

Laura C. McPherson. *Lighting the Fuse: A Survey of How Librarians Are Building Regional Identity through Public Library Services in Rural Central Appalachia*. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree. April, 2014. 75 pages. Advisor: Cliff Missen

This study explores librarians' perceptions of the presence, absence, and importance of regional identity building activities in public libraries in rural Central Appalachia through the results of a survey distributed to and interviews conducted with library directors who serve these areas. Analysis of qualitative and quantitative data suggests many libraries are promoting regional identity building through programming, collection development, and outreach and that a majority would be interested in complementing their current offerings with Appalachian-focused services if barriers such as lack of funds and limited staff availability were mitigated. Further research might focus on creating a set of best practices and a resource list for designing region-specific library services and determining library patrons' perceptions of these offerings as a component of library services. This study also addresses gaps in the library literature on rural public libraries in Appalachia and the role of libraries in promoting regional identity in their communities.

#### Headings:

Rural libraries

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Library public services

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LIGHTING THE FUSE: A SURVEY OF HOW LIBRARIANS ARE BUILDING  
REGIONAL IDENTITY THROUGH PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES IN RURAL  
CENTRAL APPALACHIA

by  
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## **Introduction**

As public libraries across the nation work to strengthen their connections to the communities they serve, the role of the library is being refined and redefined in relation to local needs and interests. This study will explore the perceptions and beliefs of librarians concerning the role of public libraries in fostering regional identity with a focus on rural libraries in Central Appalachia. During the past decade, the archival branch of librarianship has come to terms with the notion that by denying the inherently subjective nature of core archival duties such as acquisition, description, and providing access, archivists have been complicit in excluding the narratives of marginalized groups by preserving and perpetuating dominant historical, social, and cultural narratives. Often described as the ‘people’s university’, the public library demonstrates a similar diligence in ensuring that its resources and services reflect an accurate depiction of the communities they serve. Especially in the Appalachian region, where some believe that established narratives have often been constructed to support corporate and government agendas and result in stigmatization of the region and its people, the public library can provide an important counterpoint to stereotypical portrayals that distort the image of Appalachian communities. Based on the observations and attitudes of library directors, this study offers a preliminary perspective of the presence, absence, and nature of regional identity building activities in public libraries in rural Central Appalachia.

Rural Central Appalachian public libraries ought to be basking in the warmth of

the combined spotlights that have lately been trained on rural public libraries and Appalachia. In March 2013, the 36th annual Appalachian Studies Association (ASA) conference drew a record number of over 1,000 participants from across the U.S. and abroad to discuss and celebrate this living culture. In September 2013, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) published a research brief to share the results of its first ever “targeted analysis of trends for rural and small library services” which counted among its most surprising findings that nearly half, or 46.6%, of all public libraries are rural libraries and that in contrast to their urban counterparts, service utilization at rural libraries has increased over the past three years.

These milestones join a host of other indications that rural libraries and the Appalachian region are, if not quite at center stage, at least making a cameo in America’s popular consciousness: an NPR story from October 2013 highlighting a rural one room library in the Missouri Ozarks; a feature article from *Southern Living*’s October 2012 issue lauding the traditional Appalachian craftspeople and musicians who are the “inspiration for the new artisanal movement” (p. 72); the Association of Rural and Small Libraries (ARSL) keynote address by the director of Pew Research Center’s Internet Project on the “next rural library”; the countless recent media discussions of President Obama’s “Appalachian Problem” and the war on coal. However, as a review of library science literature will suggest, the “dearth of material” on rural public libraries that was noted in a 2009 study by Flatley and Wyman has not been remedied in the interim and Appalachian public libraries boast few if any references at all.

This study focuses on the topic of building regional identity through the provision of public library services in rural Central Appalachia, and if published literature on rural

Appalachian public libraries could be described as relatively scarce, then literature on this topic might well be termed nonexistent. The value of cultivating an accurate regional identity for the benefit of members of Appalachian communities as well as those outside Appalachian communities is explored in fields as diverse as education (Burriss & Gantt, 2013; Clark & Hayward, 2013; Hayes, 2011), nursing (Gobble & Smith, 2009), psychology (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006), and anthropology (Puckett, 2001). Many of these studies affirm the importance of literature, storytelling, collective memory, and community gatherings as essential components of the process of building, claiming, and understanding regional identity.

To explore the validity of these studies' findings in relation to the field of library science, the researcher will employ a sequential mixed methods research design to gather data about regional identity building activities in Appalachia and about the libraries that engage in them through programming, collection development, and outreach. One reason for this two-phase research design is to use the first phase to gather a substantial amount of both quantitative and qualitative data on this emerging phenomenon that can inform and enrich the second phase's exclusively qualitative focus. A second reason for this iterative design is that although some exploratory studies attempt to validate the role of the library as a force for increasing social capital in individuals and communities (Johnson, 2010; Varheim, 2011), preserving local heritage (Flinn, 2007; Smith & Rowley, 2012), or capacity-building (Johnson, Thompson, & Naugle, 2009), none have yet explored whether the public library can and does play a role in the development of regional identity.

## **Background**

The earliest known accounts of Appalachia as a cultural region are part travelogue and part literary spectacle, penned by local color journalists responding to the public's desire for sensational tales from exotic locales. Thus, "Appalachia was not discovered or revealed, but invented" (Foster & Hummel, 1997, p. 163) during the late nineteenth century, and even now stereotypes of the region and its people persist in government, media, popular culture, and private discourse. Eller (1999) articulates the necessity for the continued acceptance of Appalachian stereotypes even in this era of extreme sensitivity to verbal discrimination. He writes that "as Americans have sought to redefine themselves as a people, Appalachia has become a Janus-faced 'other'" (pp. ix-x) with a rigid geographic—mountainous, rural, isolated—and cultural—poor, ignorant, white—identity.

Until the past few decades, scholarship concerning Appalachia did more to perpetuate myths and stereotypes than dispel them. In an effort to redeem the region and its people from inaccurate portrayals, historians and folklorists inadvertently created new myths and stereotypes that romanticized the unspoiled wilderness, the rugged yeoman farmer, and the independent mountaineer (Banker, 2010). A revival of Appalachian studies beginning in the late 1970s and continuing through the present attempts to redress the damage of previous generalizations by examining ignored periods of the region's history during which a great deal of change occurred; offering evidence that "geographical, demographic, economic, and cultural diversity have always existed" in Appalachia; and exploring the roles of groups such as immigrants and African Americans—not to mention the Native American tribes who were the first Appalachians—who are largely absent from earlier depictions of the region (Banker,



2010, p. 4). Unfortunately, as Banker notes, “this impressive scholarship and its provocative findings are still largely unknown beyond regional scholarly circles” (2010, p. 5), and Appalachian stereotypes continue to have a “wide currency among all classes of Americans” (Huber, 1995, p. 155).

Foster and Hummel (1997) attribute the persistence of Appalachian stereotypes to the “absence of identity politics” in regional and national discourse (p. 158), and Banker laments that “history is currently unfolding” without an accurate knowledge of the region’s past (2010, p. 5). These stereotypes—whether positive or pejorative—withhold true autonomy from Appalachians as individuals with discreet motives, attributes, and potential. Moreover, the majority of Appalachians “firmly believe that Appalachia is someplace other than where they reside” (Banker, 2010, p. 2), and many others would identify themselves as geographically Appalachian but not culturally Appalachian. Oftentimes individuals only seek to connect with their Appalachian heritage after they achieve an acceptable social, economic, or geographic distance that allows them to adopt a nostalgic perspective of their roots. These examples indicate that the myth of a geographically and culturally monolithic Appalachia prohibits the development of regional identity for the majority of Appalachians. In rural Appalachia—which the Appalachian Regional Commission (2011) estimates was home to 42% of the region’s population in 2010—the absence of an accurate regional identity may serve to isolate individuals and communities more completely than geography ever could.

### **Purpose Statement**

The primary intent of this exploratory study is to examine the presence, absence, and nature of regional identity building activities in public libraries in rural Central

Appalachia. For the purposes of this study, a regional identity building activity is operationally defined as any activity that provides an authentic representation of the region, its cultures, and its people groups or any activity that provides a counterpoint to stereotypical representations of the region, its cultures, and its people groups. However, based on the researcher's belief that participants should have a voice in classification of their services, qualitative data gleaned from survey and interview responses may be used to augment this definition. The secondary purpose of this study is to understand whether public library directors in the population of interest believe that their libraries should play a role in building regional identity in their communities.

### **Research Questions**

This study attempts to answer these two questions:

1. To what extent do public libraries in rural Central Appalachia help to build regional identity in their communities through provision of the core library services of collection development, programming, and outreach?
2. Do public libraries in rural Central Appalachia consider promoting regional identity to be an important part of their role in the community?

## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

A survey of the library science literature yields few mentions of regional identity correlated with public libraries. Although the lack of discoverable studies may indicate that this is not a fruitful topic for research, it is more likely that other factors contribute to this gap in the literature, especially given the importance of social identity theory in the

social sciences as a whole (Adams, 2009; Cooper & Knotts, 2013; Gottlieb, 2001; Paasi, 2000). One possible explanation is that the idea of casting librarians and archivists in the roles of activists or catalysts in processes of social change is emerging and contested (Durrani & Smallwood, 2006; Flinn, 2007) in a profession that traditionally views the information professional as neutral and unbiased. The emerging nature of this topic also indicates that agreement on and definition of pertinent terms may be amorphous, and while the researcher attempted to mitigate this factor by searching for literature on closely and tangentially related terms such as social capital, local heritage or history, place-based, and community-building, it is likely that other terms may be in use to describe the phenomenon of identity building work in public libraries. Moreover, as data collected from survey respondents indicates, identity-building activities may include anything from a genealogy workshop to a local materials section to a program on growing heirloom tomatoes, but literature on these topics may not specifically reference identity or heritage, focusing instead on more general categories such as programming or marketing.

