “Pet jurors” that performed their civic duty arrived to the township a few days later in a new Plymouth or Chevrolet.”⁸⁸ Likewise, “many young men and women on their way to college paid their expenses with bank notes” guaranteed by Sam.⁸⁹ “By such means as these,” Caudill contended, “Sam collected a great number of IOUs, and among mountain people one good turn deserves another.”⁹⁰

Sam’s remarkable career in crime came to a screeching halt in 1963 when he was shot in the forehead by an “enraged” bootlegger unwilling to pay his extortion rate.”⁹¹ After Sam’s death, the courthouse returned to normal and Letcher County got on with the business of living. Over the years, many wondered why Sam “ill-used” his powerful combination of rascality, cunning, and wealth to insure acquittals for obviously guilty defendants. Most claimed “he hated the government with its laws and officers and courts,” but the real reason remained a mystery. As for Caudill, he remembered that “in 1942, Sam endorsed a note for my sophomore year at the University of Kentucky. Sam said he did it because I was *a fine young man*. I remembered this when I assisted in the prosecution of his killer.”⁹² When the trial was completed; Caudill was paid in full. Throughout his life, he was thankful to Sam and others for the opportunity to get an education.

By the end of his first semester at the University of Kentucky, Caudill settled into a Liberal Arts Program strong in state and national history.⁹³ Dr. Thomas Clark, a history professor, “vividly” recalled his first meeting with the “tall rawboned mountain boy...sitting in the middle of the classroom being attentive.” He was a “bright diligent freshman who had both a mind and will of his own.” Frequently, he demonstrated his independence by posing several questions about “Appalachian Kentucky.”⁹⁴ To this point, the mountains had sent forth few willing to verbally champion the region. But in the fall of 1940, Thomas Clark encountered “one student who [had] the latent talent to shake a region or a state out of its encrusted lethargies, lethargies born of generations of social failures.”⁹⁵ Over the next three years, Caudill was

⁸⁸ Caudill, “The Marriage of Sam Tate,” 86.

⁸⁹ Caudill, *Slender is the Thread*, 31-32.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*.

⁹¹ *Ibid*. 32.

⁹² *Ibid*. 32-33.

⁹³ Thomas D. Clark, “Harry Caudill, A Native Son,” *Appalachian Heritage*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1993): 14-18. Quote from pg. 18.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 14.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 14.

destined to learn that social failures were not indigenous to Kentucky but were repeated throughout the world.

As Americans desperately tried to rebuild the national economy following the Great Depression, the rest of the world was gradually succumbing to the horrors of World War II. At first, American “isolationist” asserted that the geographic distance between States and war-torn Europe validated the lack of participation in the war by United States forces. “This nation wants peace,” concluded President Roosevelt.⁹⁶ However, when Japanese fighter planes bombed Pearl Harbor in the morning hours of November 7, 1941, Americans geared up for war.

During the summer of 1942, twenty-year old Harry Caudill voluntarily enlisted in the army. It seemed the respectable thing to do. After all, “patriotism was the second religion of the hill people,” he explained.⁹⁷ His university training ran second to the defense of the county. Fortunately, he had almost completed a two-year Liberal Arts degree before being called to active duty. Most of the male students were leaving the university for the war around this period.⁹⁸

Caudill was ordered to Camp Croft in South Carolina in the spring of 1943. Shortly thereafter, he began instruction at the Infantry Replacement Training Center as a “rifleman.”⁹⁹ The rigorous training served him well on the Italian front. Later, he passed on a bit of advice to raw recruits moving through the rigid camp. He encouraged them to “...take seriously every phase of basic training and if you are trained as an Infantryman, “learn to dig fast and deep.” “An infantry soldier should love only his wife more than his shovel,” he warned with a bit of humor tainted by the seriousness of battlefield experience.¹⁰⁰

After basic training, Caudill was permanently assigned to Company E, 337th Infantry. The large contingent primarily consisted of men from the “middle-west and north-east” with an age range of eighteen to forty. The Commander was a former highway maintenance foreman in the New England area and proved to be an honorable man. Although several men hailed from the mountain region, only Walker Hibbits of Durham and Caudill were from Letcher County.

⁹⁶ Watkins, The Great Depression, 318-19.

⁹⁷ Caudill, The Mountain, the Miner, and the Lord, viii.

⁹⁸ Caudill, “An Interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Fisher and Williams, 290. Note: Caudill volunteered for service on 11 July 1942 but was not called to active duty until March 1943.

⁹⁹ Harry Monroe Caudill, Enlisted Record, recorded in Discharge Book No. 1, Pg. 47. Letcher County Court Clerk’s Office; Harry M. Caudill, Army Qualification Separation Record: Report of Separation, 18 October 1944. AHCP, Box 32, Folder 6; See Also: Harry M. Caudill, “My Experiences In the Army,” *Whitesburg, Mountain Eagle*, 21 September-16 November 1944. AHCP, Box 63, Folder 1.

“The personnel was perfectly representative of American Manhood,” Caudill claimed. “...By and large I liked them better and trusted them more fully than any group I have ever been associated with.”¹⁰¹

An eight day journey across the sea ended in French Morocco where army training continued at a pace that made boot camp seem like a “U.S.O. camp show by comparison.” Although the area and its inhabitants were a “constant source of amazement,” the place remained unappealing as a residence since “more than a million soldiers” were deployed to keep “its warlike inhabitants in check.” The company found the Arabs intimidating because a majority of the males carried “long keen knives beneath their robes” and would “doubtless stab his brother for a pair of shoes.”

In sharp contrast, Caudill painted a humanistic face on the Arabs when he noted that an unequal socio-economic status burdened the native people while the French interlopers dominated the power structure. Even though he feared the violence associated with the Arabs, he recognized that tension resulted from local conditions. He explained that the Arabs worked as tenants on land owned by “wealthier men” in the French dominated upper class. Despite their best efforts to reap a bountiful harvest from the land, the war-torn locals faced starvation. Since the fall of France in 1940 to the Nazi Regime, Allied Forces had blockaded the region causing shortages of gasoline, clothing, and food. Caudill reported that “American cigarettes sold for 65 cents while laundry soap claimed a whopping four dollars and an army mattress cost \$18.00.”¹⁰²

In March of 1944, Co. E journeyed to Italy. At once, Caudill was struck by the incredible effort of the Italians to subsistence farming. They exercised a “conservative pattern” of building their houses back to back to save the usable land for farming and pasture. By comparison, he commented that in his native Letcher County most “farmers” can see barely the smoke from the next chimney but “in Italy it is not uncommon for a peasant to be able to throw a stone to a neighbors’ house.”

Several Italian-American soldiers served in Caudill’s company. Generously, they acted as interpreters for the locals and the troops. During these awkward conversations, Caudill remembered that several Italian youths said they hoped to join relatives in the United States after the war. They believed the move would improve their circumstances. According to Caudill,

¹⁰⁰ Caudill, “My Experience in the Army,” 21 September, 1944. AHCP, Box 63, Folder 1.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Caudill, “My Experiences in the Army,” 28 September 1944. AHCP, Box 63, Folder 1.

locals hated “fascism” and could say ‘to hell with Mussolini!’ in “perfect English.” To him it was easy to understand their rationale after seeing the “poverty ridden, war-wrecked disillusioned country” they called home.¹⁰³

The affects of war were not only reserved for the native European people. After seeing his first “battle corpse,” Caudill said all previous assumptions that he would leave the war alive changed. The “all-important question [became]: will I be next?” After that, “most of us saw Germans behind ever bush.”

Life in the fox-holes beneath the German held ridges of Mount Brocke, was at least bearable with fellow soldiers as company. However, fear of the unknown kept Caudill alert to the German presence close by. “The days were not too unpleasant but the nights, spent staring over the edge of the fox-holes into the darkness, cold, often wet, sleepy, tired and lonely were down-right miserable.” The worst assignment took place in a small “half-ruined house” where a lone soldier relayed important information concerning enemy positions via the field telephone. “In all my life I never again expect to feel so entirely lost and alone in the world as I felt there in the wrecked house seven hundred yards from our line in the middle of No Man’s Land.”¹⁰⁴

During May of 1944, Company E was unable to raise their heads as nervous German forces anticipating a spring assault continuously fired their rifles at the “slightest disturbances” from their high mountain position. Finally on May 11th, the company’s long awaited military orders arrived from headquarters. “Congratulations” was scrawled across two inconspicuous sheets of paper, followed by several lines expressing the company’s “good-fortunes” in being granted the “privilege [of] striking the first blow at Hitler’s fortress.” Caudill sarcastically remarked that “nobody who was there is likely to ever desire another such privilege!”¹⁰⁵

On May 13th, the battle raged at the foothills of Mount Brocke. Attesting to the intensive struggle were the “little wooden crosses” that identified the British graves and the many rifles or sticks driven in the ground to hold the helmet of the dead Nazis that scattered across the battlefield.¹⁰⁶ However, it was the unburied corpses that lingered in Caudill’s mind. “I am sure

¹⁰³ Caudill, “My Experiences in the Army,” 19 October 1944. AHCP, Box 63, Folder 1.

¹⁰⁴ Caudill, “My Experiences in the Army,” 26 October 1944. AHCP, Box 63, Folder 1.

¹⁰⁵ Caudill, “My Experiences in the Army,” 2 November 1944. AHCP, Box 63, Folder 1.

¹⁰⁶ Caudill, “My Experiences in the Army,” 9 November 1944. AHCP, Box 63, Folder 1.

the most accusing, chilling look in the world is the look in a dead man's eyes. One thing is for certain...no man who has seen them---try though he may---can ever forget them.”¹⁰⁷

Three days later on May 16th, Caudill was wounded in the battle at Minturno, Italy. At the field hospital, doctors wanted to amputate the “badly mangled” leg and foot but a twenty-one year old Caudill pleaded with them “not to take” either and the doctors relented.¹⁰⁸ Throughout the summer and well into fall, Caudill convalesced at Thayer General Hospital in Nashville, Tennessee. He filled the long hours by writing a series of articles describing the war.¹⁰⁹ Although the accounts were the “truth” as he had “witnessed them,” they sidestepped actual battle scenes for his personal impressions of the land and people he visited during his tour of duty. “To actually describe a battle and the horror, suffering and sorrow that accompany it would be to incur criticism. They are so much more horrible than anything he has ever experienced that he cannot picture them. As a result we may naturally tend to disbelieve an account of them. That is just one trait of human nature, I suppose.”¹¹⁰ In these articles, a twenty-two year old Caudill demonstrated a capacity to understand the complexity of human nature that went far beyond his years. A year later, citizens and soldiers alike desperately shoved the imagery of war to the back of their minds in exchange for their share of the American dream.

Across the United States young men and women embarked upon a journey to create their own worlds from the vestiges of the old and new view. Just as Archibald MacLeish had predicted “the great majority of Americans understand very well that this war is not a war only, but an end and a beginning---an end to things known and a beginning of things unknown. We know that whatever the world will be when the war ends, the world will be different.”¹¹¹ Nowhere were the words of MacLeish more evident than the Appalachian Mountains and their southern neighbors as they demanded the right to participate in this “...potentially more exciting, liberating, and lucrative world.”¹¹² Battle-worn soldiers ached to be at home where the “good things” were seemingly located. A place where the image of everyday living was mentally

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ross, “Harry Caudill’s Night Comes to the Cumberlands Marks 30th Anniversary,” *Kentucky Explorer*, (September 1993), 33-35. AHCP, Box 2, Folder 33.

¹⁰⁹ Harry M. Caudill, Enlisted Record. AHCP, Box 32, Folder 6.

¹¹⁰ Caudill, “My Experience in the Army,” 16 November, 1944. AHCP, Box 63, Folder 1.

¹¹¹ Alan Brinkley, “Legacies of World War II,” in Liberalism and its Discontents, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 94.

¹¹² Boles, The South Through Time, 454.

embellished with “...the generosity, the good pay, the comforts, the democracy, [and] the pie.”¹¹³

In great numbers, they returned with, “money in their pockets, new-found skills under their belts, confidence in their nation and their own ability, and broader horizons beckoning.” Even though “few would have been able to put their fingers on precisely how they had been transformed” it is enough to say that they had changed. “Perhaps a shorthand expression would be to say that millions of southerners, white and black, had been modernized....”¹¹⁴ Infused with their own sense of importance, the generation of World War II challenged the status quo and demanded a piece of the nations economic security and the material comfort that came to represent the American Dream.¹¹⁵

Across the nation, youths financed their educational dreams with the G. I Bill of Rights. Caudill remembered that “thousands of young mountaineers” took advantage of the opportunity to get an education paid for by the government. “After a visit home they left every county and practically every community to attend the University of Kentucky [and] other colleges.... Sons of coal miners and poor land farmers became school teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, chemists, physicists, accountants....” After obtaining their degrees, few returned to their native counties. Instead most took their bright new diplomas to high paying urban areas in need of their professional skills. While the distant cities claimed the new professionals with “highland names” pronounced with a “highland accents,” mountain communities waved goodbye to their sons and daughters.¹¹⁶ The war that so drastically changed the general makeup of the academic world also resounded throughout the everyday lives of Americans.

Like millions of others, Caudill trudged home to take up where he had left off. His military career formally ended on the 18th of October 1944. For service to his country, he received \$300 of “mustered out pay plus travel pay to Lexington, Kentucky,” and a bum leg. The government recorded his health as “poor” and his character as “excellent.”¹¹⁷ After a few months of rest, Caudill headed back to the university.

As the returning soldiers took up their studies, the campus filled with the resonating male tones absent over the past five years. Historian Thomas Clark remembered that Harry Caudill,

¹¹³ John Hershey quoted in Liberalism and its Discontents, Brinkley, 96.

¹¹⁴ Boles, The South Through Time, 454.

¹¹⁵ Brinkley, “Icons of the American Establishment,” in Liberalism and its Discontents, 188.

¹¹⁶ Caudill, Night Comes to the Cumberlands, 244-246.

returned “a Purple Heart veteran.” A “mature lad who pursued the study of law. He was not only a serious and sensitive GI, he was also...an angry one. Angry about the poky way the state government...attend[ed] to social, economic, and political matters of the region.”¹¹⁸

Soon, Caudill became embroiled in the first of many controversies that marked his life. Because of his sensitivity to the war, Caudill and several other student-veterans challenged the actions of the university concerning Axel Wenner-Gren, a Swedish industrialist with ties to the Nazi regime. In a petition delivered to Kentucky Governor Simeon S. Willus on 2 April 1945, seventeen World War II “veteran students” demanded an investigation of the University’s relationship to Wenner-Gren.¹¹⁹ This open challenge and blunt criticism of university policy, Clark believed, made the administration aware of the “rapidly changing conditions of American society.”¹²⁰

In 1940, the University of Kentucky accepted Wenner-Gren’s generous offer of \$155,600 to build and purchase equipment for an aeronautical research laboratory. According to the veteran’s petition, the university’s Board of Trustees agreed on July 12, 1940 to offer Wenner-Gren rent-free use of the laboratories and shops of the College of Engineering for a ten-year period. A campus building was named in his honor to demonstrate the university’s appreciation for the generous contribution. However, their belief that the university remained supportive of Wenner-Gren launched the veteran student protest.¹²¹

The *Lexington Herald Leader* contended “the latest skirmish...[was] not inspiring.” The affair had been brought to public’s attention on a number of occasions during the war and “...whatever the motives of Wenner-Gren in making the gift or the university administration in the acceptance and operation of the laboratory, all this is water over the dam. No conceivable connection exists, or is alleged,” the paper added, “between the university and a benefactor who...turned out to be questionable.” The article declared that the students’ contention that trustees have “done something unpatriotic...was so outrageously false that fair-minded people will incline instinctively to take the side of the university.” As for the petitioners, the paper noted

¹¹⁷ Caudill, Enlisted Record, AHCP, Box 32, Folder 6.

¹¹⁸ Clark, “A Native Son,” 14.

¹¹⁹ Caudill, et.al, Petition to Honorable Simeon S. Willus, Governor of Kentucky (February 1945). AHCP, Box 32, Folder 6.

¹²⁰ Clark, “A Native Son,” 15. AHCP, Box 5, Folder 5.

¹²¹ “Students Will State Facts,” *Lexington Herald Leader*, 1945. AHCP, Box 32, Folder 6; “Wenner-Gren Issue Unfairly Raised,” *Lexington Herald Leader*, 1945 AHCP, Box 32, Folder 6.

that they are “young men who have served their country faithfully...[who] are not, however, yet qualified to pass judgment on the general competence of the university administration.”¹²²

Caudill and two co-authors L.L. Booth and Robt. B. Eastburn stated their initial petition had been “misinterpreted.”¹²³ The target of their complaint was Richard C. Stoll, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustee. They believed that Stoll used “the name of the University of Kentucky” in a quest to have Axel Wenner-Gren’s name removed from a list of “enemies of the United States” in January of 1943. Therefore, the petitioners’ argued:

...in making the University of Kentucky an innocent party to an effort to give aid and comfort to a person treated as an enemy...the Trustees responsible for such conduct may be properly charged with bad faith, a breach of trust, an offense against public morality, and insult to the Kentuckians fighting enemies armed with weapons and munitions supplied by the said Axel L. Wenner-Gren.

