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Appalachian Fables and Facts: A Case Study of the Shenandoah National Park Removals

by CHARLES L. PERDUE, JR.
& NANCY J. MARTIN-PERDUE

"What is history but a fable agreed upon?"

Napoleon Bonaparte, *Sayings*

I

Although folklorists generally define "fable" as a moral tale, often employing animal characters, it is likely that Napoleon was using the term in its sense as a made-up work or piece of fiction. History scholarship in Napoleon's time may well have been as much concerned with the creation of literary works as it was with research into the past. Still, the question is provocative in that it reminds us that history, as well as many other related endeavors and disciplines, has always been directed and shaped by the then current ideas and sets of beliefs. Whatever these ideas and beliefs were at a given time, they could be and have been applied toward many different ends, depending on economic and political interests, social class, cultural or racial/ethnic differences, and moral or theological considerations. We must also be reminded that several fables or sets of ideas and beliefs may be agreed upon and held simultaneously by different historians and/or groups of individuals. If this were not the case, revisionist history would be neither necessary nor possible.

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In his recent book, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, Henry D. Shapiro strongly and rightly suggests that the history of the *idea* of Appalachia and the history of Appalachia are not one and the same. Indeed, a proper history of the geomorphological area of "Appalachia" and of the people who have inhabited it is not possible without first teasing out the strands of that separate reality from the complex of fictions created by the local color writers of the 1870's and onward, by missionaries at various times, and by the regional developers and others at later periods. Each of these various interest groups has espoused its own particular fable of the "otherness" of Appalachia and of the "peculiar people" who dwell there.¹

With the foregoing in mind, we would apply Napoleon's use of the term fable to the present discussion by asking, "What is *Appalachia* but a fable agreed upon?" We will present some of the fables that have prevailed concerning Appalachia and set forth the need for critical historical research (including some obstacles to such research) as the problem has been perceived and stated by some writers. We will then discuss briefly our efforts to write such a history of one small segment of Appalachia: a part of the territory which became the Shenandoah National Park, and the people who were displaced from that territory by the establishment of the Park. From this work in progress, we offer a case study of a single hollow and its associated family lineage—that of the Nicholson family of Madison and Rappahannock Counties, Virginia (see Family Chart, Figure 1)—to suggest some directions and possibilities that do exist for critical, localized history research within the Appalachian region.

One important and immediate obstacle confronting Appalachian studies is the lack of a coherent view of what constitutes Appalachia. We can extend Shapiro's argument to include the notion that the history of the *idea* of *where* Appalachia is, is not the same thing as the actual location of Appalachia in time and space. Bruce Ergood has pointed out that between 1920 and 1970 Appalachia was "thrice defined, each time using distinct criteria and each time made up of a different mix of geopolitical divisions." The first of these definitions, that of John C. Campbell, seems to have most closely approximated a geomorphological approach. He "described the region as those areas of the great Appalachian mountain chain which correspond for the most part with boundaries of natural division."²

Other writers have noted that Appalachia is a "politically defined region," in apparent reference to the operational definitions employed by such agencies as the Appalachian Regional Commission.³ Poverty seems to be a major contributing factor determining these contemporary definitions. Indeed, we were told by an ARC official several years ago that a number of counties which lie along the eastern slope of the Blue Ridge and which, by geography, should be included in Appalachia, were specifically excluded at the request of the local county governments. These governmental bodies felt that inclusion in the designation was too stigmatizing and misrepresented their actual condition with regard to poverty.⁴ Their action recognized the political nature of such a designation. More importantly, their determination not to be a part of Appalachia, in this case, was based on their reaction to a set of ideas and was not connected in any way to the objective facts of their geographic and/or economic circumstances. Such political definitions of the boundaries of Appalachia thus form an insidious type of fable, which is largely useless for the purposes of serious research.

The nature of the people of Appalachia—including their physical and mental traits, behavior, history and culture—has provided material for another type of fable. A major assumption of this fable, regardless of the extent of the geographic bounds used to define the region, has been that the people of Appalachia constitute a culturally homogeneous group, most often said to be Scotch-Irish and English, mostly Presbyterian, independent, fatalistic, and culturally and geographically isolated.⁵ These notions are part of a generalized complex of stereotypes that have been held about the so-called "hillbilly" or "mountaineer" and that have been applied by different writers at various times to the

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people in specific sub-areas of the region. The following statements indicate some of the more stable ideas that have persisted about the people, as well as some of the more esoteric forms of the stereotype.