Another possible explanation for the lack of published literature pertaining specifically to rural public libraries may be indicated by the responses to a large-scale survey of rural librarians conducted by Flatley and Wyman in 2007. The researchers explain that their decision to focus on rural public libraries was motivated by the “dearth of material” in the published literature on the activities of these libraries and about the librarians who serve rural communities (Flatley & Wyman, 2009, p. 25). They find that only 14% of the librarians responding to the survey possessed an MLS degree, 29% earn less than \$10 per hour while only 11% earn more than \$15 per hour, and 80% of the

libraries surveyed have only one full time staff person (Flatley and Wyman, 2009, pp. 33-35). These results may partially account for the relative lack of published material on rural public libraries in general and rural Appalachian public libraries in particular. The librarians in these locations may not see the value of contributing to the body of peer-reviewed literature on information science because they are responsible for a wider variety of essential functions than their counterparts in larger libraries, are underpaid, or lack exposure to the theoretical basis for the profession that is provided at the master's level of education. However, it is important to note that Flatley and Wyman's study defines rural libraries as those serving a population of 2,500 or fewer, and the present study defines rural libraries as those serving a population of 25,000 or fewer or those categorized by IMLS as rural. In addition, the researcher does not intend to imply that rural libraries do not participate in other forums for information sharing such as state library associations or listservs, but those means of communication are not easily discoverable.

Because this is an exploratory research study, the literature review will focus on defining important concepts and examining the importance of regional identity to public libraries as indicated by literature from several disciplines. The first three subsections will discuss contested definitions of Appalachia, rural libraries, and regional identity that impact the formation of the research design, collection of data, and data analysis. In the last three sections, the researcher will present literature that suggests the importance of building regional identity for public libraries by examining the roles of the library as service provider and community developer; illustrates how Appalachian identities are cultivated through engagement with language, literature, education, and community; and

presents challenges to the importance of building regional identities in Appalachia.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

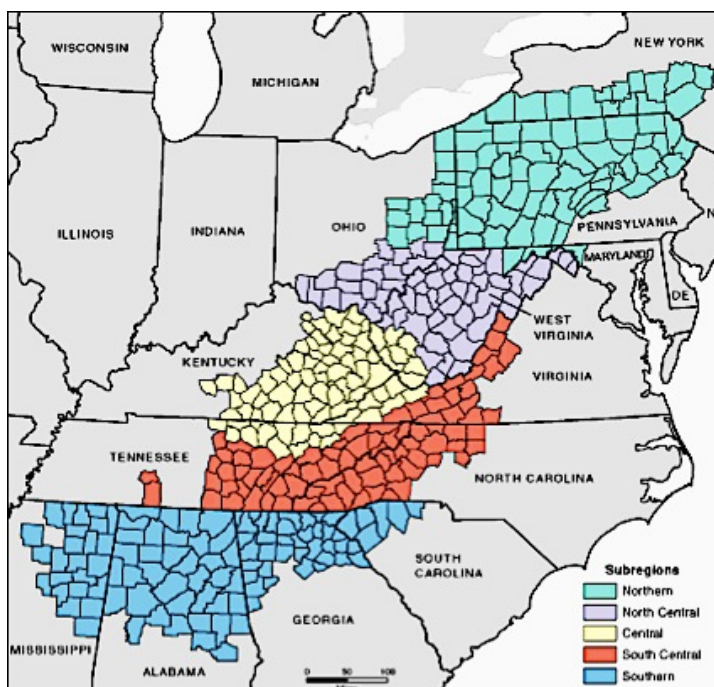
### **Defining Appalachia.**

Definitions of Appalachia abound, but three definitions are of particular interest to the present study. The first, and perhaps most widely adopted, definition comes from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), a regional economic development agency that was created by Congress in 1965 through a provision of the Appalachian Regional Development Act. The ARC (n.d.) defines Appalachia as the “205,000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states.” This broad and strictly geographic definition will be employed by the current study because it will allow a large initial sample of libraries to be included in the distribution of the survey instrument and because it avoids the more ambiguous boundaries found in cultural definitions of the region (Higgs, 1995). However, the scope and scale of the present study will be further restricted to the North Central, Central, and South Central subregions of Appalachia identified by the ARC (See Figure 1).

The second definition comes from AppLit, a project of Virginia’s Ferrum College that both creates and aggregates resources for use by teachers and others interested in Appalachian literature. AppLit (2012) defines Appalachia as the “mountainous regions of Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee, South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama; all of the mountain state of West Virginia; and the hilly region of southern Ohio.” This is a slightly narrower variation of the ARC’s geographic definition, but what is particularly interesting about the AppLit definition is the qualification that precedes it, wherein

AppLit admits that defining Appalachia “remains somewhat of an enigma” (2012). Although this study will be restricted to the ARC’s geographical definition, AppLit’s reticence in assigning a strict definition highlights the reality that building regional identity often hinges on the confluence of factors other than geographic area. However, it should be noted that the researcher does not subscribe to AppLit’s restrictions on the geological makeup of the Appalachian region to “mountainous” and “hilly” areas, preferring the more expansive geological perspective that includes the adjacent valleys and plateaus.

The third definition is the result of a study by Cooper, Knotts, and Elders (2011) that adapted a technique developed by sociologist John Shelton Reed for measuring loci of Southern identity. The researchers counted the number of businesses with Appalachia in their names to measure levels of affinity between certain geographic locations and Appalachian consciousness or identity. They use this data to speculate that the core area of Appalachian identity is “in Eastern Tennessee, Western North Carolina, Eastern Kentucky, Southern West Virginia, and Southwestern Virginia” (p. 469). This definition is included here for two reasons. First, the current study also uses markers as stand-ins for illustrating regional identity, where regional identity building activities performed in an institutional setting act as surrogates for internal, individual measurements of regional identity. Secondly, the geographic region that Cooper, Knotts, and Elders find to be most closely correlated with Appalachian identity coincides with the current study’s focus on Central Appalachia-as identified by the ARC-with the addition of southeastern Ohio to the aforementioned geographic locus.



**Figure 1. Subregions of Appalachia defined by the ARC, Appalachian Regional Commission, November 2009. The population of interest for this study is rural public libraries located in North Central, Central, and South Central Appalachia.**

### **Defining rural libraries.**

In a brief but pertinent article, Ivie (2009) discusses several accepted definitions for rural libraries, provides comparisons between them, and explores some of the shortcomings of each definition. He notes that definitions of rural are largely subjective and range from “demographic to psychological” interpretations (Ivie, 2009, para. 2). Therefore, it is important for library researchers to identify the most appropriate definition for their research based on the purpose of the research, whether the definition was established to further a political or social agenda, and how the data generated by use of a certain definition was collected. Ivie (2009) notes that the “government defines rural by exclusion: that which is not urban is rural” (para. 3), and he goes on to list the array of definitions used by the Census bureau, the Farmers Home Administration, and programs that offer community development block grants. Additionally, a 2013 research brief by the Institute of Museum and Library Services on small and rural libraries reckons at least

fifteen government definitions of rural, each designed to “address a different policy priority” (Swan, Grimes, & Owens, 2013, p. 2). The government approach of defining rurality by exclusion reinforces social and cultural assumptions that urbanity is normative, and because the current study attempts to address the marginalization of a region that has historically been defined by the government as “the other” (Banker, 2010; Foster & Hummel, 1997; Puckett, 2001), it is important to acknowledge that the definition of terms can create a bias that informs data collection methods and is perpetuated in the data itself. It is also relevant to note that the Institute of Museum and Library Services relies on a similar methodology for their Public Libraries Survey to classify rural locales into three categories based on distance from an urban cluster: rural, fringe; rural, distant; and rural, remote (Swan et al., 2013, p. 15).

The other definitions of primary interest to the current study are the two most commonly used within the field of information science. Both are population-based. Under the Library Services and Construction Act, rural libraries are defined as those serving communities of 10,000 or fewer. The second definition, used by the Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship (CSRL), identifies rural libraries as those with service areas of 25,000 or fewer (Ivie, 2009). Although population-based definitions offer a relatively unbiased method for assessing rurality, they tend to obscure nuances such as whether a small town is located in close proximity to a city or large suburb. The current study employs two definitions: the CSRL definition of libraries serving 25,000 or fewer and the IMLS definitions of rural. Although both definitions have limitations, the researcher hopes that using them in tandem produces a population that is representative of rural Central Appalachian libraries. Other reasons for choosing to use a combination of



these definitions are that their widespread use in the field of library science will help to make the current study easy to compare with others and easy to understand the terminology; that there is a larger initial sample from which to solicit participation; and that this data is readily available through IMLS's Public Libraries Survey statistics.

### **Defining Regional Identity.**

Adams (2009) points out that identity is “inherently a relational phenomenon” wherein “‘self’ is primarily defined in relation to ‘other’” (p. 316). Using this core concept, she constructs a deceptively simple definition for collective identity as a “reflexive self-understanding of group belonging” (Adams, 2009, p. 316). Reflexivity denotes the dynamic nature of identity as one group continually redefines itself in relation to other constantly changing groups. Self-understanding serves two functions: introducing insider agency into the construction of identity and rejecting the validity of categorization, which is applied to a group by external agents. Similarly, Paasi (2003) identifies regional identity as a process rather than a possession, and he describes the elements of its construction rather than offering a definition:

“Narratives of regional identity lean on miscellaneous elements: ideas on nature, landscape, the built environment, culture/ethnicity, dialects, economic success/recession, periphery/centre relations, marginalization, stereotypic images of a people/community, both of ‘us’ and ‘them’, actual/invented histories, utopias and diverging arguments on the identification of people.” (p. 477)

Paasi (2003) also introduces the importance of regional identity in “challenging hegemonic identity narratives” (p. 476), an assertion that echoed by Smith and Fisher, who write that “in this era of ruthless deracination called globalization, place attachments and the politics of place have become increasingly salient in collective mobilizations” (2012, p. 267). Sedlacek, Kurka, and Maier (2009) come closer to offering a true

definition of regional identity, but the initially simple components of regional consciousness and identity of a region are soon revealed to be only the top level categories of a complex hierarchy.