Consequently, the veterans requested that Governor Willis hold public hearings to decide whether “those persons” accused of aiding Wenner-Gren should be “retain[ed] as Trustees.”¹²⁴

Some weeks later, Governor Wills informed Caudill that the Wenner Gren Aeronautical Research Laboratory had been “investigated several times” by the War Department. Secretary of War, Julius H. Amberg assured Senator A. B. Chandler the “arrangements” between the two were “entirely satisfactory to the War Department.”¹²⁵ Further, on June 2, 1944 the Kentucky Attorney General had advised the removal Wenner-Gren’s name from the building until the federal government removed him from the “black list.”¹²⁶

The “suggestion” that the university behaved in an immoral and unethical manner brought the “wrath” of the administration and the student body down upon Caudill.¹²⁷

¹²² Note: This article does state that the petitioners’ “...error does not justify petty reprisals against them by the university authorities.” “Wenner-Gren Issue Unfairly Raised,” *Lexington Herald Leader*, 1945 AHCP, Box 32, Folder 6.

¹²³ Harry M. Caudill et al., Lexington, Kentucky to [Governor Simeon S. Willis, Frankfort, Kentucky] 20 April 1945. AHCP, Box 32, Folder 6.

¹²⁴ Petition, AHCP, Box 32, Folder 6.

¹²⁵ Governor Simeon Willis, Frankfort, Kentucky to [Harry M. Caudill, Lexington, Kentucky] The Public Paper of Simeon Willis, “Letter Concerning Wenner-Gren Aeronautical Laboratory, Frankfort/ 24 July 1945. 254-255.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Fred W. Luigart, “Caudill’s In Another Fight,” *Louisville Courier Journal Magazine*, 17 November 1963. AHCP, Box 1, Folder 2.

University of Kentucky President Dr. H. L. Donovan stated that contrary to some opinions, the petition did not “represent the views of a faculty-sponsored veterans club.” Dr. Bennett Wall, faculty sponsor along with Joe Covington, commander of the university’s Veteran’s Club stated that although the petition had not been submitted to the club for “approval collectively,” many members were individually presented with the petition.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, Donovan asserted the university felt “outside parties” instigated the campaign but that Harry Caudill...“sparkplugged” the campus debate.¹²⁹

Although the newspapers and the University ridiculed the veteran-student’s efforts, an investigation into the matter was conducted in 1946 and a full report was published in the Kentucky House Journal. Although the report exonerated the university, it also validated the Caudill’s notion that a small group of people can challenge the power structure and thereby force them to respond to their demands.¹³⁰

Caudill continued to be active in campus debates but gave no indication of the powerful writer that lurked beneath the surface.¹³¹ His law professor during the Wenner-Gren affair, Elvis Stahr contended that “Harry Caudill has always known how to get attention for his cause, not for himself. There has to be a place for the hell-raiser. That’s Harry’s place. No one can fill it like he can.”¹³² Ten years later, Stahr, H. L. Donovan, and Caudill joined forces in support of Governor A. B. Chandler’s decision to advocate the establishment of a medical school at the University of Kentucky.¹³³ Still later, they teamed up in the battle that erupted in the state legislature after the

¹²⁸ “Says UK Views not Presented,” Lexington, Kentucky, 3 April 1945, AHCP, Box 32, Folder 6. Note Dr. Bennett Hall served as the residence manager at Bradley Hall where Harry Caudill lived during the time. See: Breathitt, “On the Cutting Edge—The Gadfly and the Stron Voice--Raising Hell,” *Appalachian Heritage*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Spring 1993). 21-25. Quote from 21.

¹²⁹ “A False Appearance of Prosperity,” 1945, AHCP, Box 32, Folder 6.

¹³⁰ The Public Papers of Simeon Willis, footnotes by James Klotter note #3 page 255. See Also: Kentucky House Journal, 1946. 4400-4600.

¹³¹ Jim Warren, et al, “Appalachia’s Harry Caudill dies: Author afflicted by Parkinson’s takes his own life,” *Lexington-Herald Leader*, 30 November 1990.

¹³² John G. Mitchell, “The Mountains, the Miners, and Mister Caudill,” 101.

¹³³ H.L. Donovan, President of the University of Kentucky, delivered this untitled speech before the 1956 Kentucky General Assembly. Frankfort, Kentucky n.d. AHCP Box 26, Folder 1. Note, Scrolled across top of this paper is “inspired by the conversation between H.M.C. and Prof Elvis Stahr.”; Elvis J. Stahr Jr, “How much do you REALLY Know about the U of K?” *Lexington Sunday Herald Leader*, 18 December 1955. AHCP Box 26, Folder 1. Note: Elvis Stahr Jr. served as Secretary of the Army in the Kennedy Administration and as President of the Audubon Society in later years. Caudill’s book Night Comes to the Cumberlands received a certain amount of attention by the Kennedy Administration. Caudill also published several articles in the Audubon Society’s publication.

Education Committee chaired by Caudill accused the public school system of being corrupt and therefore, not beneficial to the people of Kentucky.¹³⁴

While studying at the University of Kentucky, Caudill continued to develop friendships with those destined to shape the state government. Edward “Ned” Breathitt along with T. George Harris became Caudill’s closet allies in his bid to change state politics. The three roomed at Bradley Hall, a men’s residence at the university in their undergraduate years. Along with the residence hall director Dr. Bennett Wall, a professor in the history program, the group held long “bull sessions” until deep in the night. Breathitt said they talked about everything from Kentucky History to girls but it was “Harry” and “George” that regaled them with stories.¹³⁵

After Breathitt and Caudill entered law school, they lost contact with George Harris who transferred first to Yale University and then to the graduate program at Cambridge. New friends joined the pair including future Kentucky legislature and Fifth Circuit Court Judge Will Tom Wathen and others.¹³⁶ Breathitt and Caudill remained the best of friends. Often they would meet for lunch between classes or to “take a break” from studying. Breathitt remembered even as students, they “discuss[ed] the state’s problems and what they could do about them.”¹³⁷ Together they forged a bargain to change Kentucky. Years later, the discussions held between college roommates turned into an impressive political agenda that brought them together on the Kentucky House floor and later as governor and advocate. Breathitt served as Governor of the Commonwealth from 1963 through 1967, at the height of Caudill’s popularity as a spokesman for Appalachia.

Amidst a collection of future political alliances and long-lasting friendships, the single most important individual in Caudill’s life stepped into the picture. A slender young woman with blue-eyes and soft brown hair, Anne Frye exuded confidence and style. It was “love at first sight.”¹³⁸

¹³⁴ See: “House Committee to Investigate Education, AHCP, Box 14, Folders 3-5: Special Commission on Education, AHCP, Box 15, Folder 1-4.

¹³⁵ Breathitt, “On the Cutting Edge.”

¹³⁶ Will Tom Wathen, Morganfield, Kentucky to [Anne Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky] 10 December 1990. AHCP, Box 5, Folder 4. Note Wathen served in the Kentucky Legislature with Harry Caudill before becoming the Firth Judicial Circuit Judge.

¹³⁷ Warren, “Appalachia’s Harry Caudill dies.”

¹³⁸ Caudill, “An Interview of Harry Caudill,” interview by Fisher and Williams, 291.

Anne Frye was born on March 6, 1924 at Cynthiana, Kentucky in the heart of the Bluegrass Region.¹³⁹ Her father worked as a “construction engineer” until employment opportunities dried up as the depression ended any significant building. Although the Frye’s relocated several times when Anne was a child, by 1931, they returned to her mother’s family home in Harrison County. “Things had just fallen apart,” Anne believed. “There was no more construction work.”

Throughout the Depression, Anne’s father built schoolhouses and constructed water systems with the Public Works Administration to support the family. Her mother, a local schoolteacher, followed her husband to job sites across Kentucky in the summer months, leaving her on the farm.

Young Anne loved living with her grandmother. She owned a house in town where they resided during the winter and an “old farm house” for summer residence. Two maiden aunts and an uncle also shared her grandmother’s home with the remainder of the Frye family within a ten-mile radius of town. “We were all just one big happy family. It was a wonderful time.”¹⁴⁰

Despite her youth, Anne recognized the tell-tale signs of the depression. She saw the gradual deterioration of houses and fences that desperately needed a fresh coat of paint. But these things seemed irrelevant since her “grandmother was a marvelous seamstress....” and her aunt was an excellent “gardener and cook.” The combined efforts of these women kept the harsher reality at bay. Anne felt very fortunate to have passed the depression years with her grandmother because the farm shielded her from the reality sweeping across America. “Though I was vaguely aware of the depression, it didn’t have any affect on my happiness as a child.”¹⁴¹

While World War II raged on the European continent, she studied home economics at the University of Kentucky. Since most men were fighting in the war, there was an unequal division in the number of women and men on the university enrollment sheets. Approximately “twelve hundred women and two hundred men” were enrolled during the war years, she remembered.¹⁴² She missed the youthful gatherings that were put aside while America fought in the war. The

¹³⁹ Ross, “Harry Caudill’s ‘Night Comes to the Cumberland’ Marks 30th Anniversary.”

¹⁴⁰ Anne Caudill, “An Interview with Anne Frye Caudill,” interview by Mary Ellen Elsbernd, unpublished, 1990, 3. AHCP, Box 2, Folder 25.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 3.

¹⁴² Ibid. 4.

campus seemed quiet and she was glad when the men began returning from the war. Especially when she noticed the confident mountain man with the “nice voice.”¹⁴³

The most memorable event of Anne’s college career was when she met Harry Caudill during the last semester of her senior year. At first Anne didn’t notice the 6’1” veteran with dark brown hair and eyes in her class, Great Religions of the World. Because her early morning class was on the far side of campus, she usually entered the class slightly late. Aware that her tardiness could disrupt her instructor, Anne tried “unobtrusive[ly],” to slide into a front row seat never seeing the lanky young man from Letcher County. “I sat up in front and he sat in back, but I didn’t know who he was. I just would hear this nice, deep voice asking questions.”¹⁴⁴

One morning when Anne arrived early the two struck up a conversation while sitting on the front steps of the building.¹⁴⁵ Before class began, she remembered, they agreed to have lunch in the student center. During their lunch, Caudill pointed to the many paintings adorning the center, noting that the pictures depicted no part of Eastern Kentucky and “its industrial powerhouse. The university ignores the eastern third of its counties.” The simplistic observation struck Anne with its powerful validity. Growing up in Central Kentucky, she was barely conscious of the eastern region. Throughout their meal, Caudill spoke of the land, the people and the many things that needed to be done there. His comments made an indelible impression on Anne. “Here, I thought, was a man with ideas and vision, no longer a boy with idle interests and conversation.”¹⁴⁶ Laughing she recalled that within two weeks of their first meeting the “persuasive man with a touch of Blarney” had “talked a ring onto [her] finger.”¹⁴⁷

As Anne’s graduation approached both decided Caudill would finish his law degree while she explored several job opportunities before they settled down. Already she had been offered several positions as a lab technician because of her strong chemistry background. Because men experienced in this type of work were off “toting guns,” opportunities for women expanded in the work place. Anne was torn between taking a job in Louisville, Kentucky where she could

¹⁴³ Ross, “Harry Caudill’s ‘Night Comes to the Cumberlands’ Marks 30th Anniversary.”

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Anne Caudill, “An Interview with Anne Frye Caudill,” 4.

¹⁴⁶ Anne Frye Caudill, “Life with a Polemecist,” *Appalachian Heritage*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1993) 9-13. AHCP, Box 5, Folder 5.

¹⁴⁷ Anne Caudill, “A Forty Year Course in Continuing Education,” (Speech given at the Harry Caudill “Roast” as part of the conference “On the Land and Economy of Appalachia” conference, Lexington. 30, October 1986). AHCP, Box 3, Folder 4.

visit with Caudill or taking a job in New Jersey. The decision was not an easy one for Anne. Thoughtfully, she weighed the affects of her choice. Years later she remembered the decision:

I finally decided that if this thing we had going was good enough to last, it would last and if it didn't, it didn't. And I wanted the experience of living near New York City. I knew that he was going to be busy with law school, and so I just decided to go on to New York. And I wouldn't have missed it for anything, a wonderful experience.¹⁴⁸

Within two short weeks after graduating in March, Anne took the position with Standard Oil in Elizabeth, New Jersey. The choice to leave Harry Caudill and go to New Jersey was a difficult one but when questioned about whether she had any regrets, she replied candidly, "not really."¹⁴⁹

A year later Anne Frye returned to Kentucky to work as a home demonstration agent. The couple married in December of 1946. While Caudill finished his law degree, Anne headed to Montgomery County. Over the summer months, she helped locals create a leadership program. Although she left as soon as Caudill graduated, she was proud the programs remained active many years later. Their success, she believed, was because responsibility of taking the lead was placed on the women. "It is an interesting theme that you have running throughout your life, women taking the lead," observed a friend later. "Well, pushing people to take responsibility," Anne Caudill frankly replied.¹⁵⁰

When Anne first came to the mountain communities, she was unfamiliar with the coal industry. Harry Caudill remembered during their first trip to visit his parents, he took her to see a "burning gob pile...that reddened the sky," choking the air with acidic fumes. The magnitude and odor of the "gob pile" frightened Anne. She asked him to take her away from the scene because it reminded her of "hell."¹⁵¹

From this point onward, Caudill credited Anne with "opening his eyes to the conditions in the hills. "You grow up" in the mountains, never thinking "about [how] these great burning

¹⁴⁸ Anne Caudill, "An Interview with Anne Frye Caudill," 6. AHCP, Box 2, Folder 25.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 6.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 7.

¹⁵¹ Warren, "Appalachia's Harry Caudill dies."

gob piles [are] sickening women and children. But Anne would call my attention to that, and I would say, ‘Well, heavenly days, that is pretty outrageous.’”¹⁵²

Together, the Caudill’s shared a loving relationship based on family and shared ideas. He was “a very loving, very kind husband” that “provid[ed] for his family” before anything else, Anne contended. He “sacrificed” many things he wanted to do because he was very protective of the family.¹⁵³ When asked to describe Anne’s importance to him, Caudill borrowed Abraham Lincoln’s quote: “All that I am...and all that I ever hope to be...I think I owe to my wife....”¹⁵⁴ Friends remembered that he gained “moral support and clarification of his ideas” from Anne. Because she came from the outside, “Anne was often more objective.”¹⁵⁵ Throughout their long marriage, she was “indispensable” as a wife, mother, companion, and colleague.¹⁵⁶

Harry and Anne Caudill moved to Whitesburg after Caudill completed his law degree. At the time, the little town was thriving under the post-war demands for coal. As Caudill remembered, the area was much like most post-war townships.¹⁵⁷ In November of 1948, at twenty-six years old, Caudill became the first new attorney in Letcher County in “twenty-two years.” Eager to begin his career, he “mortgaged [his] future” to purchase the law library of recently retired attorney Lewis E. Harvie then hurried to answer the summons of Judge Sam Ward.¹⁵⁸

Seated across from Judge Ward in his chambers at the courthouse, his eagerness to demonstrate his new legal skills faded when he learned that his first pro-bono defense was of a “depraved” man who had murdered an “old defenseless black woman without provocation.” Compounding the unimaginable task of defending an admitted killer devoid of both repentance and cash, a group of black coal miners from McRoberts retained W. A Daugherty, a well respected attorney from neighboring Pikeville, Kentucky to assist Commonwealth Attorney Gus Cornett. “Daugherty was a legendary figure and I, poor, ignorant, inexperienced, and frightened, was about to tackle him in my first court trial. At the mere thought my throat went dry and my heart raced.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Anne Caudill, “An Interview with Anne Frye Caudill,” 17-18.

¹⁵⁴ Caudill, “An Interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Fisher and Williams, 291.

¹⁵⁵ Bates, “I’d Sharpen Your Ax.”

¹⁵⁶ Caudill, interview by Fisher, 291. AHCP, Box 2, Folder 13.

¹⁵⁷ Caudill, Slender is the Thread, 48; Caudill, interview by Elsbernd, 76. AHCP, Box 2, Folder 27.

¹⁵⁸ Caudill, Slender is the Thread, 48.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid,

Faced with his own inexperience, the lack of potential compensation, local hostility to his client, and the “heinous nature of the alleged crime,” Caudill tried to convince Judge Ward to replace him as presiding attorney. Unfortunately, the judge refused to change his assignment. “You are green—green as a gourd. When you go through this trial and fight Dougherty and the commonwealth attorney, you will come out with what you need most—experience. Save his no account carcass from the electric chair...and you will be talked about as a good lawyer,” the judge assured him from behind a gray curtain that accompanied the “thousands of cigarettes” he smoked.¹⁶⁰ Caudill left the judge’s chambers resolved to the fact that total humiliation was just around the corner---fashioned from the legendary footsteps of two highly respected lawyers.

