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North Carolina Folklore Journal

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*Frame photo: Attacked by an agropelter, from Gary Carden's article in this issue.
Illustration by Mandy Newham.*

*Front cover: The Balsam Highland style with lectern, Mathis Cemetery, Jackson Co.,
April 13, 2013. Photo by Karen Singer Jabbour; Back cover: Photo courtesy of
Student Action with Farmworkers.*



Editor's Foreword

By Philip E. "Ted" Coyle

East Carolina University has had a long and productive relationship with the North Carolina Folklore Society. Joyce Joines Newman twice served as NCFJ President and hosted several annual meetings in the area. The *North Carolina Folklore Journal* was edited for several years by Karen Baldwin of ECU's Department of English, and current NCFJ Assistant Editor Leanne Smith teaches in the department. So it was with great pleasure that the North Carolina Folklore Society President Janet Hoshour and the rest of the NCFJ Board accepted the invitation of faculty-member Andrea Kitta to hold our 2012 annual meeting in and around the Bate Building, home to ECU's Department of English.

Our meeting took place on March 31st, 2012, under the theme of "Resilience and Change." The meeting was organized by Steve Kruger and other members of the North Carolina Folklore Society and featured a strong awards program and a number of emotionally powerful presentations. Clyde Ellis of Elon University in his discussion of powwow singing in southeast North Carolina made a valuable point for anyone seeking to document and learn from folk cultures: "Understand them for what they are, not for what they're not." Elizabeth C. King discussed the impact of hurricanes on creating—and eradicating—senses of place in Beaufort County. Karen Amspacher gave an update on recent work at the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center, which continues to do

Frame photo: Students walk by the Cupola on the campus of East Carolina University. Photo courtesy of ECU News Service.

excellent work documenting the fading but deeply valued maritime way of life of Harkers Island. Other presenters gave contextual information about the year's award winners, who received their awards in the afternoon. This issue of the *NCFJ* contains citations for those awards, many written by authors who will be familiar to regular readers of this journal. It also contains scholarly articles from long-time friends of the *NCFJ*: Alan Jabbour and Karen Singer Jabbour, and Gary Carden, who himself won a Brown-Hudson Folklore Award in 2006.

As this issue goes to press, the North Carolina Folklore Society is putting together the final program for our 100th anniversary annual meeting, which will occur in conjunction with a folk festival to be held in Carrboro on September 28th. We look forward to celebrating another strong group of tradition-bearers, scholars, and community groups at this milestone event.



2012 Brown-Hudson Folklore Award

Elizabeth and Alex Albright: Owners of R.A. Fountain General Store

By Leanne E. Smith

Alex Albright says he is a person who has enjoyed the accidents in his life. A turn he didn't intend to take on his way back to Greenville from Wilson one day in the mid-1990s was one of those accidents. He found himself in Fountain, NC, where US 258 and NC 222 momentarily become Railroad and Wilson Streets and cross at the town's one traffic light. On the northeast corner of the intersection, he saw a For Sale sign on the eighty-year-old Smith-Yelverton building, which had been on the market so long that the realtors had given up sales promotion a dozen years before. Upstairs in the 110 by 35 foot space, Alex saw sunlight flooding from tall windows across "the most gorgeous sight—all that old wood." He thought, "If the roof is okay in this building, then my life is going to somehow change." And it did.

At that time in his life, Alex was in transition. From Graham, NC, he had majored in journalism/English at UNC-Chapel Hill, received a Master of Fine Arts from UNC-Greensboro, and started teaching at East Carolina University in 1981. He founded the *North Carolina*

Leanne E. Smith received her MFA in Creative NonFiction from Goucher College. She teaches at East Carolina University and is the Assistant Editor of the North Carolina Folklore Journal.

Frame photo: Vintage sign and other items on the performance area backdrop at R.A. Fountain General Store, August 17, 2013. Photo by Leanne E. Smith.

Literary Review in 1991 and served as editor until 1996, just before his backroad ramble to Fountain. He and Elizabeth Edgerton Albright, who was from Chapel Hill and had majored in business administration at ECU, had been married for a few years, and they had thought about moving out of Greenville to a smaller town, but had not yet done so. Alex had some recent inheritance from his father and felt using the money on a tangible project would be a good, identifiable use for it. Buying the Smith-Yelverton building could be that project and a step towards living in a small town.

In 1999, Alex and Elizabeth's son Silas was born, and they wanted a slower-paced place for him to grow up "where the yards weren't quite so small" as Alex said. With a population of less than 500 and an elevation of just over 100 feet above sea level, Fountain is today more than 200 times smaller and twice as high as Greenville. In 2001, the Albrights moved into an older house formerly owned by the Fountains and started planning to open a business. Two years later, the R.A. Fountain family decided to sell the old R.A. Fountain General Store, the next-door twin of the Smith-Yelverton building. R.A. Fountain had built both in the 1910s, and Alex and Elizabeth bought that one, too. Then, inspired by general stores in Bynum, Pittsboro, and Valle Crucis, the Albrights had a clearer idea of what they could do in and for the community: re-open R.A. Fountain's old store to bring residents back to the town center.

In their time in the 100-year-old town, they had seen it was one of those places that had a ghost past—a history of an active time when the East Carolina Railway ran through the town that was twenty miles from Greenville, Wilson, Snow Hill, and Tarboro—and seven general stores competed in one block. Well-to-do residents could afford education for their children, but then the children didn't return to sustain the town that *Farmville Enterprise* writer A. Frank Eason had described in 1917 as "the biggest little town in the State." Well within a century of its founding, Fountain was quiet. It was one of those places people pass when they "drive through Eastern North Carolina," as Alex told *Rocky Mount Telegram* writer Fred Marion in 2005, "It's been my experience that people miss a lot by taking those big four-lane roads hell-bent for the beach." Alex described himself to Marion as "a writer who appreciates all kinds of things that don't make best-seller lists—things that struggle to be seen." To him, the R.A. Fountain building "seemed to say it needed to have people in it again."

Yet, after the music-filled RAF grand opening in 2004, the quiet returned. The store had some visits from older residents who liked talking about the town's active days, and sometimes it seemed like the Albrights were taking in more stories than dollars. Eventually, they decided the place needed to be, not a daily store, but an occasional music venue—a social place for both artist and audience. In the first four years of business, gas prices doubled, which meant that the town's location between other population centers—"smack-dab in the middle of everywhere," reads the RAF website—was less of a convenience than in the town's early years. Prices dropped, but have steadily risen again. Still, the space Alex and Elizabeth, the artists, and audience have created has survived almost a decade. RAF today is a combination of antique store, bookstore, music store, cafe, and concert hall, with salvaged church pews and theater seats, and a varied collection of chairs. The rolling ladder for stocking shelves are still there, now with the mostly local current stock of music recordings, NC-authored books, jams and jellies, honey, homemade ice cream, glass-bottled sodas, and crafts.

Alex says, "It's doubtful that R.A. Fountain, the town's founder, had any idea he was constructing a music hall...but the high ceilings and cross beams and warm wooden floors make...an especially outstanding venue for acoustic music." A lot of the charm comes from what Alex and Elizabeth have not changed in their efforts to bring life to the space. As eastern North Carolina music artist and businessman Clyde Mattocks says, "Sometimes you can create something worthwhile by simply preserving something worthwhile. That's just what Alex and Elizabeth Albright have done with the old R.A. Fountain General Store. By just not messing with it, they have given us a delightful oasis in which to experience sights, sounds, tastes, and smells that were a part of a treasured past. Not to be confused with a museum, it is a great place to enjoy non-mainstream music that would otherwise not have a venue. A trip to this unique place makes you quickly realize that it is a labor of love for these people."

What Alex says he and Elizabeth enjoy most is "the variety of exceptional talent we've discovered in the region, and the opportunity to give those performers a stage on which to play." They strive to "live local and promote local." In addition to giving locals a stage, they also bring acts from elsewhere in and out of North Carolina to make them accessible in the area—"such high profile players as Don Dixon, Kate Campbell, the Red Clay Ramblers, Alice Gerrard, John Dee Holeman, Mike Compton, and our own local hero, Light-



Elizabeth and Alex Albright at R.A. Fountain General Store's Old-Time, Bluegrass & Country Music Festival during the 6th annual Fountain Peanut Festival, August 17, 2013. Photo by Leanne E. Smith.

nin' Wells," Alex says. Lightnin', who lives outside Fountain and frequents the store, is at once a local favorite and an internationally appreciated blues artist. In the Spring 2011 edition of the N.C. Arts Council's "Artful Living" e-publication, he named R.A. Fountain as one of his favorite N.C. venues for live music.

Award-winning poet Shelby Stephenson agrees. He occasionally performs there with Linda, his partner in music and marriage. Shelby says he'll "come running anytime to perform there as a singer or as a poet (which come to me as one and the same). I feel at home there. I feel endorsed when I'm there. R.A. Fountain General Store

is an open place, as my poems of home and the world (hopefully) are open and accessible to listeners to hear and tune in to, and make their own music. That's what RAF does for me. Just consider what Alex and Elizabeth do. Their pulses come alive with the things that matter (to me) in this world. They take what is given and give all that treasure back to the world."

N.C. writer David Cecelski also observed that giving-back aspect in 2008 on his first trip to RAF. He wrote soon afterwards for the NC Folklife Institute's blog that RAF is "now one of my favorite places in all of North Carolina. Alex and Elizabeth Albright are celebrating a region's culture, revitalizing a small town, and building a community." The segregation of different generations is a significant factor in interruption of community and culture, but at RAF generations mingle. Alex told the Greenville Noon Rotary Club in 2008 that at RAF, "You get three generations of people in the building at the same time. It's a pretty remarkable thing. You get that in a mall, but the old people are together, and the kids are together, and the middle-aged people are together. Everybody's got their group. It's incredible to see that [mixing] when people bring their parents and their children" to RAF.

Facilitating intergenerational interaction to a local soundtrack at RAF is just one of several community-building traits worth honoring. Music can happen in homes, but with so many modern-day options for entertainment via technology, learning and playing music in a shared physical space with family and friends doesn't always seem as attractive a choice as it used to be for many people. As an accessible venue to share one's music with the public, though, RAF provides a reason to practice, a place to play, and a potential forum for drawing new musicians to styles they may not otherwise have been attracted to without that human interaction.

While genres at RAF vary to include even a group of young rockers from town, the Albrights have found that bluegrass is especially popular and have a line of bumper stickers that reference it, including "Bluegrass Jams & Preserves," "I Pick; Therefore, I Am," and "Pick Where You're Planted." Half of the "pick where you're planted" pun describes Alex and Elizabeth's lives: they have chosen to be rooted in Fountain. While Elizabeth works part-time in admissions at the Brody School of Medicine, and Alex still teaches at ECU in Greenville, the family is active in Fountain Presbyterian Church, where Silas is an acolyte. Elizabeth volunteers at the Fountain Well-

ness Center, a satellite of the Pitt County Council on Aging, and Alex is a town commissioner.

Alex and Elizabeth have revived and enhanced a vintage space, served as enablers for N.C. music practitioners, and given musicians and listeners a place to go and be. The audiences may not be rowdy, but their presence, and their tapping feet and nodding heads, show they appreciate RAF. Cars park on Main Street again, and on concert nights, there are now lights on in at least two buildings downtown—the Smith-Yelverton antique display windows and throughout R.A. Fountain General Store. The Albrights' contribution to Fountain and N.C. folklife is circular, yet also straightforward: by sustaining a piece of the community, they have provided a means for the community to sustain a few pieces of itself.

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2012 Brown-Hudson Folklore Award

William E. “Bill” Myers: Musician

By Beverly Patterson

Bill Myers remembers growing up in Greenville in the 1930s and 40s, and hearing his grandmother say, “This boy evidently will play something after a while.” There is no need for him to state the obvious: that his musical accomplishments have far exceeded her prediction. As a jazz and rhythm and blues saxophonist and keyboard player, and as co-founder of the Monitors, a nationally recognized band that he has directed for well over 50 years, Bill Myers has become a powerful artist and interpreter of African American music traditions in his community and region.

He has done that while rising through the ranks of Wilson County Schools, starting as a teacher and band director, becoming principal, and finally retiring as assistant superintendent. A tireless advocate for the arts and a former member of the North Carolina Arts Council’s board of directors, Bill Myers became a key consultant for the African American Music Heritage Trails project that the North Carolina Arts Council initiated.

Beverly Patterson, author of Sound of the Dove: Singing in Appalachian Primitive Baptist Churches, recently retired as director of the North Carolina Folklife Institute where her work included supervising field research with African American musicians in the state. She is co-author of a new guidebook, African American Music Trails of Eastern North Carolina.

Frame photo: Bill Myers (detail). Photo by Cedric N. Chatterley. Courtesy of the North Carolina Folklife Program, North Carolina Arts Council.

Like other African American children who showed interests in music at an early age, Bill Myers found encouragement in his family, church, school, and community. He developed keen ears and eyes for absorbing his own music heritage, and he continues to maintain a high level of artistry in the community. He talked about some of the experiences that shaped him as a musician in an interview conducted by folklorist Susan Hester at the Oliver Nestus Freeman Museum in Wilson, North Carolina, on October 16, 2007. This citation draws on Myers' words from that interview.

"As we looked back into the history of our family, it was my dad's daddy who was the only one who I knew about who had any kind of musical ability," he said. "Louis Armstrong was like *the* musician of note, so we would get other little boys out on the street and try to mimic Louis Armstrong. I had an uncle who couldn't read music, but he could pick out things very simply [on the piano]. We would hear Duke Ellington on the radio. And Duke Ellington's theme song was 'Mood Indigo.' Well, my uncle showed me how to play 'Mood Indigo' on the piano. Now, mind you, I didn't know how to read a note, but he showed me where to put my fingers."

Taking piano lessons that his grandmother arranged, Myers learned to read notes, and "pretty soon the people at the Sunday school at my church in Greenville wanted me to start playing for the children at Sunday school. This made me learn a different hymn every Sunday from the hymnbook. So that increased my reading ability."

When he reached Epps High School in Greenville, the principal sent Bill to the band director. Myers said, "I think maybe [the principal] had heard that I was beginning to play the piano a bit. So he just said, 'Tell the man I said to put you in the band.' Well, I went to the band director, who was white, who had come to the black school to teach one period a day to try to get a band started. He said, 'Well, what do you play?' And I said, 'I don't play anything.' And he said, 'Well, what do you want to play?' So I looked around, and I said, 'How about the drums?' So he handed me two sticks. He said go back there and beat on the drums. He never showed me how to hold the sticks; he never showed me how to put on the strap. He never showed me anything. Lucky for me, there was another guy there who had been playing a little bit. So I watched. He said, 'This little symbol right here is a rest. When you see that, don't play. But when you see the little dot here, that means you hit the drum.' I said, 'What?' He said, 'Yep. Hold the sticks like this. Go left and go right.'

So by watching [him] and looking at these notes, I learned to beat the drum, and that's what I was doing, literally beating the drum. I said, 'There's got to be a little more to this.' So on my own, I started to improvise a little bit because I would hear things on records. I'm still listening to Duke Ellington and Satchmo on the radio.

"My Sunday school teacher took me to New York City as part of the Sunday school convention. I had never been to New York City, but that was an eye-opening experience. She took me to Radio City Music Hall. I got a chance to see the Rockettes. I had never seen anything like that. I got a chance to hear this guy play a magnificent organ. I never heard the thing like that. I got a chance to go to the Apollo Theater and this guy named Willis 'Gator Tail' Jackson was playing saxophone, and his style was what we call the honking style—take one note and just play it like [a car horn]. But at the same time he did a lot of physical gyrations. He'd jump up on the table. Jump off the stage. Run to the back of the auditorium, and the people were going crazy because Willis 'Gator Tail' Jackson was doing this.

"So I came back home and I wanted to play the saxophone, but [my] folks could not afford a saxophone. So [my] grandmother knew a guy who played saxophone. He was like the village troubadour. Every Christmas he would walk the city of Greenville playing Christmas carols. His name was James Thomas Edmiston. He would go down every block, playing 'Silent Night,' 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing,' 'Come All Ye Faithful,' and people looked for this every Christmas.

"[James Thomas Edmiston] was in a band called the Elks Band. The Elks Band was taken from what they were doing in New Orleans. The practice was if there were a funeral, there would be what you call a turnout session. There would be a wake first, what they call sitting-up. You would go to the house of the deceased and you would sit up with the family all night long. They would serve food and drinks, and you would have to stay up the whole night. Then the next day would be the parade. You would go to the funeral, a very sad, dirge-type march, playing something like 'Nearer My God to Thee' very slow. But coming out of the church, it would be really lively, with, 'When the Saints Go Marching In,' that kind of thing. And I loved that! I would follow that band wherever they went. And I would walk along, and I'd hear trombones. I just loved that. I said, 'Boy, this is what I want to do.' I knew then that I wanted to be a musician.

"There was another guy who played blues guitar: Mo Griffith. He used to chew tobacco and sing the blues, and I would follow him everywhere he went. I would sit right down on the ground and watch



Bill Myers. Photo by Cedric N. Chatterley. Courtesy of the North Carolina Folklife Program, North Carolina Arts Council.

him play the blues because that's what he did. I was fascinated by this music.

“My family can't afford a saxophone, so my grandmother asked James Thomas to show me how to play the saxophone. He says, 'Well, I'll just leave the saxophone at your house. I don't have time to teach.' He just left it there. He never showed me how to put it together, how to put the reed on. He just said, 'Take it.' So one night he got really, really drunk and he came to the house and he completely took it apart, took all the springs off, everything. And there were a hundred pieces, and I said, 'How are you going to put that

back together?’ He said, ‘I can’t do it when I’m sober, I’ve got to do it when I’m drinking.’ And he put it back together, and I was so taken in by him taking that horn apart and putting it back together. I had never seen anything like that before. I was determined then; I really want to learn the saxophone.