Ultimately, as Cooper, Knotts, and Elders (2011) find as they try to answer the simple question, “Where is Appalachia?” (p. 457), the simultaneously personal and collective nature of regional identity makes definition an iterative process that is refined each time a new measurement is applied and new data is collected. The current study does not attempt to directly measure regional identity but rather the types and number of activities that can be identified as providing an authentic representation of the Appalachian region, its cultures, and its people groups or a counterpoint to stereotypical representations of the region, its cultures, and its people groups. In addition, the researcher did not wish to limit participants’ perceptions of regional identity. Because of the exploratory nature of the study, it is more important to encourage participants to tell their own stories about what regional identity looks like in their libraries and in their communities than to impose restrictions that might result in a more standardized dataset.

### **Public Libraries as Service Providers and Community Developers**

In a 2003 article, Durrance and Fisher argue that the growing focus on evaluation creates an imperative for public libraries to ask what difference they make in their communities, for their employees, and for the profession as a whole. Although they applaud attempts to craft new mission and vision statements that concretize the library’s goals for serving their users as well as articulating methods for achieving those goals, they note that evaluation methods remain focused on institutional outcomes rather than attempting to measure the impact of library services on users. Durrance and Fisher

recommend that public libraries employ qualitative methods “that can be used to understand the complex interactions that shape phenomena of study including the impacts of libraries and librarians on society” (2003, p. 552). The current study will contribute to this effort by investigating how public libraries contribute to the development of regional identity in their communities and identifying factors that can help or harm these efforts.

Similar to Durrance and Fisher’s concern about the obsolescence of libraries, Johnson (2010) begins her study with a statement about the looming threats of the Internet and the economic recession to the long-term wellbeing of public libraries. Due to the position of social capital as an essential community resource that is positively correlated with a host of improvements in individual and community-wide quality of life improvements, Johnson speculates that “the role of the library as a contributor to the social capital of communities may be its most important role of all” (2010, p. 148). Johnson’s data suggests that physical library space may be especially important to low-income library users who do not have access to multiple locations for reading, meditating, and engaging with other members of the community (Johnson, 2010, p. 151). Moreover, there may be a “strong relationship between involvement in community activities and library use” (p. 154). Social capital is related to the phenomenon of regional identity because the former engenders increased levels of trust and involvement in a community—both of which are components of a strong regional identity. While Johnson attempts to establish a causal link between library usage and increases in social capital, the current exploratory study will try to discover how libraries contribute to the process of building regional identity, and using the results obtained from an institutional perspective, the researcher will turn the focus of a future study to the impact of these

regional identity building activities from the user's perspective.

Smith and Rowley (2012) explore the “application of digitisation in the context of public library local studies services” (p. 272), and they also highlight the importance of local history collections as a service to the community. Like the articles described above, Smith and Rowley self-consciously note that providing local studies services can enhance the profile of libraries by recasting them as networks of community knowledge rather than simple information providers (2012). They further assert that local studies collections allow people to locate and build connections with their families and communities through the discovery of genealogies and the recognition of shared histories (Smith & Rowley, 2012, pp. 273-274). The current study incorporates this assessment of the social importance of local history collections to inform the analysis of data pertaining to connections between collection development strategies and the promotion of regional identity.

In a survey of rural librarians, Flatley and Wyman (2009) find that 44% feel that their most important role is “helping people” (p. 27) and in the comments section, a few respondents suggested “building community” or “creating community” as other roles that should be added to the list of role choices (the choices were information provider, helping people, collecting and organizing library materials, promoting libraries and library services, and other). A question about what rural librarians like most about their jobs elicited similarly relevant results wherein 38% enjoyed “interacting with the community” and an additional 33% appreciated the “opportunity to make a difference in someone's life” (Flatley & Wyman, 2009, p. 29). They also articulated nearly universal agreement that they should be a “role model to young people” (96%) and that their libraries

contribute to “making life better in [their] community” (92%). This study illustrates why regional identity building activities may be as important for the fulfillment of library employees as for the wellbeing of library users. Additionally, Flatley and Wyman’s (2009) results indicate a shift in perception from the library as an information repository to the library as a community service provider, and this trend may be beneficial for the collection of data in the current study.

In a brief article on providing library service to urban Appalachians in Ohio, Shores (2009) advocates that libraries serving this “invisible minority” should “consider building collections, programs and services not only to serve this population but also to educate the public about Appalachian culture” (p. 17). Moreover, he writes that libraries should assess programs and collections for potentially offensive content and train staff to respond with cultural sensitivity to this special population. Although the current study is limited to a survey of rural libraries in the ARC defined region of Appalachia, it is important to recognize that regional identity often exists in geographically distant locales, especially in areas where Appalachian migrants have remained closely connected to their heritage because of discrimination against the group or other socioeconomic factors that perpetuate distinctions between Appalachians and other members of the community.

### **Cultivating Appalachian Identities Through Engagement with Language, Literature, Education, and Community**

House (2010), Houston (1997), Lyon (2013), and Shelby (2013) explore the importance of language and literature to the construction of a positive Appalachian regional identity. As Shelby (2013) writes in a poem that bemoans the vagaries of using spell check when writing “hillbilly poems”, “Now it wants to replace the homeplace/with just someplace. Is this the same spell/that changed proud to poor” (p. 245, lines 13-15).

The computerized spell check system stands in for the homogenizing effects of public education, the American melting pot, and globalization. Similarly, Lyon (2013) recounts her assumption as a beginning writer that “culture happens someplace else” and that “stories are more important in the metropolis than in the mountains” (p. 185-186). Through exposure to Appalachian literature, she begins to cultivate her own identity as part of a vibrant culture in a region that is not just homeplace but also “voiceplace”. Lyon hypothesizes that “if a person’s experience of the written voice confirms her ‘first voice’...then her growing literacy will be fed by strong cultural roots” (p. 187). In a lecture at Berea College, House (2010) substantiates the close association between language and identity. He writes that “all of my life, I have been judged based on where I am from. You cannot see my ethnicity on my skin, but you can hear it. I carry it on my tongue” (p. 3). House does not express bitterness about being stereotyped, but he does implore his audience to serve and to give something back to the place and people that are part of them, noting that his own writing is one way that he answers that charge. Houston explicitly links the “power of story” with a “sense of belonging, of being a part of something larger than we are” (1997, p. 382). She also writes about claiming oral history, an element of Appalachian culture that is often used as a stereotype, as an essential component of her identity.

These four sources describe processes of building regional identity wherein a stereotypical characteristic of Appalachians is reclaimed, internalized, and becomes part of a positive performance of regional identity through story or speech and usually a combination of the two. At least in the cases of House and Lyon, it wasn’t until they were adults that they were exposed to their Appalachian literary heritage, and the experience

transformed their perspectives of who they were and who they could be. This is another area in which public libraries are poised to make a significant contribution to regional identity building in their communities. Especially in the areas of collection development and programming, libraries can help to mitigate the effects of children's lack of exposure to culturally relevant materials in traditional educational settings and contribute to recognition or rediscovery of regional identity for adults in their communities. The present study hopes to contribute to knowledge about the feasibility and relative importance of providing these types of services to rural communities in Central Appalachia.

### **Challenges to the Importance of Regional Identity**

At first glance, globalization and the concept of the global village seem to contradict the value of regional studies, and some Appalachian scholars have expressed concern that studying the Appalachian region and cultivating regional identity may become "a retreat to elemental group identity that can lock us into a one-sided, hence reified and exaggerated, sense of Otherness" (Reid, 2005, p. 164). Even on a local scale, an essentialist understanding of Appalachian identity as an insiders/outside binary can and "has led us to gloss over issues of difference around race, class, and power within the region" (Gaventa, 2002, p. 87) and deny the reality that regional identity is only one of many identities an individual possesses at a given time. Both scholars argue that the future of Appalachian studies must look outward as well as inward and must begin to address and embrace similarities of experience between Appalachians and other people groups who have been stereotyped and marginalized for the benefit of government policies and extractive industries. However, whereas Reid finds Appalachian identity to

be problematic at its core and in many of its manifestations, especially that which he describes as a “vapid communitarian version of regional culture that neglects political and economic issues” (2005, p. 167-168), Gaventa (2002) asserts his belief that it is possible to “locate ourselves as both Appalachian and global citizens” (p. 90). In the introduction to *Appalachia in the Classroom* (2013), Burriss eloquently addresses this tension between global and local when she writes that “students acquire cultural awareness and sensitivity both particular to Appalachia and yet transcendent of it, enabling them to apply their Appalachian Studies knowledge to other cultures throughout the world” (p. xiii). In fact, from the very first essay in this anthology, wherein Satterwhite shares her pedagogy for unsettling both positive and negative myths of a monolithic Appalachia in the college classroom, it is clear that scholars and educators are equipping students with critical skills that will serve them beyond the realm of Appalachian studies and beyond the classroom.

### **Summary**

While studies of regional identity building activities in public libraries remain elusive, a review of the library literature supports this study’s focus on expanded social and cultural roles for the public library as a community service organization. Researchers also suggest that librarians perceive themselves not only as information providers but as community leaders who support education, industry, and cultural heritage through library resources and services. Perspectives from the discipline of Appalachian studies further support the need to celebrate unity and diversity within communities and regions as well as between them, often citing literature as the catalyst in the process of creating individual and collective Appalachian identities.



## **Methodology**

### **Participants and Setting**

The survey population was determined using publicly available data from IMLS's 2011 Public Library Survey in combination with the ARC's designation of Appalachia's geographic subregions. Using these sources, 238 public libraries were identified for inclusion based on their conformity to the definitions of 'Appalachian' and 'rural' that inform the scope of this study such that all libraries are located in Central Appalachia and are either 1) designated by IMLS as rural or 2) serving a population of 25,000 or fewer. Among this population of interest, 138 libraries fit both criteria for rurality, 77 libraries fit only the latter criterion, and 23 fit only the former. At one of these libraries, the director had recently resigned and no one had yet been appointed to an interim position. No suitable contact could be determined, and this library was not included in the solicitation for survey participation. Two other libraries are supervised by the same director, and although survey links were generated for both libraries, the director used a single survey link to submit responses concerning both libraries. Therefore, the final survey population was composed of 236 library directors representing 237 rural libraries in Central Appalachia. The service population of these libraries ranges from 448 to 170,891.