The trial was scheduled for January of 1949. With no other legal commitments to take up his time, Caudill used the two intermittent weeks to strategically plan a legal argument that defied the anticipated outcry of “a life for a life.”¹⁶¹ Initially, he wanted his client to testify in his own defense since the only eyewitness turned state’s evidence to save his own life. However, after a criminal investigation proved the crime to be even more “appalling” than actual court documents contended, he decided the only way to keep his client from the electric chair was to avoid cross-examination--the “depraved murderer” must be kept silent. With this in mind, a legal strategy gradually began to emerge that just *might* keep the defendant from the “big, oak chair Warden Jess Buchanan” kept in tip-top condition down at the Eddyville prison. Raiding every literary text from the King James Bible to Douglas’s *Forty Thousand Quotations*, Caudill with the help of “sages, saints, and statesmen” laid out the many reasons why the defendant should be allowed to live out his life in prison.¹⁶²

Jury selection quickly advanced with only a couple potential jurors dismissed because of a refusal to vote the death penalty. The remainder promised to base their final decision on the evidence and agreed the defendant was innocent until proven guilty. The jury included a schoolteacher, a “couple county merchants, several farmers,” and a few coal miners. From the look of things, Caudill concluded, there was no doubt about it--this was a “hanging jury.”¹⁶³

The Letcher County Circuit Court was packed with observers the day the trial began. As was customary for the times, locals came from across the county to observe the events and the

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 48-49.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 40-51.

¹⁶² Ibid. 50.

¹⁶³ Ibid. 50-51.

particular viciousness of this crime and the possibility of electric chair escalated the mounting tension. A “profound silence” penetrated the room when Judge Ward rapped his gavel and announced the onset of opening arguments.¹⁶⁴ Caudill remembered the subsequent trial as “one of the most devastating psychological experiences of my life.”¹⁶⁵

The moment Caudill rose to present the opening argument, he “felt himself to be the most insignificant person in the world” and he yearned for nothing more than “to be alone on some distant hilltop.” The diligently prepared and memorized “fine allusions and quotations” faded from his memory. “At that horrible instant my mind became empty...and I stared blankly at the set jaws of my opponents...the jurors...then unbidden...unexpected a line of poetry from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow came to mind: *Our hearts life muffled drums are beating funeral marches to the grave.*”

Understanding the importance of religion to the jurors, Caudill crafted a biblically inspired speech theatrically punctuated by his hand tapping on his chest to the imagined tune of Longfellow’s beating heart.¹⁶⁶ Accompanying the gestures was a cry of “Thou shalt not kill!” In the mountains, “the Bible was the source of nearly all wisdom, and even confirmed “sinners” said they believed every word of it.”¹⁶⁷

The trial that followed was short and straight to the point. There was no doubt about it---his client was 100% guilty. The only question remaining was the form of punishment. Jury deliberations began shortly after Daugherty’s final argument. In less than an hour they decided the “vicious” murderer was to escape the electric chair and serve the remainder of his life in the Eddyville State Penitentiary. Caudill’s strategy of using religion to sway the jury had worked in his client’s favor. However, the prize for Caudill’s reward came not from the defendant who never thanked him for saving his life but when the famed W. A. Daugherty phoned him later that night, “You did a good job...you have every right to be pleased.”¹⁶⁸ Indeed at that moment, Harry Caudill had every right to be pleased with the path his life was taking.

Because Caudill’s formative years were spent outside the mountains, he constantly fought to find a medium between the traditional and the modern ideologies that crisscrossed his life. Taken by the sense of progress that accompanied the modernity, Caudill actively embraced

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 50-51.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 48.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 50-52.

¹⁶⁷ Caudill, *The Mountain, the Miner and the Lord*, viii.

modern doctrines. Tragically, modern philosophy devalued the traditional belief system of his childhood and discredited mountain culture. Constantly stepping between two very distinctively different ways of living influenced his thinking throughout the remainder of his life.

When Caudill signed the dotted line for a student loan beside Sam Bates, he abdicated power. For the price of his sophomore year at college, Bates purchased Caudill's continual support---*compliments of Sam*. Interestingly, Caudill never equated his debt to Sam as a loss of power. Possibly, he saw his obligations to Sam as a harmless "trade off" instead of the power relationship it actually was on closer inspection.

World War II challenged Caudill to think beyond the back room of a political stronghold and outside the walls of a classroom. Quickly, he learned that first impressions often shield many important facts. Gradually, he surmised that people and places are affected by their choices but influenced by outsiders as well. For example, the violence of the Arabs masked years of struggling against an unequal socio-economic status. Years of insecurity sparked the Arabs' intense resentment of the "French" interlopers dominating their lives and of the Americans that not only blockaded the coast against Nazi war ships but also prevented the docking of daily supply boats. Simultaneously, he observed that the Italians' conscious land ethic and strong sense of community kept them one step ahead of starvation even as war raged around them. After seeing Europe, Caudill was convinced that the nation must develop a responsible land ethic and a social conscience or America was doomed to repeat the failures of the Arabs and Italians

In the trenches, Caudill experienced fear of the unknown and learned the value of trust. Like most youths, the war experience left Caudill uncomfortable with his own actions. On the field of dying men, he questioned his own ability to participate in such a barbaric activity. That he acted on behalf of his country was the only answer worthy of the horrific deed. On some days, perhaps even patriotic duty was not enough. Regardless, sandwiched in between the images was the unbreakable bond of camaraderie between him and the men that had guarded his back.

Returning from the war, Caudill reaffirmed his sense of patriotism by challenging the universities' policy toward the Nazi affiliate, Axel Wenner-Gren. As a war veteran, he believed the state and university owed him an explanation. The power brokers disagreed. Like old campaign warriors, they roused the "free press" to send a message resounding across the campus. Caudill sustained the bulk of the reprisal as the "instigators" jumped ship, slinking off to

¹⁶⁸ Caudill, *Slender is the Thread*, 53-55.

the land of no further comment. A battered and bruised, but much wiser young man stepped from the fray. From this day forward, Caudill cultivated editors and reporters with the passion borne of experience, never again underestimating the power of media support. The silence of the “instigators” instilled a newfound knowledge that a colleague and a friend were two very different things. Over the years, Caudill cultivated many political alliances and friends but he never trusted them in the same fashion as he had the cold, scared soldiers “watching his back” in the trenches.

The most influential person in Caudill’s life was Anne Frye Caudill. Raised in the heart of the Bluegrass, she rode the depression out from the security of the family farm. Like Caudill, she escaped the worst of the depression due to family land ownership. While others scoured for food, her family tightened their belts and lived off their farm. In her mind, two things saved her from the depression---the land and the strong leadership of the three females that raised her.

Anne confidently moved through life, demonstrating independence by training at the university and by accepting job in distant New Jersey. Because she was fortunate enough to get a college education and to exercise a measure of control over her life, Anne never understood how others were incapable of doing the same. Education and economic security belonged to those willing to make the effort to attain them. Consequently, she “pushed” people to assume responsibility for their choices. In her view, individual achievements were byproducts of personal decisions.

Caudill valued Anne’s opinion as a wife and as a trusted confidant because her intellectualism was equal to his own. Because her ideas of power relationships were based more upon individual determination than his socially defined experience with power relationships, Caudill consistently struggled to balance the conflicting ideologies. Perhaps because he recognized the validity of both interpretations but was unable to divorce either from the reality gained through experience, the result left him torn between two worlds. Often, he searched for some thing or person to blame for the socially defined outcomes within the region.

By the time, Attorney Harry Caudill sauntered into the courtroom his formal education was complete. Faced with a predetermined “guilty” verdict for his client but determined to make a decent professional showing, Caudill reached for the assortment of skills accumulated throughout his life. The reassuring cadence of mountain religion and childhood literature combined with the theatrics of political oratory and scholarly interpretation as the masterful

storyteller, schooled on the courthouse steps of a thousand mountain communities, wove an emotionally charged narrative before the “hanging jury” for a more compassionate verdict. In that moment, tradition met modernity and Caudill came full circle. The mixture of the traditional beliefs of his childhood and the modern ideologies of his formative years forged an identity that haphazardly balanced the old and new. Out of this combination emerged an aggressive, assertive, and controversial young man determined to grasp the rings of power.

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Chapter Three: Shortage of both Poets and Sages

Nearly all lawyers dabble in politics at one time or another. The electorate labors under a delusion that lawyers are uniquely qualified to make laws and hold public offices, where as Thomas Jefferson warned people to elect their poets and sages. He thought barristers are made cynical by their early exposure to the dark and sinister underside of life. Be that as it may, there is a chronic shortage of both poets and sages in the Bluegrass State....¹⁶⁹

Harry Monroe Caudill

Harry Caudill was an ambitious young man. Like many young lawyers that grew up privy to courthouse intrigues, his goals hinged on politics. Invested with a desire for the position of power that came with being a successful politician and financial security, he truthfully noted that he like “most Kentuckians...habor[ed] a desire to get in office---[to] as we say—feather their nest.”¹⁷⁰

The long nights at the university spent discussing the “state’s problems” merely wetted his appetite for the mental joust of the Kentucky political arena.¹⁷¹ Unfortunately, his ambitions were on hold until the mortgage was paid on the family’s new brick house at Mayking. Little did he know that an unexpected benefactor was about to pave a smoother road for the future and finally give him the chance to achieve his ultimate goal in politics.¹⁷²

Ellis Island greeted many immigrants whose next stop was the Eastern Kentucky coalfields during the coal boom of the early 1900s. Included among the thousands that made their way to the coal community of Blackey, Kentucky was “a sturdy son of Imperial Russia” known simply as Steve. Content to remain in the area, Steve bypassed the opportunity to seek work in the northern cities following the collapse of the coal industry in the 1920s and remained in the community until his death.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ Caudill, *Slender Is the Thread*, 98.

¹⁷⁰ Caudill, interview by Fisher, 290.

¹⁷¹ Breathitt, “On the Cutting Edge.”

¹⁷² Carol Sutton, “The Caudill’s Environment,” *Louisville Courier-Journal & Times*, 1 February 1970. AHCP, Box 1, Folder 8

¹⁷³ Caudill, *Slender is the Thread*, 132-133.

Steve's death presented a problem to local officials since he left no will or records for property disposal. Community residents said he was unmarried and had no visitors from outside the community. Since no one could legally claim Steve's worldly possessions, Judge Sam Ward appointed Caudill to inspect the Russian's property and search for "his next of kin."¹⁷⁴

Within days, Caudill's search yielded a "thick, massive book" whose first and second pages bore the images of Czar Nicholas II and Jesus Christ. Two letters written in Cyrillic alphabet were preserved between the pages of the "Bible." Both letters were from a woman identifying herself as Steve's wife. Dated 1922 and 1946, the letters pleaded with Steve to return to the village of Novgorod in Russia because their son, Ivan wished to see his father again.¹⁷⁵ Immediately, Caudill sent a letter to Steve's family to inform them of his death and encouraging them to claim his possessions.¹⁷⁶

The first letter remained unanswered but a phone call came from the Russian Embassy in Washington. The caller identified himself as an "assistant to the ambassador." Steve's wife was dead, he stated, and Ivan did not want to come to America to claim his father's property. He insisted the property be sold and the proceeds immediately transferred to the ambassador who would convert the money into Russian *rubbles* for Ivan.¹⁷⁷ Caudill and Judge Ward's protest were pushed aside when the State Department authorized Caudill to immediately act on Ivan's behalf.

After liquidating the estate and completing the appropriate documentation, Caudill handed the order over to Judge Ward with the attorney fee "omitted." In chambers, Caudill endured another round of "endless" cigarette smoking accompanied by an appreciated "dram of bourbon" while the judge studied the final orders concerning Steve's legacy. "He [Ivan] will never get to spend a nickel of his money. They will probably wind up sending him to Siberia just because his Daddy worked in the states," the judge claimed before questioning the "omitted" attorney fee.¹⁷⁸

Caudill explained that he hoped for at least \$3500 to help pay a few payments ahead on his \$11,000 mortgage. Sharply, Judge Ward ground out his cigarette in the overflowing ashtray then affixed the signature of the court and attorney fee to the document. "You need it more than

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 133-134.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 134-136.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 136-137.

Joe Stalin,” Ward asserted casually tossing the paper across the desk. The amount of the attorney fee was \$11,333.

The total allowed Caudill “to become debt free.” The remaining \$24,000 was forwarded to the Soviet Embassy. “Often when I enter my home,” Caudill said. I think of my benefactors “Ivan, Judge Ward, and the unknown Russian peasant who worked so hard in an alien land, and saved so diligently, for such an unforeseen end.” Often, “ I wonder, too, whether justice was done....”¹⁷⁹ Regardless of the legal or ethical validity of Ward and Caudill’s actions that day, Steve’s legacy paved the way for him to pursue his political ambitions.

Caudill matured in a time when politics beat to the rhythm of the New Deal. In Kentucky, politics became “essentially a game at which politicians...played with vigor and relish. Its rich vein of political folk lore tells abundantly of manipulations, maneuvering and personal triumphs.”¹⁸⁰ Few politicians question the price paid by their constituents for their sordid contest. Their vision is obscured by an impenetrable, one way mirror of political ambition that is unreflective of cost to their constituents.¹⁸¹

When Caudill left the mountains in 1941 for the University of Kentucky, his father, Cro Carr Caudill, held tremendous political power in Letcher County. Caudill senior's political reign began in 1929 when Consolidated Coal Company successfully slated him for county court clerk.¹⁸² In the following years, he built a reputation as a strong “Organizational Democrat Party” leader in Letcher County and served as the local manager for several state campaigns. His successful support of Ruby Laffoon for the governor’s office gained him appointment to several county positions along with the authority to control locally operated state jobs. Unfortunately, Kentucky’s law prohibiting governors from running for a consecutive term ensured that political loyalty hinged on four-year cycles.¹⁸³

The Laffoon Administration chose Tom Rhea as the 1935 candidate for governor of Kentucky. However, the “underestimated” Lieutenant Governor Albert “Happy” Chandler

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 134-138.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 134-138.

¹⁸⁰ Clark, *A History of Kentucky*, (Ashland: The Jesse Stuart Foundation, 1988). 448.

¹⁸¹ Caudill, “An Interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Fisher and Williams, 290.

¹⁸² Ibid, 285-287.

¹⁸³ Harry M. Caudill, interview by Charles P. Roland, [cassette recording], (1 April 1981), Special Collections, King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington. Note: Caudill uses the term “Organizational Democrat Party” to describe the faction of Democrats in control at that time.

challenged Rhea in the Democratic race.¹⁸⁴ For Cro Caudill, this turn of events proved disastrous since the division of the Democrat party gave room for Doctor Benjamin Wright, a local Letcher County physician, to maneuver into political power by supporting the Chandler faction.¹⁸⁵ Both Wright and Cro Caudill understood the winning ticket secured local power for the next four years. However, neither men could have possibly envisioned the campaign that followed.

Previous campaigns in Kentucky were based on oratory “designed more to impress than to inform....” That tradition changed after the 1935 campaign. Albert “Happy” Chandler was the first to introduce the “sound truck” that blared his arrival long before a white-suited, smiling, “Happy” entered the town amid a procession of waving flags. The traditional campaign speech that was “designed more to impress than to inform” toppled as Happy’s booming voice rose to the tune of “My Old Kentucky Home” and “Sonny Boy” between promises of tax relief, handshakes, and kisses for the babies.¹⁸⁶ To a populace at the mercy of the depression, Happy’s mannerisms invoked a sense of *better days to come*. He embodied hope and that was the key to an unbeatable political campaign. Needless to say, Wright’s gamble paid off when Chandler took office on the 10th of December 1935.

Cro Caudill was not so lucky. Mere days after taking office, Chandler fired several employees of the Laffoon Administration. His “little” position as Sales Tax Collector felt the weight of Chandler’s revenge. Harry Caudill remembered “column after column of firees [in the newspaper] and there, among others, was my dear ole Dad.” At that moment, Chandler made a lifetime enemy and insured that the Caudill and Wright factions remained on opposite ends of the political contest.¹⁸⁷ Throughout the remainder of their lives, the two political warriors continuously swapped local power.

Less than two years later, Wright’s political control fell apart when “Happy” Chandler challenged U. S. Senator and majority leader Alben Barkley for United State Senator in 1938.

¹⁸⁴ “Happy” Chandler used political manipulation to change the official convention system to a primary election. After Governor Ruby Laffoon left the state on a trip to Washington, Chandler as Lt. Gov. called a special session of the legislature to enact a primary election law. This shifted power from state authorities brokers to constituents. However, Laffoon cleverly insisted upon a second primary in case several candidates ran and none received a majority. In 1935, two primaries were held and Chandler won the Democratic nomination. Later, he won the position of governor, defeating Republican King Swope (461,104) to Chandlers (556,573). See: Happy Chandler and Vance Trimble, *Heroes, Plain Folks, and Skunks: The Life and Times of Happy Chandler*, (Chicago: Bonus Books, 1989): 101-107; John Ed Pearce, *Divide and Dissent*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1987): 24-54.; Clark, *A History of Kentucky*, 445-447.

¹⁸⁵ Caudill, interview by Roland.

¹⁸⁶ Pearce, *Divide and Dissent*, 41-45.

¹⁸⁷ Caudill, interview by Roland; Chandler, *Heroes, Plainfolks, and Skunks*, 92-106.

Briefly Caudill senior secured control of the New Deal programs that served the county with state and national support. However, as World War II stimulated the economy, a conservative congress re-accessed government commitment to the programs of the New Deal until they were drastically reduced or “eliminated” altogether.¹⁸⁸ At the same time, the United Mine Workers Association unionized the mountain coal miner and the power once wielded by Cro Caudill and Doctor Wright shifted toward union loyalty and away from company affiliation and government programs.