“So, the next year, the most phenomenal thing that ever happened to me happened in my life. This white band director left and a new band director was hired. His name was Bob Lewis. Bob Lewis went to school at Virginia State in Petersburg, Virginia. I had never met a man like Bob Lewis. He was a sharp dresser, a very debonair guy. I just admired everything this guy did. His shoes were shined every day. And he played the saxophone. I wanted to be just like Bob Lewis. He was my idol. I worshiped this man. I’m still in the school band. But I don’t want to play the drums anymore; I want to play what Bob Lewis plays. But now I have a saxophone at the house, too. And Bob Lewis played the saxophone, too, so I said, ‘Please show me how to play this horn.’ He started to teach me, and he moved me from the drums to the saxophone, so I watched everything he was doing, I watched his fingers, watched his mouth, everything he did. I just had to copy everything he did.

“I had no money, but I wanted to go to Virginia State. I started to get better at playing my horn because I started doing what I saw Gator Tail Jackson doing in the Apollo, taking the one-note and hopping it. And people started to think that I was very good, because I was more show than ability. That was the style of playing during that time. And my nickname in Greenville was Popeye. Everybody called me Popeye. And they would say, ‘Have you heard Popeye play?’ Everybody would come, and people would start to hire me and pay me. When you made five dollars, that was big-time money. You played a nickel-gig is what you’d say. And if you ever got paid a dime-gig, or ten dollars, that was big-time. So my name and reputation began to spread around in Greenville. People would come to hear me play, and I would get up on the table and jump off the table and run to the back. People were making lines behind me. One night I ran out of the building and ran around the building and came back in, and the people right behind me, clapping hands, and saying, ‘Blow, Popeye, blow!’

“Even back at this time, there were minstrel shows that would come to town. One of the famous ones was the Silas Green Minstrel Show. Another was the Winstead Mighty Minstrels. I started playing with the Winstead Mighty Minstrel Show in Wilson. We would get

on the back of the truck and go around to try to excite people who were coming to the big tent shows that night, go out in front to play to get the people to come in, and then we would play inside before the show. And I even did a little tour with them, but I couldn't take that; that was too much for me. There were no places for us to stay as black folks. You had to eat any place you could, and any place you go you would have to go to somebody's house to ask them for a pail of water so that you might bathe. I said, 'I can't do this.'

"I'm still a young teenager, trying to do these kinds of things, but saying, 'This is not my life.' I would not do that. But I joined some bands in Greenville. We would play the clubs in Greenville—the Tropicana Club, the Blue Moon Club, the Red Rose Club—and I was playing in all those clubs as a high school person. I even played for my own high school prom. I didn't go to the prom; I played for the prom with these bands. During this time with the band, my reputation is out there as somebody who is pretty good at playing the horn."

Bill Myers realized his dream of going to college at Virginia State in Petersburg, Virginia. When he graduated, he set aside plans to be a professional musician in order to teach public school for one year in Elm City, NC. That year stretched into many years of service in schools and churches teaching the music that matters to him: "I want to learn about the intricacies of music and what makes it happen. Until the last breath goes out of me, I'm going to keep teaching that. If I'm choir director, I can't let you get away from the anthems, the hymns, and where this all came from. I'm here to say that it's not new. [Rap, for example] is new to the kids because they haven't heard it, but it started way, way back."

He continues to perform with the Monitors, as he has since the late 1950s when he and Cleveland Flowe co-founded the group. The Monitors were featured on the Rhythm and Blues stage at the 2011 Smithsonian Festival in Washington, D.C. When Bill acknowledges being the only original member, he reminds us that the band has been performing for many years: "We were before the Embers; we were before the Band of Oz, the other bands who were very popular. We were before that, and yet, we're still doing it right now. Members had to leave us for various reasons, either they got sick or something happened that they had to stop playing, but the band is still going on."



2012 Brown-Hudson Folklore Award

Carmine Prioli: Teacher, Scholar, Folklorist, Editor, and Friend

By Karen Willis Amspacher

If this citation were to follow the usual protocol, this is the place where a long list of Dr. Prioli's academic credentials, career accomplishments, published articles, and the like would go. However, for Carmine (that's with a long-"i") Prioli, "We're not going there!" His commitment to North Carolina folklife is well documented in the endnote of this article. Carmine's work—and the reason for this award—run deeper than any list of activities could ever reflect. So, this nomination is about his *relationship* with the people—the folks of North Carolina, in particular the coast of North Carolina, specifically Harkers Island in Down East Carteret County, and what that has meant to the local people who have been privileged to be part of that relationship.

For those of us who live in places like Harkers Island, with all its rich traditions still visible on the landscape, it's not unusual for a college student (or even a professor) to "take to us." (That means stop and talk, try to get to know us, visit often, take pictures, make notes, etc.) We have figured out that we are "different"—or at least

Karen Willis Amspacher of Harkers Island was recently described on the Our State magazine website as a "fourth-generation native and one of the most valiant defenders of Down East."

Frame photo: Carmine Prioli (left) with boatmaker Julian Guthrie. Photo courtesy of Carmine Prioli.

“interesting,” that we talk funny, that we think differently, that we are a people apart from the mainstream of people around places like Chapel Hill and Cary, on the move, moving here, moving there. We have grown accustomed to the questions, usually the questions that go something like “What kind of wood is that?” or “Who invented the flair bow?” Or remarks like “Say something!” We pretty much do all we can to help answer those same questions over and over, gracefully and respectfully. We appreciate folks coming to ask, an occasional magazine or newspaper article, or a high school or undergraduate research paper. What we are not used to are people like Carmine Prioli who get past the questions, the obvious, the surface, the drive-by view, and make a difference: a positive and lasting difference *within* us.

It is rare to find someone who takes the time to get to know (and I dare say “love”) us the way Carmine has. Carmine’s initial interest in boatbuilding has now evolved into years of caring, working, believing, struggling, hoping, giving, sometimes pushing hard, for the people who build, work, and appreciate not only those boats, but all the pieces of our heritage. Now Carmine—and all those who have continued to be touched by his classes, publications, presentations, and journals—know that we Islanders are more than boatbuilders, or decoy carvers, or quilters, or cooks. We are proud people, and rightly so. And yes, we are different, and that is okay.

Carmine’s work is not only telling others about us (as folklorists most often do), but more importantly Carmine has helped us understand ourselves. I believe that has been his greatest contribution to us, to the folklife traditions of North Carolina, to the academic community, and to all who will read his work and benefit from the many programs and projects he has been an integral part of. He has allowed us to be ourselves, to be different, to be hard and difficult, stubborn and determined, rough and rugged. He has stayed with us through the tears and battles to help us understand why we fight so hard for the things that make us different, the “things” that matter to us—“things” like wild horses and wooden boats, pound nets and sacred places.

He has helped us realize that those traditions have meaning far deeper than even we understood. Carmine has taken the time to listen and to help us listen to ourselves. He continues to listen and learn with us as we now realize that our “islandness” is not just of Harkers Island or Down East, but of islands that span across genera-

tions of watermen and islanders to places like Smith Island, Maryland, and Pellworm, Germany. Carmine continues to help us find our way as Islanders in a changing world with an uncertain future for places like the old Harkers Island.

Carmine Prioli is now part of our story. His research and writings will help define the way our history is recorded for generations yet to come. This special accomplishment alone gives cause for the honor of the Brown-Hudson Folklore Award. Yet, that is only part of the reason why we celebrate him with this honor. Carmine's greatest contribution has been the work he has done *within us*, the people of Down East, as "islanders set apart," in the way he has encouraged and believed *in us*, worked *with us*, rallied *for us*, and become *one of us*. Thank you, Carmine!

ENDNOTE

Early in my time as editor of the *North Carolina Folklore Journal*, past editor Richard Walser remarked that I had brought the footnote to the publication. Walser probably was offering mixed praise. The following note recognizes important academic accomplishments of Carmine Prioli without interrupting the insider's praise and tone of Karen Amspacher's appreciation.

Professor Prioli received his Master's in English from Boston College in 1971 and his Ph.D. in English from State University of New York at Stony Brook in 1975, writing a dissertation on imagery in the poetry of Edward Taylor. Before joining the faculty at North Carolina State University, he taught at SUNY-Stony Brook, Boston University, and Tufts University. He has taught and served as an administrator at N.C. State since 1977. His courses are notable for their insightful scholarship and careful planning, but also for his kind and supportive attention to students, an attention he also has brought to generous administrative tours as Interim English Department Head, Director of Graduate Programs, Associate English Department Head and Director of Undergraduate Studies, Director of the Scholars of the College Program and the University Transition Program, and Park Faculty Scholar for the class of 2008. Any university or English department is lucky to have caring, intelligent, and efficient administrators, and Carmine has served patiently, productively, and generously in sometimes-repeated posts at N.C. State.

Carmine's consultancies have also supported numerous local and professional projects. Again, his generosity and unobtrusive ef-

iciency are marks of his consulting work, and Karen has appreciated his participation Down East well in her Brown-Hudson citation. He has served as a grant consultant for the Core Sound Water Fowl Museum and Heritage Center, chaired its exhibit planning committee from 2000 to 2006 and wrote its exhibit plan report in 2001, and wrote the report for N.C. State's long distance learning plan in 1995. He has served as an editorial consultant for the *Thomson Anthology of American Literature* (Thomson/Wadsworth, 2006), two editions of the Prentice-Hall *Anthology of American Literature* (2002, 2005), and the forthcoming Oxford University Press *Anthology of American Literature*.

As a past editor of the *North Carolina Folklore Journal*, I especially appreciate his outstanding work as its editor from 2004 to 2005. His four issues are notable for the diversity of folklife covered, the quality of photography and design, a remarkable special issue developed from Barbara Lau's exhibit on Cambodian folklife at the Greensboro Historical Museum, special attention to activities on Portsmouth Island and Down East, and the thoughtful editor's introductions to each issue. I once accidentally encountered Carmine at Minor's Printing in Boone; the accident was mine because he had driven up the mountain with purpose: to assure the print quality of the *NCFJ* issue by reviewing signatures as they first came off the press.

The bibliography below displays the extent and diversity of Dr. Prioli's publications, but I also note the local quality of many topics. Carmine has paid attention to our state's literary and traditional culture in his research and work. —Tom McGowan

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2012 Brown-Hudson Folklore Award

Vollis Simpson: Whirligig Artist

By Jefferson Currie II

Vollis Simpson grew up in Wilson County, near the town of Lucama. His family farmed, and his father moved buildings for a living. Vollis was drafted before World War II, and continued serving during the war in the Army Air Corp stationed on the Island of Saipan. During the war, two projects foreshadowed his approach to repurposing cast-off materials after the war: a windmill he made to wash soldiers' clothing and a motorcycle he constructed out of spare parts.

After the war, he opened a repair shop in a rural area outside of his hometown of Lucama, where he repaired farm and industrial machinery. He built tow trucks out of Army surplus trucks and used them to move machinery into manufacturing plants and to tow large trucks. He also salvaged metal from around the area, and he—like his father—moved buildings, including tobacco barns, houses, railroad depots, and the Parker's Barbecue building, among others. During the evenings, he farmed. As he reached retirement age, he began to slow down a bit. While running his businesses since the war, he had constructed only one windmill. He built it to force heat into his home, but there was a smoke problem, and his wife, Jean, told him to take it out.

Jefferson Currie II is a folklorist and a member of the Lumbee tribe.

Frame photo: Vollis Simpson in front of his whirligig "Horse Wagon," which tells the story of rural Eastern North Carolina. Photo courtesy of the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park in Wilson, NC.



The only whirligig that bears Vollis Simpson's name. Photo courtesy of the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park in Wilson, NC.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, he began to make the windmills and whirligigs that have become so well known. Over a ten year span, he made more than twenty whirligigs and placed them around a small pond in a field on family land across the road from his repair shop. He created the whirligigs out of salvaged metal, fiberglass, wood, and other objects. He painted some of the materials, and he sometimes attached pieces of reflective road signs that he cut into various shapes. The road-sign reflectors glow at night, looking to some people like stained glass. Unaffiliated members of the local community refer to the whirligig park Vollis built—with its cacophony of sound and sight during the day and at night—as “Acid Park,” “The Lights,” and “The Phenomenon.”

Although there is a long history of whirligig-making in eastern North Carolina, Vollis Simpson's whirligigs are larger and more intricate than most. He spent more than thirty years creating whirligigs before his death at the end of May 2013, and his work is known throughout the world. Some of his pieces reside at the Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore, the Olympic Folk Art Park in Atlanta, the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh, as well as other places throughout Wilson County, North Carolina, and the United States, and even in the Museum of Everything in London, England.

He and his artwork have been written about and featured at conferences by scholars such as Roger Manley, Dennis Montagna, and Ron Harvey. In 2010, Vollis received the North Carolina Award, the state's highest honor for an artist. Vollis has also been featured in the *New York Times* and other publications. His work is currently being conserved and repaired for an outdoor museum in downtown Wilson, NC—the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park—a project that has garnered support from the NEA, ArtPlace, and the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation, among others.



2012 Community Traditions Award

Green Grass Cloggers: Folk Dance Group

By Leanne E. Smith

The weekend of the North Carolina Folklore Society's 2012 annual meeting in Greenville, NC, marked forty years since the Green Grass Cloggers debuted at the 1972 World Champion Old Time Fiddlers' Convention on April Fool's Day—a cosmic date for a group of hairy counter-culture college kids to invade a previously clean-cut clogging world. In their early years, the GGCs collected fans and shocked some audiences. They later shared what they'd learned in North Carolina with international audiences, and sometimes faced questions about their "folkness." Concepts and designations of what's traditional and "folk" can be complicated, but in the case of the GGCs, they used material from older practitioners, combined it with original material, and made the results their own. They developed an internal culture, shared their art person-to-person inside and outside the group, and have sustained a style for four decades, despite fluctuations in membership—all of which sounds like "folk" to me.

By the early 1970s, the Easter weekend convention, which was commonly just called Union Grove, drew thousands of people. Many among the masses were young counter-culture types enthralled

Leanne E. Smith is Assistant Editor of the North Carolina Folklore Journal, and an active member of the Green Grass Cloggers.

Frame photo: Green Grass Cloggers in Pitt County, 1973. GGC archives.

with the opportunity to live a Woodstock-style experience closer to home—about forty miles west of Winston-Salem, NC, at J. Pierce Van Hoy's farm just off Interstate 77, between the Harmony and Union Grove communities. Dudley Culp and his friends from East Carolina University in Greenville, NC, at first sought a different version of the youth experience that had less to do with the music. They wanted the vibe some people invoked when they called Union Grove by a different name: Onion Groove.

The youth influx from all over North Carolina and several other states overwhelmed some of the locals. Just from being in the environment, though, it was inevitable that some of those youth who went for the party, and wanted to find what felt real to them, would become interested in the music and seek older practitioners from whom they could learn. That was Dudley's experience at Union Grove in 1971. He saw clogging for the first time and felt so drawn to the energy that he wanted to learn how to do it, teach other people, and take a team to dance at Union Grove the next year. The plan worked. From there, the GGCs got invitations to dance at other festivals, where they met bands from other states, which led to invitations to dance farther and farther away from their home base in eastern North Carolina.

As with some older musicians who became magnets for people wanting to learn from them, the popularity of the GGCs grew because they were different from other groups in the clogging genre. Historical record and popular perception have designated clogging as a western North Carolina dance form. In terms of team clogging, that's true since the competitive team dancing—combining group figures and previously solo footwork into a percussive group dance for performance—can be traced to Bascom Lamar Lunsford's Mountain Dance and Folk Festival in Asheville, NC. In the GGCs' early years, NC team clogging was still concentrated in western counties and parts of the Piedmont. In eastern North Carolina, some rural communities hosted square dances that had continued from earlier decades, while western-style club square dancing had also become popular and reintroduced group social dance opportunities in population centers.

Many of the western NC clogging teams were named for a town or natural landmark in an effort to make them seem more local, more *of* a certain place—preferably a place where the members had grown up learning the dance form from their families and community members. The GGCs found, as they traveled to larger folk festi-



Dudley Culp, GGC founder, circa 1973. Photo from the Budd/Culp Collection.

vals, that some festival organizers didn't want to classify their dancing as a folk form or accept them as cloggers on par with other teams. They had at least three problems: they hadn't learned from relatives and locals in the mountain hometowns they didn't have; they didn't do the mountain-based dance figures that they didn't know were much different from the western squares they did know; and they didn't dress as crisply and identically as many teams because it wouldn't have been natural for them to do that anyway.

Though the early GGCs were not originally from a single geographic place, they were still *of* a place—a college town. Thus, their place shaped them into a collection of people from multiple locations, at first mostly from across North Carolina, which made them less of a single geographic place and more broadly of the state. The youth-fueled cultural place out of which they grew celebrated counter-culture sensibilities, which influenced their semi-casual costuming and raw-energetic approach to their dancing. In addition to the initial basic step they learned from southwest Virginia dancer Ev-



*Green Grass Cloggers at Union Grove, 1972. Photo by
Toni Jordan Williams.*

elyn Smith Farmer, they learned square dance figures from a Texan named Betty Casey who was living in Greenville in the early '70s.