A psychoanalyst, working in West Virginia, discussed what he termed "cultural primitives." This group, which he thought could be "regarded as approximating the legendary 'hillbillies'," and which he figured made up "not more than 10 to 15% of the total population" was characterized as follows:

The isolation these people sought originally was certainly not based on a desire for space and freedom, as might have characterized the pioneers who settled the west, but rather... was sought for negative reasons,—to get away from something undesirable.

The tendency was, and is to till the smallest possible amount of land, and to maintain the smallest amount of livestock to achieve the barest of subsistence.

The more positive emotions of love, affection for children, loyalty, and enthusiasm are dramatically scarce, and it seems conceivable that they never occur in some individuals, or even in some families.

One of the strongest motivations seen is the avoidance of responsibility, which mobilizes more effort and ingenuity, it seems, than does survival itself.

The group of people described above are fundamentally uncivilized people. As such, they strike other people as being bizarre.

...the group described, as a whole, shows the characteristic traits of schizophrenia. Like the schizophrenic, they end up in life as bizarre, isolated groups through a process of default. That is to say, they are what they are because they are not something else. A very valid way of describing the individual schizophrenic is that he is the peculiar irrational person he is because he has not succeeded in becoming a more ordinary rational person....⁶

Another account which focused upon the "mountain people" of the Blue Ridge Belt of Virginia was heavily influenced by local mission workers. This account pictures the mountaineer as "not industrious" but rather, "in the majority of cases, lazy." The mountaineers do have wonderful memories and often know whole chapters of the Bible, but this ability results from the fact that the mountaineer's "mind is not occupied with so many things to distract his attention." Still, "they are devoid of any sense of artistic beauty," have "a very low sense of obligation or loyalty," and have no moral standards. Promiscuity begins at the age of twelve or fourteen for the mountain girls, who mature earlier than the average girl.⁷

One might dismiss such commentary as ranging from the simply uninformed, through the ridiculous and absurd, to the utterly outrageous, if it weren't for the monumental proportion of the literature on Appalachia which depicts the people of the region in such manner. Some writers have offered positive values and views of the Appalachian people as a form of corrective to the negative images presented.⁸ While this impulse is understandable, it often succeeds only in substituting one set of stereotypical beliefs for another.

The prevailing assumptions about the nature of Appalachian people have combined with ideas about the culture of poverty to produce what has been called an "Appalachian subculture model."⁹ In this model, responsibility for the problems of Appalachia, including its intractable poverty, is placed directly upon Appalachian people and their cultural traits. The Appalachian Regional Commission offers the archetype of this view in the March-April, 1979 issue of *Appalachia*:

The poverty of Appalachia is almost as deeply rooted in American history as its mountains. The first settlers—frontiersmen—were English and Scotch Irish. They were poor, ill-educated and lacked rudimentary farm skills. Proud, independent, skeptical of organized society, they stayed in the hills, eking out a living. So did their descendants.¹⁰

Stephen L. Fisher model and its proponents, who question such as colonialism

We would suggest Appalachia as a stratification.¹² In

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Stephen L. Fisher gives a good overview and critique of the Appalachian subculture model and its proponents. He also discusses the work of Dwight Billings, Helen Lewis and others, who question the assumptions of the model and/or suggest other possibilities, such as colonialism, to explain the region's problems.¹¹

We would suggest that it is possible, for the purposes of analysis, to view the people of Appalachia as a quasi-ethnic group and usefully to apply theories of ethnic stratification.¹² In one such formulation, Donald Noel points out that

the presence of ethnocentrism, competition and differential power provides a firm basis for predicting the emergence of ethnic stratification.

Ethnocentrism is expressed in a variety of ways including mythology, condescension, and a double standard of morality in social relations.

Further, this double standard of morality leads to "intergroup economic relations...which...are characterized by exploitation."¹³

Applying this theory of ethnic stratification in a general way to Appalachia, one could delineate a process by which the culture-trait fable functions together with competition for resources (coal for instance), and the power differences that exist between various groups (e.g., mining corporations/local individuals) to produce exploitative economic relations and an unequal distribution of social positions and rewards (stigmatization and poverty). There is a certain circularity in that once such ethnic stratification emerges, it tends to perpetuate itself through the operation and/or manipulation of the same factors that produced it in the first place. Consequently, various interest groups could exploit the situation to their own ends, and poverty could become a self-fulfilling prophecy in Appalachia.

Although this tentative theoretical perspective simplifies a very complex set of problems and ignores the diversity of historic development and of people in the region, we contend that the linkages between ethnocentrism, economic competition, and power differentials serve as important foci for research. Careful case studies in specific sub-areas might refute the stereotypical claims made about Appalachian people and remove the bases of ethnocentrism, as well as expose the political, economic or other issues underlying the stratification process.

