

Southern Appalachia: Historic and Imagined

Graduate Division

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Summary

This collection contains works of fiction and nonfiction that reflect contemporary and historic Southern Appalachia, with a particular focus on East Tennessee, Western North Carolina, and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The works of fiction are authored by some of the most notable contemporary writers of the region, including Cormac McCarthy, Ron Rash, Lee Smith, Barbara Kingsolver, and Amy Greene. Nonfiction includes scholarly and historical surveys of Appalachia and the wider South, anthologies of folklore, oral histories, journalism, and memoir. The collection is supplemented by topographic and historical maps of Tennessee and the Smokies.

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The Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Those mountains, those blue-green ridges visible from anywhere in my hometown. I know their names, their silhouettes. The LeConte massif looms large over downtown Gatlinburg. Sugarland Mountain hems in another side of the town. Cove Mountain shelters picturesque Wear's Valley from the overwrought kitsch of Pigeon Forge. Greenbrier Pinnacle appears at the crest of Highway 321 on the way to Pittman Center. In Cosby, the chin of Mount Cammerer juts out over the land, keeping watch, its fire tower in prime position to spot trickles of smoke and flame in the sinuous contours of the park. I know whom these mountains were named for, and why. I know the way they look with mist rising from their crevices during spring rainstorms, with flanks of riotous green in the summer and fiery reds and oranges in the fall, and dusted with snow like confectioner's sugar on winter mornings. For the first eighteen years of my life, they formed the backdrop to my daily activities; very often they were part of those activities, whether I was hiking with my family, building trails with my classmates, or volunteering at the park visitors' center.

And yet I didn't realize how important those mountains are to me, to my identity, until I left them. I suppose I didn't really become Appalachian until I was no longer in Appalachia; only then did I realize that I was from an unusual and unique place, different from the rest of the country and quite different from the rest of the South. The Appalachian writer Lee Smith has written about her dismay with most literary depictions of the South, noting that they ignore Appalachia, focusing instead on the moonlight and magnolias of *Gone With the Wind*, or Faulkner's Mississippi. Appalachia is often seen as a backwater, disparaged not only by many Americans but by many other Southerners. As an avid reader and budding writer from the region, I certainly experienced similar dismay. I wanted to write about the world that I knew so well, I wanted to use the language and dialect that I grew up hearing, yet I rarely saw it depicted in print.

My collection began as an attempt to remedy that problem. In the years after my graduation from college in 2008, I started looking for authors who wrote about Southern Appalachia, and East Tennessee and the Great Smoky Mountains in particular. One of the first writers I discovered was Lee Smith, the matriarch of contemporary Appalachian literature. I will never forget reading *Fair and Tender Ladies* and recognizing in print, for the first time, language and characters from home. Lee Smith proved to me that one *could* write about Appalachia, that there was real value and art to be found in Appalachian fiction. Soon after I discovered Ron Rash, another contemporary Appalachian writer; his novel *Serena* in particular excited me, for it dealt directly with the issues surrounding the development of the national park.

Wilma Dykeman, a celebrated writer and speaker from East Tennessee, was another author I added to my collection, and I was pleased to discover that her novels, like *The Tall*

Woman, are published by a local press in Newport, Tennessee. Cormac McCarthy's early novels, as well as his most recent novel, *The Road*, have been a huge influence in my writing and my scholarly work. My collection also contains works by noted novelist Barbara Kingsolver, national book award finalist Marianne Wiggins, and up-and-coming writers John McManus, Amy Greene, and Holly Goddard Jones. All of these writers are concerned with social, environmental, and feminist issues in the region. They also, to varying degrees, play with Appalachian language, history, and folklore in creative, memorable ways.

It seemed to me that in order to write about Appalachia, I not only needed to be familiar with Appalachian writers, but also Appalachian history. As such, I began collecting nonfiction work that focused on the history and folklore of the region. I was aided in my search by a small, unprepossessing used bookstore in Cosby, Tennessee. It doesn't even have a name — just a sign by the road that says "BOOKS AND COFFEE" — but it is a veritable treasure trove of local lore. A significant portion of the nonfiction work in my collection hails from this little business, including the historic and topographic maps of the area that now hang above my writing desk.

The nonfiction work in the collection varies in topic, scope, and method. A few works, such as Michael Frome's *Strangers in High Places* and Margaret Brown's *The Wild East*, focus specifically on the history of the Great Smoky Mountains and the national park. Others are more concerned with documenting and exploring Southern Appalachian traditions, folklore, and crafts; Horace Kephart's *Our Southern Highlanders* and the *Foxfire* anthologies are particularly valuable in this respect. The memoirs of Arthur Morgan, the first director of the Tennessee Valley Authority, give interesting insight into the early years of that monumental organization, while the

journal of Harvey Broome offers a picture of the Great Smoky Mountains developed from over two decades' worth of hikes.