Of the 236 survey links delivered via the Qualtrics mailer and the researcher's personal email account, 86 (36%) were submitted. Because the survey employed Qualtrics' skip logic and display logic features to customize the survey based on participants' responses, it is difficult to assign validity to responses based on the number of participants who completed all questions. Of the questions that were displayed to all

participants, completion rates range from 93% to 100% for closed-ended questions with the low figure coming from the final survey question that asked whether participants would be willing to be contacted for an interview. It could be reasonably argued that the six participants who declined to answer simply did not wish to be interviewed. The only open-ended question that was displayed to all participants had the lowest response rate at 67%, but this question was located near the end of the survey in the classification questions section. This question asked participants to finish the sentence “This library is unique because...”, and while the researcher included this question in the survey in order to give respondents a forum to identify their perceptions of their library apart from the central research focus of library services that focus on the Appalachian region, lack of a complete response set does not markedly diminish overall validity.

Although library directors would not typically be identified as a vulnerable research population, the researcher has tried to remain cognizant of the possibility that many members of this study’s population of interest may object to their inclusion because they do not believe that their community is rural or Appalachian or because they have experienced or witnessed the negative effects of inaccurate representations of the region and its people. By soliciting qualitative responses in equal measure with questions designed to collect quantitative data and by allowing participants to express their individual perceptions of the types of programs, collection resources, and outreach activities that could be identified as “focusing on the Appalachian region”, the researcher sought to engage participants in the ongoing construction of what Appalachia means and what culturally-relevant library services should look like.

## **Research Design**

Choices about research design were informed by the researcher's beliefs that the cultivation of Appalachian identity is important in personal, local, national, and international spheres and that public libraries are uniquely equipped to participate in building Appalachian identity in their communities-as well as the lack of literature pertaining to relevant activities in Appalachian public libraries in particular and the role of the public library in identity formation in general. In accordance with these beliefs and observations from the literature, this two-phase, sequential mixed methods research study employs a pragmatic worldview that emphasizes postmodern imperatives for social justice and incorporates elements of an advocacy worldview (Creswell, 2009, pp. 9 & 17).

As Creswell indicates, a mixed methods approach is well suited to pragmatic or problem-based social sciences research because it allows the researcher to explore the problem and its possible solutions without committing to one philosophy or one truth (2009, pp. 10-11). The pragmatic and advocacy worldviews encourage the researcher to ground inquiry and results in a social and political context, and the advocacy worldview goes a step further by insisting that research ought to address "issues such as empowerment, inequality, oppression, domination, and alienation" as they relate to the population of interest in order to produce results that may benefit that population (Creswell, 2009, p. 9). By attempting to identify and understand how public libraries in rural Central Appalachia value and engage in regional identity building activities through the provision of library services, this exploratory study seeks to benefit library professionals by aggregating and providing access to the results of a survey and interviews conducted with their peers. Indirectly, the results of this study may impact

residents of rural Central Appalachia by equipping the librarians in their communities with information about providing culturally relevant library services.

## **Research Methods**

### **Survey.**

A survey instrument was used to gather quantitative and qualitative data from the directors of rural public libraries in Central Appalachia about programs, collection development activities, and outreach activities that focus on the Appalachian region. Due to the specificity of the topic, the researcher constructed a unique survey instrument to be distributed to all members of the target population. As discussed in Wildemuth (2009, p. 258), the survey is composed of three major sections: an introduction section that also serves to address the potential for contested definitions of Appalachia and rural; a substantive questions section that uses open-ended and closed-ended questions to discover the extent to which these public libraries focus on the Appalachian region in programming, collection development, and outreach; and a classification questions section that attempts to contextualize participant responses based on the amount of time they have lived in Appalachia and how many years they have worked at their library. The survey was designed and distributed using Qualtrics survey software (see Appendix A for complete survey instrument).

### **Interviews.**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted via email and telephone with six of the library directors who participated in the survey and indicated that they would be willing to be contacted for a more in-depth interview. The semi-structured interview type was chosen because an unstructured interview did not promise to yield enough focused

data but a structured interview did not adequately account for the probability that participants “understand the world in varying ways” (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 233). The purpose of these interviews was to better understand the challenges experienced by rural libraries that seek to promote the construction of regional identity through the provision of core library services. In addition, these interviews allowed participants to articulate their perceptions of the role of the public library and its value to their local communities in rural Central Appalachia.

## **Data Collection**

### **Pre-survey invitation.**

Three days prior to distribution of the survey, a solicitation email (See Appendix B) was sent to each member of the survey population via the researcher’s personal email account. Although the Qualtrics mailer is capable of handling mass distribution of unique survey links, reminder emails, and thank you emails, it does not support contact with participants prior to survey activation. Moreover, the researcher thought it would be prudent to test the validity of participants’ email addresses so as to lessen the probability of bouncebacks during the survey distribution. The solicitation email introduced the researcher’s personal and professional interest in the topic, alerted participants that they would be receiving a survey link in a separate email, requested their participation, and informed them that participation was voluntary and that their information would remain confidential. This initial contact resulted in 24 responses, most of which communicated a simple willingness to participate in the survey. A few of the respondents also indicated their pride in their Appalachian heritage and the importance of rural libraries.

**Survey distribution.**

On February 26, the Qualtrics mailer was used to distribute 236 unique survey links to library directors of rural public libraries in Central Appalachia. These links were embedded in an email invitation (see Appendix C) with a personalized salutation that reiterated the voluntary nature of participation and the researcher's commitment to maintaining confidentiality of contact information and collected data. The email also indicated the closing date of the survey. Within 30 minutes, Qualtrics identified 76 bouncebacks, and these survey links were redelivered via the researcher's personal email account. The Qualtrics mailer was set up to deliver personalized thank you emails (see Appendix D) to participants upon completion of the survey. On March 11, the researcher's personal email account was used to send 189 survey reminders to participants who had not activated their survey link or had started but not submitted a survey response. This reminder email (see Appendix E) included the survey link, repeated the statement on voluntary participation and data confidentiality, and advised participants of the survey's closing date. The survey closed on March 20. In accordance with Wildemuth (2009), all communications between the researcher and participants concerning the survey were personalized and "written in such a way as to build participant interest in the research enterprise" (p. 261). However, due to time constraints, the five-contact framework was abbreviated to a three-contact framework composed of the pre-survey invitation email, initial survey distribution email, and reminder email (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 361).

**Interview invitation.**

The final survey question asked participants whether they would "be willing to be contacted for an interview to further discuss the role of public libraries in building

regional identity in rural Central Appalachia?” Upon entering an affirmative response, the participant would be prompted to enter contact information. By March 10, twenty-five respondents (53%) had agreed to be contacted for an interview. From this list, two respondents were randomly selected from each Central Appalachian subregion-North Central, Central, and South Central-for a total of six interview candidates. Personalized emails (see Appendix F) were distributed via the researcher’s personal email account to verify these candidates’ willingness to participate in an interview and to identify their preferred interview method: email, telephone, or video chat. Five candidates indicated their preference for email interviews due to unpredictable schedules. One participant responded to the email by telephone, and the interview was conducted at that time. On March 24, the researcher identified five more interview candidates from the final pool of 40 survey respondents who indicated their willingness to participate in an interview. The purpose for this second sampling was twofold: to increase the collective amount of interview data and to include at least one library director from each state in the interview stage. One candidate chose to conduct the interview via email, and one preferred a telephone interview.

### **Interview.**

Because the interview guide (see Appendix G) was based on preliminary analysis of survey responses, all of the questions are classified as either essential-those that address the central research focus-or probing-those that ask the respondent to elaborate on an answer to a previous question (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 234). On March 13, personalized emails containing the interview questions were distributed to the five initial interviewees via the researcher’s personal email account. The interview questions were

attached to the email in a separate document as well as appended to the end of the email to account for the possibility that the attachment could be blocked by recipients' email filters. Three interviewees returned their answers in the body of an email. One interview took place on March 13 via telephone. This interview began at 11:58 a.m. and lasted 37 minutes. Because this interview occurred impromptu, it could be described as more unstructured than the email interviews. The researcher took detailed written notes during the interview; the interview was not recorded. From the second cohort of interview candidates, one returned the interview responses via email on March 25, and a 17-minute telephone interview was conducted with another library director and an adult services librarian on March 27. As with the previous telephone interview, the researcher took detailed written notes but did not record the interview.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Characteristics of Represented Libraries**

As mentioned above, population of service area and locale data from IMLS's 2011 Public Libraries Survey (PLS) and subregions of Appalachia defined by the ARC were used to determine the population of interest for inclusion in this study. Additional data from the PLS, the ARC, and the researcher's own data will be combined in this section to provide a character sketch of the public libraries represented in the results of the survey. The 86 respondents represent libraries with service populations ranging from 467 to 77,428 with a median population of 11,871. Forty-five libraries conform to both definitions of 'rural' (service populations under 25,000 and defined by IMLS as rural based on distance from an urbanized area or urban cluster) with 75 libraries fitting only the population-based definition and 56 libraries fitting only the IMLS definition. Then,



the ARC's definition of Central Appalachia was used to obtain the final pool of study participants. For the purposes of this study, Central Appalachia is made up of the ARC defined subregions of North Central Appalachia composed of portions of Ohio and West Virginia; Central Appalachia composed of portions of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia; and South Central Appalachia composed of portions of North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Of the libraries represented in the survey results, 40% (n=34) are located in the North Central subregion, 32% (n=28) are located in the Central subregion, and 28% (n=24) are located in the South Central subregion. All six states and 75 counties are represented (see Table 1 for full state-level results).

<b>STATE</b>	<b>ELIGIBLE PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>RATE OF PARTICIPATION</b>	<b>OVERALL % PARTICIPANTS</b>
<b>KENTUCKY</b>	41	20	49%	23.2%
<b>NORTH CAROLINA</b>	7	3	43%	3.5%
<b>OHIO</b>	16	7	44%	8.1%
<b>TENNESSEE</b>	82	22	27%	25.6%
<b>VIRGINIA</b>	10	3	30%	3.5%
<b>WEST VIRGINIA</b>	80	31	39%	36.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*The number of primary library outlets varies considerably between states, with some states preferring a consortium model for library service to small and rural areas and others encouraging the establishment of independent county and municipal libraries.