In their first two years, the cloggers had no idea they were doing something others wouldn't completely like—and they didn't much care. They were having fun attempting something like what they had seen—and wanted to do—just because it looked fun. Their college friends in Greenville liked them when they danced at the Attic, the hippie nightclub downtown. At Union Grove '72 on April Fool's Day, the audience liked them, possibly because the hairy people on the stage looked like the hairy people in the audience. After they won first place in their division at the '72 Autumn Square-Up at Fiddler's Grove, they thought they had something worth taking to other competitions—like the next summer's Mountain Dance and Folk Festival in Asheville.

In the meantime at other festivals, they met old-timers Willard Watson of Deep Gap, NC, and Tommy Jarrell of the Mt. Airy, NC, area (later two of the NC Folklore Society's Brown-Hudson Award winners in 1983 and 1981, respectively). The GGCs' casual dress and the spirited way they danced reminded Willard and Tommy of the

informal social dancing they remembered from their youth, before the performance and competition environments sparked so much change in the dance form. The approval from the old-timers that the GGCs admired so much inspired and validated them. They absorbed culture from Willard and Tommy, learned dance steps from Willard, and bonded with them through senses of humor that were much less conservative than what some people assumed of the traditional music and dance practitioners as a whole. Though the early GGCs didn't live in the mountain counties, they felt accepted into a cultural family.

In Asheville, though, at the August '73 Mountain Dance and Folk Festival, the GGCs remember the atmosphere when they walked out on the stage as a could-have-heard-a-pin-drop moment. They assumed the audience was shocked at the long-haired dancers in blue jeans and dresses that weren't all the same color. By the end of their routine, the audience was cheering, but the judges disqualified the GGCs. The organizers invited the GGCs to do an exhibition the next night, and GGC Doug Baker found out what some of the required dance figures were so they could have a better chance the next year. With help from library books back in Greenville—again, using resources affordable and available like folk artists do—the group adjusted their choreography slightly to include some of the mountain figures the other teams did and that the judges expected to see. They'd already known they looked different by choice and brought a more raucous energy to the stage than many of the groups they'd seen, but their experience in Asheville was the first time it mattered for competition.

The GGCs were puzzled by the contrast in the audience's reception and the judges' disapproval in Asheville, but they still competed again at the '73 Square-Up at Fiddler's Grove. They lost to a team from Asheville, and at the time, some of them believed that team wanted to win the Square-Up competition because they didn't like the positive audience reception the GGCs had gotten in Asheville. At the next Mountain Dance and Folk Festival, the GGCs thought they had a better chance of placing than the year before—but the same thing happened: disqualified, but invited to do an exhibition, and the audience liked them. They thought they had made the required adjustments for choreography, so for years, they thought the judges were biased against the GGCs for looking different and for being from eastern NC. About thirty years later, they heard the disqualification couldn't have been all about their looks since even

Lunsford had a grandson who wore his hair shaggy. They were just so different from the other teams that the judges didn't know what to do with them. The confusion at the time—in Asheville and later at Fiddler's Grove—helped the GGCs reexamine their purpose. They decided they were more suited to performances and expanded their travel range.

The more time they spent together, the more intragroup linguistic jokes they developed. They'd always liked puns and double entendre—evident in the name Green Grass Cloggers itself—but some other expressions grew out of shared experiences and reflected group culture. One Gary Joynerism, called so because of the person who brought the term to the group, was “torn outna frame,” which was short for “torn out of the frame”—or, drunk. Frequent bus troubles led to another expression: TC, short for “temperature check.” The temperature gauge for the bus was in the back by the engine. So, for the driver to know what it showed, the cloggers passed back the “temperature check” message—later abbreviated to just TC—and then they passed the temperature reading forward. Among the women, TC became a code for one to alert others that she had spotted an attractive guy.

The question of “What's wrong with us?” started as a joke among the group when some of the dancers would disappear at festivals to socialize with people outside the group—but it took on more meaning as the cloggers faced bias about their dance style and internal culture. Though they started focusing more on performances instead of competitions, they continued to compete at the Autumn Square-Up out of nostalgia and because they typically had a good audience reception there. But after a culture clash in '76, they reexamined their competition goals. Fiddler's Grove venue organizer Harper Van Hoy wrote a letter to the GGCs in July '77 that said, in part:

I've seen several pictures and news articles on the Green Grass Cloggers in different periodicals, during the year. It looks like you have made it big. Congratulations. [...] I have intended to write you earlier about this incident (love in) by a couple on your team. It took place on Sunday morning of last year. Several older couples (parents) complained to me about it and made quite a “to-do” about it. I regretted this very much, and I am sure you do, too. Incidents of this nature can destroy the family image we have



Green Grass Cloggers, mostly western NC members, with the Spring Chickens. Bluff Mountain Festival, Hot Springs, NC, June 15, 2013. Photo by Joe Bruno.

worked so hard to preserve at Fiddler's Grove. You understand what I'm saying, so I want you to make sure this doesn't happen again.

You know your people...I don't want to offend anyone...if you can tell them in a way they will accept in a cooperative spirit, I'll be glad to have your dancers at our Square-Up. If you think they would not accept this in the right spirit...I would not want this to reoccur as it would seriously damage Fiddler's Grove's reputation as a family atmosphere.

Not everyone in the group saw the letter when it arrived, and then the oral history of its contents became a humorous, shortened story: the group was "uninvited" from Fiddler's Grove because of what some other people perceived to be a love-in (It was really a single, interracial couple with clogger connections making out on a picnic table). When Dudley first met Harper and Wansie Van Hoy at the 1971 Autumn Square-Up, they had encouraged his goals of starting a clogging team. The dancers who joined the GGCs after Dudley moved away from Greenville maintained their counter-culture identity and found popularity for being themselves—but at the compe-



Green Grass Cloggers, mostly eastern NC members, before a performance with Molasses Creek. Sunday in the Park, Greenville, NC, August 18, 2013. GGC archives.

tion where they'd felt they could still be themselves, the group's expression of "What's wrong with us?" applied to their style and culture. Whereas old-timers like Willard Watson and Tommy Jarrell had made the GGCs feel welcome in the traditional music and dance communities, the GGCs had seen another sector of the traditional music and dance world in their competition experiences, a sector that valued conformity. The message the GGCs sensed was that they were welcome as long as they weren't themselves.

The GGCs ultimately settled completely on being a performance group rather than a competition group. With the rise of the National Clogging and Hoe-Down Council in the late '70s, and the ensuing specifications for standardized steps and costuming, the GGCs wouldn't have been able to place in competition anymore anyway. The new competition trend complicates the question of folkness: some of the same people who thought of the GGCs as too innovative, because they were different from the identical-costume competition cloggers, later followed the trends in standardizing clogging. The new clogging Council helped the dance develop into the power-tap competition styles of today. In terms of figures and footwork, those styles are less clearly rooted in the early solo percussive and social group figure dancing than the GGC style is.

The rise of the new style of clogging increased the significance of the GGCs in folk culture. Even with some aspects of folk festivals being organized and contrived, with the atmosphere often diverting arts away from everyday life and more towards performance, they still created a space for cultural exchange. The extent of the GGCs' travels allowed them to learn more about the roots of their dancing and then share the art and stories with the interested public in several states and countries, which spawned a GGC diaspora. When the GGCs started teaching workshops at large festivals, they were the primary team to pass on older steps from people like Willard Watson and to inspire offshoot teams that did the same. After 1978, when they met Robert Dotson of Sugar Grove, NC (1994 NC Folk Heritage Award winner), they shared his Walking Step, which has become a primary perception of flatfooting and a widespread way to start learning flatfooting.

One way to gauge a tune's folkness is whether authorship is known or whether it has passed through so many people that most of the people who know it can't give a comprehensive history of it. In some ways, similar interruption of oral history has happened in the GGCs' relatively short history. New dancers have always learned directly from experienced dancers, but after passing through several people over a couple of decades, the stories didn't stay with the steps. Some of the stories expanded a little bit beyond reality, as they tend to do over time. More often, however, art and story disconnected over time, especially outside the group: while the steps disseminated and kept their names, their sources within Green Grass may have dropped away. For instance, people who know steps named for GGCs don't always know where they came from. Another example is the portable dance boards called step-a-tunes that can be traced to a GGC named Wynn Dinnsen. He was tired of dancing in the mud while camping at Union Grove, so he made a dance board, and then he designed other dance boards at different depths to make different tones, with the idea that he could put them together and actually step out a tune. Today, the term step-a-tune is common, but the attachment to GGC history and the idea of different-toned boards isn't always known.

With new efforts to tell GGC stories and capture them for public record, future dancers can understand the GGC contribution to dance communities in and beyond North Carolina. The question of the GGCs being "folk" has an element of irony. Despite some people questioning the degree to which they were traditional and to what

extent they could be counted as folk artists, if they weren't folk forty years ago, they are unquestionably folk now. The group faces questions about sustainability, as many folk groups do: new people must find it relevant, but it must be close enough to what came before it, or else it's not a continuation—it's something new, only distantly influenced by the old. Who the early GGCs were, what they did, how they learned, where they were from, and why they became popular countered the stories of many competitive clogging teams, yet the GGCs have persisted beyond ones who questioned the GGCs' credentials of folk and tradition. By being different from the norm at the time they began, they have preserved older steps that have dropped out of today's contemporary clogging, contributed new steps to the dance world, and more than forty years on, they are a significant element of community traditions in NC folklife.



2012 Community Traditions Award

The Heritage Quilters

By Joyce Joines Newman

The Heritage Quilters are a diverse group of women and men from Halifax, Vance, and Warren counties, North Carolina, who organized in 2001, based on their shared belief that quilt-making is one of the most widely known and personally experienced crafts for many North Carolinians. The more than 20 women and men aged 14 to 82 have the mission to support, encourage, and document quilting traditions and activities.

Key to organizing the group were Margaret Bullock and Jereann King (now Johnson). Jereann worked in Durham, NC, and helped launch the African American Quilt Circle in 1997. Jereann has been quilting as long as she can remember. Her interest in textiles and

Joyce Joines Newman grew up mostly in the Brushy Mountains of Wilkes County, playing paperdolls, swinging on grapevines, eating Blackheart cherries and Limbertwig apples, and sleeping under piles of quilts made by her mother and grandmother. She received an MA in 1978 from the Folklore Curriculum at UNC-Chapel Hill, where she began studying quilt-making and documenting quilts. She was lead documenter for the North Carolina Quilt Project, which documented 10,000 quilts statewide, presented in the book North Carolina Quilts. She later earned a BFA from UNC-Greensboro in textiles and art history and an MFA in studio art from East Carolina University, where she currently works. She served two terms as president of the North Carolina Folklore Society, and was a co-editor for Watching TV from the Back of a Fire Truck: Voices from the Hurricane Floyd Flood of 1999.

Frame photo: Jereann King Johnson tacking a quilt, a quick and expedient way to make everyday quilts for warmth and utility. Photo courtesy of Jereann Johnson.



The Heritage Quilters, 2008: back row, L to R: Wilhelmina Scott-Ratliff, Ellen Pankey, Cathy Alston-Kearney, Wallace Evans, Earlean Henderson, Belinda Austin, Connie Kenney, Jereann King Johnson; front row, L to R: Portia Hawes, Ihsan Abdin, Ruth Howard Chambers, Leo Kelly, Jr., Margaret Bullock; seated: Louise Spruill and Mary Terry. Not in photo: Victoria Lynch, Jackie Privet. Newer members: Terri Grady, Hollis Larkins, Krista Larkins, Dorothy Luis. Photo courtesy of the Heritage Quilters.

texture were formed during her childhood in Bainbridge, Georgia, where she grew up under a canopy of live oaks and Spanish moss, braiding grass from the fields for play and learning traditional ways from church women and school teachers. When her Durham work ended, Jereann began thinking about a community of quilters close to home, in Warrenton.

Margaret Bullock worked in Warren County Cooperative Extension as a Family and Home Specialist, and for years Margaret and Jereann dreamed about bringing together groups of people who were interested in either writing oral and family histories or promoting quilting. With the encouragement of Leo Kelly, who had organized quilting classes at Vance Granville Community College, and

Portia Hawes, a native of Warrenton who had retired from teaching home economics in New York City and returned to her hometown, Jereann planned a gathering to talk about quilts and quilting. Leo and Portia helped tell people about the meeting and distributed flyers. The meeting's purpose was to talk about quilts and quilt-making and to determine if there was interest in forming a group to hold regular meetings.

The notion of oral histories was folded into the quilt meeting; people were asked to introduce themselves through quilts by bringing a family quilt, a quilt project they were working on, or a quilt story about their involvement with quilting. Ten people attended the first meeting at the Warren County Senior Center, facilitated by Jereann. Mary Terry and Beatrice Richardson shared quilts, and Nina Goode brought quilts made by her mother from feed sacks and old clothes. Jereann photographed each person's presentation and made an audio recording of the meeting. The group committed to meeting once a month, getting others involved, and teaching and learning from each other.

Seven of those who attended were still active members when the group received the 2012 Community Traditions Award: Ihsan Abdin, Margaret Bullock, Portia Hawes, Cathy Alston-Kearney, Leo Kelly, Jr., Jereann King, and Mary Terry, along with Belinda Alston, Ruth H. Chambers, Wallace Evans, Terri Grady, Earlean Henderson, Connie Kenney, Hollis Larkins, Krista Larkins, Dorothy Luis, Victoria Lynch, Ellen Pankey, Jackie Privet, Wilhelmina Scott-Ratliff, and Louise Spruill.

At their second meeting, Leo Kelly demonstrated how to use a rotary cutter, which was a big deal for the members and for quilting in general. With the capacity to cut multiple layers of cloth, the rotary cutter and mat offered an entirely new approach to quilt-making. By the end of the meeting, Wallace Evans, who had joined the group, Portia, and Mary agreed to teach and to demonstrate quilt patterns and techniques. Victoria Lynch suggested quilting activities and regional quilt shows to attend. A regular feature of the meetings became "Show and Tell," where members brought quilt projects, patterns, and vintage quilts to share and study. The group formulated its mission statement: "The Heritage Quilters is a diverse group of women and men from Halifax, Vance, and Warren County, whose mission is simply to support, encourage, and document quilting traditions and activities."

As other members joined, the group's experiences and talents expanded. Ruth Howard Chambers' family originated in the Olive Grove community of Warren County, which had a tradition of exceptional quilt-making. Ruth had registered voters in Gee's Bend, Alabama, during the 1960s Civil Rights movement, and she shared her knowledge of those quilters and their community. Gladys Foster-Young, Belinda Alston, and Iris T. Olinger worked in an adult day program, where they taught quilting to their clients. Iris was an experienced quilter with a wealth of quilting techniques and knowledge to share, as was Ellen Pankey, who joined in 2008.

In order to raise awareness of the rich heritage of quilt-making in the area, the Heritage Quilters have implemented various quilt-related activities. In addition to learning from each other, the group attends area quilt shows and lectures. They have staged numerous quilt shows and hosted quilting events. Their first show of members' work was held in 2002 and was called, "There Always Was a Quilt." In 2004, their second show was titled, "Making Quilts, Spreading Joy," followed by "In the Spirit" in 2006, "My Soul Looks Back in Wonder" in 2008, and "Patterns of Our Lives" in 2010. In 2012, the Heritage Quilters hosted two shows: the first regional exhibition of quilts made by men, "3 Men and Their Quilts," and their regular biennial show, "Quilts and the Heritage of Giving." They participate in the Ridgeway Cantaloupe Festival (Ridgeway is another community important in the county's quilt-making tradition), the Warrenton SpringFest, and the Harvest Market.

In partnership with the Warren County Arts Council and the Warren County Memorial Library, they received grants from the North Carolina Arts Council's Folk/Traditional Arts program to hold two series of quilt documentation days at the library, where quilt-makers from the area were interviewed, and their quilts photographed and documented. The Quilters brought together an array of volunteers from throughout their communities, including group members, local quilting instructors, and other area quilters to staff these documentation days, pick up quilt-makers and bring them to the library, serve refreshments, and do follow-up recordkeeping. The resulting information is housed in the Warren County Memorial Library and is accessible to the public.

The Heritage Quilters group is much more than a quilting club. They have extended the principle of cooperative work, which is the basis of much traditional quilt-making, to an interest in and understanding of community and community building. They created a



Earlean Henderson, Hollis Larkins, Portia Hawes, and Mary Terry examine a member's quilt during Show and Tell at a monthly meeting. Photo courtesy of the Heritage Quilters.

“giving circle,” a form of philanthropy where a group donates money, time, and talent to a pooled fund and allocates these resources to address community needs and issues. The Heritage Quilters Giving Circle is a member of the Community Investment Network, and the Triangle Community Foundation hosts its fund. The quilters gave their first grant to a Youth Summer Enrichment Program sponsored by a local alumni association to support a summer field trip with the theme, “Healthy Families, Healthy Communities.”

The Heritage Quilters believe that quilts and quilt-making have the power to heal and the power to love, and their goal is to extend that power into their own communities. They have actively sought to contribute to the economic health of the area. In partnership with the Warren County Arts Council, they initiated a Quilt Trail featuring six four-foot square panels of quilts or quilt patterns painted by local artists to draw attention to the exceptional quilt heritage of the area. As part of their educational activities to increase the visibility of the area’s quilt-making, group members make presentations to local school children, teaching geometry and quilting. The group makes lap quilts for residents in nursing homes and shelters.



Mrs. Nell Hicks proudly displays the Fan Quilt made by her grandmother Blanche Pinnel Burroughs at a Warren County Counting Quilts documentation day. Photo courtesy of Jereann King Johnson.