Still other works are broader in scope, encompassing Appalachia and the wider South. Burkhard Bilger's *Noodling for Flatheads* is a series of essays about peculiar Southern pursuits such as moonshining and cockfighting. *The South*, by B.C. Hall and C.T. Wood, and V.S. Naipaul's *A Turn in the South* provide thoughtful cultural analyses of the wider region to which Appalachia belongs. Along with John Alexander Williams's comprehensive history of Appalachia, these works present a rich, multi-faceted picture of Appalachia's economic, political, cultural, and environmental history in the context of the American South.

This collection has a direct influence on my own research and writing. I have a scholarly interest in Appalachian literature, and I have written and presented a seminar paper on the work of Lee Smith and Amy Greene at the Southern Appalachian Cultural Series conference in 2014. I am currently working on a geologic and eco-critical reading of McCarthy's *The Orchard Keeper*, which is an expansion of a paper I wrote during my time as a master's candidate at North Carolina State University and which I hope to present this fall at the annual Cormac McCarthy Society conference in Memphis.

In a more creative vein, I have been writing about Appalachia for several years now; my short fiction set in the region has been published in *Appalachian Heritage* and *The Writing Disorder*. For the last year, I have been planning and drafting a novel set in Sevier County, Tennessee, which deals with environmental and social issues in the tourist communities that border the national park. For all my success in discovering other Appalachian writers, I still feel that the region is under-represented in American fiction. My collection of fiction and historical

works has been incredibly useful to me as I research and write this novel. I cannot imagine getting very far in the book — or even generating the ideas for it — without this collection. Even the maps have been helpful, as they allow me to see the novel's setting spatially in a way that would be difficult without them.

This is a collection that I imagine will continue to expand for the rest of my life. My fiction collection certainly has notable gaps, writers whom I have read but do not yet own — Thomas Wolfe, James Agee, and Charles Frazier among them. The books that I currently own digital copies of I want to eventually purchase in print form. And I would particularly like to collect more local lore, oral histories, periodicals and pamphlets, the sort of materials that are created, published, and distributed regionally, rather than nationally. Currently the only locally-produced text in my collection is a bound copy of a series of interviews conducted with living World War II veterans from Sevier County. Another goal is to expand my collection to include more scholarly studies of Appalachian fiction.

I consider myself fortunate to be from East Tennessee. I can only hope that this collection reflects my enduring interest, respect, and longstanding affection for the place I call home, a region that I believe is generally overlooked in both literature and American history. I already know that it has been instrumental in shaping me as a writer and a scholar — almost as instrumental as the mountains themselves.

Bibliography

Bilger, Burkhard. *Noodling for Flatheads*. New York: Scribner, 2000. Print.

In this book, Bilger, a journalist by trade, takes a delightful stroll through some of the more unusual recreational pursuits of the South alongside their pursuers. The title refers to a method of baiting catfish with one's fingers. There are chapters devoted to cockfighting, moonshining, raccoon hunting, and the peculiar Appalachian culinary affection for squirrel brains. I spotted this in a tiny used bookstore in Cosby, Tennessee, a stone's throw away from both a recently busted cockfighting ring and a ravine that contains the rusted out remains of a moonshine operation dating from the Prohibition era. It seemed a fitting purchase at the time, and though I keep an eye out for it when browsing, I've never seen it in any other bookstore.

Broome, Harvey. *Out Under the Sky of the Great Smokies: A Personal Journal*. 1975. Knoxville, TN: U of TN Press, 2001. Print.

Harvey Broome played an influential role in the founding of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. He was friends with Benton MacKaye, planner of the Appalachian Trail, and a number of figures in national government prominently involved with the planning and maintenance of our national parks. He was a member and eventual president of the Smoky Mountain Hiking Club, and helped to found the Wilderness Society; both of these groups lobbied hard for protection of the Great Smoky Mountains' wild spaces and against legislation that threatened them. This book contains extracts from his personal journal, detailing the numerous hikes he took in all areas of the park, during all seasons, from 1941 to 1966. His writing is lush, evocative, almost painfully lovely. I have read nothing else that so successfully captures, in prose, what he calls the "sovereign quality of wilderness" (xxxiv). His deep, enduring love for the Smokies comes through in every sentence.