In 2011, these libraries employed between 0.3 and 41.43 staff members with a median of 3.525 and their total budgets varied from \$9,501 to \$3,497,913 with a median of \$172,927. They circulated between 2001 and 623,547 items, answered between 10 and 83,901 reference questions, and recorded between 1,250 and 357,396 visitors. As Swan, Grimes, and Owens (2013) note in the IMLS research brief on rural and small libraries, there is "wide variability across rural libraries" especially with regard to revenue (p. 6).

## **Participant Demographics**

The primary focus of this study is on public library activities and library directors' perceptions of the importance of regional identity building to the libraries they represent and the communities those libraries serve. However, the researcher was also interested in whether participants' number of years of service at their libraries or the length of time they lived in Appalachia affects their perceptions of the value of supporting regional identity building through library services. Three questions specifically sought participants' opinions on the value of offering programs and participating in outreach activities that focus on the Appalachian region. The results from these questions do not conclusively indicate differences in perception of value based on either of these demographic factors.

The results indicate that library directors in rural Central Appalachia reflect the diversity of the region as a whole with regard to the length of time they have lived in Appalachia. As several participants mentioned in the course of the survey and interviews, their communities are increasingly diverse with a core of longtime residents complemented by retirees and young families who have relocated. All but one survey participant (99%, n=85) answered the question concerning length of time they have lived in Appalachia, with half (49%) responding that they have lived in Appalachia "all their lives" or "since childhood". The remaining respondents are distributed across the other categories (See Table 2). Likewise, 85 participants also answered the question concerning number of years of library service, and the respondents were distributed fairly evenly between the five specified ranges (See Table 3). While over half of participants had worked in their libraries for more than 10 years, one fifth are relative newcomers with

between 1-5 years of service. These results reflect both stability and vitality in the workforce.

<b>Table 2. Length of Time Participants Lived in Appalachia</b>		
<b>ANSWER</b>	<b>RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>All my life</b>	40	47.0%
<b>Since I was a child</b>	2	2.4%
<b>Since I became an adult</b>	14	16.5%
<b>Since I have been employed at this library</b>	13	15.3%
<b>On and off throughout my life</b>	10	11.8%
<b>I have never thought about whether I lived in Appalachia or not</b>	6	7.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100%</b>

The researcher did not ask participants to disclose their highest level of educational attainment because this factor was not considered to be central to the purposes of the study. Also, because this is a topic of some contention in the library community, the researcher decided not to include a question that might alienate any members of the population of interest. However, further research may benefit from including this demographic statistic due to the ease of comparison with large-scale public library surveys, such as those conducted by IMLS, that generally include this measure in their questions.

<b>Table 3. Number of Years Participants Worked at Their Libraries</b>		
<b>ANSWER</b>	<b>RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>1-5 years</b>	18	21.2%
<b>6-10 years</b>	19	22.35%
<b>11-15 years</b>	19	22.35%
<b>16-20 years</b>	9	10.6%
<b>More than 20 years</b>	20	23.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **Contested Definitions of Appalachia and Rurality**

The population of interest for this study was determined on the basis of contested definitions that have traditionally been formulated and administered by exterior entities.

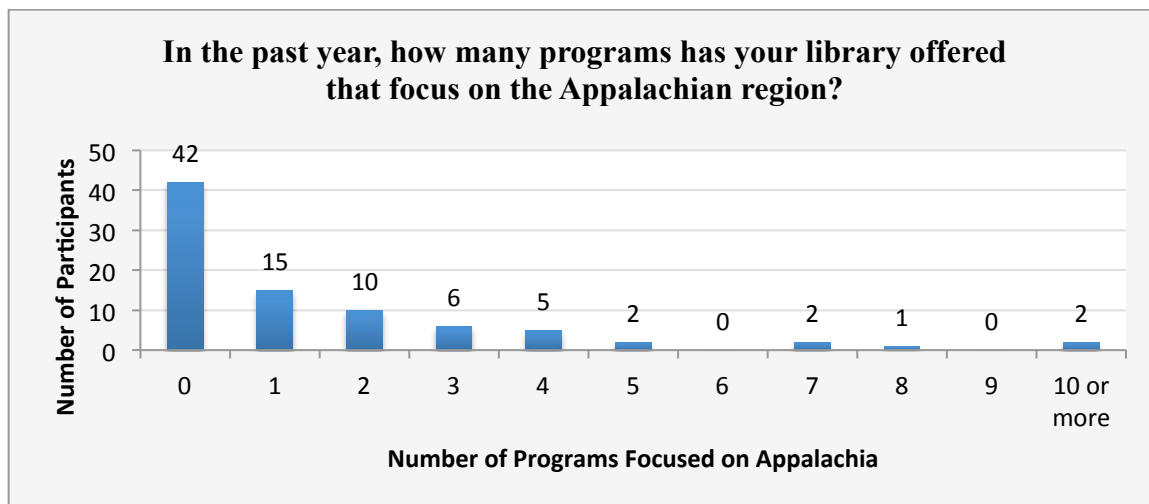
In an effort to acknowledge this bias and allow survey participants to agree or disagree with their rural, Appalachian designation, the researcher asked respondents whether they would describe their library's service area as 1) part of the Appalachian region and 2) primarily rural. All participants (n=86) answered these two questions. Over 90% (n=79) of respondents would describe their service area as Appalachian with 3% (n=3) not identifying as Appalachian and another 5% (n=4) answering that they are not sure whether their service area ought to be described as Appalachian. With regard to whether their library's service area is rural, 90% (n=77) agreed, 8% (n=7) disagreed, and 2% (n=2) were not sure. Of course, it is possible that participants' prior knowledge that the study would focus on rural, Appalachian public libraries motivated those who identify strongly with these characteristics to participate in greater numbers than those who do not. Additionally, those who do not identify their service area as rural or Appalachian may have eschewed participation because they believed their inclusion in the survey invitation was a mistake and that their responses would contaminate the data. The researcher received two responses to the pre-survey solicitation email to this effect; the directors indicated that they would be glad to help with the project but feared they would not be the best candidates for inclusion because their libraries are not located in Appalachia. However, the results seem to indicate that most respondents self-identify as library service providers in rural, Appalachian areas.

## **Presence, Absence, and Nature of Regional Identity Building Activities**

### **Programming.**

When survey participants were asked how many programs their library offered in the past year that focused on the Appalachian region, the 85 responses were divided

nearly in the middle with 51% (n=43) having offered at least one program and 49% (n=42) having offered none.



**Figure 2. Participants' responses to the number of Appalachian focused programs held at their library in the past year.**

Of those participants who had held programs focused on the Appalachian region, over half had held either one (35%, n=15) or two (23%, n=10) programs (see Figure 2 for full results). Many were special, one-time programs designed for a variety of audiences—adults, teens, children, all ages—and while many programs resulted from in-house expertise, many also benefitted from partnerships with another community service organization, an educational institution, another library, a business, or another cultural heritage organization. Participants were also invited to describe the content of one or more of these programs. The researcher determined the following categories from the 37 descriptions of program content. These categories are listed in descending order by number of mentions:

- local and regional history (n=9)
- performance and oral tradition (n=7)
- literature and local authors (n=7)
- food and gardening (n=4)



The top three reasons were lack of funds (24%, n=10), lack of staff time (24%, n=10), and lack of community interest (21%, n=9). As noted in Swan, Grimes, Owens (2013), diminishing revenue and decreases in staffing are two of the major concerns of rural and small libraries across the nation so it is not surprising that lack of funds and lack of staff time figure heavily in participants' programming decisions. Given the purpose of this study, it is noteworthy that roughly one-fifth of respondents have not held a program due to lack of community interest, but this may also indicate an area for further research. Why isn't the community interested? Is it because they don't know or believe that they live in Appalachia, or they don't know that the library is capable of offering programs that focus on the Appalachian region, or they just plainly aren't interested?

The remaining participants cited other priorities for programming (14%, n=6), other local organizations fulfill this role (10%, n=4), moving into a new facility disrupted programming, and a new director hoping to offer Appalachian programs in the near future. Participants were encouraged to identify all auxiliary factors that prevented them from offering Appalachian-focused programs in the past year. Lack of staff time topped this list of additional barriers with 19 of the 79 total responses followed by lack of funds with 18; other priorities for programming with 16 votes; lack of community interest with 13; other local organizations fulfill this role with 10; and under the selection for "other", one response was entered for each of the following: lack of staff awareness of region's significance, "had not considered this as a program", and "territorialness: people living in one community often will not attend programs at a library in another".

Dependent on whether participants had or had not offered Appalachian-focused programs, they were also asked whether they would consider doing a similar program

again or whether they would consider doing an Appalachian-focused program in the future. Over 85% of respondents to both questions answered that they would be interested in offering programs with an Appalachian focus in the future.

Of those participants whose libraries had held such a program in the past year, 88% (n=36) would be interested in holding another, but 12% (n=5) would not due to lack of participation or dubious program quality. Reasons given for interest in holding future programs included educational and entertainment value, high levels of interest and participation, positive feedback from attendees, importance of mountain heritage, and opportunity to expose children to regional culture.

Among participants whose libraries had not held such a program in the past year, 86% (n=31) would be interested in holding one in the future. However, 14% (n=5) would not be interested based on the following factors: the library is only open part time; there are too many other things to do; or there is a lack of interest in the topic. Participants who would be interested in offering Appalachian-focused programs in the future enumerated reasons such as relevance of regional programming, opportunity to engage with more members of the community, and opportunity to diversify programming options.