At the close of the 1940s, Consolidation eliminated the last vestige of company “paternalism” with the community when they announced that the “whole town of Jenkins was on the market.” Wendell D. Boggs asserted the shift in company policy constituted “the biggest social change” that ever occurred in Letcher County.¹⁸⁹

Years later, Harry Caudill explained how the mine operator “foresaw” the end of the traditional method of hand-loading coal and the inevitable end to mass employment by the coal industry. Not as much as a murmur concerning the dismal forecast passed beyond the distant boardrooms in the northern cities. Instead potential homeowners were led to believe that the company’s interest in “free[ing] the camps” was based solely on their desire to allow families “to enjoy the feeling of independence and self-assurance that come from home ownership. It was undemocratic” they declared, “for the company to dominate the affairs of the community” any longer.¹⁹⁰ Unsure of the consequences of this new development, the miners questioned trusted union officials about the change in company policy.

The United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) had been a fixture of life in Jenkins since 1933. Because the community placed a great deal of trust in the organization, the men asked local representatives if they should purchase their homes from the company. “The president of the local,” remembered Lester Able, “advised a bunch of us not to buy our house and by the very next meeting, he had bought his.”¹⁹¹ Feeling betrayed but unwilling to lose faith in their union, the miner’s purchased the tiny row houses built nearly thirty years ago. They had

¹⁸⁸ See Also: Brinkley, Liberalism and Its Discontents, 97.

¹⁸⁹ Wendell D. Boggs, “The Social and Economic Study of Jenkins,” in The History of Jenkins, Kentucky, C-3. Likewise a similar argument can be made that the coming of Consolidation Coal Company to Letcher County also constituted a major modification in the social structure of the county.

¹⁹⁰ Caudill, Night Comes to the Cumberlands, 263.

¹⁹¹ Lester Able, “Interview with Lester Able” in The History of Jenkins, Kentucky, G-66.

no way of knowing that the meager payments would be hard to come by over the next few years as mechanization totally changed the coal industry.

Across Appalachia, the coal mining industry drove headlong into the age of mechanization. At one time, the population of Jenkins had been 9,000; however, this number rapidly decreased as “mechanical mining” replaced men in the mines. After World War II, the Joy loader renamed the “man killers” were followed by the continuous miner as part of the highly “competitive battle with oil and natural gas.” These giant coal diggers churned immense quantities of coal dust into the air coating the miner’s lungs with black while increasing the potential of mine explosions.¹⁹²

Coal production “skyrocketed” as miners mastered the new machines but the number of jobs decreased as the machines replaced the men. Pink slips appeared inside pay envelopes, solemnly accompanying the inevitable explanation that “they had been faithful and diligent workmen and the company would be happy to recommend them to any prospective employer.” The irony was that there was no “prospective” employment and coal remained the sole industry in the mountains.¹⁹³ “Automation ha[d] made the miner jobless. And as the mines rejected him, so did his union, for which he had picketed, fought, and even died. So the mountaineer became another paradox: an unemployed and unemployable industrial worker....”¹⁹⁴ Shortly thereafter, the conveyor belt, shuttle car, and roof bolting machine replaced even more men, ending mass employment in the only industry operating in the Cumberland Valley.

By the thousands, jobless men and their families crammed all their possessions into the automobiles purchased when coal was booming and once again headed north. Entire communities boarded up their houses, emptying the precinct of all the voters except the very young, sick, and elderly. The mass exodus of mountaineers strengthened local political control by removing youthful challengers to the system while leaving behind inhabitants dependent upon the “generosity” of those in charge.

After Doctor Benjamin Wright won the newly established office of school trustee for the combined districts of Millstone and Seco in 1949, his office became a “political center where local intrigues were plotted morning, noon, and night.” Doc paid little attention to political

¹⁹²Barbara Ellen Smith, Digging Our Own Graves: Coal Miners and the Struggle over Black Lung Disease, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987). 53-55: Dave Zeeger, “Interview with Dave, Division Superintendent, Beth-Elkhorn, a subsidiary of Bethlehem Steel,” in A History of Jenkins, Kentucky, G-56.

¹⁹³ Caudill, Night Comes to the Cumberland, 266.

dealings beyond the county line, but kept a firm hand on everything political that happened inside county limits.” Doc effectively secured his powerful position by using the chairmanship to install a group of “sensible men,” into essential posts.¹⁹⁵ According to Caudill: ...he hired and he fired. People wanting jobs in the school district filled his waiting room and his office almost every morning. They would see him before they saw the superintendent. Nobody undertook anything without Doc....” In a similar fashion, Wright used locals to cement his authority in state politics.

Doc always stood high in Frankfort because every time you went around Doc, he’d solicit money from you for the coming election. And then when it was time, he’d turn it over to the incumbent administration in Frankfort.... He’d take it down there and say, you can’t heat a furnace without coal. Then he would pour this money out on the table. He may not have had a five-dollar bill in it but he got all of the political credit.¹⁹⁶

By this method, Wright secured total control of local affairs that lasted until his death in 1969.¹⁹⁷ Locals fully understood his power as was demonstrated when a potential recruit for the Korean War responded to the government question “Who is the President of the United States? Do you know who runs this country?” with “Shore I do...why it’s old Doc Wright---everybody knows that!”¹⁹⁸ Across both state and local politics, Doctor Wright was the man in charge of Letcher County.

All of these factors became evident to Caudill after he unsuccessfully challenged Doctor Wright’s nephew, Charlie Wright in the 1949 race for county court clerk.¹⁹⁹ The economy in Letcher had changed and with it so had the political bosses. His father once sanctioned by the powerful coal industry and then the New Dealers involuntarily relinquished power to “Doc” Wright. Caudill never forgot the harsh lesson learned in his defeat by Charlie Wright and

¹⁹⁴ Quote from John Fetterman’s *Stinking Creek* Dutton: 1967 in *My Land is Dying*, Caudill, 90.

¹⁹⁵ Caudill, *Slender Is The Thread*, 86.

¹⁹⁶ Harry Caudill, “Local Governance,” interview by Don Harker and Liz Notter, [cassette recording], (2 June 1990), Special Collections, King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington.

¹⁹⁷ Caudill, *Slender Is The Thread*, 86.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 87.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 96, 111. Note: In 1987, Caudill contended that Charley Wright’s political position as county court clerk extending from 1949 to the present day in 1987 represented “one of the longest tenures in states history” even though Dr. Wright died in 1969.

followed the “unwritten rules” of Letcher County politics when he ran in 1954 and 1956 for the State Legislature.

In 1953, Caudill aligned himself with the Wetherby Administration on the issue of school reform.²⁰⁰ Educator Wendell Butler, who was leading the reform movement for Governor Lawrence Wetherby, believed that when the program passed into law then additional funding could be budgeted.²⁰¹ First, they needed voter approval to amend the state constitution. Crisscrossing the state in search of support, Runsey Taylor “enlisted” Caudill’s help. As a native of Letcher, Caudill “worked the county thoroughly” until the voters approved the changes. After the vote, several leaders of the movement encouraged Caudill to run for the House of Representatives in 1954. Caudill agreed to make the race since he was “interested in passing the law.”²⁰² Understanding the importance of local sanction to his decision to run for office, Caudill sought out Doctor Wright.

The re-indoctrination into the Letcher County political tradition required a healthy dose of preventive medicine. Caudill remembered Doctor Wright invited him to sit in on a morning session down at his office.

The medical office of Doc Wright served the many Letcher Countians sickened by years of working in the coal industry or those replaced by mechanization and forced to seek compensation from government aid.²⁰³ Regardless of the reason for a patient’s trek to visit the physician, both the doctor and patient were well aware that the examination had a two-fold purpose during election years. Like it or not each person fully understood that future employment or continued reception of state assistance depended upon Doctor Benjamin Wright.²⁰⁴ Understanding that “...you didn’t get elected if you didn’t have Dr. Wright on your side,” Caudill made the trip for a lesson in “Docism.”²⁰⁵

²⁰⁰ Lawrence Winchester Wetherby, a Democrat from Louisville Kentucky, had officially taken office as the 48th Governor of Kentucky after Governor Earle Clements won the United States Senate race in 1950. In the following year, he was elected to a full term as the Governor of Kentucky. Shortly after he took office in 1951, Governor Wetherby called a special session of the General Assembly to increase teacher’s pay and to increase benefits for the “needy” and for state employees.

²⁰¹ Harry Caudill, “Beyond the Minimum: History of Education,” interview by Richard Royster, [cassette recording], (24 July 1990), Special Collections, King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington.

²⁰² Caudill, “An interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Fisher and Williams, 291.

²⁰³ See: Caudill, Night Comes To The Cumberlands, 273-301.

²⁰⁴ Caudill, Slender Is the Thread, 88-89.

²⁰⁵ Caudill, Slender is the Thread, 86-96. Note: During Caudill’s years at the University of Kentucky, Doctor Wright signed several financial notes so that he could finish his education. Also, Caudill credits Republican “Big Bill”

At the physician's office, Caudill observed a series of brief medical examinations from a chair in the corner of the exam room. Silently he listened as Wright listed the slate of candidates important to the residents of Letcher while the patients obediently opened their mouths to a series of "ahs." Doc presented the virtues and vices of each potential office holder while solemnly scribbling notes in the patient's medical chart. Then his opinion of whether their election was positive for the community or threatened to bring "evil days to the county and state" ended the session. Understanding that voter compliance unofficially determined the content of Wright's medical report to state agency or any hope for local employment, most patients vigorously pumped Caudill's hand with a promise to vote for him in the upcoming election. "At this point," Caudill recalled, "Doc would smile and wink."²⁰⁶

For those elections not totally secured by the unorthodox practice of medical manipulation, the politicians of World War II unknowingly provided an alternative method of vote management—the absentee ballot. Caudill claimed that in one particular election when he was running for legislature, a "tried and true" messenger was sent to Detroit Michigan home of the vast majority of the counties' out-migrants. Carting a number of absentee ballots, this successful gentleman ferreted out the Democrat populace, encouraging them to sign and mail the much-needed ballots. The *vote-getter* carted the appropriate sum for postage plus the "notary public" necessary to ensure the validity of the votes.

On Election Day, bated breath accompanied total apprehension as the "tickets" ran "neck and neck" in the early hours of the vote count. However, spirits soared as the absentee ballot box was counted since "it contained 482 Democratic 'straights'" and only eleven republican votes.²⁰⁷ Under the auspices of vote management, Caudill won the 92nd District Seat in the Kentucky House of Representatives.²⁰⁸

The most important thing on Caudill's political agenda was education since he heartily believed that knowledge was the key to solving many of the region's problems. According to longtime friend Representative Edward "Ned" Breathitt, both he and Caudill were "big on education."²⁰⁹ They believed that the Minimum Foundation Program had the potential to greatly

Adams for coining the phrase "Docism." A phrase that Caudill thought "reflect[ed] so well the flavor and character of rural Kentucky politics." Caudill, *Slender Is The Thread*, 95-96.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 88-89.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 104.

²⁰⁸ Harry Caudill, "An interview with Harry Caudill," interview by Elsbernd and Claypool, 77.

²⁰⁹ Breathitt, "On The Cutting Edge," 21-25.

improve education since for the first time in state history, “the allocation of education...funds [were] based on need rather than number of pupils.”²¹⁰ Although the program lacked adequate funding to achieve its full potential in the 1954 session, by the end of 1956 it increased teacher salaries statewide. Locally it brought “several hundred thousand dollars per year to the Letcher County and Jenkins [Independent] school systems” plus funded “three desperately needed High School buildings at Fleming, Whitesburg, and Letcher.”²¹¹

A secondary issue for the Wetherby Administration was the unregulated strip-mining occurring in Western Kentucky. Few politicians realized the catastrophic damage that strip mining could potentially visit upon the mountainous terrain of Eastern Kentucky. Actually, there had been very little above ground mining done in the area by this time. However, plans were in the works by several major companies to use the process. But all Eastern Kentucky politicians clearly understood the coal lobby’s order to vote against the bill or risk future political funding. When Kentucky’s first attempt at a strip-mining law was introduced before the legislators, Harry Caudill was the sole Eastern Kentucky representative to vote for it.”²¹²

The coal industry, on the other hand, recognized it as a foot in the door for environmentalists and immediately reacted with their usual barrage of grievances. They cited that an “undue [financial] burden would “force” companies to go bankrupt and this would lead to the inherent “starvation” of entire communities and “God-fearing little businessmen.” More importantly they contended that the state would be labeled “anti-business,” driving out future industry, and “kill the goose that laid the golden egg.” According to Caudill, “the spectacle” of Consolidation Coal Company’s vice-president dressed “in sharkskin suit and alligator shoes” chastising “bemused legislatures, incredible though it may seem, [was] simply a fact of life in Frankfort.”²¹³

Altogether, Caudill’s first term in the legislature proved both a satisfactory and enlightening experience. He enjoyed a “most pleasant relationship” with Governor Lawrence Wetherby during his first term in the Legislature.²¹⁴ The heady experience of passing the strip-mining law, the Minimum Foundation Law, plus taking the first stab at environmental protection

²¹⁰ Caudill, “Beyond the Minimum,” (1990).

²¹¹ Harry Caudill, [Political Speech to voters], November 1959.

²¹² Lee Mueller, “Harry Caudill Still Beating the Drum,” *Lexington Sunday Herald Leader*, 8 March 1981, AHCP, Box 2, Folder 9.

²¹³ Caudill, *My Land is Dying*, 102

with a “comprehensive law on littering these old creeks” was beyond measure.²¹⁵ Caught up in the heat of success, Caudill returned to the mountains to resume his law career and to prepare for the 1955-election year. How simple the betterment of people’s lives seemed when you operated far away from the reality of the Cumberland Valley.

To Caudill, the residents of Whitesburg were not strangers but family and friends. Upon his return, the harsh realities facing the mountaineers, easily forgotten while serving in Frankfort, vehemently assaulted his senses. Colleagues dressed in three-piece suits and Consolidation presidents dressed in “sharkskin suits and alligator shoes” did not walk the streets of his hometown. In their place were old friends who coughed into blackened handkerchiefs while smiling their confidence in the next “boom” cycle. The transition from the social club atmosphere of the Kentucky Legislature to the dingy halls of a country courthouse was a slap in the face.

In an area where the majority of the population, dug coal for a living, Caudill listened to many stories involving “close brushes with death.” One story that was told by a man about his own age made an “especially deep impression on [his] mind.” As the story went, this fellow was “mining” beside his father when a slab of top at least twelve inches thick and “bigger than a mattress” totally covered the “old man.” After the thick slate was removed, a mining light revealed “only the clothes and a greasy place.” The son “scraped” what “remained of his father” from the coal damp floor and wrapped him in a piece of brattice cloth.²¹⁶ Real life stories such as these and his experience with the mining industry had a tremendous impact on Caudill since his only brother, Truman was a coal miner.

Clearly, Caudill understood the difficulties facing the miner. “The miner was up against something that...he was never able to cope with, and that was that were too many of him, too many miners, always. ...the companies...could always mechanize him out the mines, if he became troublesome.”²¹⁷ As a lawyer, Caudill tried to “even the odds for [those] old miners.”²¹⁸

²¹⁴ Harry M. Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky to [Wilson Wyatt, Louisville, Kentucky] 18 November 1959. AHCP, Box 27, Folder 3.

²¹⁵ Caudill, “An Interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Elsbernd and Claypool, 77.

²¹⁶ Caudill, *Slender is the Thread*, 116-118.

²¹⁷ Caudill, “An Interview with Harry Caudill,” interview by Fisher and Williams, 282.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, 282-285.

In 1955, he assisted with the important legal case of *Goebel Adams et al. V. Ruby Bryant et al* that helped reinterpret the political and legal definitions of the physically disabled.²¹⁹

The “assumption of risk” doctrine, the idea that a coal miner knew the risk when he entered the mines and therefore was entitled to no compensation, protected corporate and Kentucky State coffers until 1955 when the Kentucky Court of Appeals ruled that a man could be disabled or killed by an experience that left no visible scar on body, head, or limb but was an invisible, damaging blow to his mind, spirit, psyche, and self confidence.”²²⁰ Prior to this ruling the court enjoined the petitioner to physically “show his scars” thus establishing proof of the “trauma” inflicted upon his body. The event that rewrote the legal definition of “trauma” and the “assumption of risk doctrine” took place on February 14, 1950.

Worley Dickson, his son Paul, and his son-in-law Ernest Bryant lived in Wise County, Virginia and drove twenty miles each day across the state line into Kentucky to the Fire Chief Coal Company. Together with Dewey Rose the men worked the black coal of the Elk Horn No. 3 for the substantial paycheck of twenty dollars a day.