The Heritage Quilters also host a tour of Warren County historical structures and places for new teachers and school staff. The 2012 day-long tour included the historic main street of Warrenton, the courthouse, the Hendrick house, the John S. Plummer Hook and Ladder Company of black volunteer firemen, the church which housed a Freedman's School in its basement, and sites in communities near Warrenton. Participants received door prizes provided by area groups including the Heritage Quilters.

In partnership with Preservation Warrenton, the group has used quilts as a backdrop for tours highlighting Warren County's unique architectural features that have drawn countless visitors to the area. For the 2012 Spring Homes Tour "Architectural Reflections: Building Styles in Warren County, North Carolina," the three men in the group—Wallace Evans, Leo Kelly, Jr., and Hollis Larkins—gained notoriety for their quilt show, "3 Men and Their Quilts," which was on display in the Jacob Holt House.

Leo Kelly, Jr. of Henderson is a retired dean who worked for 37 years in continuing education at Vance-Granville Community College. He decided to take a quilting class that he had organized for

the college because of his memories of his mother Lucy and paternal grandmother Annie, whose quilting was “by golly by gee.” From instructor Peggy Stocks of Manson, NC, he learned to cut pieces for a block, but it was while he was homebound by a winter storm that closed the college for 16 days that he finally started sewing them together. He loved seeing the pieces form a square, and he was hooked.

Wallace Evans of Henderson, NC, teaches cosmetology at Halifax Community College in Weldon and is master stylist at Renaissance Styles by Wallace in Henderson. Encouraged by Leo Kelly, he also learned to quilt in a class with Peggy Stocks at Vance-Granville Community College and became addicted: “I just do it because I love it. I saw my mother quilting, and it woke up my senses.” He incorporates African and other ethnic fabrics in his quilts and repeats the same fabric from work to work so the people who receive them as gifts can trace the fabric.

Hollis Larkins of Tampa, FL, is a retired senior manager with the U.S. government; he holds an AA degree from San Diego City College, a BA degree from San Diego State University, and a JD degree from the UCLA School of Law. His wife of 44 years is Krista Reavis Larkins, whose family was from the Embro/Marmaduke community of Warren County. Hollis was trained to sew and repair sewing machines while in the US Navy. He began quilting in 2011, and had completed eight quilts by 2012. He favors geometric prints and the colors blue and brown.

More recently, the group successfully petitioned the Warren County Board of Commissioners to designate the county as “a community for quilts, quilting, and quilters.” Next, they petitioned the board to lease to them the historic home of free African American businessman Aaron Hendrick, who operated a livery in Warrenton, to develop as a quilt center and museum to promote Warren County as a tourist destination. This center is intended not only to honor Warren County’s African American citizens, past and present, but to provide a thriving and prosperous economic entity that will support the ongoing and living process of quilt-making.

The energetic enthusiasm of the Heritage Quilters for the inherent values of the quilt-making tradition—community, thrift, and creative expression—and the ways they have used those values as a framework for giving to their communities across boundaries of age or ethnicity continue to nurture their communities’ emotional and economic well-being. They are highly deserving of the North Carolina Folklore Society’s Community Traditions Award.



2012 Community Traditions Award

Student Action with Farmworkers: Labor Advocacy Group

By April Leanne Simon

Every year, hundreds of thousands of people migrate to North Carolina. These men, women, and children arrive with the harvest season to work in fields of fruits and vegetables, pine trees and tobacco, and meat and poultry processing plants. They are largely hidden away from public view, but each and every one of us relies on their contribution to our state's industry and economy. Migrant farm work has a long legacy in the United States, and contributes to a particularly rich culture and folklife in the Southeast. For more than twenty years, Student Action with Farmworkers (SAF) has used documentary work to share farmworker stories with the public and to bring students and farmworkers together to learn about each other's lives, to share resources and skills, and to honor their contributions and culture.

Since being incorporated as a nonprofit in 1992, SAF has taught documentary skills in photography, audio recording, and folklore to a diverse group of twenty college students from across the country

April Leanne Simon was an SAF intern in 2009, and has since continued to work in food justice. She serves as Education Director with Zomppa, a nonprofit which educates children about healthy eating, cultural awareness and social responsibility. She also serves on the SAF board of directors.

Frame photo: Tobacco workers in Fuquay-Varina, NC. Photo by 2010 SAF Fellow Dida El-Sourady.



*Karen and her son in Western NC. Photo by 2009 SAF Intern
Koehler Briceño.*

who come to North Carolina each summer to engage in SAF's programs with farmworkers. A majority of the students hail from farmworker families, and many have themselves worked in agriculture—like Lubella Torres, a 2011 SAF intern, who said, “For many years, I underestimated what my family had to go through to put food on the table and was embarrassed of what my family did for a living.” She “lived the life of a true farmworker; not one portrayed in some movie with actors, but one that saw and felt it all. For me to be able to show my parents that I am willing to stand up for the farmworker and their family is...priceless.”

In addition to working with farmworker agencies doing legal, health, education, and community organizing outreach throughout the summer, students also work in pairs to identify and document one farmworker's folklore narrative. Students work collaboratively with farmworker participants, who labor in the fields and agricultural processing plants in rural North Carolina. Most farmworkers are native Spanish-speakers, recent immigrants, and earn less than \$11,000 annually. Students share the documentary skills they

learned, encouraging workers to photograph and document their own lives, and work with farmworker participants to edit their documentary projects together. “Although we live in different worlds in many ways,” 2008 SAF fellow Leanne Tory-Murphy said, “the common work of the documentary project helped us to break down some of the barriers that might have separated us, because we came together in the spirit of listening and being heard.”

The collaborative process allows farmworkers to share their experiences in the fields and labor camps, sites which often go unseen and are sometimes inaccessible even to outreach workers. Additionally, they are able to lend their own voice to conversations about topics that unequivocally impact them—such as immigration, child labor, and poverty—conversations that they are all too often left out of. Agustin Sanchez was fifteen when SAF workers interviewed him, and he described his difficult experiences starting work at age 10: “Well, it was very hard for me because I was very little. And I could hardly lift a full bucket. And I’d see all the people filling them up



All Smiles. Photo by 2012 SAF Intern Lucero Galván.

really fast and they would lift them up high. And one time I filled it up to the top and then I couldn't lift it...I drug it away. And then it emptied out, the entire bucket, I dropped everything."

SAF uses the documentary images, interviews, and writings to produce bilingual publications, traveling exhibits, virtual exhibits, and theater performances to educate the public about farmworkers. In the past, SAF has shared their bilingual traveling exhibit, *Nuestras Historias/Nuestros Sueños—Our Stories/Our Dreams*, across the state and nationally; launched a bilingual website that provides a virtual exhibit space for their documentary work; presented students' documentaries at an end-of-summer reception for the public in Durham and at the NC Latin American Film Festival; and shared their documentary slideshows with students, community members, and people of faith through presentations across NC.

In celebration of their 20 year anniversary, SAF's farmworker youth group, the Levante Leadership Institute, created a portable mural using their personal stories as a jumping off point to graphically tell a collective story that not only captures their experiences and those of other farmworkers, but also highlights SAF's work to address farmworker injustice. The experience allowed the youth to think creatively about documentary work and empowered them to open dialogues about their own experiences in the context of farm labor and folklife.

As SAF forges into the future, the group continually seeks new ways to build relationships and share farmworker stories. SAF believes it is vital to collect the stories and experiences and educate the community about the important cultural contributions that farmworkers make to the state of North Carolina.



The Balsam Highlands Cemetery Style: A Meditation On Regional Creativity

By Alan Jabbour and Karen Singer Jabbour

Beginning in 2004, we undertook research in western North Carolina focusing on the topic of Decoration Day as a folk custom associated with the rural cemeteries of the region. We believed that in order to understand Decoration Day—an annual spring or summer cemetery renewal practice that led to the establishment of Memorial Day—we needed to understand the history, values, and styles associated with the cemeteries where the decorations took place. The result of our research over the next five years was a book entitled *Decoration Day in the Mountains: Traditions of Cemetery Decoration in the Southern Appalachians*. When we began our North Carolina research, we enlisted several knowledgeable local historians to guide us through some local rural cemeteries, and they all proved excellent tutors. What follows is a meditation on how certain striking cultural features we encountered seemed to offer persuasive evidence for the creativity and cultural identity of one micro-region within western North Carolina.

*Alan Jabbour is a folklorist who has documented North Carolina folk cultural traditions since the 1960s, when he was a graduate student at Duke University. He and his wife, Karen Singer Jabbour, have been studying the traditions of cemetery decoration, as well as the cemeteries in which the decorations take place, since 2004. Their book *Decoration Day in the Mountains: Traditions of Cemetery Decoration in the Southern Appalachians* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) has not ended their fascination with these important cultural traditions.*

Frame photo: The Balsam Highlands style with lectern in background, Broom Cemetery, April 13, 2013. Photo by Karen Singer Jabbour.

One of our cemetery guides was William Crawford, whose contributions to the genealogy and local history of Jackson and Swain Counties are profound and compendious. We spent most of the day with Bill Crawford on August 25, 2004. A key portion of our day's tutelage took us up N.C. Highway 281 (Canada Road) into the high country of Jackson County's Canada Township, often referred to as Little Canada by people in the wider region. The township has a reputation for being tough and reclusive and "marching to its own drummer." We had already seen quite a few cemeteries in Swain County and a few in Graham and Jackson Counties, but we were in for a cultural surprise in Canada Township when we visited Shook Cemetery, Mathis Cemetery, and Broom Cemetery. The first cemetery on our tour was Shook Cemetery, a beautiful cemetery with a wonderfully variegated style. Different family groups within the larger cemetery seem to have different ways of managing the gravesites they tend. Of the many styles we saw at Shook, we had not seen one style before, but later we found it more consistently rendered throughout Broom and Mathis Cemeteries—and that style is the main subject of this essay.

To explain what that style is, and what we think brought it about, we should clarify what we mean by *style* as it pertains to cemeteries. Many of the western North Carolina cemeteries we visited are open, level, and grassy, which is perhaps the most widespread cemetery style in America today. Others, especially beyond the Blue Ridge in Piedmont North and South Carolina, enclose family plots with coping—borders of wood, concrete, stone, or brick—and fill the enclosed family plot with a bed of gravel. A few cemeteries preserve an old but now uncommon style: they mound the graves and carefully pluck any grass or weeds from the mounds, creating a bare-earth aspect to the cemetery. Sometimes, in a variant of the bare-earth style, white sand is spread over the earthen mounds.

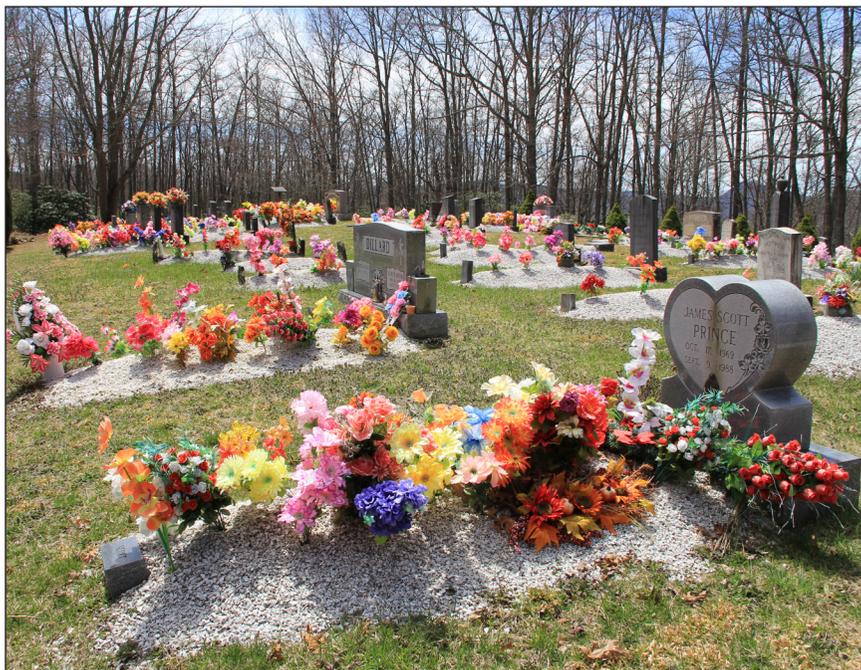
The mounding we are speaking of is not the same as what often takes place for new graves, where the gravesite is typically heaped up with dirt to compensate for the grave's settling in its first year or two. The old mounded style calls for maintaining the cemetery in a bare-earth style without grass, just as the old rural dooryard before the modern advent of grass was once maintained in a bare-earth style. Within the cemetery, mounds are maintained in perpetuity from head to foot on each gravesite, which requires annual or periodic re-mounding of the earth. As we noted in our book, mounding was once the dominant style of grave maintenance in Southern cemeter-

ies. The mounds remind people of their loved ones—almost as if the bodies were recumbent on top of the gravesite. Furthermore, the task of remounding is like a re-enactment of the original burial. And finally, paradoxically, mounded cemeteries resemble mounded gardens in spring—especially when the mounds are decorated with flowers in the single-row decoration style. Thus, mounding simulates both burial and resurrection.

Mounding is in decline as a style of cemetery maintenance. Indeed, many younger people today are amazed that people still do, or ever did, such practices. We found some cemeteries that are still mounded, some where the old mounded style competes with the new level and grassy style, as well as quite a few where the level and grassy style is now dominant, but one or two families, conservative cultural holdouts, refuse to change the style of the graves where their loved ones lie. The style we encountered in the cemeteries of Canada Township is fascinating, both because it is strikingly handsome and because it can be interpreted as a strategic compromise between the opposing models in this century-long cultural competition: mounded and bare-earth vs. level and grassy.

The style to which Bill Crawford introduced us in Broom and Mathis Cemeteries can be seen in the Broom Cemetery photo on the following page. The graves are all mounded with bare earth. Then the mounds are dressed with a thick layer of white gravel, maintaining the mounded shape and suppressing the growth of grass and weeds on the mounds. Between and around the mounds lie swaths of verdant grass. Flower decorations are removed before Decoration Day and left on the cemetery after the decoration till sometime in the summer before the next decoration. The juxtaposition of the green grass and the white mounds is visually striking, and flower decorations are nicely set off by the white background and green surround. In a conversation with church member Jimmy Luker after the service at Sol's Creek Baptist Church, he explained to us that this style was preferable to bare-earth mounding, because earthen mounds tend to wear down from heavy rain and require regular reconstitution, whereas gravel-covered mounds hold their shape much longer and resist the degradation caused by weather, feet, or mower wheels.

In the years between our initial visit to Canada Township in 2004 and the 2010 publication of our book, we visited the area several times, catching more of the seasonal round and exploring the boundaries of the style we had discovered in Mathis and Broom Cemeteries. Testing the style boundaries by exploring to the west, we



*The Balsam Highlands style, Broom Cemetery, Jackson Co.,
April 13, 2013. Photo by Karen Singer Jabbour.*

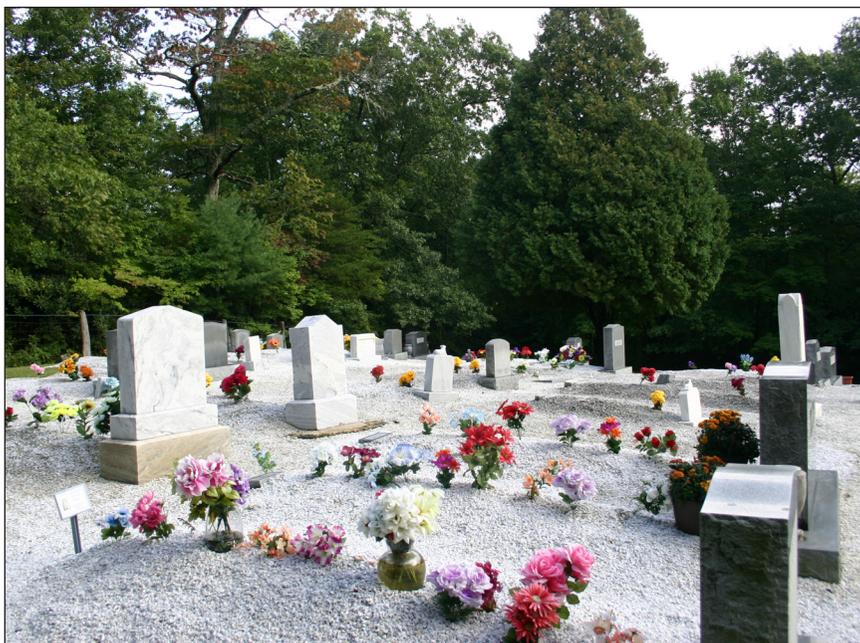
found one grave using the Balsam Highlands style across the Tuckasegee River on top of Cullowhee Mountain. There, the Double Springs Cemetery contains a number of mounded graves dressed with white sand and a single grave mounded and dressed in both sand and white gravel.

Returning to the Tuckasegee River Valley, we can see the geographic and cultural transition as we move eastward. Along the river, Tuckasegee Baptist Church Cemetery presents its handsome monuments against the backdrop of a level and grassy cemetery style. Beginning the long ascent up the mountain on Canada Road, the first cemetery near the highway is Woodring Cemetery. It does not have the same style as Mathis and Broom Cemeteries, but a number of its graves are mounded and dressed with white sand, which seems to have been the style that preceded and anticipated the style in Broom and Mathis. The next cemetery up the mountain, Shook Cemetery, shows a mixture of several styles, including a substantial number of graves using this special new regional style of mounding and dressing graves.