Such case studies have not yet been generated in sufficient number or authority to lay the culture-trait fable to rest. One reason for this lack may be another current scholarly fable, which holds that there are insufficient documents from which to do a proper history of the people of Appalachia. A number of researchers have made statements to this effect and suggested that new methodologies, such as oral interviews, are required to fill the gap in the historical record.¹⁴ We recognize that the amount and types of documents that are available in any given area vary considerably. But the very existence of the belief that no documents exist often precludes a search for such materials as *may* exist.

With regard to the Shenandoah National Park area, Edward Steere, a Park Service historian, made the following claims in 1935:

The settlement of the glens of the Blue Ridge range has received little attention from historians. The reason, no doubt, has something to do with the fact that the mountain people have left no records of their achievements.

A detailed and accurate historical analysis of...[relationships between mountain dwellers and lowland property owners] would present an all but impossible task. As already stated, the mountain people left no records.¹⁵

Gene Wilhelm, Jr., investigating settlements in the same area, commented that "because such a large number of mountain people were squatters, county courthouse records furnished scant information."¹⁶

The case study we present below concentrates on an area studied by both Steere and Wilhelm and relies exclusively on the use of available documents. We hope that this example will help persuade others that documents do exist in many areas, and that their discovery and use can add significantly to the quality of historical research in the Appalachian region.

II

The dedication of the Shenandoah National Park by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on July 3, 1936, was the culmination of an idea which had been extant since the turn of the century: to establish a national park "for the recreation of the people who lived in the thickly populated metropolitan centers of the East."¹⁷ However, the movement which eventually resulted in the creation of the Shenandoah National Park, encompassing about 200,000 acres on the slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains, lying in eight Virginia counties, had not begun to take shape until early in 1924.¹⁸

It is crucial to recognize that, from its inception, the idea of a national park in the East brought into sharp conflict the recreational needs and desires of a non-resident, urban population and the cultural/subsistence needs of a resident, rural population who held the land by right of private domain. Establishment of the Park resolved the conflict in favor of the larger, more powerful, urban interests and set a precedent by making use of the blanket condemnation forcibly to acquire privately-held land from persons, many of whom did not want to sell their land or to move from the area.¹⁹ It must also be understood that the movement to establish a park was composed primarily of middle- to upper-class entrepreneurs and politicians who were anxious for their own reasons and vested interests to promote tourism in the state.²⁰ These persons were well organized, and their lobbying for a park was carried out in Washington, D. C., and across Virginia principally through a chamber of commerce type of organization set up in the Shenandoah Valley and a business association set up by George Freeman Pollock, the owner and operator of the Skyland resort in the Blue Ridge.

The membership of these organizations, which eventually merged to work toward establishing the Shenandoah National Park in the Blue Ridge, included Pollock; Governor E. Lee Trinkle; then Senator (and later Governor) Harry Flood Byrd; editor of Byrd's Harrisonburg newspaper, John Crown; later Project Manager for the Shenandoah Park Homesteads, L. Ferdinand Zerkel; and "many prominent citizens" of the state of Virginia.²¹ These individuals may have been motivated by altruistic or conservationist concerns as well, but there is considerable evidence that economic interests and developing industrialization in Virginia were strong factors in their support of the Park.²²

Perhaps most important of all, the attitudes expressed about the mountain people of the Blue Ridge by park proponents and officials covered the range of stereotypes which has commonly been applied to the people of Appalachia generally, and which we referred to previously as the "culture-trait fable." By some accounts, the people of the Shenandoah area were the "sturdy people who have inhabited these mountains since the days when the pre-revolutionary adventurer advanced against this frontier." This view fostered and developed the "noble home life, strength of character and fine intellectual thought that characterized the whole process of the founding of our new Nation"²³ and which "descended from the best blood of the British Isles."²⁴

On the other hand, George Pollock, who was said to have been sympathetic to the mountaineer and his needs, wrote:

The Blue Ridge mountaineer was probably no different from any other Anglo-Saxon; but being ignorant, usually having a chip on his shoulder and being possessed of bulky strength, he had to go through a good many years of 'mixing' before he became the docile person he is today.²⁵

Other writers deplore "dependence upon our children as evidence of strictly upland homes. A writer claimed that "a and cited "their removal" and cited "the fact that there was no money to this condition."²⁷

Another view was expressed in the spring of 1930. They and the Great Smokies the real tourist attraction replied that the editors of the mountaineers... would not take money from the tourists. Some types of mountaineering had the same interest in tourism as was seen as disreputable.