On February 14, the men returned to the “face” to make their cut of coal only to find a rock the size of a “bale of hay” lying in the hallway. While they pondered this new development, “the unmistakable snap and crackle of splintering roof timbers and the duller thump of breaking rock” split the silence. Within seconds, the only exit was blocked, Dewey Rose was dead, and Worley Dickson was alone, alive but unable to move. His only hope was that his son-in-law had made it outside. In total darkness next to the “pasty white form of Dewey Rose,” he took comfort in the fact that “thousands of coal miners lived in Letcher and surrounding counties.” Dickson knew not a single miner would rest until they removed him and Dewey Rose from the darkness--either dead or alive.²²¹

Worley Dickerson’s entombment lasted for a little over twenty-six hours. As his son Paul pulled him from the “cat-hole,” Worley remembered that the “gray hills..[were] the loveliest sight he had ever seen.” Hi son-in-law, Ernest had gotten out of the mines to summon the rescue team but died of a heart attack after digging for “twenty” straight hours.²²²

²¹⁹ *Goebel Adams et al. V. Ruby Bryant et al.* 274 S. W. 2nd 791 reported in the Kentucky Decision on January 28, 1955 in *Slender is the Thread*, Caudill, 127.

²²⁰ Caudill, *Slender is the Thread*, 117-118. See also: *Goebel Adams et al. V. Ruby Bryant et al.* 274 S. W. 2nd 791— reported in the Kentucky Decision (28 January 1955); *Ibid*, 127.

²²¹ *Ibid*, 120-122.

²²² *Ibid*, 126.

The family of Ernest Bryant filed a claim under the workmen's compensation law but was promptly denied because his death had not resulted from "trauma" under the definition of the existing law. However, Judge Sam Ward, well versed in the dangers of coal mining, "reversed the decision" and the Kentucky State Court of Appeals upheld his ruling. The family of Dewey Rose, whose "flesh...bones and blood soaked clothing were scraped up," was "paid without contest." As for Worley Dickerson, his testimony helped change the state laws because law-makers formed a better understanding of what "trauma" meant to men that dig coal for a living.²²³

Caudill noted that "two more names...joined the roster of American coal miners who have died that we might have warmth, light, and power." However, "...so routine is death in the mines that it is little noted nor long remembered. There are no medals or citations to mark it. In the mining of coal—courage is commonplace."²²⁴ The comparison of the miner's deaths with the demand for electricity demonstrated his understanding of the differences between the harsh reality of coal mining and the meaningless political hoopla of American progress.

Caudill continued his quest "to get justice for these old miners" while in the 1956 Kentucky State Legislature. Approximately 5000 miners dug coal in the rich fields from the Virginia line to Whitesburg, Kentucky and few laws dealt with the problems directly related to the coal industry. At the time workman's compensation laws reflected little of the reality facing the men that mined coal for a living. Most men and their families after years of working in the industry found themselves in "dole" lines with no hope of being compensated for their health. Caudill remembered, the old statutes provided a "dozen" or more loop holes by which a coal company could avoid paying the miners.²²⁵ In 1955, Caudill hoped to place Manchester, Kentucky native Bert T. Combs in the governor's chair thereby insuring that the issues important to the mountains received adequate attention.

In the race for governor of Kentucky, Albert Benjamin "Happy" Chandler beat mountain rookie Bert T. Combs. A quiet and unassuming lawyer turned Court of Appeals judge, Combs stood no chance against the finely tuned political machine that Chandler seasoned over more than twenty years in politics. "The little judge," as Chandler referred to him, lost the race during his first public speech when he declared new taxes would be required to finance Kentucky

²²³ Ibid, 127.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Caudill, "An Interview with Harry Caudill," interview by Elsbernd and Claypool, 77.

improvements. Combs' blunder was music to Chandler's ears who won his last governor's race on the basis of no new taxes.²²⁶ The loss was devastating to Harry Caudill who spent a lot of time working in politics for Bert Combs alongside his college friend "Ned" Breathitt.²²⁷

During the campaign, Chandler taunted the public with the threat of a tax increase. "Do you want four more years of the tax-crazy, spend-crazy, and waste-crazy dictators, or do you want an administration that knows the value of a dollar?"²²⁸ Only days after the 'roar of the crowd' quieted, he changed his tune when faced with financial difficulties of the state. For starters, the Chandler budget included bills to raise the state income tax, to initiate a sales tax, and to increase the whiskey tax from five cents to ten cents.

In the first session of his term, the Chandler administration introduced House Bill 1. The bill increased the number of persons required to pay income taxes and included a tax hike of approximately "50 per cent" across the board. Immediately, legislatures argued against the bill. Many of them were slated for re-election and not one relished the idea of standing before their constituents admitting they voted a tax increase.²²⁹ At this time, the bulk of Kentucky population was dependent upon a tobacco crop or the coal industry. Both of these industries were subject to price decline and weather conditions and therefore lacked the constant income needed to support a tax increase.²³⁰

Early in the session, Representative Edward Breathitt made it clear that he was against new taxes. Counterpart Pat Turner "vigorously" agreed with Breathitt until House Speaker, Thomas Fitzpatrick ordered him escorted to his chair by the Sergeant at Arms, Henry Hale. From a different perspective, Caudill asserted the House understood that "new taxes [were] needed" and that the division came from different ideas on how to secure the money. He and Leonard Hislope introduced a bill for a series of state owned liquor stores as an "alternative to new taxes." In the end, all lost to Chandler. Six roll calls and a great deal of political maneuvering later, the Chandler Administration's tax package was passed including an increase in the whiskey tax from five cents to twenty cents.²³¹

²²⁶ Pearce, *Divide and Dissent*, 52-65.; George W. Robinson, ed., *Bert T. Combs, The Politician: An Oral History*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991).

²²⁷ Breathitt, "On the Cutting Edge," 22.

²²⁸ Chandler, *Heros, Plain Folks, and Skunks*, 248-249.

²²⁹ Ben Reeves "House Votes to Raise Income Taxes, 63-26," *Frankfort Courier-Journal Bureau*, 18 April 1956. AHCP, Box 27, Folder 1.

²³⁰ Caudill, interview by Charles P. Roland

²³¹ Ben Reeves "House Votes to Raise Income Taxes, 63-26,"

Another full-blown battle erupted when Governor Chandler advocated the construction of a medical school at the University of Kentucky in 1956. The Louisville *Courier-Journal* where Kentucky's only medical school existed at the University of Louisville lined up against the idea. Most of Kentucky's physicians educated at the University of Louisville fell in behind the newspaper. Chandler noted "old Doc Howard" a physician from Glasgow was their leader. He would "brook no competition to the Louisville med school." Howard claimed the new school was "impractical, not financially feasible, can't be done, and won't succeed." Chandler stood his ground. He would build the medical school. Soothingly, he promised Howard that young doctors would sign a "proviso" to return to their "home county to practice."²³²

In Letcher County, the opposition for the new medical school lined up behind Doc Wright. While in Frankfort, Caudill received a phone call "asking" him to drive up to Letcher and meet with the local physicians. Dr. J. E. Johnson, a senator and physician from Pike County was "leading the fight" against the vote. It was Wright's job to convince Caudill to vote against the new medical school. The doctors feared losing positions if young doctors returned to practice in the mountains as Chandler insisted.²³³

In an attempt to "soften their opposition," Caudill argued that it had been twenty-one years since a new doctor moved to Letcher and that it would take time to finance, build, staff, and graduate doctors. The doctors present at the meeting, he asserted, would all be "dead and in the grave yards" by then. When most agreed, Caudill returned to Frankfort and voted for the medical school. He "kept the friendship of most of them."²³⁴

After the medical school fiasco, Caudill's political career began to fall apart. Caudill's public disagreement with Wright proved a turning point in their relationship. The inability to "handle" his man in office angered Wright and threatened his power base. For this reason, Wright refused support to Caudill in the next election. A public confrontation with Governor Chandler further reduced his future chance of holding public office.²³⁵

The line was drawn between Caudill and Chandler toward the end of the 1956 legislative session. The straw that broke the camels back surfaced when Caudill advocated placing a two cent per gallon tax on gasoline in a "sinking fund" as a means of "retiring" the old road bonds.

²³² Chandler, *Heroes, Plain Folks, and Skunks*, 252-253.

²³³ Caudill, interview by Roland.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

Publicly against any type of tax, Chandler openly “ridiculed” then “singled [him] out in one of his special addresses.” The governor claimed Caudill wanted to unnecessarily burden the “good people” of Kentucky with more taxes. Chandler’s booming rhetorical ended with total silence in the chamber. Caudill believed the governor “went too far by ridiculing him in public.”

Regardless, the members understood that a line had been drawn between Chandler and Caudill.

While winding up the 1956 legislative session, the humorous, and perhaps vindictive, side of legislature made itself known when the House voted on \$200,000 appropriation to remodel the governor’s mansion. Harrodsburg Democrat Edwin Freeman refused to vote for the measure. He proclaimed that during a recent speech, he told his constituents the \$20,000 rug in the office of former Governor Lawrence Wetherby was mistakenly purchased. Humorously, he decided the only possible solution was the offensive rug to be auctioned. In full voice, he theatrically launched into a mock auction supported by the mock bids of his fellow legislatures. After a round of applause for the mock auction, the perspective amount for remodeling the governor’s office dropped to \$50,000.²³⁶

The roll call began to the frustration of several members who stood to ask that the bill receive serious consideration. Meanwhile several members including Harry Caudill, who questioned the “fate of the ‘genuine’ foam rubber, vinyl plastic toilet seat” under the reduced fund, continued to delight in the total absurdity of the situation. Before “the floor show” ended, Republican James Lambert was seated and a Louisville newspaper photographer was ejected for taking a picture of the auction. The bill to remodel the governor’s mansion was dead.²³⁷ The humorous but politically lethal “rumblings of discontent” that surfaced at the end of 1956 grew to a roar of opposition by 1958.²³⁸

By the end of the 1956 Legislative Session, there was strong opposition to the Chandler Administration. A small group of legislatures nicknamed the “rebels” openly spurned any bills sanctioned by the governor. Among the “rebels” were “Paul Huddleston, Pat Tanner, Gil

²³⁶ George Reynolds, “House Kills Bill To Remodel Mansion; Lensman Put Out for ‘Shooting’ Scene,” *Lexington Herald Leader*, (1956). AHCP, Box 27, Folder 1. Note: The actual cost of the “rug” and all office supplies purchased by the Wetherby Administration was \$2400. 00 according to former Governor Lawrence Wetherby who published the purchase invoices in several prominent newspapers. See: Robinson. Bert Combs, The Politician, 55-56.

²³⁷ Reynolds, “House Kills Bill To Remodel Mansion.”

²³⁸ Pearce, Divide and Dissent, 65-85.

Kingsbury, Harry King Loman,” and the threesome of Harry Caudill, “Ned” Breathitt, and John Breckinridge.²³⁹

Breathitt, recalled that he, Caudill, and John Breckinridge joined several other members to fight “the iron leadership of Happy Chandler...we were rebels together and we fought for causes.”²⁴⁰ Together they stood behind the “merit system” for state employees, “campaign-contribution reform,” and general election reform. Under the leadership of Chandler, most bills made it to committee and no farther. “But Harry would have a lot of funny things to say about that bill, wondering where it was,” Breathitt remembered.

On one particular occasion, Breathitt remembered that Chandler endorsed a bill calling for a “pari-mutuel handle for a nonprofit track to benefit Keeneland race track.”²⁴¹ Caudill’s refusal to cast an “aye” vote for a bill supported by the horse industry garnered the further antipathy from Chandler. Consequently, Caudill remembered that “...Happy became furious with me because I refused to vote to lift the tax from the Keenland Gamblers.”²⁴² No doubt his comment that “he had never seen a horse that cost over forty dollars” gained him attention from journalists but little respect among the Chandlerites.²⁴³ Representative Leonard Hislope placed a poetic spin on the situation:

Early one mornin’ when the sun didn’t shine
Met with Happy to talk and dine
He says, ‘I’ll give sixteen miles with grade and fill,
For all who vote for the Keeneland Bill.

Democrat or Republican
Well, you couldn’t tell
They all fell in line
When Happy rang the bell.²⁴⁴

²³⁹ Ibid, 72-77.

²⁴⁰ Judy Jones Lewis, “Harry Caudill in Retirement: He remains a mountain rebel,” *Lexington-Herald Leader*, 26 October 1986. AHCP, Box 2, Folder 22.

²⁴¹ Breathitt, “On the Cutting Edge,” 22.

²⁴² Harry Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky to [Harry Lee Waterfield, Frankfort, Kentucky] 21 May 1958. AHCP, Box 27, Folder 2.

²⁴³ Breathitt, “On the Cutting Edge,” 22.

²⁴⁴ Leonard Hislope, “Sixteen Miles,” 1956. AHCP, Box 27, Folder 1.

Needless to say by the end of the 1956 term, Caudill's refusal to vote in accordance with the administration caused him to run "...afoul of Governor Chandler..."²⁴⁵ As a result, he did not to seek office in 1957 but chose to wait until Chandler's term expired before re-entering the race for legislature.²⁴⁶

Harry Caudill was an extremely ambitious young man. After finishing his law degree, he returned to the mountains determined to reclaim the former political position of his father. Steeped in the aggression of youth, he failed to recognize that his father's power had been based in New Deal and coal patronage. After loosing the county court clerk to Charlie Wright, Caudill realized that the socio-economic conditions of the region had changed and so had the political boss. Calculating his losses, Caudill chose to acknowledge Doctor Benjamin Wright as the local political directorate in order to move into state politics.

Once elected to the House of Representatives in 1954, Caudill helped push important legislation concerning education, strip-mining, and littering through the legislature. Newspapers published his record of bill submission and the often "outrageous content of his political career. Understanding that the press fixated on sensationalism, Caudill fed the hungry reporters with a constant barrage of melodramatic commentary and a challenging legislation. However, upon his return to the mountains after the 1954 legislative session, Caudill realized that he was nothing more than Wright's pawn in the political contest.

The return to the mountains re-enforced Caudill's determination to rank among those in power. With the mechanization of the mining industry, the streets of Whitesburg filled with scores of men searching for work. The daily contact with their desperate condition eroded the barriers Caudill had deliberately erected between himself and the haunting images of the depression years. Few events had a greater impact on Caudill than the years of the Great Depression and the hunger he had witnessed in the mountains. Ironically in the late 1950s, the names of the power brokers had changed but the total domination of the populace remained the same. Although, Caudill noted the subjugation of his neighbors to Wright's political control, he never challenged the situation outright. To do so would have ended his political career and his

²⁴⁵ Harry M. Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky to [Wilson Wyatt, Louisville, Kentucky] 18 November 1959. AHCP, Box 27, Folder 3.

²⁴⁶ Fred Luigart Jr., "Compassion for a Region: Letcher County Lawyer looks at Appalachian Area and Suggest How it might be Improved," *Louisville Courier-Journal Magazine*, 7 July 1963. AHCP, Box 1, Folder 1.

skills as a lawyer were not in high demand during this time. So Caudill, like his neighbors, lined up behind Wright as a means of survival.

The triumph of “Happy” Chandler over Bert Combs in the 1955 race for governor was a severe blow to Caudill. Within days after the 1956 legislative session began the gloves were off both Caudill and Chandler. Faced with his own helplessness against the combined power structure of Chandler and Wright, Caudill joined the “Rebels” in an effort to exert authority over his time in office. From this session, emerged a more mature and determined man with a new awareness of what it meant to be a mountaineer. His own inability to achieve his political goal provided him with a better understanding of events taking place in the Cumberland Valley. Gradually, he began to understand the numerous layers of power that stood between mountaineer and the power brokers. For the first time, Caudill understood power was not guaranteed by an educational degree or by a political position. Instead, power lurked in the smoke-filled back rooms of distant corporations and the sterile environment of a doctor’s office. Like the mountaineers that unwittingly cast their votes, he was merely a pawn in a high stakes game of politics.

Chapter Four: Weep for Us

Pine Mountain. Isn't it wonderful? It broods over us and pities us, and it would weep for us too, if it had tears.²⁴⁷

Harry Monroe Caudill

“For as long as I can remember,” Harry Caudill testified before the Subcommittee on Mines and Mining, “I have been profoundly distressed by the ruinous impact of the coal industry on the people who depend upon it and the land from which the product is wrested.”²⁴⁸ Sickened by the dictatorship of King Coal, he repeatedly insisted the government act responsibly toward the counties of Eastern Kentucky. The gradual degradation of the school system, high unemployment, and countless broken political promises convinced Caudill that an effective plan for regional development needed support from the agents located outside and inside the mountains.

After the hectic pace of the 1956 legislative session, the slow comforting rhythm of mountain society was a blissful reprieve from the demands of Frankfort, Kentucky. Still stinging from Chandler's biting comments but elated by the opposition developing in the legislature, Caudill settled into the familiar tempo of Letcher County. Daily, on his way to the courthouse, he stopped to speak with a friend or to smile at a passerby. In the small town of Whitesburg, no one called him “Mr. Caudill.” On these streets, he was simply “Harry.”

Never one to rest on his laurels, Caudill formulated an agenda for the upcoming year. Top priority was persuading the nationally acclaimed *Courier-Journal* to do a “feature story on [his] community” to “demonstrate confidence in Southeastern Kentucky.” Well attuned to the ego of the Louisville based newspaper, he lavished praise upon the institution while calling attention to the accomplishments of local residents. “I naturally believe that my district is among the most progressive in the Commonwealth. In fact, I believe its great progress warrants a feature

²⁴⁷ Mitchell, “The Mountains, the Miners, and Mister Caudill,” 83.