Continuing up Canada Road, next comes a series of cemeteries that have adopted the new style entirely, beginning with Broom and Mathis Cemeteries, which we had visited with Bill Crawford. At a broad level area well up the mountain, we come to Sol's Creek Baptist Church. Its large cemetery has an old section consisting mostly of uninscribed rock markers, which is level and grassy, while the rest of the cemetery (including a new section across the road) has been refashioned in the new mounded style. Nearby, two smaller new cemeteries, Bryson and Queen Cemeteries, have also adopted the new style. Continuing eastward toward the Transylvania County border, Harris Cemetery is a medium-sized cemetery far into the Balsam Mountains high country that has uniformly adopted the new style. Crossing over into Transylvania County, three cemeteries in the general vicinity of the Balsam Grove community have adopted the new style: Owen Cemetery, Jason McCall Cemetery, and Shoal Creek Cemetery, which is the easternmost example we have found.

Shoal Creek in Transylvania County and Sol's Creek in Jackson County seem to be the only church cemeteries in this epic catalog—though Owen Cemetery is situated next to a church with a different name. All the rest are family or community cemeteries, mostly bearing surnames common in the high country. There are perhaps a few more examples that we have not seen, or that have adopted the style since our visits a few years ago. And there may be other cemeteries, like Wood Cemetery in Jackson County, where one or two family groups have adopted the mounded style for their graves, though the rest of the cemetery does not show the style.

Three cemeteries in this larger class—Vess Owen Cemetery, Jackson Owen Cemetery (also known as Wolf Mountain Cemetery), and Transylvania County's Woods Cemetery—have carried this creative model for cemetery style a dramatic step further. Instead of having grass between the individual graves, they cover that space with white gravel, too. Vess Owen Cemetery, on the banks of a dam lake south of Sol's Creek off Canada Road, shows how the new adaptation developed. There, between mounded graves dressed with white gravel, some grass is preserved, but where there are groups of graves—often family groups that are close together—the spaces between the mounded graves are filled with gravel. The covering is carried farther in Jackson Owen/Wolf Mountain Cemetery, where a major section of the cemetery has been continuously dressed in white gravel. Finally, Woods Cemetery has been entirely given over to



The all-white-gravel variation on the Balsam Highlands style, Woods Cemetery, Transylvania Co., September 11, 2010. Photo by Karen Singer Jabbour.

the continuous-gravel adaptation. Since the gravel-covered mounding is preserved, the modification creates the effect of an undulating sea of white.

At Woods Cemetery for its 2010 Decoration Day, we met the caretaker of the cemetery, Wilkie Owen. We asked him how it came to be that the cemetery is fully dressed with white gravel. He said he had done it after taking the job of caring for the cemetery about a decade ago (that would be about 2000). The cemetery had been mounded with white gravel before, but there was grass between the individual mounds, as we had seen in other cemeteries. He found that it was hard to cut the grass between and around the mounded and graveled graves, so he experimented with filling in the neutral turf with white gravel. That seemed more manageable, and people liked the look of it, so he gradually filled in all the intervening space in the cemetery with white gravel. It did not happen as a single large project, but gradually over time.

For our book, the name we gave to the style of managing cemeteries that we found in this highlands region of the Appalachians was the Balsam Highlands solution—or, we might say now, the Balsam Highlands style. We used the word “solution” in our book because

the style provides a creative compromise between the old bare-earth, mounded style and the new level and grassy style that had gradually spread through the rural South from the later 19th century to the later 20th century. The Balsam Highlands style conserves the venerable and sacred tradition of mounding, and according to Jimmy Luker at Sol's Creek Baptist Church, it also conserves the essence of the older tradition of using white sand to dress the mounds. The idea of white sand, like the tradition of whitewashing grave markers, reveals an impulse to mark the cemetery as sacred by dressing it in white. White sand also highlights wonderfully the flowers used to decorate the gravesite. White gravel provides the same benefits as white sand, and, as our conversation with Jimmy Luker suggested, is also more stable—less likely to erode or wash away from rainstorms or human intrusions—and is easier to maintain.

Thus, both Jimmy Luker and Wilkie Owen described the decision-making regarding the new style as a practical choice influenced by what seems most efficient to accomplish the work at hand. But Wilkie Owen also made a point of saying that he tried out his idea of filling in the grassy area between graves with more white gravel, and when people liked it, he then worked to cover the entire cemetery. One could say that both the original Balsam Highlands gravel-covered mounds and the expansion of the style to eliminate all grass were like gardening or engineering solutions. They were exercises in practical problem-solving, using personal creativity regulated by a collective religious and aesthetic sense of what seemed proper and looked beautiful.

“Balsam Highlands” is a phrase of our own inventing. When we first learned about this style, we associated it in our minds with Jackson County's Canada Township. But crossing over from Jackson County into Transylvania County, we found more cemeteries that displayed one or another gradation of the Balsam Highlands style. Thus, we concluded we needed a more encompassing term that would comfortably straddle the Jackson-Transylvania border. What emerged as our coinage was “Balsam Highlands,” embracing the high-country rural communities in the Balsam Mountains from Canada Road in Jackson County to the area around the community of Balsam Grove in Transylvania County.

We should stipulate, however, that not all the cemeteries of this micro-region participate in the style. It may be a coherent region, but its cemeteries are not stylistically uniform. Sol's Creek Baptist Church, not far from Canada Road, has a large cemetery close to



The all-white-gravel variation on the Balsam Highlands style in two grave groups, Vess Owen Cemetery, Jackson Co., September 11, 2008. Photo by Karen Singer Jabbour.

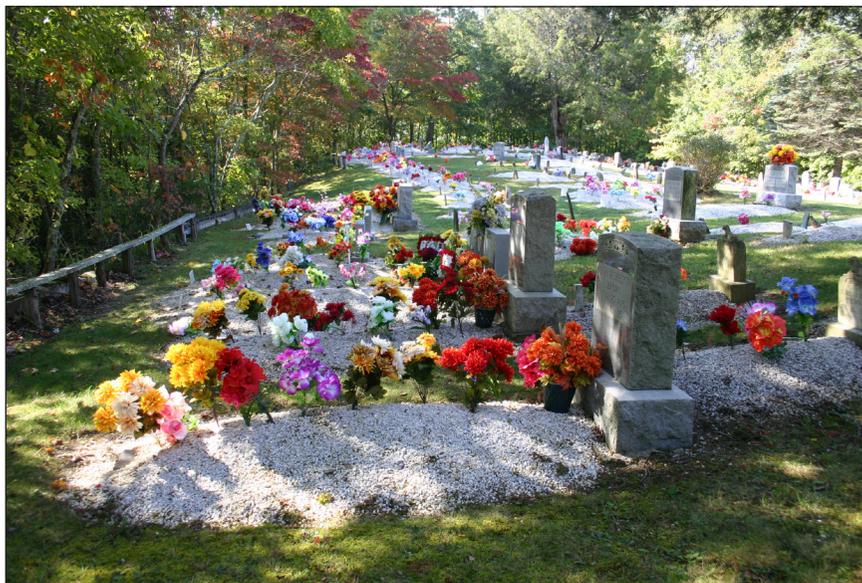
the epicenter of the style, which is fully rendered in the Balsam Highlands style except for a section of old unscribed markers. But a nearby cemetery, Cathey Cemetery, does not display the Balsam Highlands style at all. Driving south in both Jackson and Transylvania County, leaving the high country, we found no additional examples of the style. The most easterly example we have seen is Shoal Creek Cemetery, a large cemetery affiliated with Shoal Creek Baptist Church. It is possible, but unlikely, that there are more examples to the north and east, which is mostly national forest or national park lands with hardly any population.

An interesting sidebar to the white gravel story is the white sand story. We documented white sand gravesites in several western North Carolina locations and in various other Southern states. A number of people in western North Carolina told us that white sand used to be a common covering for mounded graves in the old days. Jimmy Luker told us that Sol's Creek Cemetery had been converted a number of years earlier to what we are calling the Balsam Highlands style. When we asked what it had been before, he replied, "White sand." He explained that the white gravel was preferable because heavy rains did not wash it away, but he also said vaguely that their former

source for white sand was no longer available. When Bill Crawford was showing us Mathis Cemetery, he had us stop along a country road and pointed out an unusual white cliff-side that was gashed from being hewn to excavate white sand. This cliff was a sand source for Mathis Cemetery, and perhaps for other cemeteries in the area as well. A sign had been posted forbidding people to enter the property—presumably in response to the cliff-hewing. In a similar vein, a Swain County resident described how people used to visit a certain railroad right-of-way, gathering white sand from the embankment to dress their gravesites.

An intriguing parallel to the Balsam Highlands cemetery style is another Jackson County cemetery tradition, and an unusual one: several Canada Township cemeteries contain wooden lecterns. They are not movable, and are instead fixed in the ground as permanent artifacts of the cemetery. In Broom, Mathis, Cathey, Sol's Creek, and Harris Cemeteries, each of the lecterns is positioned facing an area with benches or space for congregating. One might think that the lecterns are for funerals; but funerals call for speaking at gravesides, which might be anywhere in a cemetery. It is a better presumption that the lecterns are there for preachers to use on Decoration Day to address people gathered in the cemetery to honor their loved ones. We have observed movable lecterns in cemetery pavilions scattered throughout the South, but these five fixed outdoor lecterns comprise, to the best of our knowledge, a unique cultural feature of the Balsam Highlands. The fact that the geographic distribution of these lecterns parallels the distribution of the Balsam Highlands cemetery style strengthens the argument that what we have named "the Balsam Highlands" is indeed a distinctive cultural micro-region.

We may also glance to the south, not for continuation of the Balsam Highlands decoration tradition, but for evidence of an older and larger regional tradition in cemetery management that may have influenced the Balsam Highlands style. Crossing the Blue Ridge into the South Carolina Piedmont, one encounters a style of cemetery management that occurs through the Piedmont from the Carolinas westward into Alabama. In this style, larger cemeteries are broken down into family plots, which are visibly set off from the neutral spaces of the cemetery and from other family plots by what is often called "coping." The family space is marked off into rectangles with stone, wooden, brick, concrete, or other borders, and the space inside the coping is usually filled with white, gray, or other colored



*The Balsam Highlands style, Sol's Creek Cemetery, Jackson Co.,
October 5, 2008. Photo by Karen Singer Jabbour.*

gravel. The style incidentally does not usually retain the older tradition of mounding; rather, the coping and gravel seems to be a substitute for mounding. The design seems to have arisen out of two impulses: (1) to stake out family sites, ensuring that future family burials are not separated from those already buried; and (2) to protect family gravesites from people or mowers crossing over them. People are taught from childhood to avoid stepping on gravesites, and the thought of a mower running over the grave of a loved one can be distressing.

The coped-and-graveled style occasionally shows up in western North Carolina, revealing an awareness of it as an option. But it tends to be an alternative for only one or two gravesites when it appears in a western North Carolina cemetery, whereas in the South Carolina Piedmont it is often the cemetery's dominant style. It is notable in this Piedmont style how little grass is visible. Indeed, we also encountered in South Carolina and elsewhere in the South a growing trend of applying herbicides along the outside of the coping to eliminate the problem of mowing the grass and weeds growing against the coping. In some cases, the coping is so close to adjacent coping that the space in between is totally grassless, thanks to the herbicide applications. Paradoxically, the modern trend toward grass, having cre-

ated unintended consequences from and for mowing, has fostered a countertrend back toward the ideal of grassless cemeteries.

But though one can find a few coped and graveled gravesites in some Appalachian cemeteries, the style is not common in the high country of the Balsams, and no cemetery we visited uses it as its dominant style. On the other hand, it seems possible that seeing the generous use of white gravel within coped sites in cemeteries just one county south across the state line inspired someone to adopt and adapt the use of white gravel in the Balsams. It is also possible that inspiration for the new style came from the world of home landscaping, where white gravel is a popular ingredient. In comparison with the preceding style of white sand dressing the mounds, the newly invented gravel-dressed style retains mounding (unlike the Piedmont coped-and-graveled style), but applies a generous portion of white gravel over each mound and permits grass between the mounds. Thus—we still know not how—the Balsam Highlands style was born.

One factor that may have supported this newly minted Balsam Highlands cemetery style is a broader trend in regional cemeteries toward managing cemeteries with less deference to and reliance on the individual efforts of disparate families, and more deference to the central intelligence and controlling aesthetics of a single caretaker or a cemetery committee. Throughout western North Carolina, one can find many older cemeteries revealing a style that would best be described as variegated—reflecting in the same acreage the many different styles and solutions carried out by different families over time. Shook Cemetery along Canada Road reflects this older diversity of cemetery styles—including the contemporary graveled-mound style that is our subject.

But the 20th century was a time during which cemeteries more and more were shaped by the guiding hand and vision of one person—a cemetery hero, as we termed them in our book—who tackled the difficult task of saving and restoring a cemetery that had fallen into a period of neglect. In the present era, it is likely to be a person such as Wilkie Owen, who talked to us about his work in reshaping Woods Cemetery in Transylvania County. In other parts of the South, there are more cemetery committees, and their signs posting rules show that they have spent a good deal of energy trying to constrain people stylistically, mostly to facilitate the work of the mower. The Balsam Highlands cemeteries do not display such signs, but they do have caretakers who have embraced the new gravel-covered mounds

as their signature style, and it is interesting to reflect that most cemeteries with this new style are managed entirely this way. We have moved from variegated cemeteries to comprehensive renderings, cemetery by cemetery and grave by grave within each cemetery, of a new creative concept.

We close finally with the central topic of regional identity and its cultural markers. We can see in the Balsam Highlands cemetery style a classic engineering solution that is at once innovative and deeply traditional, modern and old-fashioned, practical and aesthetically pleasing. It is important to note that this is a stylistic invention of the current generation. Careful interviewing might pin down two interesting questions: When was it first done? And with which cemetery? Lacking that data, we would suggest that it probably originated as a style no earlier than 1980, and that the first cemetery to introduce it is one of the current examples we have surveyed. Thus, the style has been adopted by twelve cemeteries and portions of two more in the span of a generation. The wooden lecterns are a fascinating bit of corroborative cultural evidence. They occupy roughly the same geographical range as the Balsam Highlands cemetery style, but the examples we have seen may date from earlier. Taken together, these two cemetery features can be seen as cultural manifestations of a dynamic and distinctive cultural micro-region. Among the people of the wider region, this geographic micro-region is perceived as a fascinating and distinctive special place; that judgment seems well supported by the internal cultural evidence of their cemeteries.

POSTSCRIPT

This essay was composed for and delivered at a lecture-slideshow at Western Carolina University's Mountain Heritage Center on April 12, 2013. That same day and the following day, we revisited many of the Balsam Highlands cemeteries described in the lecture, which brought some surprises. The lectern in Mathis Cemetery had been replaced, and the lectern in Harris Cemetery had been painted white. Graves were decorated with different color combinations. But the big change was in Broom Cemetery. It was still in the Balsam Highlands style, but one row of about ten graves had been experimentally recast. The graves are still mounded and dressed in white gravel, but the neutral turf around the graves in this row is no longer grassy. It is now dressed with gravel, too. Yet the neutral-turf gravel is not white;

it is gray, creating a two-toned effect that does not compete with but highlights the white of the sacred mounds—a fresh new solution in the continuing creative evolution of the Balsam Highlands style.



The latest variation on the Balsam Highlands style: white gravel mounds surrounded by gray gravel, Broom Cemetery, Jackson Co., April 13, 2013. Photo by Karen Singer Jabbour.



Appalachian Bestiary: Wondrous and Fearsome Creatures of the Southern Wild

By Gary Carden

The folklore of ancient lands abounds with creatures that cannot be. Dragons, chimeras, and griffons. Hippogriffs and minotaurs. Orcs and feathered serpents. Wondrous monsters that are the imaginative embodiment of disparate parts and talents. There are fish with golden eyes that prophesy, men with the bodies of horses that instruct young heroes, and birds that pursue and punish the guilty. Such beings are undoubtedly immortal, for they are still with us, passing from Parnassus to Appalachia, from the forests of Germany to the Ozark hills.

Even when the reader finds traces of classical origins, these creatures are unique. Like most illegitimate offspring that “know not their own fathers,” the fabulous creatures of the southern mountains

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Frame photo: Panther. Illustration by Mandy Newham.

move to a different music. Instead of the pipes of Pan or aeolean harps, they fly, swim, and gambol to the banjo and fiddle. Like the culture that has nourished them, the creatures of the Ozarks and the Alleghanies confront adversity with humor: fish that wear fur, panthers that whistle, and birds that fly backwards. The combination of fur, fin, and feathers is new, but many of these creatures have ancient eyes.

When questioned about his description of a fabulous Arkansas beast, one storyteller observed, "Well, it is only a lie when you tell it for the truth." When Vance Randolph once questioned a "windy-spinner" as to his belief in the details that he had just reported with considerable passion, vowing that the source he had was his own grandfather, the storyteller was surprised by Randolph's apparent credibility. "Do you suppose your grandfather really believed that about the bald-know buzzard?" Randolph asked. "Well of course not! It was just one of those old stories. But, he always acted as if he believed it. That was part of the joke, you see."

The following catalogue of "Wondrous Creatures" has been simplified somewhat. A whole bevy of oddities has been eliminated because they (a) sound suspiciously like another creature included in the list, and (b) there seems to be a paucity of information about them. This is especially true of critters like the hickle-snoopus, ring-tailed hooter, saw snake (and snow snake), cross-feathered snee, dismal sauger, waw-waw, thunderbird, you-ho, snow wasset, rumptifusel, dingbat, hootpecker, jackalope, flutterick, shagamaw, roperite, snoligoster, wapaloosie, tripodero, toodalong buzzard, and wiffle-pooffle (which is an aquatic beast that Pecos Bill captured with the aid of a very humorous storyteller).