Brown, Margaret Lynn. *The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains*. Gainesville, FL: U of FL Press, 2000. Print.

Brown is concerned with telling a people-centered account of the history of the Great Smoky Mountains, noting that most other works about these mountains are more interested in environmental history. She is interested in the Cherokee, European settlers, and their descendants; she investigates their traditions, their language, and their folklore. The effects of the creation of the national park on the region's inhabitants is of particular concern to Brown. She explores the uprooting of families and the changes in the local economy fostered by the park's establishment, tracking the evolution of agrarian communities into the booming tourist towns of today.

Dykeman, Wilma. *The Tall Woman*. 1962. Newport, TN: Wakestone Books, 1982. Print.

Wilma Dykeman was a prolific writer of East Tennessee history and lore, and another native of the region who was influential in the development and maintenance of the national park. She wrote both fiction and nonfiction, but this novel is my favorite of hers. It tells what I

believe is a distinctly feminist story of a mountain woman, Lydia McQueen, as she struggles to keep her family and her community together during the Civil War and the years following.

Frome, Michael. *Strangers in High Places: The Story of the Great Smoky Mountains*. 1966. Expanded Ed. Knoxville, TN: U of TN Press, 2002. Print.

Michael Frome is an environmentalist and journalist who worked assiduously to protect the wilderness of the Great Smoky Mountains, among many other wild spaces. This book was and remains the definitive history of the Smokies from the pre-colonial era of the Cherokee to the twentieth century. This later edition pays particular attention to the environmental challenges and threats posed to the park by the tourist-driven economy that defines the communities at its borders. This is another book that I found in the treasure trove of "regional literature" at the tiny used bookstore in Cosby, Tennessee, and was the first in my collection about the history of the region.

Great Smoky Mountains. Relief Map. [ca. 1:250,000]. Chippewa Falls, WI: Hubbard, 1983. Print.

Greene, Amy. *Bloodroot*. New York: Vintage, 2010. Print.

Amy Greene is a relative newcomer to the Appalachian fiction scene. This is her first novel, set in East Tennessee and following the tragic fortunes of a magnetic woman named Myra Lamb and her descendants. It bears remarkable similarity to Lee Smith's *Oral History*; its narrative is also comprised of first person accounts from alternating characters and is written in mountain dialect. And, like *Oral History*, it is particularly interested in troubling repercussions of the suppression of female sexuality in patriarchal Appalachia. I wrote a seminar paper on themes of matriarchal legacy and sexuality in these two novels, which I presented at the Southern Appalachian Cultural Series in 2014.

Goddard Jones, Holly. *Girl Trouble*. New York: Harper, 2009. AZW File.

Hall, B.C. and C.T. Wood. *The South*. New York: Scribner, 1995. Print.

Kephart, Horace. *Our Southern Highlanders: A Narrative of Adventure in the Southern Appalachians and a Study of Life Among the Mountaineers*. 1922. Alexander, NC: Land of the Sky Books, 2001. Print.

Without Horace Kephart, there might very well be no Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Though his personal life was troubled by alcoholism and family strife, his contribution to the conservation of the last great wilderness east of the Mississippi cannot be understated. In addition, he was one of the first to write about the inhabitants of Appalachia from a perspective that did not reduce them to caricatures. This work captures Kephart's Appalachian world; however romanticized his view of the mountains and their inhabitants may be, it remains a valuable resource for any scholar of Appalachian history and culture.

Kingsolver, Barbara. *Flight Behavior*. New York: Harper Collins, 2012. AZW File.

—. *Prodigal Summer*. New York: Harper Collins, 2009. AZW File.

McCarthy, Cormac. *Child of God*. 1973. New York: Vintage, 1993. Print.

Cormac McCarthy, the son of an attorney for the Tennessee Valley Authority, was raised in Knoxville, Tennessee. His first four novels are all set in East Tennessee. Dense and verbose, with disturbing and troubling themes, they are less widely-read than his later works set in the West. But these novels are ambitious, memorable, and reflect the area's language and landscape with a dark McCarthyian twist. I include *The Road* in this collection as well. Though radically different in style and tone from, say, the Joycean exploits of *Suttree*, *The Road* is nonetheless a return to an apocalyptic Appalachia, a wasteland that father and son must navigate on their journey to the sea. McCarthy's Tennessee works are the focus of my current critical work on Appalachian literature.

—. *The Orchard Keeper*. 1965. New York: Vintage, 1993. Print.

—. *Outer Dark*. 1968. New York: Vintage, 1993. Print.