²⁴⁸ Harry M. Caudill, testimony to Subcommittee of Mines and Mining, House of Representatives, United States Congress, October 1971 in *Stripping: The Surface Mining of America*, John F. Stacks, (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1972).

story in...your great newspaper.”²⁴⁹ Obviously, he was very proud of the town that placed third in the 1956 “Better Eastern Kentucky” community development contest.²⁵⁰

Whitesburg with a population of 1390 had made great strides in creating a modern infrastructure over the past ten years. Completed community projects included a new city hall, an up-to-date water plant and a sewage plant, and a city park complete with a swimming pool. Also finished were several privately endorsed projects such as the UMWA Hospital that held the distinction of being among the “most modern in the US,” according to Architectural Forum Magazine.²⁵¹ Little did he know but in less than a year, it would all be gone. Washed away by three consecutive days of rainfall that sent the tranquil Kentucky River roaring through the town.

During the twilight hours of January 28, the gentle spring rains falling upon the mountains increased to a torrential downpour that battered the region over the next two days. Although accustomed to the cyclical rise and fall of the waterways, residents were taken by surprise as the river violently surged over its sandy banks on the 29th of January. Pike County native David Deskins was eight years old when the “’57 Flood” devastated Eastern Kentucky. Like thousands of migrants who had fled the region looking for work, the Deskins family watched the horrific images flash across the television screen from the safety of Washington, DC. Unable to get a telephone call through to family members, they loaded the car for a return trip to Pikeville. In an effort to help, the Deskins family returned “to see what [they] could do. Which was not much.”²⁵² The towns of Pound, Virginia and Hazard, Kentucky fared no better as muddy river water soared above “the ceilings of Main Street retail shops” cresting as high as twelve feet in the center of Hazard where twelve people drowned.²⁵³

On the 30th of January 1957, Caudill set aside his personal differences with Governor “Happy” Chandler in an effort to secure aid for the flood ravaged Cumberland Valley. Solemnly, he summed up the severity of the situation to Governor Chandler “...Eastern and Southeastern Kentucky...have been calamitously ravaged by flood. Our citizens and local units of government [are] simply overwhelmed.” The region long at the mercy of the coal industry confronted this last

²⁴⁹ Harry M. Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky to [Cary Roberts, Louisville, Kentucky] 30 March 1956. AHCP, Box 27, Folder 1.

²⁵⁰ “Development Association Considers Projects Designed to Improve Whitesburg’s Appearance,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 2 May 1957.

²⁵¹ Harry M. Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky to [Cary Roberts, Louisville, Kentucky] 30 March 1956. AHCP, Box 27, Folder 1.

²⁵² Deskins, *Pike County: A Very Different Place*, 171-172.

catastrophe with few resources. In the face of such monumental disaster, Caudill pleaded for state aid.

Thousands of citizens are homeless. To deepen the tragedy, our coal mines are shut down and the income of the entire region has been stopped. In short, our people are in a desperate plight. If a special session of the General Assembly is deemed by you to be necessary to provide funds to cope with the situation or to broaden your executive powers in the emergency please issue your call promptly.²⁵⁴

Governor Chandler responded to the needs of the region by declaring several counties state disaster areas. On January 31, President Eisenhower followed suit and a flood relief center to handle both state and federal efforts was established at London, Kentucky.²⁵⁵

Twice, Governor Chandler waded into the disaster area to reassure the distraught citizenry. Twice, he publicly ignored Representative Harry Caudill. Incensed by Caudill's participation in the "Rebel" faction during the 1956 legislature, he refused to acknowledge his efforts on behalf of the mountain communities. In the meantime, the people remained oblivious to the political jousting in their back yards. Their eyes were fixed upon the river. From this point onward, "they [were] river watchers."²⁵⁶

By the time the area returned to normal, Caudill firmly dismissed any notion of running for the House of Representatives. Another term with Chandler as governor seemed fruitless in light of their intense political differences. Instead, he committed to several local projects; distancing himself from politics and leaving the door to the capital wide open for local schoolteacher and hardware businessman Hillard Kincer.²⁵⁷

²⁵³ Caudill, Night Comes to the Cumberlands, 320-324; "12 Believed Drowned in Hazard Flood," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 31 January 1957.

²⁵⁴ Harry M. Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky to [Governor A. B. Chandler, Frankfort, Kentucky] 30 January 1957. AHCP Box 27, Folder 1. Also see: "Rep. Caudill Urges Special Legislative Session," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle* 31 January 1957.

²⁵⁵ "Chandler Tours County Promises Immediate Help," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 31 January 1957; "Senator, Governor Visit County Promise Disaster Recovery Aid," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle* 7 February 1957.

²⁵⁶ Deskins, Pike County, 172; Caudill, Night Comes to the Cumberlands, 322-323.

²⁵⁷ "Large Tree Shipment to Arrive Here," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 7 March 1957. Note: Locals continued a reforestation program in Letcher County. "Reynolds Plants to Set 40,000 Trees This Spring," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 2 January 1958.

Despite his decision to remain outside politics for awhile, Caudill maintained contact with his colleagues in Frankfort. Shortly after the May primary, he dashed off a letter to his friend John Breckinridge to congratulate him on his recent win. Breckinridge in turn expressed disappointment at his friend's decision not to seek re-election. "Although I look forward with a great deal of anticipation to the 58 Session (barring a fatality at the hands of the Republicans and His Happiness this Fall!) the prospect would have been much more enjoyable... [if] you and Ned Breathitt could be counted among those present."²⁵⁸ Oddly enough, Breckinridge's letter was dated for the exact day that Caudill buried his father.

Cro Carr Caudill was dead at the age of sixty-five. The community was shocked by the unexpected loss. Although, he had suffered a serious heart attack in mid-April, he had been on the road to a full recovery.²⁵⁹ Unfortunately, his health continued to decline once back at home. By late June, he successfully underwent kidney surgery but suffered a fatal heart attack in the next week. The county mourned the passing of the well-respected "Democratic political leader and member of a pioneer Letcher County family."²⁶⁰ The imaginative politician that turned the loss of an arm into a symbol for a political career that scanned nearly four decades was now just a memory.

Harry Caudill was devastated. Without a word, the mountaineer that delighted in being the focus of the media attention disappeared from the limelight. Unable to share his grief with others, he never spoke publicly about the death of the boisterous, one-armed man fondly referred to as "my dear old Dad." The high-spirited politician that had incurred the wrath of the governor while regaling the legislature with mountain stories was gone forever. In his place, was a conscientious family man content to remain in the mountains.

The value of mountain life was reaffirmed in Caudill's mind after the death of his father. The love of family and neighbors provided a buffer against the loneliness that accompanied the loss. As days passed into weeks, he spent long hours hiking in the hills with Anne and their children. He remarked "when I walk amidst the smooth tender trunks and contemplate the

²⁵⁸ John B. Breckinridge, Lexington, Kentucky to [Harry M. Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky] 25 June 1957. AHCP Box 27, Folder 1.

²⁵⁹ "Cro Caudill suffers Attack," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 18 April 1957.

²⁶⁰ "Services Held Today for Cro C. Caudill: Heart Attack Proves Fatal," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 27 June 1957.

rapidity of the land's revival I am immensely encouraged."²⁶¹ Perhaps, his relationship with the land is best understood within the context of his neighbor's explanation.

The land is "a religion within itself, a manner and mode of living," wrote Letcher County native Lee Daniel in 1956. He professed:

God meets me in the mountains when I climb alone and high.... I seem to lose Him in the jostle of the streets but on the crooked cow trails as I trudge alone, a mystic presence in the mountain often stays my feet. God meets me in the mountains when I miss Him in the towns.²⁶²

For a time, Caudill took solace in the mountains and in his family as the demands of the outside world faded into the background.

The socio-economic condition of Letcher County echoed the sorrowful burden carried by Harry Caudill. Families claimed there was no food, no jobs, and no prospects for the future left in the mountains. Once again, grandparents waved to their grandchildren from the front porch as the old cars sputtered to life and headed north. Bound by years of hardship, the remaining mountaineers gathered their strength and demanded their rights. Gradually, their mumble of dissatisfaction grew to a roar of protest.

Since the fall of 1956, the local newspaper had printed several complaints against a school system that fulfilled few obligations to the student body. "One who knows" said unacceptable "school conditions" were the result of corrupt school officials whose "politics...are sticking out like sore thumbs..." Overpayment for unqualified teachers forced the pay scale for qualified teachers to the "least" dollar required by the "Minimum Foundation [Law]." Jobs in the school cafeteria are voting tools, complained One Who Knows. Those seeking employment in the "lunchroom" should not apply to the principal but should seek "the Sheriff's wife and the County Superintendent's wife" to submit an application.²⁶³

The intentional neglect of school facilities combined with the resignation of the county's best teachers in favor of better paying positions increased parents' determination to change the

²⁶¹ Harry M. Caudill, "The Land as Therapy," reprinted in *One Hundred Years of Appalachian Visions*, compiled by Bill Best, Berea: Appalachian Imprints, 2000.

²⁶² Lee Daniel, "Pioneers of Kentucky," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 5 January 1956.

system.²⁶⁴ A well-educated student body had long been the pride of Letcher County. Weekly the newspaper reported on the progress of locals that went away to college. Honors and acceptance letters were printed like badges of courage among a populace that worked long hours to educate their children, validating the miner's declaration, "I shoveled my children through college."²⁶⁵ Thus, the gradual degradation of the educational system was unacceptable to residents that took pride in educating their children.

In June of 1957, the teacher crisis reached the "critical" stage according to Superintendent C. V. Snapp of the Jenkins Independent School System. Out of the sixty-five personnel needed, "only 32 teachers...returned their acceptance forms."²⁶⁶ Similarly, Letcher County Superintendent W. B. Hall published a "list" of teachers for the coming year, cautioning that several listed were considering higher paying positions in rival school systems. Fortunately a few days short of the fall term, the teacher "shortage" had been relieved "somewhat." Nonetheless, the *Mountain Eagle* declared the overall county situation demanded a serious consideration of a salary increase.²⁶⁷

Determined to secure a quality education for their children, parents appointed a special committee to assess the "problems" within the school system. Among the men selected were Attorney Harry Caudill and publisher of the *Mountain Eagle*, Tom Gish. In his first appearance in the newspapers since the death of his father, Caudill expressed faith in state government's ability to correct the current situation. In the fall of 1957, he believed the problems affecting the school district needed to be "solved in Frankfort and not Whitesburg."²⁶⁸

The Chandler Administration under pressure from the reports compiled by outside experts responded to the deepening crisis in Eastern Kentucky by establishing a "regional planning commission" in the autumn of 1957. Although no state money was available to the

²⁶³ "Citizens Write, Telling of School Conditions," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 4 October 1956. Dave L. Craft, "Is Your Child Getting the Best From Our Schools?" *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 4 October 1956.

²⁶⁴ "Two Whitesburg Teachers resign," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 7 March 1957.

²⁶⁵ Caudill, *The Mountains, The Miners, and The Lord*, 34-49.

²⁶⁶ "The School Situation: Only 32 Return to School Jobs in Jenkins Area," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 20 June 1957; "The School Situation: High School at Cumberland Employs Boggs," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 20 June 1957.

²⁶⁷ "Shortage of Teachers At Jenkins Relieved Somewhat, Superintendent Snap Says," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 1 August 1957; "County Lists Teachers For Coming School Year," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 1 August 1957; "Teacher Vacancies Filled," *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 5 September 1957. Note: Letcher County Superintendent W. B. Hall published a "list" of teachers for the coming school year, cautioning that several of the teachers on the list would not be employed at the school since they accepted "jobs in other school systems."

group, acting Governor Harry Lee Waterfield appointed a team of “nine men...to chart [the] future of Eastern Kentucky.” The group included:

R.R. Wooden, Pikeville, a gas company executive; Lawrence Davis, Hazard, a real-estate promoter; B. F. Reed, Drift, [Turner Elkhorn Mining Company] a coal operator; Rexford Blazer, wealthy oil company executive; S.C. Van Curon, Harlan, a newspaper executive; Dr. Adron Doran, Morehead, a professional educator; the Rev. William M. Hule, Corbin, a former minister in Western Kentucky; Dr. Alec Spencer, West Liberty, a physician, and Harry LaViers, Paintsville, president of the South East Coal Company.²⁶⁹

Stanley Pinel, chief assistant to the President’s Advisor on public works commended the state’s prompt response to the “needs” of Eastern Kentucky, calling the new commission the “finest of [its] kind.”²⁷⁰ Local residents refrained from comment.

Less than seven months later, the Eastern Kentucky Planning Commission (EKPC) informed local leaders they must “change or be left behind the rest of the world.” B. F. Reed, chairman of the EKPC said that county leaders should concentrate on cleaning up the area and work toward developing a good school system. At an all day meeting in Perry County, participants learned of the many federal loans available to improve the region. However, Hazard City Manager, Herbert Wooten warned citizens applying for federal loans to expect criticism from local leaders that are “reluctant to accept aid” and “reluctant to change.”²⁷¹ After years of working hard to improve the area, the callous and unjustified insinuation that locals lacked the desire to improve the region sparked a barrage of protests. As spring passed into summer, several businessmen sick of being treated like “second-class” citizens decided to take matters into their own hands.

Over a “friendly cup of coffee,” Tom Gish reported, several local businessmen decided to march on Frankfort “unless state officials and the rest of Kentucky do something more than pay

²⁶⁸ “Citizens’ Group Starts Work on Problems of Schools; Report Due in Six Months,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 3 October 1957.

²⁶⁹ “Study Group Lays Down Broad Road for Eastern Kentucky to Follow, Then Leaves it Up to Citizens to Walk it Along to Improvement of Entire Area,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 25 July 1957; “Nine Men Named to Chart Future of Eastern Kentucky,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 15 August 1957.

²⁷⁰ “East Kentucky Planning group called finest of Kind in USA,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 12 June 1958.

²⁷¹ “Change or Be left Behind Rest of the World, Planners Tell Eastern Kentucky Cities and Counties,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 6 March 1958.

lip service to [the] problems here.” The group maintained that because Eastern Kentucky received an unequal portion of state tax dollars, the best decision might be to create a new state called “East Kentucky.”²⁷² The “secessionists” singled out the lack of funding for road construction and schools as the central focus of their debate. Interestingly enough, Harry Caudill was listed among the group responsible for the idea of separating from the Commonwealth.

Hearty approval of the plan to secede resounded from several other counties in the region. Magoffin County Rural Development and the Salyersville Kiwanis Club joined several other groups in a request for “ten minutes on the program.”²⁷³ Further “encouragement” came from “Floyd, Knott, Perry, Harlan, and other Eastern Kentucky counties” while Clay County businessmen signed a petition supporting the movement and “to let the state government and our representatives of the mountain counties know that Kentucky boundaries reach farther to the southeast than Lexington.”²⁷⁴

The debate over the legality of secession from the Commonwealth confirmed the genuine concern of state officials. Kentucky Attorney General Jo M. Ferguson agreed that secession was possible if locals presented a signed petition before the 1960 Legislature. If approved, the bill would go to the people for a final vote to amend the state constitution. Seemingly unconcerned, Governor Chandler dismissed the events in Letcher County as the “peeves of one disgruntled citizen.” He commented that the area was not being “mistreated” and that he would fight the secession. “I am obligated to keep them,” he stated. On the issue of unequal distribution of state funds, Revenue Commissioner James E. Luckett commented that “generally speaking there is no sound basis for the argument that Eastern Kentucky pays more into the state than it gets back.”²⁷⁵

George Hubley Jr. Commissioner of the state economic department and John Whisman, newly appointed director of the EKPC, both asked for “a fair chance” to demonstrate their ability to help the area.²⁷⁶ In a show of good faith, the EKPC voiced their “tentative approval” of the

²⁷² Tom Gish “New State of East Kentucky considered by local men tired of Second-class rating,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 31 July 1958.

²⁷³ “Magoffin County wants to get in,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 14 August 1958.

²⁷⁴ “Move to form New State Gets Support All Over Mountains,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 14 August 1958; “Secessionists set 3rd meeting here Sept. 30,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 18 September 1958. Note:

Dissatisfaction with distant government unfamiliar with the mountain region was not a new phenomenon. Local historian Henry P. Scalf stated that in 1784, Abingdon, Virginia elite Arthur Campbell asked Congress to create a “single state” from “mountainous regions” since these areas “never fare as well as more level section when the state scatters the largess....” See: “Idea Talked of in 1784,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 14 August 1958.

²⁷⁵ “Move to form New State Gets Support All Over Mountains,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 14 August 1958.

²⁷⁶ “Don’t secede yet, state officials say---give us another chance,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 14 August 1958.

heavily debated 125 mile long “Skyline Drive” across the peaks of Pine Mountain.²⁷⁷ The idea of the “Skyline Drive” initially introduced as a campaign promise of rival Wilson Wyatt was part of the plan to promote tourism in the mountains.²⁷⁸ Sensing a way to bolster political support and a way to pacify the angry citizens, the EKPC used the highway project to retain support for the committee.