Then, there are the lost myths of the gigantic hornets and the yellow jackets, which, according to a tantalizing fragment of Cherokee mythology, used to soar like jet planes through the Nantahala Gorge until they were vanquished by the "little people." There are a host of others that I feel are either too ridiculous or too alien to consider here. I have also omitted lizard men, "Big Foot," the Funeral Mountain terrashot, and the UFO visitors, since they are not creatures that originated in the southern mountains. Here they are, then: wondrous creatures that run the gamut from whimsy to spine-tingling terror. All are drawn from the same deep well—the oral tradition of the southern mountains.



Agropelter. Illustration by Mandy Newham.

AGROPELTER

This little critter lives in dead trees. According to Walker Wyman, who seems to know more about it than anybody, lumberjacks consider the agropelter mischievous and good humored. Small enough to be carried in a shirt-pocket, its greatest joy in life was to pelt unsuspecting people with pinecones, bark, and tree limbs. Sitting in the top of a dead tree, the agropelter had an excellent vantage point, and when it saw hunters or lumberjacks approaching, it would begin to gather its arsenal. Since it has a slender, wiry body and muscular, thin whip-lash arms, it could appear, throw its missile, and vanish in an instant.

Unfortunately, hunters who first encountered the little critter did not share the lumberjacks' belief that it was harmless and began to kill agropelters in astonishing numbers. To make matters worse, unscrupulous trappers began to capture the little tree monkeys and

ship them to southern mill towns were the agropelters were trained to run the looms in cotton mills. When it became obvious that the species was facing extinction, concerned woodsmen undertook to train them to defend themselves. Consequently, the agropelter became fierce, crafty, and capable of throwing dangerous objects. They could throw pieces of dead wood with amazing accuracy, stunning and sometimes killing woodsmen.

Although hunters still return home with injuries that could have been caused by an angry agropelter, most folklorists feel that the beleaguered critter is endangered since it can only reproduce once in every four years on February 29. Litters always consist of odd numbers, such as one, three, five, etc. According to William T. Cox, the agropelter's diet consists of hoot owls and woodpeckers (and the hybrid, the hootpeckers). As these birds diminish, so does the agropelter. It is interesting that William T. Cox and Walker D. Wyman, the agropelter's two most fervent chroniclers, disagree considerably about this tree creature's appearance. Cox's agropelter is bigger and meaner, while Wyman describes it as small and cute. Another writer, Henry H. Tryon, doesn't add any significant information. Paul Bunyan literature notes that the agropelter has "never been completely described and its life history is unknown."

AXEHANDLE HOUND

The Axehandle hound, a lumberjack pest and camp follower, looks a bit like a dachshund, with a hatchet-shaped head, a handle-shaped body, and short legs. A nocturnal creature, it prowls through lumber camps at night sniffing out axe and peavey handles. Since its diet consists solely of these items, it is totally dependent on lumber camps. The Axehandle hounds sometimes travel in packs, and have been known to devastate whole cords, or wagonloads of axe handles.

BELLED BUZZARD

This "harbinger of death" has been sighted from North Carolina to Oklahoma. In Appalachia, his appearance was thought to presage the death of some notable person. Dying politicians, generals, and ministers were supposed to hear the dreaded tolling of the death bell as the "funeral bird" circled their house. However, as oral tradition spread, the belled buzzard's responsibilities became more complex. In some instances, the buzzard becomes a form of divine judgment and punishment. Like the Furies in Greek mythology, punishing those who had committed "unspeakable crimes" or had otherwise

offended the gods, the buzzard's tolling bell followed secret murderers until they confessed their crime. At other times, it flew to a death site prior to the event and waited, its presence serving as a prophesy of inevitable death.

There are stories (literary) about the buzzard roosting on the courthouse cupola during court session, thereby making the final death sentence anti-climactic, since everyone knew the fate of the accused before the jury reached a verdict. North Carolina writer Thad Stem uses the buzzard as a portent of death in his short story "The Belled Buzzard of Granville County" when the buzzard sits on the courthouse roof throughout a controversial murder trial. The belled buzzard seemed to have seized the imagination of additional writers who have used its ominous image to their advantage. Irving S. Cobb's short story, "The Belled Buzzard," is especially noteworthy. When a plantation owner murders his wife's lover in a Georgia swamp, the ominous buzzard shows up and circles the murder site. Each day, more buzzards appear, and the murderer resorts to desperate means to drive them away. Seeing the buzzards, curious residents find the body. The plantation owner, called to sit on the coroner's inquest, confesses.

Perhaps the most noted misuse of the "winged messenger of death" is several published accounts of "The Bell Witch" (which has nothing to do with bells, but is the name of a Randolph County, Tennessee, family that was allegedly tormented by a witch). Especially unfortunate is the Readers' Digest version that depicts the dolorous bird leading the funeral procession of Mary Bell, an action that has no basis in the original story—"The Bell Witch of Tennessee" by Charles Bailey Bell and Harriet Parks Miller. Vance Randolph has numerous anecdotes about belled buzzards in Ozark country, including a reference to a series of belled buzzard stories that were broadcast over KWTO in Springfield, Missouri, on May 21, 1950. (One tale deals with a buzzard that wore a red flannel shirt.) Randolph also notes that Ozark folklorists report that such stories appear in "nine localities of Missouri and Arkansas."

In the Southern Appalachians, the belled buzzard acquires a supernatural prescience and was said to appear over homes, courthouses, and graveyards several days prior to "some dread event." In eyewitness accounts, it is described as larger than the average buzzard, and frequently flying with an escort of unbelled brethren. There are numerous newspaper accounts of belled buzzard sightings in the 1920s-30s. In fact, one article describes the final exodus of thousands

of buzzards—a migration headed west—led by the doleful bell tied on the wing (not around the neck), of a huge specimen flying point.

There are a number of accounts of how the buzzard got his bell. In the most prosaic versions, a prankster captures a buzzard, ties a bell to its neck, and releases it. The buzzard is heard and seen in several states. This story and the varied accounts of the consequences appear in Southern Black, Ozark and Appalachian folklore. One of the most colorful story is given by Ira Ford, a folk music collector who published a fiddle tune entitled “The Belled Buzzard” (complete with plucked strings to simulate the ringing bell). In his collection entitled *Traditional Music in America*, Ford gives the following account of how the belled buzzard originated:

Back of the old fiddle tune, “The Belled Buzzard” is a tradition which has its origin in the Ozark mountains. The story concerns a settlement along a river bottom. One bank of the river was bordered for miles by high unscaleable bluffs crowned with scrub timber, the home and breeding place of thousands of buzzards.

Hog-raising was the main source of income of the community. Mast from the acorn-bearing trees furnished food for the droves of hogs ear-marked and turned into the woods each year, to be rounded up in the fall ready for market. One summer, hog cholera broke out among the porkers. The buzzards feasting on the dead carcasses carried the disease from one section of the country to the other. There was an unwritten law that these birds should not be killed, but the farmers were aware that, unless some action was taken to check the spread of the disease, their hogs, together with their incomes, would be wiped out entirely.

A meeting was called. It was decided to capture one of the birds and fasten a small sheep bell to it, in the hope that the bell would cause them to leave. One of the birds was accordingly trapped and belled. His arrival among the others created a great commotion, and in a few days, the flock of buzzards disappeared, only the belled buzzard remaining. Finally, he, too, took flight.

At the end of the summer, there was an epidemic of typhoid fever in the community, many dying. About that time the belled buzzard reappeared, the tinkle of his bell being plainly heard as he soared above the houses. He came and went time after time, and always following his reappearance, some sort of calamity happened. The return of the belled bird aroused apprehension in the minds of the more superstitious, and his presence became associated with their misfortunes. They believed that the repulsive bird was possessed by an evil spirit. Many believe that he still roams the skies, as he has for more than one hundred years, so that even today, any report of the belled buzzard casts a spell of gloom over them.

BOOGER BIRD (a.k.a. BOGIE BIRD)

The Booger bird shows up in *The Life Treasury of American Folklore*, but is referred to as the Goofus bird, as it also is along the banks of the Big Onion River in Paul Bunyan country. I suspect that the Bogie, the Whiffle-bird and the Filly-goo are actually “birds of a feather,” so to speak. Vance Randolph does characterize the Bogie as some sort of “mystical goose or swan,” while the filly-loo is said to resemble a crane. The Booger bird flies backwards and seems to “have no interest in where it is going, but is very interested in where it has been,” similar to Carl Sandburg’s *The People, Yes*, where “The auk flies backward so as to see where it has been.”

Stories about backward-flying fowl date back to classical mythology and a mythical auk that flew backward for the same reasons attributed to the booger bird. Old timers claim that booger birds sometimes attract the attention of hunters when the fowl crashes into trees. When the hunters find the stunned booger lying on the ground, they usually place it on a tree limb where it can recover its senses (so to speak). Then it zooms off (backwards, of course) whereon it immediately crashes into another tree.

CABBAGE SNAKE

This deadly viper lives inside cabbages. Since it is pale green or colorless, hapless victims can’t see it until it is too late. It is a little disheartening to learn that there have been cabbage snake scares that were so extreme, some folks let their cabbage rot on the hillside rather than risk being bitten. There have even been reports of



Cabbage Snake. Illustration by Mandy Newham.

people who unwittingly cooked the snakes along with the cabbage. Cabbage snakes have been reported throughout Appalachia and as far west as Ohio and Missouri.

COACH SNAKE (a.k.a. WHIP SNAKE)

There seems to be two species of coach, or whip, snakes: one not poisonous and one very much so. The non-poisonous variety attacks both humans and beasts and proceeds to give them one hell of a thrashing. The second species is blood chilling and deadly. Combining the worst traits of rattlesnakes, hoop snakes, and coach snakes, this species will bite, sting, and whip its victims to death.

Stories about the non-poisonous species tend to be cautionary. Humans are punished for breaking some moral code. For example, a backsliding adult may be attacked and whipped by the outraged reptile because he is caught fishing or hunting on Sunday; truant school children are caught and whipped (sometimes, by the blue

racer). James Zachery, a friend of mine who was raised in Cashiers Valley, told me an interesting reversal of the Coach Snake story—that he once saw his father whip a blue racer. Apparently, his father was attempting to discipline the snake, which had made repeated attempts to climb a pole in order to get into a bird's nest. James said that his father would whip the snake until it dropped from the pole and then continue to punish it as it tried to escape into the woods. The snake invariably returned to the pole, so finally James' father killed it.

In the Black folklore of the South, the coach snake usually grabs a man by the nose, fixing its teeth in the septum, and proceeds to thrash him to death. Numerous folktales describe the sound of the whip striking flesh as a loud crack that can be heard for a mile. Should help arrive, the only recourse is to cut the snake's head off (which stays fixed in the victim's nose). In some accounts, the coach snake has a plaited tail, and emits an angry whistle when it attacks. The coach snake encountered by the "big windy artist" and hunter Uncle Davy Lane in Hardin Taliaferro's *Fisher's River (North Carolina) Scenes and Characters* can travel at a terrifying speed. According to Lane, his own flight to escape from the snake became so furious, he ran out of all "his linens." When Uncle Davy's skin began to split, he realized he was running too fast and was in danger of running out of his skin, so he slowed down a little. He arrived home buck-naked and frightened his wife and children, but he outdistanced the whip snake.

Tales in the eastern Carolinas frequently describe a time "way back" when coach snakes used to gather in the woods near trails, and when people walked by, they would "stand up on their tails and whistle at you." An old superstition in the southern mountains warns against "whistling in the woods" because it will attract snakes. Likewise, in South Carolina, if you hear a whistle in the woods, don't whistle back or try to find the source. It may be a whipsnake luring the unsuspecting to his or her death.

A variant of the nose-biting whip snake of the Carolinas, the black-with-red-tail Ozark "coachwhip snake" will "catch a child by the lip, take one turn around its neck and whip him very severely." Usually, coach snakes travel in pairs, and Vance Randolph says that two coach snakes "will work together, one holding the victim while the other lashes him." This is also a common superstition throughout the rural South. According to Texas and South Carolina folklore, when a coachsnake victim collapses, the snake will stick its tongue or its tail

up the victim's nostrils to determine if he is dead, unconscious, or playing possum. There are stories that the whipsnake will conduct a "test." By puncturing the eardrum of the fallen victim with the barb on its tail, the whipsnake can identify someone who is merely feigning death. If the victim reacts, the snake proceeds to whip him until he is undeniably dead. Naturally, the Texas species is deadly since each blow of the snake's tail is the equivalent of a poisonous bite.

DAKWA (DAGWUH)

In Cherokee mythology, the Dakwa, or "Great Fish," lived in deep pools in Nantahala Gorge in North Carolina and the Little Tennessee River. Hunters (or children) who walked too near the Dakwa's home would be slapped into the water by the fish's tail, and drowned and eaten. One ancient myth sounds like a Cherokee version of Jonah: a young warrior is swallowed by the Dakwa, but manages to cut his way out with a mussel shell. The warrior suffered no ill effects, except his head was scalded and rendered permanently bald by the juices in the fish's stomach. Remarkably, the Greek hero, Hercules, became bald for the same reason.

FRUIT-BEARING DEER

In Appalachia, the fruit-bearing deer is the consequence of a desperate hunter who, upon discovering he is out of lead shot, loads his gun with either a plum, peach, or apple seed and brings down a huge white stag. However, the stunned deer manages to escape, and years later, the hunter encounters the deer, which now has a huge fruit-bearing tree growing among his antlers. In a Kentucky version, a hunter captures a stag and grafts an apple-tree seedling onto his head.

Perhaps the most outrageous tale of this type is told by Uncle Davy Lane in *Fisher's River*. In addition to shooting a peach-seed in the back of a buck, Uncle Davy's second encounter with the deer involves his unwitting climb into the tree, where he gorges himself on fruit only to discover that the tree is moving. He is carried fifteen miles before the buck allows him to dismount. Occasionally, the deer's behavior is as strange as its fruit. It is frequently described as giving a strange human-like cry, and like the snawfus, exhaling a pale blue smoke from its mouth—which accounts for the morning haze over the Appalachian and/or Ozark mountains. This deer has become a stock item in tall hunting tales.

GOWROW

Like many of the mythical creatures of the Ozarks, the gowrow is considered to have been an original inhabitant of the Southern Appalachians, but finally migrated to the deep caves of Arkansas and Missouri and terrorized those areas in the 1880's. The gowrow was a monstrous lizard (over twenty feet long) that reproduced by hatching gigantic eggs (as big as beer kegs). The female gowrow carried her young in a pouch like a possum. Living in deep caves and under rock ledges, it ventured into the outer world only for food: deer, sheep, goats, and humans.

The Jack tale, "Jack and the Gower," is undoubtedly a folktale about the gowrow. A noted folklorist (and ardent fan of the "big windy" tradition), Otto Ernest Rayburn, once published a story of the killing of a gowrow by a traveling salesman named William Miller near Marshall, Arkansas, in 1897. The salesman gives a grisly account of the gowrow's lair, noting that there were "skeletons, skulls, and bones" around the entrance. Miller and his posse waylaid the creature, and his description of its return is impressive: the earth quakes, and a nearby lake develops tidal waves. After an extended assault with firearms, the gowrow falls, destroying several trees and one assailant.

Miller notes that, in addition to tusks, the gowrow had webbed feet, clawed toes, green scales, and a back that bristled with "short horns." The tail terminated in a "deadly sickle," and Miller seemed confident that the gowrow was a pachyderm that dated back to the dinosaur age. According to Vance Randolph, Miller claimed to have sent the creature's remains to the Smithsonian; however, Randolph states that attempts to verify Miller's claim have been unsuccessful. According to Curtis D. MacDougall, a friend of Miller's named Elbert Smithee claimed to have a "drawing of the dead creature." Credulous folks are still trying to find this illustration.

One of Randolph's informants told him that a gowrow was once captured because it ate a wagonload of dried apples. The apples swelled the creature's body and made it impossible for it to return to its lair. Consequently, the gowrow was exhibited in a traveling show that displayed a terrifying painting out front of the gowrow "eating an entire family of cotton farmers." No one ever actually saw the gowrow because after the crowd had paid the admission and sat waiting for the curtain to be raised, the sounds of clanking chains, shots, and screams came from backstage. Then the showman emerged, his clothes torn and blood running down his face, shouting, "Run for

your lives! The Gowrow is loose!” Pandemonium ensued with more screams, roars, and shots. The audience invariably fled “without stopping to get their money back.”

HANGDOWN

As its name suggests, this sloth-like critter likes to hang down from tree limbs over well-traveled trails. A hangdown is especially disconcerting on a dark night when it unfolds downward into the face of someone on horseback! It can hang from either its fore or hind legs, and likes to creep along the bottom of limbs at a pace that is so painfully slow, it takes prolonged observance to perceive its movement. Its skin is highly prized by hunters, who hunt it with a washtub and an axe.

HIGH-BEHIND (a.k.a. HIDE-BEHIND)

A near-relative of the jimplicute, the high-behind is so named because his hind legs are enormous and tall, while his forelegs are fore-shortened and tiny. In conjunction with his unusual shape, the high-behind can stand erect and contort its body until it is easily concealed behind a tree. Showing a decided preference for human flesh, this creature only comes out at night and lurks near trails in wooded areas.