Altogether, approval of the Shenandoah National Park on their own did so much to the lowland areas. Those who were relocated in suitable areas. Some of the political reasons may be seen in stark contrast to who had recommended the resettlement of the population concerning

A seldom considered, "outside" people care of these "inside" people "squatters" in the inassimilable on the "undesirable from the mountaineers is wholehearted not but believe that settlement and lack of education from Miss Sizer's tab Only 22 families entirely illiterate (4th. Grade the 132 homes and one of the 132, alone scarcely almost universally in and threshed with flour. The colonization idea in mind for the "squatters" recognized—53 out of and, consequently, v

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Other writers deplored the lack of "independence and resourcefulness" and the "dependence upon outside help"²⁶ that characterized the people of Shenandoah. Some decried their lack of morality, citing the high incidence of venereal disease and of bastard children as evidence of their promiscuity. By the estimate of one author's sources, "in the strictly upland homes...ninety per cent of them would have bastard children." This same writer claimed that "another bad moral feature is that of living together out of wedlock" and cited "their remoteness and the journey to the Court House to secure a license" and "the fact that there were no ministers at hand to perform the ceremony" as contributing to this condition.²⁷

Another view was expressed by two assistant editors of the *National Geographic* in the spring of 1930. They thought that the Park Service should let the people of Shenandoah and the Great Smokies stay on the land because "the mountaineers, not the scenery, were the real tourist attraction." Assistant Director of the Park Service, Arno Cammerer, replied that the editors were "all wet." Cammerer's assessment was that "the worthy mountaineers...would leave; the only ones anxious to stay were those anxious to make money from the tourists." He claimed further, "There is no person so canny as certain types of mountaineers, and none so disreputable." "There is an irony in the fact that the same interest in tourism which motivated the businessmen and politicians touting the Park was seen as disreputable if it motivated the mountaineer.

Altogether, approximately 500 families were displaced by the establishment of the Shenandoah National Park in the period 1924-1936.²⁸ Families who could afford to move on their own did so, often moving only a few miles away to nearby communities or lowland areas. Those families who had little or no resources by the time they had to move were relocated in subsistence homesteads provided by the Resettlement Administration. Some of the political, ethical, and cultural questions raised by the removal and relocation may be seen in stark relief in a letter from L. Ferdinand Zerkel to Hon. Wm. E. Carson, who had recommended that Zerkel become Director of a proposed Bureau to handle the resettlement of the Park dwellers. In his December 11, 1933, letter, Zerkel set forth his position concerning the job, the people, and the problems of removal and resettlement:

A seldom considered, if not largely unrecognized, phase of our problem is the need of informing the "outside" people carefully and accurately of the present and potential capacity, usefulness, habits, etc. of these "inside" people. It is very generally accepted that the poorer mountain folk, certainly the "squatters" in the inaccessible sections, must be guided into more civilized action and habits to become assimilable on the "outside"....Admittedly, these people are now improvident, listless and often undesirable from many angles. What the "outside" people must give these under-privileged hollow dwellers is wholehearted cooperation with the welfare agencies that seek to improve their situation. I cannot but believe that such will be forthcoming, particularly when it is more widely recognized that environment and lack of education, as much as laziness, accounts for such conditions as the following taken from Miss Sizer's tabulations in five hollows in Madison's park area: 132 families totalling 652 people—Only 22 families entirely self-supporting; 435 illiterate (over 6 years but neither read nor write) and near-illiterate (4th. Grade or lower); 389 persons with bad teeth and tonsils; 12 privies and 10 screens among the 132 homes and only 1 home provided with lime or ashes to cover excreta; 4 housewives, by name, out of the 132, alone scald their dishes (others using merely warm or cold water and usually no soap) and, almost universally in these hollows, the small patches of grain are still harvested with scythes or cradles and threshed with flails and the hauling is done almost entirely with sleds.

The colonization idea which I suggested to you and to Director Albright several years ago is today still in mind for the "squatters"; of whom, by the way, there are considerably more than is generally recognized—53 out of 132 families in five hollows in Madison County being without any property title and, consequently, without cash allowances under the Park condemnation awards.

Any "wholesale" colonization or group removal would, in my judgement, be very unpopular and prove later to have been ill-advised. A plan of re-establishment on a "trade" or "exchange" basis, absorbing the evident differential in value between the abandoned cabin and the new home out of relief funds, is ideal in preserving greater self respect and pride of possession. It will pleasantly camouflage the enforced transplantation of penniless and near-penniless families. I believe that small neighborhoods now inside the Park boundaries should be relocated in very similar but better small neighborhoods outside the boundaries, preserving isolation as far as possible and, assuredly, not grouping many unacquainted families.³⁰

Zerkel's comment regarding small neighborhoods existing within the Park and the necessity of retaining those in the relocation process should be noted carefully. In 1935, Edward Steere commented that "the area of the Shenandoah Park is almost destitute of the remains of a mountain culture." Steere noted specifically, "The glens were too small to permit the development of a vigorous community life."³¹ Zerkel's statement in 1933 offers one bit of written testimony in support of the contention that communities had indeed formerly existed within the confines of the Park boundaries.