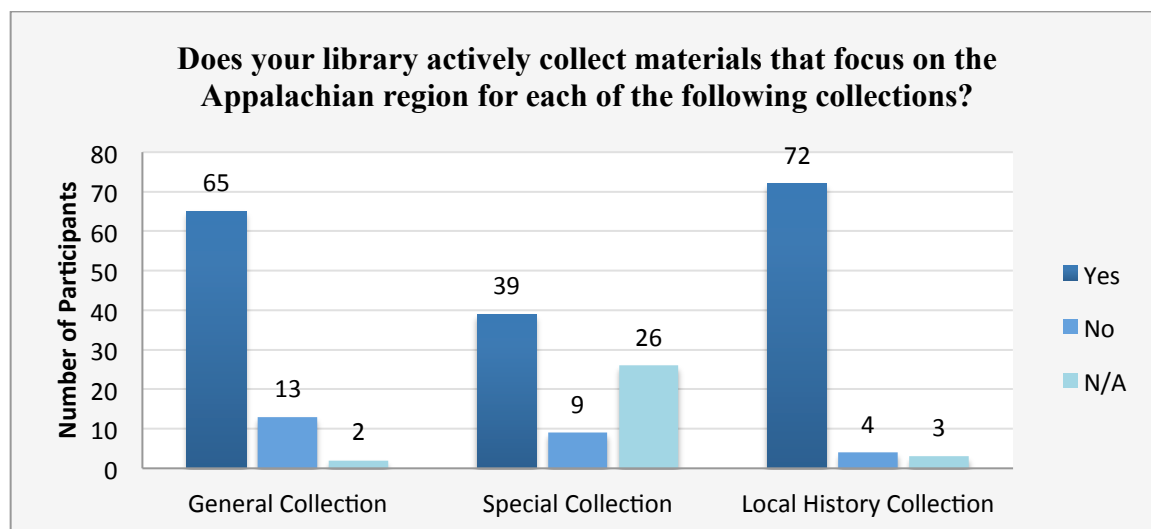
The researcher interprets these results as preliminary evidence that programs promoting regional identity are occurring at many rural libraries in Central Appalachia and that many more libraries would be interested in offering region specific programming if barriers such as funding and staffing are overcome. Moreover, the variety of programs offered and participants' willingness to share information about them indicates that despite the lack of published literature on this particular topic, rural public libraries in



Central Appalachia are responding to the needs of their communities by providing both traditional and innovative programming, often with a focus on local or regional concerns.

### Collection development.

The next set of survey questions asked participants whether their libraries “actively collect materials that focus on the Appalachian region” for their general collections, special collections, and local history collections (see Table 4 for results). With the exception of special collections (53%), the overwhelming majority of respondents do actively collect regional materials for their general (81%) and local history (91%) collections. Respondents who collect Appalachian materials for any of these collections were further asked to describe how they find, obtain, and promote these materials to their patrons. Those who do not collect materials for at least one type of collection were asked to give primary and auxiliary reasons that prevent them from doing so.



**Figure 4. Participant responses to whether their libraries actively collect Appalachian materials.**

The questions concerning promotion and identification and acquisition of Appalachian-focused materials garnered 68 and 71 responses, respectively. Reported methods for promoting materials within the library may be divided into seven categories.

Displays are the most popular promotional tool with 23 respondents describing displays that highlight local and regional concerns and Appalachian authors. Physical and intellectual organization of materials plays a role in three of the response categories. Many participants noted that Appalachian or local or genealogical materials are located in a special room or section of the library (n=18), three respondents affix distinguishing labels to these materials, and two respondents support discovery and use of their Appalachian materials through specialized cataloguing procedures. Fifteen responses indicate that reader's advisory and reference services are important methods of promotion, and programming (n=6) and library tours (n=1) round out the response categories for promoting Appalachian materials within the library. Promotion of region-specific materials outside the library is conducted through the following communication outlets: local newspaper (n=6), library website (n=4), library newsletter (n=3), brochures and flyers (n=3), radio, library social media accounts (n=2), and community forums (n=1).

Many of these tools are standard marketing and promotional methods used to good effect to highlight any type of library materials. Employing at least two or three—many respondents listed four or five methods—demonstrates that libraries value their Appalachian and regional materials, and based on many responses throughout the study that indicate the importance of providing library services aligned with community interests, promotion of these materials also suggests significant interest from patrons. Arguably, when local or regional or Appalachian materials are promoted, especially when the materials are gathered into a single location as a collection or identified with labels, libraries are reflecting the importance of these materials to community identity,

just as a large collection of cookbooks or frequent displays of mystery novels might indicate that many members of the community enjoy cooking and are rabid mystery fans.

Respondents also described the methods they use to identify and obtain Appalachian-focused materials. Of these descriptions, six methods combine identification and acquisition, six methods are used for identification only, and one method only pertains to acquisition. Participants employ the following six methods for purposes of both finding and obtaining Appalachian-focused materials, listed in descending order by number of instances found in responses: local bookstores and publishers (n=10), publisher and vendor catalogues (n=7), university presses (n=7), conferences and festivals (n=4), commercial sources such as eBay and Amazon (n=2), and through collective determination (n=2). It is significant but perhaps unsurprising that local resources are consulted more often than well-established avenues such as library vendors. In addition, university presses rank fairly high on the list considering that academia is the traditional audience for many of their publications, but given the continued growth of Appalachian studies as a multidisciplinary academic discipline, libraries are likely to find a variety of titles to suit their patrons. The six methods used solely for locating these materials are likewise listed in descending order by number of mentions by participants: patron requests (n=10); promotions by authors and publishers (n=9); word of mouth, including recommendations from colleagues (n=8); professional review sources (n=7); newspaper articles (n=5); and via the Internet (n=2). Again, the results suggest that community interest is a main driver of collection development decisions with regard to materials about Appalachia. The sole category focusing on just on methods of acquisition

is donations, with five participants indicating that they obtain local history materials and older book titles through donations.

Participants whose libraries do not collect Appalachian materials for at least one of these collections identified a primary reason for this omission from among the following options: lack of quality materials, lack of affordable materials, lack of community interest, other organizations fulfill this need, or other priorities for collection development. Forty-five percent of respondents (n=14) to this question cited other priorities for collection development as their primary reason, followed by 26% (n=8) who said other organizations fulfill this need in their communities, 13% (n=4) pointed to lack of community interest, another 13% (n=4) noted the lack of affordable materials, and 3% (n=1) indicated a lack of quality materials. When asked to name additional reasons 12 more respondents listed other priorities for collection development, lack of community interest and lack of affordable materials were each selected by 6 respondents as secondary reasons, lack of quality materials received four more mentions, and two additional respondents noted that other organizations fulfill this need. These results reflect that public libraries in rural Central Appalachia must equitably distribute a limited amount of revenue to ensure that they are serving as many community needs as possible. Oftentimes the presence of organizations providing complementary information services may discourage public libraries from duplicating materials and services, but this could become an opportunity for like-minded organizations to collaborate for the benefit of the community.

**Outreach.**

The final category of public library services addressed in the survey was community outreach. Respondents were asked whether their library participates in Appalachian-focused events held by other community organizations. If they answered “yes” participants were asked to describe one or more of these events, and if they answered no participants were asked to select primary and auxiliary reasons for their library’s lack of participation and whether they would be interested in participating in Appalachian-focused community events in the future. Of the 83 responses to the initial question concerning participation, 39% (n=32) do participate in Appalachian-focused community events while 61% (n=51) do not, making participation in outreach activities the only category in which fewer than half of respondents answered affirmatively.

Forty-seven percent of respondents cited the absence of Appalachian-focused community events as the primary reason that their library does not participate in such events. Other primary reasons were that the library has not been invited to participate (16%, n=8); staff are not available to represent the library (16%, n=8); or the library has other priorities for community outreach (12%, n=6). Five respondents selected “other” as the primary reason with two respondents pointing to a lack of funding, one noting that all of the above reasons are primary reasons for lack of participation, one noting that the “previous director did not make community outreach a priority”, and one identifying a difference between events and projects, the latter being more prevalent in their community. This last response indicates a failing on the part of the researcher to allow for possible differences in local terminology. In response to the question concerning auxiliary reasons for lack of participation in Appalachian-focused events, lack of staff to represent the library received the most mentions (n=21) with the library not being invited

to participate as a close second with 18 votes. Thirteen participants noted the absence of such events in the community (n=13) and other priorities for community outreach (n=12) as other auxiliary reasons. Under the entry for “other”, one participant answered that “it’s not really clear how the library could participate” and another noted that the library usually supports local festivals by hosting displays rather than participating in events. Again, this last response indicates that the researcher’s use of the term “events” may have been problematic for some respondents; a more encompassing term may have yielded more a more positive outcome for the category of community outreach.

Despite these barriers, when participants who had not previously participated in Appalachian-focused outreach were asked “would your library be interested in participating in such events?”, 77% (n=37) responded that they would. Participants were also asked to briefly explain their answer, and unlike the responses to a similar question about programming wherein the respondents who chose to elaborate seemed enthusiastic about the possibility of providing Appalachian-focused programs, the responses concerning future outreach activities are prefaced with contingencies. It is important to note that unlike a similar question about programming, the question itself did not include the caveat of “if these barriers were removed”. In part, the decision to exclude this phrase was due to the fact that the library has little control over whether such events are held in the community, but this decision may have influenced the tone of participants’ explanations.

Respondents answered that they would be interested in participating if staff were available (n=2), if the community expressed interest (n=2), and if such events were held. Furthermore, three respondents annotated their “yes” answer with “depending on the



programs hosted by universities (n=2). Specific activities and programs offered by libraries at these types of events include book talks, storytelling, informational booths, puppet shows, serving refreshments, hosting workshops, and sponsoring writing contests.

Although the survey results pertaining to outreach provide fewer instances of public libraries offering regional identity building activities, it is evident that quite a few libraries are creatively engaging with their communities outside the physical space of the library. In a joint interview with a library director and adult services librarian, they noted that because their library meeting room is small, they do a lot of library programs out in the community in addition to participating in community events held by other organizations and partnering with local museums to host events (personal communication, March 27, 2014). This might suggest an area for further research, in which a more nuanced qualitative study might be more effective at identifying overlap in library services.

### **Library Directors' Beliefs Concerning the Role of the Public Library in Building Regional Identity**

Although the primary purpose of this exploratory study is to identify the extent to which public libraries in rural Central Appalachia are engaging in regional identity building activities, it is also important to understand whether this topic is important to library administrators who serve communities throughout the region both for establishing the usefulness of the results and guiding future research. Results supporting this secondary purpose are drawn primarily from six interviews conducted with library directors who volunteered their participation through the survey. However, some pre-survey communications between the researcher and members of the survey population will augment information gathered from the interviews. The researcher acknowledges the



difficulty of generalizing the results of these six interviews based on the size of the population of interest, but every effort was made to include interviewees from the three, targeted subregions of Appalachia and each state within these subregions as well as those who represent libraries with varying service populations and degrees of rurality.