In Pennsylvania folklore, the hide-behind does not prey on humans, but merely frustrates them by following them through the woods. It is thought to be an ancient creature that originally tormented the Seneca Indians. When Seneca hunters walked single-file down a trail, says James York Glimm, no one wanted to be last in line because the hide-behind followed him. Also in Pennsylvania stories, no one ever sees the hide-behind, but they know it is there because it snickers and giggles uncontrollably at their inability to catch sight of it. Although Glimm says nothing about the hide-behind snickering, he does suggest that its primary purpose is to drive its victims crazy. According to Glimm, the high-behind and the hide-behind are two separate creatures. As for the high-behind, well, it is sort of a misshapen deer, so pathetic that most hunters won't shoot at it. Paul Bunyan historian Charles Edward Brown does not agree. “A very dangerous animal,” he says, “which undoubtedly accounts for many missing lumberjacks.” Brown goes on to describe how the hide-behind kills its prey and drags or carries the body home where it “feasted...in solid comfort.”

HINGE-TAILED BING-BUFFER

This pathetic creature resembles a hippopotamus, except that it has a long, flexible tail and a great, kangaroo-like pouch beneath its chin. Since it is too awkward and slow to overtake other animals, it must rely on its elephant-trunk-like tail, which can remove a stone from the Bing-Buffer's pouch and hurl it with deadly accuracy. Randolph notes that it carries a pouch full of stones weighing three-to-five-pounds, which it can throw distances of 300 yards with fatal results.

HOOP SNAKE (a.k.a. HORN SNAKE)

The first recorded description of a hoop (or horn) snake in America was given by the venerable historian, John Lawson in his 1714 account of flora and fauna in North Carolina:

Of the Horn-Snakes I never saw but two, that I remember. They are like the Rattle-Snake in Colour, but rather lighter. They hiss exactly like a Goose, when any thing approaches them. They strike at their Enemy with their Tail, and kill whatsoever they wound with it, which is arm'd at the End with a horny Substance, like a Cock's Spur. This is their Weapon. I have heard it credibly reported, by those who said they were Eye-Witnesses, that a small Locust-Tree, about the Thickness of a Man's Arm, being struck by one of these Snakes, at Ten a Clock in the Morning, then verdant and flourishing, at four in the Afternoon was dead, and the Leaves red and wither'd.

There is also this article in *The New England Courant* in 1723: Newbury, June 14—A Serpent was killed here this Week, about two foot long with two perfect Heads, one at each end; in each Head, two Eyes and a Mouth, and in each Mouth a forked Sting, both which he thrust out at the same time with equal fierceness. The manner of his defense was, raising up his Heads about two Inches from the ground, he kept one directed towards his Adversary, thrusting out both of his Stings at once; the lad that killed him affirm'd that when running, if his Motion was obstructed one way, he could run directly the contrary way and never turn his Body. One Head was something bigger

than the other, and from the biggest to the other, his Body was somewhat Taperwise, but in a far less proportion than in common Snakes.

Lawson says nothing about the horn snake rolling down hills; in fact, we could be talking about two different species of snakes. However, in the century following Lawson's description, the horn snake and the hoop snake became indistinguishable.

There are instances in which the fabulous comes dangerously close to the world of reality. I find this letter about a snake in Tennessee, which was printed in the *North Carolina Citizen* circa August 1, 1872, to be very convincing:

Several weeks ago while Sylvester Bowman of Clairborne County was cutting the sprouts off his oats, he saw what he took to be a large black snake, and struck at it with his scythe, when to his astonishment, the snake struck at him with its tail, lifting its tail several feet from the earth. Bowman, whereupon again struck at the snake, but the vicious reptile, not at all intimidated, returned the blow and pressed Bowman so closely that it was with difficulty he got away. Returning to the attack, Bowman, by means of large rocks, at last succeeded in crippling the snake and fastened it to the earth. With the assistance of Jordon F. Longmire, it was now examined, and to their astonishment was found to be six feet long and to have a horn at the end of its tail a little over an inch and a quarter long, shaped like a rooster's Spur [sic]. But what was more astonishing, it had two eyes in its tail, which, excepting the horn, was shaped exactly like the head, but not so large. Indeed, to see the tail, one would have thought that it was the head and the horn was its tongue. The horn was very sharp. The snake seemed very fierce at its tail end, and endeavored to strike everything that came near its tail. Various experiments were performed to ascertain whether it could see with the eye in its tail, and it was demonstrated beyond doubt that it could see with its tail eyes. These eyes had lids which opened and shut and gleamed with anger. Indeed, the tail head seemed far more fierce than the other head. Although the snake tapered somewhat from its main head, the tail

head was as thick as a large thumb and as blunt. Mr. Bowman carried the snake home while disabled, but it continued to strike at every intruder with its horn, and the family became alarmed. Mr. Bowman shot it dead. Messrs. Bowman and Longmire vouch for the truthfulness of these statements and so will many other citizens of the neighborhood. The writer of this knows Mr. Longmire to be a truthful man, a man of wealth and intelligence, and an old member of the Methodist Church. Jacksonboro, Tenn., July 21, 1872.

It is interesting to compare the aforementioned details with John Lawson's description of a hoop (or horn) snake. Is it possible that such a snake once existed (or still lives) in remote areas? Hoopsnake sightings are not restricted to the Ozarks and the Appalachians. An excellent example is the Beaver Falls, Nebraska, hoop snake invasion in the 1930s mentioned by Curtis MacDougall, author of *Hoaxes*, who quotes a journalist as saying there "came a report (from Beaver Falls) of terrible devastation of cattle and horses from the stings of hoopsnakes."

Most everyone has heard the old chestnut about the hoop snake that stung a hoe-handle (or wagon tongue or hickory log), but it is worth summarizing. In most tall-tale versions, the narrator claims that the poisoned wood swelled to gigantic proportions. Sometimes a poisoned hoe-handle will explode into a storm of splinters, or continue swelling until the narrator hauls it to a sawmill and manages to get enough lumber cut from it to build a house and a barn, with enough left over for a chicken coop. Things go well until the new home owner decides to paint his holdings. The turpentine in the paint takes the swelling out of the lumber and the four-room cabin is reduced to the size of a bird (or dog) house.

The Ozark writer Otto Ernest Rayburn tells a story about a woman who managed to evade a hoop snake; however, the serpent's poisonous tail struck her dress hem. When she washed the dress the next day, the poison "turned three tubs of wash water plumb green!" This is reminiscent of the numerous stories about mad stones, which are supposed to "draw poison." After applying the mad stone to a snakebite, the stone is placed in a bowl of milk. As the poison drains from the stone, the milk turns green.

As far as Appalachian folklore is concerned, the hoop snake is a well-known species. Most mountain folk can relate a tale about a hoop snake pursuing a hunter. The snake seizes its tail in its mouth

and rolls down the mountain after its victim. When it gains enough momentum, it flies through the air, tail foremost, and tries to impale the hapless hunter with the poisonous barb on its tail. In the traditional story, the hunter ducks, and the snake impales a tree, which dies in a matter of hours or days, depending on which version is being told. There are a few variations. Clyde Hollifield, a storyteller in Black Mountain, North Carolina, claims that his motorcycle once had a flat on the Blue Ridge Parkway, but he was fortunate enough to find a hoop snake. Substituting the snake for the tire, Clyde rode sixty miles to his home and “still had some tread left” when he got there.

HUGAG

Although the hugag is not a native of the southern mountains, it seems to have migrated to the virgin forests of Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina with the lumbering camps. According to Horace Palmer Beck, Julius Caesar gives an early description of one in his *Conquest of Gaul*. Specifically, Caesar says,

There are also animals that are called elks. The shape of these, and the varied color of their skins, is much like roes, but in size they surpass them a little and are destitute of horns, and have legs without joints and ligatures; nor do they lie down for the purpose of rest, nor, if they have been thrown down by any accident, can they raise or lift themselves up. Trees serve as beds to them; they lean themselves against them, and thus reclining only slightly, they take their rest....

Usually described as resembling a gigantic moose or elk with a hairless head, floppy ears, four-toed feet, and a bushy tail, the hugag is poorly equipped for survival since it has a pendulous lower lip that prevents it from grazing. Like Caesar’s elk, its legs lack joints, so it is unable to lie down. Instead, the hugag leans on trees, or on occasion, on fences and houses. That is why farmers who find their houses, barns, and fences leaning precariously will say, “Looks like the Hugag has been here.” Its sole source of food is tree bark, usually pine, and its progress through the forest can be charted by simply following the damaged trees, the bark being stripped at ten to twelve feet from the ground. One hugag specialist notes that the hugag’s steady diet of pine causes pitch to ooze from its pores.

Hunters have found it impossible to overtake the hugag, as it travels at a high rate of speed, even when grazing. However, hugags

have been captured by locating “hugag trees,” which are trees that are favorite leaning places for the sleeping creature. By cutting a great notch in the tree, hunters simply wait until they hear the crash. Once the tree and the hugag fall, the poor creature can’t get up again, and can be easily killed. Given the fragmented nature of Hugag folklore in the south, it seems likely that when the lumber industry left the Ozarks and Appalachia, so did the Hugag. At present, it seems to be alive and well in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

JIMPLICUTE

Vance Randolph describes this creature as a weird combination of “ghostly dinosaur, an incredible dragon or lizard supposed to walk the roads at night, grab travelers by the throat, and suck their blood.” Randolph further suggests that the creature was invented after the Civil War to “frighten superstitious Negroes.” Whatever his origin, the jimplicute has kin throughout the Southeast and Midwest, and numerous hunting parties with baying hounds and impressive arsenals have scoured mountaintops, swamps, and isolated farms searching for a misshapen creature that was drinking the blood of dogs, cows, and hapless humans. No doubt the Texas “wowzer” is a close relative.

The name of this creature, according to Randolph, seemed to have captured the imagination of several newspapermen, including Walt Whitman. Writing in the *North American Review*, Whitman mentions a Texas newspaper called *The Jimplicute*, and allegedly, a *Weekly Jimplicute* was published in Missouri as recently as 1940. Sightings are not restricted to the mountains and the prairie, either.

For example, the “Vampire Monster of Bladenboro” received extensive newspaper coverage in 1954, and an atmosphere of hysteria surrounded this eastern North Carolina community for several weeks. In the final days, over 1,000 armed men scoured the countryside and swamps looking for a “sleek, black creature with a round head” that was slaughtering dogs, sheep, and cattle. When a half-starved bobcat was shot, many hunters refused to believe they had killed the “vampire monster” and continued the search. However, the killing of domestic animals stopped.

JOINT SNAKE

Many people in western North Carolina refer to this reptile as a “glass snake,” because it allegedly breaks into pieces when struck (usually by a rock or an axe) only to reassemble itself after the sun

goes down. One way to thwart the snake is to carry away one of the “joints,” or segments. The theft doesn’t always work, for sometimes the frustrated reptile sets out in search of his missing part. Vance Randolph recounts a tale of an Arkansas farmer who found what he thought was sections of a fallen tree in the woods and carted them home for firewood. After sunset, a very angry snake’s head arrived looking for its body. According to the witness, the snake found his parts stacked against the house, reassembled itself “sorta the way that box-cars couple up,” gave the terrified farmer a resentful look, and crawled away into the woods.

There is also a Tennessee tale about a farmwoman who encountered a joint snake while she was killing a rooster. Using the ax that just dispatched the rooster, she cut the joint snake into pieces and then carried the pieces (plus the rooster’s head) to the hog pen. The following day (Sunday) while the local preacher was enjoying fried chicken at the woman’s home, a rooster started crowing. Going to investigate, the family found the joint snake in the hog pen with the rooster’s head where the snake’s head ought to be. Apparently, when the snake tried to “reassemble” itself, it got the rooster’s head instead of its own.

KING-DODDLE (a.k.a. WHANG-DOODLE)

Most commonly known as the whang-doodle in western North Carolina—a nocturnal creature that lurked about barns and houses—the king-doddle was last seen in McDowell County over fifty years ago. In the North Carolina mountain stories, when children come awake at night to the sound of chickens cackling, the cow bawling, the pigs squealing, and the dog barking, there is a good chance that there is a whang-doodle outside. The whang-doodle was feared by small children living on farms who were occasionally sent outside at night by their parents to do chores they had neglected earlier.

The king-doddle’s appearance is fragmented since the frightened children who run screaming into the house only remember bits and pieces. “It had big floppy ears!” or “It had grey fur and green eyes.” There are frequent comments on its panther-like scream, too. The black child, Moe, in Jean Cothran’s book *The Whang-Doodle: Folk Tales from the Carolinas* accompanies his father to the barn one dark night and sees the creature jump the fence as his father fires a shotgun at it. “He look like he long as a cow, high as a goat and got big ears like a mule”—these disparate pieces, which, when fitted into the shape

of the whang-doodle, are sufficiently disquieting to encourage any farm child to get all the chores done before dark.

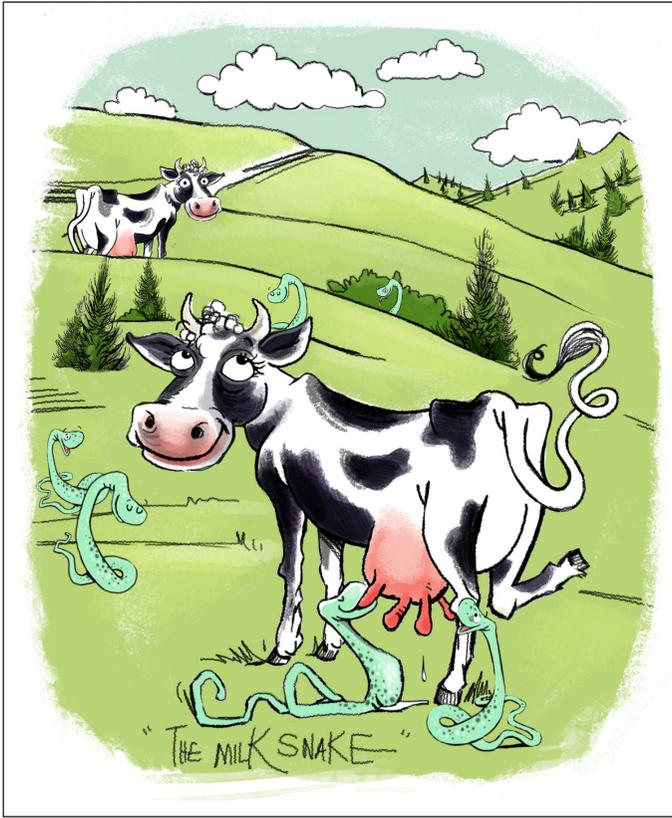
In the Ozarks, the king-doddle is thought to be a “big lizard, doubtless related to the Gowrow, the Jimplicute and the High-behind.” The critter is “longer than a well-rope, an’ fourteen hands high.” Some Missouri residents claim that the king-doddle is actually a gigantic “boomer” or ground squirrel, which makes the issue even more complex when Vance Randolph notes that a “boomer” in Missouri is a lizard. Regardless of its physical appearance, it is strong enough to “tear down rail fences and pull up saplings.” Some folks in the Ozarks claim that the king-doddle, or whang-doddle, is all bluff and bluster; it likes to scare people, but it won’t physically harm them. Yet, it is given to impressive displays of violence, such as uprooting trees and destroying rail fences. Randolph records several instances in which random violence to trees and fences is attributed to the whang-doodle, and he once heard a hunter explain a strange cry in the dark woods as “the whang-doodle a-mournin’ for its dead.”

A comic sermon written in dialect and entitled, “Where the Lion Roareth and the Wang-Doodle Mourneth for His First-Born” was very popular in western North Carolina during the 1940s. Many people in this region still remember hearing the folk musician and collector Bascom Lamar Lunsford quote it. The sermon is also often quoted in folklore anthologies.

MILK SNAKE

Usually described as fat, spotted, and toothless with a mouth like a funnel, the milk snake seems to be a harmless, goofy sort of reptile. As his name implies, he “milks cows,” usually catching them in the pasture. The cows don’t seem to mind; at least, I haven’t heard any stories of terrified cows fleeing a milk snake. In fact, there are tales of cows that become enamored of a milk snake, and will return to the same location each day, lowing for the reptile to return. In these tales, cows actually grieve themselves to death if the snake is killed. In the Midwest, the role of the milk snake is assumed by the milk trout. They milk cows when the livestock wade into the rivers to drink.

There is an account of a “milk snake epidemic” in eastern Tennessee in the early 1900s when a large number of farmers reported that their cows had suddenly “gone dry.” Another sign that a milk snake may be in the vicinity is “bloody milk.” There is a story that one dairy farmer hired a forty men to stand guard on his cows in



The Milk Snake. Illustration by Mandy Newham.

the pasture. After three days and nights, the exhausted guards went to sleep. When they awoke, all the cows had been milked, and the pasture was littered with bloated, sleeping milk snakes. The guards hauled the milk snakes to the barn, strung them up by their tails and milked them. It took two men to milk a snake: one held the snake's head in a bucket and the other climbed the snake, locked his legs around it, and slid down. The reclaiming of the milk was such a success that the dairy farmer stopped milking his cows since he felt that it was easier and cheaper to just milk the snakes.

In the Ozarks, there are stories about nocturnal milk snakes that climb through bedroom windows and get milk from the breasts of sleeping women. In this tradition, milk snakes are like panthers since they can smell "human milk," and when they do, they will resort to desperate measures to get it. Fortunately, however, the victims are usually cows. Yet, I do occasionally encounter an eerie superstition about the affinity between human babies and snakes. Numerous sto-

ries tell about a mother discovering her infant in the company of a snake. In most versions, the child has crawled into the undergrowth and the mother finds it sharing a “bowl of bread and milk” with the serpent. Sometimes the snake is a copperhead or rattlesnake, while in some instances the snake is a blue racer or other non-poisonous species. In these stories, the implication is that the snake’s life is somehow linked with that of the child; consequently, if the snake is killed, the baby dies soon afterwards. This story can be found in rural Georgia, Appalachia, and Ozark country.