—. *The Road*. New York: Vintage, 2006. Print.

—. *Suttree*. 1979. New York: Vintage, 1992. Print.

McManus, John. *Born on a Train*. New York: Picador, 2003. Print.

Morgan, Arthur E. *The Making of the TVA*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1974. Print.

This is the rarest find in my collection, as to my knowledge it has been out of print for decades. This is the memoir of the first director of the Tennessee Valley Authority, chronicling the early years of the development and operation of a program that completely altered the landscape and economy of Appalachia. It is a valuable primary source for any work about the TVA. My copy appears to be a long-ago, never-returned library book, as it still bears a shelving tag and stamp from the Henderson County Public Library. Somehow it made its way to that wonderful used bookstore in Cosby, Tennessee.

Naipaul, V.S. *A Turn in the South*. New York: Vintage, 1990. Print.

Rash, Ron. *Burning Bright*. New York: Harper Collins, 2010. AZW File.

Ron Rash is one of the outstanding examples of contemporary Appalachian writers. His short stories and novels have been critically praised and commercially popular, particularly *Serena*, the tale of a lumber baron and his Machiavellian wife in the years leading up to the establishment of the national park. Rash's work is extremely influential in my own writing, as he was one of the first authors I ever read who depicted the landscape, language, and people that I call my own.

—. *Serena*. New York: Harper Collins, 2008. Print.

Smith, Lee. *Fair and Tender Ladies*. 1988. New York: Berkley, 2011. Print.

Lee Smith is the matriarch of Appalachian fiction; when she began writing, there was relatively little scholarly attention paid to the region's literature. She has said that, as a student reading southern literature, she was never able to identify with the landscape and communities that were taken to represent the South in the work of writers like Faulker, Welty, and O'Conner. It was as if Appalachia had been forgotten or rendered invisible. Her works, vivid and memorable, bring it into the light, treasuring Appalachian tradition and language, folklore and history, and championing the strength of Appalachian women. This book is particularly special to me because I was able to meet her and have her sign it.

Tennessee. Map. [ca. 1: 633,600]. Chicago, IL: Geographical Publishing Company, 1933. Print.

Wiggins, Marianne. *Evidence of Things Unseen*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004. Print.

A finalist for the National Book Award, this novel is a moving love story set in Knoxville, Tennessee in the years between the two world wars. The Tennessee Valley Authority and the Oak Ridge nuclear development site play prominent roles in the plot. Wiggins' lyrical, meditative narrative depicts a bustling, growing, and changing Knoxville at midcentury, a city slowly evolving from a relative backwater to a cosmopolitan center of regional industry.

Wigginton, Eliot, ed. *The Foxfire Book*. 1st. ed. New York: Anchor, 1972. Print.

Published by Eliot Wigginton and his students at Georgia's Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School in the mid-sixties, *Foxfire Magazine* was a revolutionary experiment in hands-on education as well as Appalachian oral history. The books, which anthologize the best of the magazine's articles, contain a wealth of information on Appalachian folklore, culture, dialect, and craft. These volumes are in many ways the pride of my collection. I grew up with a later edition of the Foxfire books, but lost them at some point in the years after I left home for college. Then I stumbled across a complete set of first editions at a used bookstore in Chicago, of all places.

—. *Foxfire 2*. 1st ed. New York: Anchor, 1973. Print.

—. *Foxfire 3*. 1st ed. New York: Anchor, 1975. Print.

—. *Foxfire 4*. 1st ed. New York: Anchor, 1977. Print.

—. *Foxfire 5*. 1st. ed. New York: Anchor, 1979. Print.

—. *Foxfire 6*. 1st. ed. New York: Anchor, 1980. Print.

Williams, John Alexander. *Appalachia: A History*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of NC Press, 2002. Print.

World War II: The Contenders. 2002. TS. Collection of Clarissa Nemeth Lawrence, Kansas.

From the title, this may seem like a very odd text to include in this particular collection. It is a bound copy of a group research project completed by my tenth grade English class at Gatlinburg-Pittman High School. While the topic of the project was World War II, our research essays were supplemented with a series of lengthy interviews my classmates and I conducted and transcribed with a number of World War II veterans from Sevier County. These are, as far as I know, unique testimonies from men who are no longer alive to tell their stories; and all but one of the men interviewed in the collection had spent most of their lives in Sevier County. Along with preserving recollections of the war, the interviews capture the veterans' local dialect and many interesting and colorful reflections on Sevier County life before, during, and after the war — for example, no less than three of the veterans interviewed mention squirrel hunting as being excellent preparation for sniper training!