Interview participants represent all three subregions of Central Appalachia and five states (KY, OH, TN, VA, WV). Three of their libraries are rural by both definitions used in this study, one is rural based on IMLS's locale code alone, and two are rural because their service population is below 25,000. Number of full time staff ranges from 0.75 to 33.75, and unduplicated service populations vary between 3,185 and 61,275. Interviews were conducted and responses received between March 13 and March 27.

Interviewees who submitted their responses via email were asked, "Do you think that your library could or should play a role in building Appalachian identity in your community?" One respondent answered with a simple yes (personal communication, March 24, 2014). Others combined this question and another that asked whether building Appalachian identity is "an important consideration given all the other things that your community needs the library to provide". Another noted pragmatically that while other priorities would continue to take precedence, building Appalachian identity is important as well (personal communication, March 13, 2014) within the library. Similarly, one email respondent noted the needs for computer access and support for literacy but acknowledged the "value of having [regional identity building] as a part of the library's mission. Regional identity can and should be a source of pride for our community" (personal communication, March 25, 2014). Later in the interview, when participants were asked whether the survey made them think of any other information that would be

relevant, this interviewee responded that “I am so very glad you have contacted me with this survey. I now look at our special section [of local materials] with new eyes and look forward to developing a deeper vision for what this area can provide to our community” (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

A fourth respondent wove the importance of celebrating local heritage together with the library’s role in providing services that expose the community to other cultures and ideas, writing that

“I think our community has a strong sense of our Appalachian identity, and a proper pride in it. It is one of the factors that guides our selection of materials and programming. I believe it is a very important consideration. On the other hand, we try to offer our patrons exposure to other cultures even as we celebrate our own.” (personal communication, March 17, 2014)

Likewise, one of the telephone interviewees noted the need for balancing the needs and interests of longtime residents with the needs presented by an influx of more affluent residents living in nearby resort communities wherein “people [who are longtime residents] feel very strongly about who they are” but also feel that they are being ignored in favor of the newcomers. The interviewee attributed this defensiveness to the area’s coal mining history; coal companies took the community’s resources, wealth, and voice. This library director—also a recent transplant—strives to include a variety of community members in any large library decisions but also says that “sometimes you have to leave something behind to move forward...my grandmother couldn’t read or write, and I have a master’s degree” (personal communication, March 13, 2014). In the other telephone interview the participants didn’t discuss the cultural importance of promoting regional identity, but its importance is suggested by the \$10,000 budget line item their library designates for delivering programs and events in partnership with local museums. Many

of these focus on local history and the river that has figured prominently in the area's development.

In response to the pre-survey solicitation email, the researcher received several emails that illustrate the personal nature of participants' dedication to Appalachian heritage and their eagerness to share their interest with others. Below is a sampling of these personal notes:

- "I have always been proud of my heritage and the area where I was born and raised...I will be happy to participate in your survey."
- "I would be glad to help you in any way I can. Libraries are so important in rural WV and I appreciate the fact that you have decided to write about this topic."
- "The Appalachian area is a unique place and contains personalities you will find no place else. Similar, maybe, but not like here. I grew up in the Smoky Mountains and it has mysteriously seeped into my essence."
- "As a 7th generation [resident] of the mountains, 40 years away, and now 7 years home I know of which you speak! I'll be happy to do whatever I can to be of help."

Although it would be difficult to ascertain whether these library directors' personal sense of Appalachian identity would translate into belief in the library's role in promoting regional identity, and certainly many other factors such as mission and community needs would inform this belief, they might also be glad of a chance to bring a personal passion to bear in their professional sphere.

Interviewees were also asked if it would be useful to have a list of resources or a set of best practices for developing Appalachian programs/collections/outreach activities.

Responses were positive with one interviewee writing that this would be a “tremendous boon”. The researcher intends to use data gathered in the course of this survey as a foundation for a resource like this. Finally, participants were invited to share any additional thoughts or experiences about providing library services in rural areas in general or Appalachia in particular. Two noted the effects of the digital divide on their ability to keep pace with demand for computer and Internet access in rural areas that lack accessible and affordable ICT infrastructure. Two also described the challenges of promoting library services in communities that do not have, as one respondent put it, a “strong literacy tradition” (personal communication, March 25, 2014). One of these interviewees expressed optimism that Appalachian-focused programs might provide a means of introducing broader sections of the community to the expanded role of the modern library. Another respondent stressed the need to be “on 24/7”, acting as a perpetual ambassador for the library in the community and making customer service a top priority within the library itself (personal communication, March 13, 2014). This library director stressed that although she is the only full time staff member, she encourages part-time employees to participate in professional development and continuing education opportunities: “I want them to know about libraries and how to serve people” (personal communication, March 13, 2014). Others welcomed the opportunity to serve the needs of increasingly diverse communities despite conflicts that sometimes arise. One participant wrote that “what we all have in common is that we want to be right where we are. We love this region, we love its people and we appreciate its rich history and culture” (personal communication, March 17, 2014).

## **Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

Perhaps the greatest limitation for this study is the lack of pertinent literature to inform the topic's importance to the field of library science. The researcher believes, and the results of this exploratory study suggest, that this topic is valid and valuable, but apart from the data reported herein, the importance of regional identity building activities to rural public libraries in Central Appalachia can only be extrapolated from related fields of practice. Future research may focus on other perspectives such as those of library staff, library patrons, Appalachian studies scholars, or other organizations that serve rural Central Appalachia. Another potentially fruitful topic for future research might be a comparison between the perspectives of library directors at rural, suburban, and urban public libraries in Central Appalachia or between library directors working in Northern, Central, and Southern Appalachia. Finally, the researcher hopes to use the qualitative results of this study as the first step in compiling a set of best practices and creating a toolkit for funding, designing, implementing, and assessing library services that focus on the Appalachian region.

The researcher acknowledges several additional limitations. Most prominent among these secondary limitations is the effect of time constraints on the study's scope and scale. This factor influenced everything from the definition of the population of interest to the survey design to the analysis of data. On a more pedantic level, the study's reliance on contested terms such as rural and Appalachian could have caused members of the population of interest to eschew participation or could cause members of the audience to dismiss the study's results as based on an erroneous or artificial designation. Other limitations include the use of secondary data from IMLS to identify survey participants;

the use of an original survey instrument that has not been previously tested for validity and reliability; the relatively low survey response rate; the bias of self-selection inherent in the method of recruiting interview participants; and the small number of interviews conducted.

## **Conclusion**

The survey and interview results indicate that many public libraries in rural Central Appalachia are helping to build regional identity through the provision of core library services such as programming, collection development, and outreach. About half of respondents' libraries have held at least one Appalachian-focused program within the past year, nearly all (n=79) actively collect materials about Appalachia for either general, special, or local history collections, and more than one third engage in outreach through participation in community events that focus on the Appalachian region. A majority (85%) of the other respondents would be interested in offering programming and participating in community events that focus on the Appalachian region if barriers such as lack of funding and staff time were removed. At all stages of the study, from pre-survey contacts to interview responses, the researcher encountered enthusiasm for the research topic and evidence of participants' personal pride in their Appalachian heritage. It is a privilege to have benefitted from their kindness and assistance in completing this study and an honor to be able to provide a glimpse of what these librarians offer to their communities and their colleagues in the library profession.

Overall, the results provide preliminary evidence of the importance of this research topic and create a foundation for other studies on the same subject. Although it

is beyond the scope of the current study, many respondents mention the need to evaluate community interest in region-specific library services to justify their inclusion in core library activities. Eventually, work may also be done to assess the impact of region-specific library services on the construction of personal and collective Appalachian identity. The researcher would like to have had more time to conduct interviews. The limited amount of time allotted for data collection at this stage of the study may have influenced the variety and quality of the responses obtained and made in-person interviews unfeasible.

In a 1982 interview, Wilma Dykeman addresses the tension between social sciences and humanities disciplines in the realm of Appalachian studies by emphasizing unity over polarity, but she also points out the error of “assum[ing] that people who are working in literature are not interested in action” (Miller & Dykeman, p. 54). She cuts the interviewer off mid-spiel to make this eloquent statement:

“Well, let me ask you: What has always stirred action? What has usually stirred societies, historically, to action? We had any number of reports about slavery, but it was *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* that lit the fuse. We had any number of studies about the meatpacking industry, what was happening in Chicago—there were reporters, there were economists, any number of people who had protested. What lit the fuse? *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair.” p. 54

Librarians are social scientists by profession, but despite new technologies and new roles that are redefining what it means to be an information professional, it will still be some time before librarians surrender their personal ardor for an older information technology—the discreet presentation of information commonly known as the book (including its most recent incarnation, the ebook). As Wilma Dykeman advocates, librarians represent a unity between social sciences and humanities that ideally positions them to be the conductors between the fuse of regional identity and the spark—be it

literature, storytelling, film, music, local history, heritage crafts, heirloom gardening, or any other activity that presents the Appalachian region and the people who call it home in all their complexity. The results of this exploratory study suggest that public libraries in rural Central Appalachia are already doing this work or are, for the most part, interested in offering Appalachian-focused services in the future. These libraries and their directors are unique in so many ways (see Appendix H for further details) and are serving an ever-changing array of community needs through the provision of library services. There is more work to be done, and the beginning of that work will be connecting librarians to the resources—funding, information, and inspiration—that can support and sustain regional identity building activities.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A. Survey Instrument

#### **Building Regional Identity Through Public Library Services in Rural Central Appalachia**

**Your participation in this survey is much appreciated but completely voluntary. The results will be reported without identifying information or in aggregate to ensure that individuals and individual libraries remain anonymous.**

##### INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

Would you describe your library's service area as part of the Appalachian region?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Would you describe your library's service area as primarily rural?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

##### PROGRAMMING QUESTIONS

In the past year, how many programs has your library offered that focus on the Appalachian region?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 or more





Answer If In the past year, how many programs has your library offered that focus on the Appalachian region? 0 Is Not Selected

Could you describe the content of one or more of the programs?  
[TEXT ENTRY]

Answer If In the past year, how many programs has your library offered that focus on the Appalachian region? 0 Is Not Selected

Would you consider doing a similar program again? Briefly explain why or why not.

- Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
 No \_\_\_\_\_

Answer If In the past year, how many programs has your library offered that focus on the Appalachian region? 0 Is Selected

Could you identify the primary reason why your library has not offered a program that focuses on the Appalachian region?

- Lack of funds  
 Lack of staff time  
 Lack of community interest  
 Other priorities for programming  
 Other local organizations fulfill this role in the community  
 Other reason \_\_\_\_\_

Answer If In the past year, how many programs has your library offered that focus on the Appalachian region? 0 Is Selected

Are there other reasons why your library has not offered a program that focuses on the Appalachian region? Please select as many choices as are applicable.

- Lack of funds  
 Lack of staff time  
 Lack of community interest  
 Other priorities for programming  
 Other local organizations fulfill this role in the community  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

Answer If In the past year, how many programs has your library offered that focus on the Appalachian region? 0 Is Selected

Would your library be interested in providing a program that focuses on the Appalachian region if these barriers were removed? Briefly explain why or why not.

- Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
 No \_\_\_\_\_

#### COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONS

Does your library actively collect materials that focus on the Appalachian region for each of the following collections?

	Yes	No	Not applicable
General Collection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Special Collections	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Local History Collection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Answer If Does your library actively collect materials that focus on the Appalachian region for each of the following collections? General Collection - No Is Selected Or Does your library actively collect materials that focus on the Appalachian region for each of the following collections? Special Collections - No Is Selected Or Does your library actively collect materials that focus on the Appalachian region for each of the following collections? Local History Collection - No Is Selected

Are there other reasons why your library does not actively collect materials that focus on the Appalachian region? Please select as many choices as are applicable.

	Lack of quality materials	Lack of affordable materials	Lack of community interest	Other organizations fulfill this need	Other priorities for collection development	Not applicable
General Collection	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local History Collection	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special Collections	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### COMMUNITY OUTREACH QUESTIONS

Does your library participate in events held by other community organizations that focus on the Appalachian region?

- Yes  
 No

Answer If Does your library participate in events held by other community organizations that focus on the Appalachian region? Yes Is Selected

Could you describe one or more of these events?

[TEXT ENTRY]

Answer If Does your library participate in events held by other community organizations that focus on the Appalachian region? No Is Selected

Could you identify the primary reason why your library does not participate in such events?

- Such events are not held in the community.  
 The library has not been invited to participate.  
 Staff members are not available to represent the library.  
 The library has other priorities for community outreach.  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

Answer If Does your library participate in events held by other community organizations that focus on the Appalachian region? No Is Selected

Are there other reasons why your library does not participate in such events? Please select as many choices as are applicable.

- Such events are not held in the community.
- The library has not been invited to participate.
- Staff members are not available to represent the library.
- The library has other priorities for community outreach.
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Answer If Does your library participate in events held by other community organizations that focus on the Appalachian region? No Is Selected

Would your library be interested in participating in such events?

- Yes \_\_\_\_\_
- No \_\_\_\_\_

#### CLOSING QUESTIONS

This library is unique because...

[TEXT ENTRY]

I have worked at this library for

- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- More than 20 years

I have lived in Appalachia

- All my life
- Since I was a child
- Since I became an adult
- Since I have been employed at this library
- On and off throughout my life
- I have never thought about whether I lived in Appalachia or not.

Would you be willing to be contacted for an interview to further discuss the role of public libraries in building regional identity in rural Central Appalachia?

- Yes
- No

Answer If I would be willing to be contacted for an interview to further discuss the role of public libraries in building regional identity in rural Central Appalachia. Yes Is Selected

Please provide your contact information in the space below.

[TEXT ENTRY]

## Appendix B. Pre-Survey Solicitation Email

February 24, 2014

Dear [Library Director's First Name Last Name]:

I wonder if you could help me. I am a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and I am conducting a research study to learn about the role of public libraries in building Appalachian identity through programming, collection development, and outreach.

In order to gather information about this topic, I would like to invite you to complete a brief survey. You will receive a link to the electronic survey on Wednesday, February 26, 2014. This survey link will be active until Friday, March 14, 2014.

My interest in Appalachian public libraries is both personal and professional. I grew up in southeastern Tennessee, and although I am proud to say I was born and raised in rural Appalachia, that was not always the case. It was in my hometown public library, when I was in high school, that I first found my life and my home reflected positively in a book— *The Tall Woman* by Wilma Dykeman. That book, and many others since, gave me new perspective on my heritage. I have also written academic papers on libraries in Appalachia and hope to live and work in the area after finishing my graduate degree.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [lmcphers@live.unc.edu](mailto:lmcphers@live.unc.edu) or [lmcpherson@orangecountync.gov](mailto:lmcpherson@orangecountync.gov) or 423.280.8636.

Best regards,  
Laura McPherson

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Laura C. McPherson  
MLS Candidate 2014, UNC-Chapel Hill  
Youth Services Library Assistant, Orange County Public Library  
Research Assistant, Southern Folklife Collection

## Appendix C. Survey Invitation Email

February 26, 2014

Dear [Library Director's First Name]:

As promised in my email from earlier this week, a link to my survey is available below. Your participation in this study is much appreciated but completely voluntary. You may skip any questions and may discontinue participation at any time during the survey. Survey results will be reported without identifying information or in aggregate to ensure that individuals and individual libraries remain anonymous. Your contact information and survey responses will only be available to my faculty advisor and myself.

### Follow this link to the Survey:

[https://unc.az1.qualtrics.com/WRQualtricsSurveyEngine/\[custom survey link\]](https://unc.az1.qualtrics.com/WRQualtricsSurveyEngine/[custom survey link])

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

[https://unc.az1.qualtrics.com/WRQualtricsSurveyEngine/\[custom survey link\]](https://unc.az1.qualtrics.com/WRQualtricsSurveyEngine/[custom survey link])

Follow the link to opt out of future emails:

[https://unc.az1.qualtrics.com/CP/Register.php?OptOut=true&RID=MLRP\[custom opt out link\]](https://unc.az1.qualtrics.com/CP/Register.php?OptOut=true&RID=MLRP[custom opt out link])

This survey link will be active until March 14, 2014. If you have any questions or if you have difficulty accessing the survey, please feel free to contact me at [lcmcpher@live.unc.edu](mailto:lcmcpher@live.unc.edu) or [lmcperson@orangecountync.gov](mailto:lmcperson@orangecountync.gov) or 423.280.8636.

Best regards,  
Laura McPherson

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Laura C. McPherson  
MLS Candidate 2014, UNC-Chapel Hill  
Research Assistant, Southern Folklife Collection  
Youth Services Assistant, Orange County Main Library

## **Appendix D. Survey Thank You Email**

Dear [Library Director's First Name]:

As a soon-to-be librarian and a forever-in-my-heart Appalachian, I am grateful for your participation in my survey, and I am eager to discover all the wonderful ways that libraries in rural Appalachia are celebrating their communities, states, and region!

Thank you again,  
Laura McPherson

## Appendix E. Survey Reminder Email

Dear [Mr./Ms. Library Director's Last Name]:

This is a reminder that my survey on rural Appalachian libraries will be available until March 14, 2014. I feel very fortunate to have received many excellent responses thus far, and I would love to hear from more folks before the survey ends.

Your participation in this study is much appreciated but completely voluntary. You may skip any questions and may discontinue participation at any time. Survey results will be reported without identifying information or in aggregate to ensure that individuals and individual libraries remain anonymous. Your contact information and survey responses will only be available to my faculty advisor and me.

Please follow this link to access the survey:

[https://unc.az1.qualtrics.com/\[custom survey link\]](https://unc.az1.qualtrics.com/[custom survey link])

If you have any questions or if you have difficulty accessing the survey, please feel free to contact me at [lmcperson@orangecountync.gov](mailto:lmcperson@orangecountync.gov) or [lcmcpher@live.unc.edu](mailto:lcmcpher@live.unc.edu) or 423.280.8636.

Best,  
Laura McPherson

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Laura Cowden McPherson  
MLS Candidate 2014, UNC-Chapel Hill  
Youth Services Assistant, Orange County Public Library  
Research Assistant, Southern Folklife Collection



## **Appendix F. Pre-Interview Solicitation Email**

Dear [Library Director's First Name]:

Thank you again for completing my survey. I would love to schedule a brief interview with you sometime this week or next week.

Please let me know what method would be best for you (email, telephone, or video chat). I will be available for telephone and video interviews all day on Thursday, March 13, but I certainly want to schedule this interview on a date and time that would be most convenient for you. Email interviews can be done at any time.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 423.280.8636 or [lcmcpher@live.unc.edu](mailto:lcmcpher@live.unc.edu) or [lmcperson@orangecountync.gov](mailto:lmcperson@orangecountync.gov)

Best,  
Laura

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Laura Cowden McPherson  
MLS Candidate 2014, UNC-Chapel Hill  
Youth Services Assistant, Orange County Public Library  
Research Assistant, Southern Folklife Collection

## Appendix G. Interview Email with Interview Guide

Dear [Library Director's First Name],

I really appreciate you taking the time to help me with this project. I do have to tell you once again that your participation is voluntary, and you should feel free to decline to answer any questions that you don't feel comfortable answering.

The basic interview questions are attached to this email as a word document. Return your responses in any form you see fit. They are also included at the end of this email. If you would like clarification on anything, please call me at 423.280.8636 or email me at [lmcpheer@live.unc.edu](mailto:lmcpheer@live.unc.edu) or [lmcpheer@orangecountync.gov](mailto:lmcpheer@orangecountync.gov)

Best,  
Laura

### Interview Questions

- Do you think that your library could/should play a role in building/promoting Appalachian identity in the community?
  - Is this an important consideration given all the other things that your community needs the library to provide?
- Do you recall any feedback you have gotten from staff/patrons about your special section for local materials?
- Would it be useful to you and your staff to have a list of resources or a set of best practices for developing Appalachian programs/collections/outreach activities?
- Could you share any other thoughts or experiences about providing library services in Appalachia in particular or in a rural area in general?
- Did any of the survey questions prompt you to think about other information that you would like me to know?