PANTHER (a.k.a. PAINTER)

There is nothing imaginary about the mountain panthers (called painters) that once lived in the Appalachians and the Ozarks. In fact, a lot of folks say they are still around. James Zachery of Cashiers Valley in Jackson County, North Carolina, and Richard Jackson of Banner Elk, Avery County, North Carolina, have reported repeated painter sightings during the last decade. One of Zachery’s painters was in the Norton section of Jackson County; Jackson saw a “tawny brown” one near Linville Gorge. The folklore associated with the supernatural powers of the mountain painters, however, has more to do with imagination than fact.

The average native of Appalachia can tell a “painter story,” usually about their great-great-great-grandmother, who, when pursued through the woods by a painter, distracted the beast by throwing articles of clothing behind her. There is a good one about a little woman named “Granny Pop” over in the Big Bend section of Haywood County that did that. Usually, the shivering woman arrives home “devoid of linen,” or ends up neck-deep in a mountain pool where she is rescued by her husband/father who shoots the painter. Some stories “passed down in the family” are about how people’s triple-great-grandmothers had saved their families from a painter. Drawn to the house by the smell of a newly butchered hog (or a newborn child), the painter would attack the cabin door and scream. The resourceful woman would either pull her spinning wheel close to the door and begin to spin, or she would play a fiddle or other stringed instrument. The sound would disconcert the painter, who would remain in a state of confusion until the husband or a neighbor arrived and killed the “charmed beast.”

Wilbur Zeigler and Ben Grosscup relate a frightening personal encounter with mountain painters in an abandoned cabin alleged by local hunters to be “hainted.” The narrator of this story awakens

in the night to the sound of terrifying screams, thumps, and crashes. In the light of a dying fire, the author watches shadows move, and tries to create a rational explanation for the gore-splattered floor. Eventually, he learns that several painters were in the cabin with him. While devouring a fresh kill, the painters are frightened by a snow-slide, which strikes the cabin, cascades down the chimney, and extinguishes the fire. Bolting for the door, the painters (and a badly frightened companion) brush against the author and escape. Shortly after this experience, four painters are found living in the rock cliffs above the cabin and are killed.

All of these stories, whether true or not, sound factual. It seems conceivable that a hungry mountain panther would behave in this manner. However, many tales describe painters as gigantic creatures with preternatural intelligence and senses; they can “smell the flesh of a new-born baby,” or the milk of a nursing mother. Driven to a frenzy by these smells, the painters descend chimneys and murder entire families. Ozark folklore contains numerous stories about painters that are driven mad by the smell of a newborn baby. One of Vance Randolph’s sources, Wayman Hogue, claims a painter came to Hogue’s own home, fought their dog to a standstill, and “came down the chimney after a five-day old infant.” The painter was finally driven away by Hogue’s mother, who burned a straw mattress in the fireplace and forced the painter to retreat. In some tales, painters walk upright. Where is the line between fantasy and fact? Probably somewhere around the point where the painter stands erect and begins knocking on doors with its paw.

SNAWFUS

An enormous albino deer, the snawfus, is found from Arkansas to Pennsylvania. Many folklorists document superstitions surrounding the appearance of an albino deer. Hunters generally believe that killing a white deer will bring bad luck to both the hunter and his family. Both in Appalachia and the Ozarks, seeing a white deer is a bad omen and can signify anything from “witches’ work” to approaching disease, drought, or death. To see the whimsical snawfus wafting above the trees (with wings that look like boughs entwined with apple blossoms) is supposed to be an omen of death.

Ozark folklore notes that the snawfus has strange powers that may bewilder humans, but will not harm them. When the snawfus travels, it leaps above the treetops, and some stories describe the snawfus call as “Hallyloo!” Vance Randolph interviewed a woman

in Missouri who told him that the snawfus “Emitted spirals of blue smoke which drift away over the hills.” A number of stories indicate that the snawfus, the Great White Deer, and several tall tales about fruit-bearing stags are all interchangeable.

SNIPE

The snipe is probably the most well known of the wondrous and/or mythical creatures, but despite its popularity, no one seems to agree as to what a snipe looks like. The North Carolina snipe is rumored to be a small bird (two or three inches long) with a white spot in the center of its back. As a child, I was also told that snipes run in huge coveys like quail, and their movement through the underbrush is soundless. Like most of the children of my generation, I participated in a snipe hunt. Armed with two candles (some folks use a flashlight) and a burlap sack, I sat in the dark and whistled. I'm not too embarrassed about that since so many others probably did it, too!

In actual fact, the snipe hunt originated in Europe, and French children still hunt the elusive “Dahut.” According to Simon Bronner's *American Children's Folklore*, the snipe hunt has become a “kind of initiation” for many Boy Scout troops, and is described in detail in the official publication, *Patrol and Troop Activities Handbook*. Bronner describes a typical snipe hunt as follows: “The inexperienced and experienced scouts are divided into two groups. The inexperienced (those who don't know what a snipe is) will be sack men and the experienced hunters will be the drivers.” Before the hunt, anecdotes of former hunts are told. The snipe is described as a “ground bird that has a white spot in the middle of its back. They make a wonderful pie when you get enough of them...On the night of the hunt, the sack men are stationed approximately 20 feet apart. This is done to separate and isolate each sack man and to limit noise and talking between members of the hunt.” Funnels, constructed of logs and rocks, direct the snipes into the sacks.

The sack men are “permitted to click two baseball-sized rocks together to lure the snipe....the clicking noise is similar to that of a male snipe in mating season. The female snipe is much easier to call in and is also known to be the tenderest of meats.” The experienced drivers yell things like “There goes one” and “I got him!” A favorite trick is to tie a small white cloth on a stick, which when pushed towards the sack in the dark is thought to be a snipe. Other drivers

always club the snipe before it gets to the sack. Sometimes the sack man is given a bell to tinkle to attract the snipe.

The success of the snipe hunt is based on the gullibility of the new scouts who frequently do not know that the venture is a hoax until they return to the camp to cook the snipe. Vance Randolph tells a wonderful story about a snipe hunt that backfired. James York Glimm notes that in the Pennsylvania mountains, snipe hunters are cautioned to use onion sacks so that “the snipe can breathe after you catch it.” He also describes a snipe hunt in which the credulous sacker is given a box of Barn Burner matches, which are struck to attract the snipes. The dupe in Glimm’s report is a teenage girl who is left alone on a dark road. Glimm says that after an hour, he took pity on her and returned to find her still waiting for the snipe. When he asked if she had caught anything, she said, “No, I haven’t, but I’m sure I heard a couple of them dart by.”

TLANUWA

In Cherokee mythology, the Tlanuwa is the “divine hawk.” A number of these great birds came from “the world above” to live among the Cherokees. Gigantic Tlanuwa nests crowned the rock cliffs along the Little Tennessee River and the treeless balds of Nantahala Gorge. The gigantic birds preyed on children, carrying them back to feed to their young. A popular legend tells of a young man who was carried to the nest of the great hawk, but managed to escape by riding one of the half-grown chicks into a treetop.

A variant on this particular theme includes a grandmother who rescues her grandchild from the nest and hurls the young birds into the river, where they are consumed by the water serpent, the Uktena. (In one version, the grandmother magically “creates” the serpent by dropping a rope into the river.) The returning parents find the nest empty and see the Uktena consuming their young. Enraged, both birds attack the serpent, dragging it from the water, and while one Great Hawk holds it aloft, its mate slashes the serpent into pieces. Thus, the story is used to explain how a series of unusual rock formations in the Little Tennessee River came into being: they were created by pieces of the Uktena falling in the river. Having lost their brood, and finding life in the Middle World (Earth) bleak and unrewarding, the Great Hawks ascend to the Upper World and never return.

TLANUSI

According to Cherokee mythology, the Tlanusi, or Great Leech, lived in western North Carolina at the junction of the Valley and Hiwassee rivers. As is the case with most Cherokee monsters, the Great Leech lived in a specific location. In this instance, it is a deep hole under a rock ledge in the Valley River that still bears the name “Tlanusiyi” or “The Leech Place.” According to several stories, a huge leech with red and black stripes could be seen on a rock ledge in the middle of the river. It moved by drawing itself into a ball and then extending itself. When disturbed, it would drop from the rock into the deep waters. Then, the surface of the river would begin to boil and foam and a great column of water would rise, flooding the overlook and the banks of the river, sweeping the hapless Cherokees into the deep underwater hole. The bodies of the leech’s victims would later be found downstream with the ears and nose eaten away.

In the oral tradition of the Cherokees, Tlanusiyi became a place to avoid. Among the numerous stories about hunters and fishermen who were foolish enough to visit “The Leech Place,” one bragging warrior announced that he intended to challenge Tlanusi. Putting on war paint and his best buckskins, the youth marched down to the overlook and issued a challenge in the form of a boasting song which said, in effect, “I’ll wear red leech skins on my legs for garters”—a bit of braggadocio similar to the expression, “I’ll wear your guts for garters.” However, the young man fared no better than his predecessors.

UKTENA

The “great horned snake” of Cherokee myth is also described as “the grandfather of all snakes.” In addition to being gigantic, the uktena has a large crystal embedded in its skull called the “ulunsuti,” which it uses to hypnotize its prey. In addition, its neck is encircled by seven bands of color. In some versions, the serpent has antlers like a stag, or is winged, making it possible for it to function in the water, on land, and in the air. Among the Creek, Yuchi, and Hitchiti, the serpent becomes a “tie snake” and preys on children and fishermen.

Strangely enough, the shaman who finally destroyed the uktena was not a Cherokee but a Shawano—a hated enemy of the Cherokees. In exchange for his life, Aganunitsi (Groundhog’s Mother) promised the Cherokees that he would kill the serpent and bring the magic crystal embedded in its skull back to the Cherokees where

it would heal the sick, make the rivers teem with fish, and cause the corn to grow. The shaman was as good as his word. Shooting an arrow through the seventh band of color encircling the uktena's neck, Aganunitsi pierced the serpent's heart. Then, he called all the birds in the world to come and feed on the snake's flesh for three days. Finding the magic stone among the uktena's bones, he returned to the Cherokee village. As promised, the "flashing crystal" brought prosperity to the Cherokees, but the shaman was less fortunate. Because a drop of the serpent's blood had struck him when he killed it, a red-eyed snake grew from his head. He became a slave to it and the magic stone, killing wild animals to feed them.

The extensive number of stories about the Great Serpent, and the frequent references by early travelers in the Southeast to the widespread belief in its existence, suggest that the uktena has acquired something akin to totem status. Charles Hudson even contends that the Uktena is the most powerful totem figure in the mythology of all the Southeastern Indian tribes. The horned snake is incised on conch shells, pots, and gorgets. Similar carvings among Florida tribes depict a serpent with a cougar's head, and the corresponding myths about the Great Water Cougar are variations of the Uktena myths.

In the mythology of the Florida Seminoles, the Underground Panther becomes the Underwater Cougar with some characteristics that are similar to the Uktena. In Murray County, Georgia, on the mountain that is now called Cuhutta, a stone construction somewhat resembling a wall encircles the mountain. Recent excavations support the theory that the rocks create an effigy of the Uktena. The theory is given additional credibility by the fact that this mountain, originally called Guhuti by the Cherokees, is the place where the Shawano shaman killed the Uktena.

When Sir Alexander Cumming visited the Southeast in 1730, he encountered frequent references to the "healing crystal" that had once been in the Uktena's head. Cumming talked to medicine men who claimed to possess it. Among the Seminole, Choctaw, Creek, and Cherokee tribes, medicine men still speak of the healing stone which can prophecy, cure disease, and end barrenness in women. Throughout the Southeast, there is considerable mystery associated with the healing crystal in conjunction with the belief that the stone will lose its power if non-Indians know where it is located. In some traditions, the belief persists that the crystal must be fed fresh blood

every seventh day or it becomes an avenging spirit, searching in the night for the medicine man who has neglected to feed it.

James Adair, who lived among the Cherokees and other southeastern tribes, states that his conversations with tribal leaders indicated that they believed the “magic stone” existed, and had been buried with the shaman who had once been its caretaker. Adair said that their belief was so convincing, he repeatedly requested permission to see it. Shaman and medicine men refused to permit this because it would disturb the resting place of the shaman who had been buried with it, and it would diminish the power of the stone if an “infidel” saw it.

UNDERGROUND PANTHER

Like numerous fanciful beings in Cherokee mythology, the Underground Panthers are benevolent creatures that speak, but live in an underground world where it is eternal summer. In a story much like that of Rip Van Winkle, a Cherokee hunter meets a panther that speaks to him in the forest. Panther and man hunt together, and return to the panther’s world, which greatly resembles the world of the Cherokee in terms of custom and tradition. The panthers celebrate the Green Corn Dance and congregate in townhouses where they socialize and feast.

There is one significant difference in the two worlds. The panthers live an existence that is not marred by sickness or hunger. Still, the Cherokee wishes to return to his own world, so the panthers lead him to a secret exit, and he emerges into a wintery forest. He encounters a search party and learns that what he thought was an absence of a few hours was actually many days. After his return, he becomes unhappy, and his friends notice that he is gradually changing. Fur grows on his body, and his hands acquire claws. His change is accompanied by a growing discontent and a wasting illness. He finally dies realizing that if he had stayed with the Underground Panthers, he would have lived forever.

USTUTLI

The name “ustutli” means “footed snake.” Like many Cherokee mythical monsters, the Ustutli seems to be an exaggerated version of a diminutive life form—in this instance, a caterpillar, or inchworm. According to Cherokee legend, the creature was actually a serpent with a three-cornered foot on either end that acted as suckers. When Ustutli traveled, the anterior end would rise like a snake and then

glide forward until it attached itself to a rock or ledge; then the hind portion would jerk forward and grasp the earth.

In the oral tradition of the Cherokees, the speaker would describe how Ustutli would blot out the sunlight as it crawled along the ridge-tops of the Nantahala Gorge. The serpent would sometimes cross ravines and rivers, and hunters learned to flee when they found its three-toed footprint in the earth. In addition, the “footed snake” could imitate the sound of a lost fawn bleating, and if hunters came to investigate, Ustutli attacked them from their hiding places.

However, because of its bulky body, the “footed snake” could travel only up and down mountain pinnacles; it could not travel across them. This flaw was the serpent’s undoing. A quick-thinking hunter finding himself pursued by the Ustutli escaped it by running across a sloping mountain ledge. He then built a fire that swept up the mountain, trapping the serpent and searing its body. The Ustutli died, attempting to leap through the fire to another mountain pinnacle.

UWTSUNTA

Uwtsunta is another mythical serpent of the Cherokees whose name means “Bouncer.” Like Ustutli, the footed snake, the Bouncer traveled in glides and jerks. However, its territory was restricted to the eastern side of mountains where it awaited the rising sun before it began its daily trek for food. Following the sun, the Bouncer moved from mountain crest to mountain crest, and its shadow would sometimes throw the land below into shadow. According to oral tradition, some valleys in Cherokee country were abandoned because the Bouncer lived there.

WHISTLING WAMPUS (a.k.a. WHISTLING WHOO-HOO)

A whistling wampus is a huge wildcat with supernatural intelligence and a talent for making beguiling sounds. Some species can whistle, and lure hapless hunters and woodsmen to their doom by whistling at them from “dark cedar thickets.” Lumberjacks often explain the disappearance of a fellow worker by saying, “I guess the Whistler got him.” In addition to whistling, some wampus cats give calls—usually “Hoo-Hoo” or “Whoo-Hoo.” The combination is supposedly irresistible, something like the siren call in Greek mythology. Folklore of other regions has some fascinating near kin of the “Whistling Wampus.” Among other variations, the Sliver Cat, which lives in Paul Bunyan country, is a close relative of the Whistling Wampus,



Whistling Wampus. Illustration by Mandy Newham.

with a few additions. With tasseled ears and red eyes that are vertical instead of horizontal, the Sliver Cat also has a long tail with a ball-shaped knob on the end. One side of the knob is bare and hard, while the other side contains long, deadly spikes. While perching on a limb over a woodland trail, the Sliver Cat can use its tail to stun a hapless woodsman. Then, the tail spikes are used to impale the victim and draw him up into the trees.

WILL-AM-ALONE

This is another migratory critter with a nasty disposition. Squirrel-like in appearance, it is devoted to making lumberjacks miserable. It picks poisonous plants and lichens and rolls them into tiny pellets. It then drops its missiles into the ears and eyes of sleeping woodsmen, thereby causing nightmares, painful headaches, and hallucinations.

ZIGMALL

The Zigmall is another lumber camp follower. It probably migrated from the Northwest with the lumberjacks, and left when they did. The descriptions are varied. James York Glimm claims that it looks like a flying squirrel, but the resemblance is deceptive. The Zigmall actually travels by “following the bouncing ball.” Possessing a very long and limber tail with a hard rubber ball on the end of it, the Zigmall twirls the ball around its head and then throws it. When the ball hits the ground, it bounces, propeling the Zigmall forward. When the ball stops bouncing, the Zigmall repeats the whole process. Of course, Glimm tells the old chestnut about the cook who made himself a pair of boot heels from a Zigmall’s tail. When he jumped off the cookhouse, he bounced so high and so long that the lumberjacks had to shoot sourdough biscuits to him so he wouldn’t starve to death. Well, that’s what Glimm said.

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