A week later, “Virgil Proctor, president of Proctor-Ingels, a consultant engineering firm” in nearby Lexington favorably endorsed the plan. Proctor asserted that the “Skyline Drive” was economically feasible. Although it would cost a “great deal” to build, he “viewed the proposed road as an investment in the future of Kentucky.” Member Harry LaViers’ motion to “study” the idea and to solicit cost estimates from the Department of Highways was “unanimously” approved by the EKPC.²⁷⁹

Ironically in the same edition of the *Mountain Eagle*, Letcher Countians discovered that LaViers played an important role in the recent proposal to build a road connecting the mountain counties with the Bluegrass. The *Mountain Eagle* stated that LaViers wanted to “public[ly] apologize” to “his friends and neighbors” for participating in the decision to exclude Letcher County from the list of potential destinations. LaViers asserted that “no slight [was] intended” to locals when he laid a “yardstick” across a map of Kentucky and drew a line from Winchester, Kentucky to Prestonsburg, Kentucky.²⁸⁰ At this point, local tolerance faltered as Cossie Quillen remarked “Flash floods from heaven, taxes from Frankfort, promises from politicians, and surveys from everybody. We have had about enough.”²⁸¹

Things went from bad to worse during the month of December as unemployment steadily climbed. A few days before Christmas, local officials said that they had no choice but to ask Governor Chandler to declare a state of emergency for the county after the UMWA representative in Jenkins reported out of “937 miners...only 200 currently are working.”²⁸²

²⁷⁷ “Proposal for ‘Skyline Drive’ along Pine Mountain gets Tentative Approval of East Kentucky Planners,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 21 August 1958.

²⁷⁸ “Skyline Highway on Pine Mountain Proposed by Wyatt,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 17 July 1958.

²⁷⁹ “Proposal for ‘Skyline Drive’ along Pine Mountain gets Tentative Approval of East Kentucky Planners,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 21 August 1958.

²⁸⁰ “No Slight Intended LaViers tells Letcher,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 21 August 1958.

²⁸¹ Cossie Quillen, Whitesburg, Kentucky to [Editor of the *Mountain Eagle*, Whitesburg, Kentucky] 21 August 1958.

²⁸² “Letcher County to ask Chandler to declare emergency here and send extra assistance,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 18 December 1958.

Always at his best during an election year, Chandler rushed to the mountains with a promise “to take care of our own people” in Kentucky.²⁸³ “Don’t secede” he told the crowd filled with out-of-work miners. “I did not go into the governor’s office to liquidate the Commonwealth....” The governor explained that he had tried to get industry into the region but they refused because of “bad schools, bad roads, and floods.” The solution was to build a new road between Winchester and Hazard to link Southeastern Kentucky with the Bluegrass, he claimed. Faithfully he promised a construction “contract” would be issued sometime “this spring.”²⁸⁴

The unmentioned, but perfectly understood, price for the potential road contract was a vote for the combined Democrat ticket of Waterfield and Hillard Kincer during the May Primary. “It’s my judgment that you’ve never had a better representative than Mr. Kincer,” the governor declared, publicly severing all political ties with Caudill.²⁸⁵ Showing his appreciation of local talent, Chandler appointed *Mountain Eagle* publisher, Tom Gish, as press representative for the Waterfield campaign.²⁸⁶ With the ease of a well-schooled politician, Chandler trumped the “secessionist” by removing Gish to Frankfort. Few people questioned Chandler’s motives during the bitter winter of 1959. Alas, a *good turn* in exchange for political patronage was the soul of mountain politics

Prior to the first meeting of the secessionist in July of 1958, Caudill informed Lieutenant-Governor Harry Lee Waterfield of his intention to run for the House of Representatives.²⁸⁷ An extremely likable man, Waterfield stayed his pick for the governor’s office in 1960 until region native Bert Combs authenticated the rumors that he sought the nomination for a second time.²⁸⁸ Caudill believed the best choice was Combs because he understood the conditions in Eastern Kentucky. His excitement for the upcoming race increased after Wyatt Wilson joined the Combs ticket as candidate for Lieutenant Governor. The possibility of electing the “first governor from

²⁸³ “Chandler says Whitesburg will get new bridge over river,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 15 January 1959.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.* “Chandler says Whitesburg will get new bridge over river,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 15 January 1959.

Note: Governor Chandler authorized the Department of Highway to employ local men for the upcoming road projects.

²⁸⁶ “Editor of *Eagle* to serve as aide to Waterfield,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 15 January 1959.

²⁸⁷ Harry M. Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky to [Harry Lee Waterfield, Frankfort, Kentucky] 21 May 1958.

²⁸⁸ Bert Combs, Louisville, Kentucky to [Harry Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky] 28 August 1958. AHCP. Box 27, Folder 3.

Eastern Kentucky” while serving in a Legislature where all eyes were focused on the region held tremendous appeal for Caudill.²⁸⁹

The Combs-Wyatt ticket held the “general grass-roots sentiment, Caudill believed in early January. The only “fly in the ointment” was “Dr. Wright and Charley [Wright’s]” endorsement of Harry Lee Waterfield and Comb’s local manager, Jesse Holbrooke’s decision to slate his nephew, Bill Jordon, against Caudill for the House seat. The increased the “friction” among county Democrats compelled Judge James Caudill to request that Democrat campaign funds coming into the county be sent directly to him or his assistant Claude Creech. “I think this is wholly important,” Harry Caudill explained on the judge’s behalf, “and can be handled in such way as to leave Holbrook wholly undisturbed in the matter.”²⁹⁰ Comb responded that he “under[stood] the situation thoroughly regarding the representatives’ race and you may be assured that we will not do anything that might give later comfort to your opposition.”²⁹¹ While politicians relentlessly vied for political supremacy in the state, outsiders began to demand an answer for the declining conditions in the mountains.

A renewed interest in the “woes” of Eastern Kentucky developed from the attention focused on the region by the secessionist movement and the EKPC’s efforts to secure federal funding. According to the *Mountain Eagle*, Washington Correspondent Robert Riggs reported that the unemployment problem of the area represented the line dividing President Eisenhower and congress on government spending in the nation’s “distressed areas.”²⁹² The congressional battle fixed national attention on the unemployed populations across America. However, Kentucky Senator John Sherman Cooper’s support drew all eyes toward the coalfields. Scrutiny of Eastern Kentucky yielded a varied set of reactions from inside and outside the region. Fingers were pointed at everybody from the mountain communities to Washington, DC.

The *Chicago Tribune* boldly claimed that “while the coal miners starve,” the federal government sent “5 million dollars to help Tito, the communist dictator of Yugoslavia, buy locomotives for his state-owned railway system.” In fact, the *Tribune* claimed while “millions keep rolling abroad...in Kentucky, part of Virginia, and...downstate Illinois, Americans are

²⁸⁹ “Candidate Combs promises to fill up holes in roads,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 19 June 1958.

²⁹⁰ Harry Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky to [Bert T. Combs, Louisville, Kentucky] 31 January 1959. AHCP, Box 27, Folder 3.

²⁹¹ Bert Combs, Louisville, Kentucky to [Harry Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky] 12 February 1959, AHCP, Box 27, Folder 3.

²⁹² “East Kentucky Woes in National Spotlight,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 29 January 1959.

suffering as a result of conditions over which they had little control....”²⁹³ The *Courier-Journal* chimed in with the assertion that the government analyzed depressed areas in “terms of relief rather than economic cures” while the “basic properties for economic prosperity are here—people, desire, and natural resources. Only the imagination and assistance of Washington is needed. But so far, we have seen no imagination, and the wrong kind of assistance.”²⁹⁴ Without federal assistance, the depressed counties have “little hope” of financing the type of industry needed to employ the region’s population. “An administration that spends 1,250,000 a year just to store and handle farm surplus...[should] divide some of these surpluses among starving people.”²⁹⁵

Many local citizens blamed the plight of the region on the hungry residents themselves, totally ignoring “outside” contentions that existing economic conditions were related to the current political situation. In a letter to the editor, Joseph E Maggard stated that the plight of “our poor people” has generated a lot of “talk.” Now, he commanded, “it is time that we look at and recognize the facts. If there is a days work in a truck mines now and then most of the men will do it. The rest of the time they...sit around.” Few families garden the bottom-land and therefore they have nothing to eat during the winter months. They should leave the region in search of work, he believed, and the government should stop giving them “food and clothes.”²⁹⁶ Wee Willie applauded Maggard’s letter saying that instead of working for “\$1.00 per hour or even at \$.50 per hour some of our men will let their children go to school nearly barefooted.”²⁹⁷

Not everyone in the region believed the “poverty” of the area was due to a refusal to work. Several civic organizations asserted that although many men did not want to work, they knew “personally of many cases in which men and women have done everything they could to help themselves but they are unable to get jobs because there are no jobs to get.”²⁹⁸ Others supported their faith in a strong work ethic but it was an article tucked neatly among the less

²⁹³ “While Coal Miners Starve,” *Chicago Tribune* reprinted in *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 19 February 1959.

²⁹⁴ “Eastern Kentucky needs imagination, assistance from federal government,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 19 February 1959.

²⁹⁵ “Not Much Cheer for Eastern Kentucky,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 19 March 1959.

²⁹⁶ Joseph E. Maggard, Dongola, Kentucky to [The Editor of *Mountain Eagle*, Whitesburg, Kentucky] 29 January 1959.

²⁹⁷ “Wee Willie Wanderings,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 19 February 1959.

²⁹⁸ “Together We can Help Each Other,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 19 February 1959.

important events of the Thursday paper in March of 1959 that epitomized the horrors of hunger and unemployment. A single byline read “Out of work Dunham father kills himself.”²⁹⁹

Both local residents and distant journalists failed to link high unemployment and rampant hunger to the continuing conflict over the new UMWA contract. After the extension of the old contract for an additional year, President John L. Lewis demanded immediate negotiations in 1958. Thoroughly, “surpris[ing]” everyone by agreeing to negotiate separate contracts for the commercial mines and the captive mines in order to secure a “protective wage clause.” The clause forced union mines to agree not to purchase non-union coal to sell on the market unless they paid the established union wage scale.

For years, “non-union mines paying miners less than scale wages [had been] selling their coal to the large union mines.” The underhanded agreement provided that either party pay the forty-cents per ton into the UMWA welfare fund as required by the previous contract. Neither questioned the legal or social repercussions of the arrangement that allowed small mines to pay less than a living wage to the coal miners. Instead, “everybody wink[ed] at the transaction” heartened by the profitable exchange.³⁰⁰ That unconscionable bargain altered with the new contract. Now, either small truck mines caved into union demands or they would not be able to sell coal to union buyers. Despite the notable lack of enforcement for past UMWA contracts, several unidentified people predicted the new agreement could force many small mines out of business. Consequently, the mandate to pay the union wage scale of “\$22.25 to \$23.45 per day” when non-union mines paid as little as “\$22.00 every two weeks” insured rebellion in the coalfields.³⁰¹

As a native of Eastern Kentucky, Caudill understood the interrelated dynamics creating the situation in the mountains. In a letter to the *Courier-Journal*, he identified several factors associated with the continuous economic conditions confronting the region. Heatedly, he argued that regional “prosperity” needed to be in a product other than coal since absentee owners held “90% of our mineral wealth.” This lack of resource ownership by natives guaranteed “more than 90% of the royalties” derived from mineral extraction were deposited in banks outside the region. Because absentee ownership left no tax base, modernization of everything from the school system to road construction was beyond the regional capabilities. Consequently, the lack

²⁹⁹ “Out of Work Dunham Father kills himself,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 12 March 1959.

³⁰⁰ “New UMW contract Signed some truck mines may close,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 4 December 1958.

³⁰¹ “New UMW contract gives miners \$1.20 a day raise,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 25 September 1958.

of modern roads and the low educational attainment ensured that manufacturing facilities avoided the valley. The region was “doomed to continual decline” without the prospect of a “decent” transportation system.³⁰² By the end of the “Fabulous Fifties,” it seemed as if there was no end to the distress visited upon the Cumberland Valley.

The conflict erupting between the coal antagonists shielded a newcomer to the mountains. Hidden high upon the ridge and deep in the hollows, giant machines ruthlessly gutted the mountains for the coal they contained on a daily basis. The impact of strip mining on the mountaineers was immeasurable. One woman swore “every time they stick a dozer blade into the mountain its kind of like stickin’ a knife into a mountain person’s heart.”³⁰³ Equally devastating was the impact of strip mining on the steep ridges of the ancient mountain chain. David McCullough described the assault as “beyond belief, and sickening.”³⁰⁴

Deeply concerned, Caudill asked Barry Bingham publishing editor of the *Courier Journal* to champion the cause of the region.³⁰⁵ Strip mining in the flatlands of western Kentucky is “entirely different” from that taking place in the mountain region, he explained. The “very steep” angle of our hillsides makes it impossible for the removal of coal without the destruction of both the hills and the valleys. Even a mild rainfall propelled loosely packed spoil banks down upon the land and people below. He warned the entire state would be encumbered with the cost of clean up. Therefore, the newspaper should bring these events to the “attention” of the state and nation. “They deserve to at least be forewarned and that is the duty of the free press.”³⁰⁶

Bingham agreed that the situation in Eastern Kentucky warranted a close inspection. As a supporter of the laws passed in the 1954 legislation to control strip mining in western Kentucky and a supporter of the tourist industry, he was “personally concerned” with the growth of strip-mining and the future implication for the “the beauty of Eastern Kentucky.”³⁰⁷

True to his word, the *Courier-Journal* contacted Caudill to prepare a story for publication. The consensus was that few Kentuckians understood what the escalation and affect of strip-

³⁰² Harry M. Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky to [*Courier-Journal*, Louisville, Kentucky] 24 March 1959. AHCP, Box 27, Folder 3.

³⁰³ Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*, 134.

³⁰⁴ McCullough, “The Lonely War of a Good Angry Man,” 108.

³⁰⁵ For information on Barry Bingham and The *Louisville Courier-Journal* see: David Leon Chandler and Mary Voel Chandler, *The Bingham of Louisville*, New York: Crown, 1987.

³⁰⁶ Harry M. Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky to [Barry Bingham, Frankfort, Kentucky] 17 December 1958. AHCP, Box 27, Folder 3.

³⁰⁷ Barry Bingham, Louisville, Kentucky to [Harry M. Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky] 19 December 1958. AHCP, Box 27, Folder 3.

mining meant to the entire state. A story punctuated with pictures would point out the vast economic burden projected on the average taxpayer plus stimulate action in the upcoming Legislative session.³⁰⁸ Ironically, it was the government owned Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) that made strip and augur mining profitable.

The TVA envisioned by Senator George Norris and the New Dealers in the late 1930s was a far cry from the coal-consuming monster that Caudill believed “decreed the destruction of a broad region adjacent to the territory it was mandated to protect.”³⁰⁹ After World War II, the TVA recognized that the American demand for power far exceeded its capabilities as a supplier of water generated electricity. Searching for alternative resources, the Authority singled out coal-powered generators as a “cheap” way to produce electrical power.

Without further consideration, the TVA began soliciting bids for large quantities of coal needed to fuel the newly installed coal fired generators. In a headlong drive to seize the tremendous profits of the strip mining industry, businessman turned away from the traditional methods of coal extraction. As a result, the smaller mines or “truck mines” dependent upon manual labor were forced out of business while larger operations consolidated into competitive giants that employed machines instead of men. In the mountains, the drive for high production at the minimum cost was a recipe for disaster as “coal, shale and slate went into the flames together.”³¹⁰ Eventually, the UMWA entered the race for profit. Gingerly they sidestepped their role as miner representative and through a deal with West Kentucky Coal Company tapped the wealth generated by the TVA contracts.³¹¹

Taking advantage of the situation, the mountain elite used their savings to invest in the new operations.³¹² Heavily invested in the coal industry, they acted as guardians against the environmentalist determined to prevent total destruction of the mountains by defending the method of strip-mining. Harlan County Chamber of Commerce associate Ernest Smith asserted that “strip miners benefit rather than damage the land they gouge and strip.” Others contended

³⁰⁸ James S. Pope, Louisville, Kentucky to [Harry M. Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky] 30 December 1958. AHCP, Box 27, Folder 3.

³⁰⁹ Caudill, *A Darkness at Dawn*, 1976., 26-28.

³¹⁰ Harry Caudill, *My Land is Dying*, 67-75. Quote from pg. 70.

³¹¹ Thomas Bethell quoted in *My Land is Dying*, Caudill. Note: By 1952, Cyrus Eaton purchased a majority of the West Kentucky Coal Company stock using UMWA money channeled to him by President John L. Lewis. Later, Eaton and Lewis used the same method to purchase stock in utility companies. Their combined efforts insured union coal remained the main source of coal for utility companies. See: Joseph E. Finley, *The Corrupt Kingdom: The Rise and Fall of the United Mine Workers*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972. 144-169.

³¹² For an explanation of the “managerial class,” see: Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 234-235.

that “strip-mining” assured the development of the tourist industry by providing “roads to strip sites over which to ride to see the scenery.”³¹³ Locals balked at the absurdity of these statements. Bitterly, they questioned whether these advocates had traversed the “roads” that sported holes large enough to swallow an automobile or if they had bothered to drive to the head of hollows where homes were threatened by the spoil banks and their architects. As Moss Creech attested, “it is hard to understand how Earnest H. Smith can think as he writes...in regard to augur mining in Eastern Kentucky. This is the most devastating thing that has ever happened to this section of the country.”³¹⁴

Indiscriminately, coal exacted a vicious price from the valley for the electricity that lit distant cities. Despite all Caudill’s educational preparations and his high standing in the community, he remained powerless to stop the King. Scornfully, Caudill assessed the partnership formed between the government and coal:

The same cheap fuel that that made possible an era of prosperity in the TVA region has wrecked the coalfields, impoverished entire communities, and forced thousands of mountain people to desert the place of their birth, leaving behind the graves of countless miners needlessly killed while still others were being crippled for life.³¹⁵

Ironically, while fighting for a seat in the House of Representatives in January of 1959, his only living brother, Truman, was crippled for life in a coal tippie accident.³¹⁶ The mournful sound of a thousand similar stories must have echoed in his mind as his brother languished in the hospital over the next several months.

Gradually, protest trickled out of the mountains but the local newspaper refused to tackle the powerful augur and strip mining industry in the early days. The locals “having ceased to be self-supporting...were now wards of the bureaucrats and the pawns of increasingly ruthless political machines.”³¹⁷ The voices that cried out in defense of the environment quickly

³¹³ “The Life and Death of a Good Bill,” *Louisville Courier Journal*, 11 March 1960. AHCP, Box 27, Folder 4.

³¹⁴ Moss S. Creech, Wooten, Kentucky to [To the Editor of The *Courier-Journal*, Louisville, Kentucky] March 17, 1960.

³¹⁵ Caudill, *My Land is Dying*, 69.

³¹⁶ “Around Town with Sibyl Brown,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle* (12 March 1959).

³¹⁷ Caudill, *My Land is Dying*, 62.

succumbed to the political and economic pressure asserted by the state and county power structure. In the mountains, silence was golden.

Not immune to the power wielded by mighty coal industry, Caudill asked Bingham to withdraw the story on strip mining until after the election. Executive Editor James S. Pope agreed the article should be “postpon[ed]” until after the race. “If we agitate the matter now, the strippers would be put on guard and they might attempt to elect those they know are on their side,” Pope surmised. Meanwhile, they would continue to collect several photographs to be used in the future story.³¹⁸ Caudill’s decision to distance himself from the controversial issue of augur and strip mining illustrated the power wielded by the coal industry in Eastern Kentucky. The nationally acclaimed *Courier-Journal’s* agreement to halt publication until after the race confirmed the power structure.

The race for state representative was the “closest” in the county. Democrat Incumbent and Chandlerite supported Hillard Kincer won with 1,171 votes. Bill Jordon with 1,077 was the runner up with Caudill at 1,068 votes coming in last.³¹⁹ Only a few votes separated the winners and the losers. Bert Combs and Wilson Wyatt who successfully won their bids for office requested that Caudill put aside “Primary differences and rally behind the Democratic banner.”³²⁰

Shaken by his defeat but determined to get attention for the strip mining cause, Caudill renewed communication with the *Courier-Journal*. My candidacy for the House of Representatives “is now history,” he wrote. “My scalp, like those of many others who opposed [Chandler] in the 1956 and 1958 legislative sessions now dries in the sun before the lodge of the Fat Sachem of Frankfort.” No longer pressured to keep silent, he requested they pursue the strip mining issue so that Kentuckians could judge their willingness to pay the price for reclaiming the mountain region. “The consequences of strip mining if left unchecked cannot be over-stated. The peril is too great.”³²¹ However, Caudill’s intentional delay of the story before the primary boded ill for his quest to get quick results now. Throughout the remainder of the summer, little

³¹⁸ James S. Pope, Louisville, Kentucky to [Harry M. Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky] 7 January 1959.

³¹⁹ “Combs and Wyatt carry county 264,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 28 May 1959.

³²⁰ Bert Combs and Wilson Wyatt, Louisville, Kentucky (Union to [Harry M. Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky] 3 June 1959, 7:27 AM AHCP, Box 27, Folder 3.

³²¹ Harry Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky to [Barry Bingham, Louisville, Kentucky] 30 June 1959, AHCP, Box 27, Folder 3.

information filtered into the papers concerning the strip mine issue. What both Caudill and the mountains desperately needed now was a little good luck.

Six days shy of the November election, the *Mountain Eagle* headline declared “Hillard Kincer’s death puts Harry M. Caudill on Democratic ticket.” The fifty-two year old incumbent died from an unexpected heart attack during the early morning, placing the Democrat ticket in jeopardy. “In the emergency, Roland Price [Letcher County Democrat Chairman]...ordered the name of Harry M. Caudill placed on the ballot in place of Kincer.” Immediately, Caudill expressed “regret” over Kincer’s death and promised to represent the needs of the county.³²² An extremely difficult task since Caudill’s appearance on the ballot instead of the Bill Jordon who had been the runner-up in the May Primary reflected the division in Letcher County at the end of 1959.

Despite being listed by local business leaders as the most “outstanding event of the year,” the “mine strike” cast a pall over the coming election.³²³ Remarking upon the political situation, one native sarcastically stated “Republican or Democrat--party labels mean nothing in Letcher County. We choose our officials largely on the basis of personalities, family kinships, personal favors, personal insults or slights, real or imagined, alignments pro or anti union or truck coal operator....”³²⁴ As tensions mounted across the valley, the deadly struggle for survival between the union and the non-union coal operators was mirrored in the political camps.

More than likely, few mountaineers were shocked when Roland Price nominated Caudill since his family had long been equated with the “truck” mine industry. Before his death, Cro Caudill, had owned several small coal mines in the area and had helped establish the “truck” ramps at Roxana.

Throughout 1959, Price’s non-union truck ramps and tipples at Colson were a favorite target for union dynamite practice.³²⁵ Governor Chandler avoided taking a stance against the powerful UMWA that had supported him for the governor’s office in 1938 and in 1956. Bitterly, Price claimed Chandler’s indecisive actions were based on the “fear of loosing votes” for Waterfield. Angry over the lack of state protection after several violent confrontations that left

³²² “Hillard Kincer’s death puts Harry M. Caudill on Democratic ticket,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 29 October 1959; Roland Price, Letcher County, Kentucky to [Charles Wright, Whitesburg, Kentucky] 29 October 1959. AHCP, Box 27, Folder 3.

³²³ “Business Leader Optimistic about prospects for 1960 here,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 21 December 1959.

³²⁴ “Election, A warning to Combs?” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 9 November 1961.

³²⁵ “Blasts Damage Equipment at two Letcher County Ramps,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 9 April 1959.

damaged property and hospitalized several men, Price told reporters, “this is a fight by the big coal operators and the UMWA to wipe out the small truck mine industry.”³²⁶

Throughout the remainder of 1959, non-union, truck mine operators pleaded with the UMWA to broker a separate contract that reflected their specific economic conditions. After pleas for state protection were basically ignored, a widow and several coal firms filed lawsuits against the UMWA after several men were fatally wounded and millions of dollars worth of equipment was destroyed by dynamite.³²⁷ Ironically, while the small truck mines fought to preserve their livelihoods in the face of union contracts, expensive mechanization, and cheap strip and augur coal, the large rail and captive mines such as Southeast Coal Company owned by Harry LaViers and Turner Elkhorn Mining operated by B. F. Reed signed the new UMWA contract. Meanwhile, truck mine operator, Roland Price worked to send an ally to the state capital.

While the mountains simmered over the bitter division in the coal industry, Caudill prepared for the final vote. With only six days between him and the November elections, a very astute Caudill borrowed from Doctor Wright’s “principal elements of his winning campaign” to secure a victory. Since Caudill represented the Democrat Party against the Republicans, Wright, a devout Democrat, backed him in the days before the election.

During his years as a major political force in the Letcher, Doctor Wright held a callous image of the voting public. “Like other successful politicians,” Caudill claimed, “Doc was supremely contemptuous of the public.” Wright’s supported his claims. “I don’t pay much attention to the good people among the voters. They will generally split about even between the candidates,” he told Caudill. “I go after the trash vote. The man who gets the trash vote wins the election.”³²⁸ In a ruthless bid to secure his seat in the House of Representatives, Caudill skillfully crafted a victory from Wright’s political handbook.

In 1960, *Harper’s Monthly* published “How An Election was Bought and Sold” by an unidentified member of the Kentucky Legislature later named as Harry Caudill. The piece discussed the elections held in 1959 and the candidate’s experience during the last five days of

³²⁶ “County Appears Quiet Today as Strike Enters Fourth Day,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 19 March 1959.

³²⁷ “Blasts Damage Equipment at two Letcher County Ramps,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 9 April 1959; “Coal firms sue UMW for \$4,000,000 damages,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 25 June 1959; “Coal Firms, widow sue UMW for \$6,600,000,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 11 June 1959; “Sheriff Investigating death of miner shot near Isom,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 1 October 1959.

³²⁸ Caudill, *Slender is the Thread*, 105-106. Quotes from 106.

the election. The need “to do something” about the dilapidated schools and pitiful public roads, the author remarked, were his reason for making the race.³²⁹

Determined to expose the corruption of Kentucky politics, Caudill boldly exposed the shadowed underbelly of the electoral system. Glibly, he claimed that bribery of the voters “figure[d] importantly” in the critical days prior to the election. Friends and relatives of the candidates enlisted their acquaintances to work the election by handing out cards or driving voters to the precincts. “The fiction of buying votes by pretending to hire precinct workers has now become routine,” he noted. The candidate either “shell[ed] out the sum” or took the chance on loosing the vote of all those directly connected to the worker. As the battle for office heated up, he insisted, the candidates become “desperate” and “inventive” as they attempt to insure the election results.

Supplementing the tall stacks of twenties, tens, and single dollar bills distributed to “workers” were gallons of moonshine intended to appease that “ruffianly bunch...[of] one eyed villainous-looking souls” that swore, “no liquor, no votes.” Nestled between precinct workers and the “trash vote” was the host of civic organizations that offered support in return for favorable legislative support at a later date. Whether purchased for a dollar, a drink, or a promise, the outcome remained the same. Frankly, he asserted the only reprieve from vote buying was when the UMWA sent their representatives into the region to encourage members and their families to “vote it straight.”³³⁰

Cynically, Caudill claimed his *hard work* had paid off at the end of the day when the Republicans conceded the election shortly after midnight. His words laced with sarcasm, he remembered his opponent’s characterization of the election as a “hard-fought, but clean” campaign that epitomized the “very finest of American tradition.”³³¹

Few state leaders supported Caudill’s contention that Kentucky elections were “*bought and sold.*” House majority leader, Republican Thomas L. Ray told the press that he did not question the validity of the author’s argument but that these were “isolated” instances and that “on the whole, elections in Kentucky are honest and free of coercion and fraud.” Republican Marlowe Cook of Louisville agreed, further stating that the author’s refusal to identify himself

³²⁹ Caudill, “How An Election was Bought and Sold,” *Harper’s Monthly*, Vol. 221, No. 1325 (October 1960) 33-38. AHCP, Box 63, Folder 2.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid.

while accepting the nomination under such circumstances made him the “biggest hypocrite...he is as guilty as the people he is attempting to expose.”³³²

Interestingly enough, an editorial in the Pike County News asserted that “the facts set forth in this article are too pitifully true and very well known to those who run for public office.” Further, the writer noted that vote buying “only gets worse with time” and that it did not stop once the candidate had been elected to office. Understanding that the office holder would seek re-election “organizations...[continue] this type of legal blackmail.”³³³

In the weeks before the legislature opened a new session, Caudill stood on his front porch and watched the giant augurs mercilessly bore into the heart of Pine Mountain. “The next time you are driving along KY 15 in the Mayking area, take a look at what strip mining has done in but a few months to one of the most beautiful valleys anywhere,” suggested the *Mountain Eagle*.³³⁴ In a bid to get outside assistance, Caudill wrote to the Lieutenant Governor elect Wilson Wyatt. The “strip mine menace” in the region is “one of the most urgent items of business to confront the new administration and legislature....”³³⁵ Bitterly he complained that “no news media [would] write, shout, or expose the situation, and the people and tax payers in this country are living in blissful ignorance of the calamity which a few selfish business groups [were] preparing for the region.” Well aware that Wyatt promised to build a tourist industry along the peaks of Pine Mountain, he warned “...some of the most beautiful scenery...in the United States...is being rapidly slashed to pieces by the strip miners.”³³⁶

Publicly, Caudill pledged the 1960 Legislature would “make history” because Bert Combs intended to reform education, build roads, and promote tourism. If Letcher County collected on these promises, future prospects were unlimited for locals.³³⁷ However, privately even his faith in government must have been hard pressed as strip mining machines brutally hacked away at the landscape where Eastern Kentucky businessmen dreamed of creating a

³³² “Legislature writes of Vote Buying,” Frankfort: *The Courier-Journal Bureau* (26 September 1960). AHCP, Box 63, Folder 2.

³³³ “As Others See It: An Editorial from the Pike County News,” Whitesburg (KY) *The Mountain Eagle* (1 December 1960) 4. AHCP, Box 63, Folder 2.

³³⁴ “Strip Mining Endangers All of Us,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 18 February 1960.

³³⁵ Harry M. Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky to [Wilson Wyatt, Louisville, Kentucky] 24 November 1959. AHCP, Box 27, Folder 3.

³³⁶ Harry M. Caudill, Whitesburg, Kentucky to [Wilson Wyatt, Louisville, Kentucky] 24 November 1959. AHCP, Box 27, Folder 3.

³³⁷ Larry Caudill, “Letcher Legislators will ‘make’ history,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 26 November 1959.

tourist center.³³⁸ Surely, he cringed when Governor-elect Bert Combs informed the Eastern Kentucky Tourist Council that residents must “prepare before asking tourists” to visit.

We do not suggest that any of us accept the onus of being a moonshiner or feudist...but we have to restore much of what we have lost if we are to captivate the visitor with the olden romance and tradition of the Kentucky mountains. Let them see us at our modern best, yes---but let’s not be so thin-skinned or hypersensitive that the mention or sight of a log cabin, mule and sled, loom and feudist rifle will send us wailing that a proud people have been insulted.³³⁹

Ironically, arranged slightly beneath the Combs commentary in the *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle* was a subtitle for an unrelated piece that read, “Some days it just pays to stay in bed.”³⁴⁰

Clearly, the Corp of Engineer’s statement that “there’s nothing in Whitesburg worth spending the money to save,” dealt the most painful blow.³⁴¹ Only one month short of being in a position to influence public policy, Caudill’s greatest fears were becoming reality. And as always, the final outcome reflected the needs of those in power.

Harry Caudill loved Whitesburg, the steep ridges of Pine Mountain, and the communities secluded by the towering trees. As a result, four years of continuously broken promises by politicians while locals faced starvation transformed him from a power hungry politician to a social activist. Although he believed the effective government was an equalizer, he never again completely trusted public institutions to act in the best interest of the general populace.

Familiar with the inner dynamics of the political arena, Caudill understood that campaign promises generally were not invested with definite truths. Therefore, long before residents faced the reality that state politicians never intended to build a road connecting Letcher County with Central Kentucky or promote a tourist industry complete with recreation facilities, Caudill knew they would never materialize. The truth tasted bitter because he desperately wanted to believe the government would assist the depressed county.

³³⁸ “Strip Mining endangers all of us,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 18 February 1960.

³³⁹ “We have to prepare before asking tourist,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 3 December 1959.

³⁴⁰ “Some says it pays just to stay in bed,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 3 December 1959

³⁴¹ “City not worth saving from floods,” *Whitesburg Mountain Eagle*, 12 November 1959.

Ironically even after being forced to recognize his own limitations within the political arena, he still questioned the mountaineer's lack of resistance. On one hand, he knew the coal industry played a tremendous role in the region's continual economic depression long before others were willing to acknowledge it. And yet, while he completely understood the inability of the people to fight a system that controlled their total existence, he also resented their willingness to accept charity by carrying home free food and clothes to their families. Daily as he watched the "dole" lines grow longer and longer, his anger increased against the people for not demanding their rights and at the system that kept them from doing so.

Steeped in self-righteous indignation, Caudill conveniently forgot the corrupt politics that created and maintained the "trash vote." He made no reference to the local machine built by the New Dealers that sanctioned vote exploitation. Intentionally, he negated his role as a purchaser of votes to the less important role of a candidate with no choice but to purchase or lose. He validated this position as the least offensive alternative on the old ideology of paternalism. In his case, he assumed good intentions by far outweighed the means of achievement. However, although his angry words targeted only the people selling their vote, the fact that he wrote the article indicated his animosity for the corrupt system supporting the degrading practice.

Although the idea of developing a tourist industry in the area continued to be raised throughout the early sixties, the declaration that Caudill's beloved Whitesburg was not "worth saving" told the real story of the region. Consequently in the days following a stint in the legislature that offered more "frustration than satisfaction," Caudill committed to paper his impression of the Cumberland Valley. Throwing caution to the wind, his heartrending commentary peeled back the undeniable layers of power that brutally carved a spokesperson for Appalachia from a "good angry man."³⁴²

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³⁴² David McCullough first referred to Harry Caudill as "a good angry man" in 1969. See: McCullough, "The Lonely War of a Good Angry Man."

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