It is also important to know that Zerkel was a local man, who lived in Luray and dealt in real estate and timber before he began his rise through several positions associated with the construction of Skyline Drive and the supervision of Emergency Conservation Work camps in Shenandoah. Zerkel's involvement with the park project thus suggests that local people were not necessarily any more sympathetic and sensitive to the needs of the mountain people or understanding of their lifestyle and culture than were outsiders such as George Pollock. For Zerkel, class position and economic interests proved compelling. Although Zerkel may have had a genuine concern for what he called "this sociological problem," his concern was that of one of the "outside people" rather than of the "inside people," or of a superior for an inferior. Because of his own personal background and social class, Zerkel could not differentiate between legitimate differences in technology and lifestyle (e.g., the method of harvesting grain) and elements of the widely generalized culture-trait fable (e.g., improvidence, listlessness, and laziness). He was a product of his times, caught up in what was represented to be a reform movement to help bring an illiterate, impoverished, and backward part of the population into the mainstream of modern society.

There was no single, consistent, or irrevocable policy with regard to removal of the people in the Shenandoah Park area until February 1, 1934, when Arno Cammerer, by that time Director of the Park Service, announced that the federal government would not accept any park lands from the State until all inhabitants had left the area.³² This announcement stemmed from problems the federal government had had with the people left in the Great Smokies Park and from the attitudes of the new Secretary of Interior, Harold Ickes. Cammerer's final removal policy statement set off an immediate and bitter controversy between federal officials, state officials, and local public opinion that has not been totally resolved even at this late date. Unfortunately, Cammerer had not heeded Zerkel's advice in the 1933 letter:

One of the most important phases of the whole proposition; beyond the soul, mind and body salvation of the children particularly in the poorer cabins; is a guided publicity. With well planned press releases and developed sympathetic local newspaper propaganda, great assistance and no new ill will should be forthcoming. With possible haphazard news stories or any wild or sensational press reports, tending to indicate eviction plans or methods, both the State and Federal agencies will face embarrassment and highly unwelcome publicity and a greatly handicapped process of moving the people.³³

For the 10 years of the Park movement preceding the final removal policy statement, various conflicting assumptions regarding removal had been current. In 1926, then Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work declared that the people would have to leave the park lands, but Col. Glenn Smith, head of the Geological Survey and secretary of the Southern Appalachian National Park Commission, disagreed. One writer states that "it is clear that Virginia officials were operating on the assumption of a removal policy as early as the winter of 1927-28."³⁴ Some individuals supported the Park movement under the assumption that people would not have to move; others apparently found the idea of removal acceptable in the abstract, but were appalled by the action when it involved people they knew. At best, there was confusion and inconsistency regarding removal; at worst, there was outright deception.

In the intervening years since 1936, there has been little systematic inquiry into the nature or history of the people who were displaced by the formation of the Shenandoah

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National Park or into the socio-cultural consequences of their involuntary displacement. For the past nine years, we have been living in Rappahannock and Madison Counties, only a few miles from the Park boundaries, and have conducted research toward that end. We have been concentrating upon 160 or 32% of the approximately 500 families who were displaced. The 160 families involve only 10 surnames and are located in Rappahannock County and adjoining Madison and Page Counties. Neither the land area nor the population of the Shenandoah National Park was distributed evenly among the eight counties involved, and, in fact, these three counties contributed more than their proportionate share in both land area and in persons removed. Consequently, the 160 families that we are focusing on may safely be assumed to form a fairly representative sample of the total number displaced. We have been able thus far to trace all 10 family lines back in the general area to the mid- or late 1700's, using the same types of documents and research as will be presented in the Nicholson family case study which follows. Even though the 10 family groups have diverse backgrounds and came into the area by way of various migration routes, their 175-200 year experience in the area makes it possible to talk about them as a stable, homogeneous population at the time of their removal.

III

The Nicholsons—A Case Study

Nicholson Hollow is located along the Hughes River in the northwest corner of Madison County, Virginia, approximately 70 miles W.S.W. of Washington, D.C. One reason for choosing Nicholson Hollow and the Nicholson family for this case study is that there is more published material available dealing specifically with the Nicholsons than with any other family removed from the Park. It will be instructive to look at some of this material and then see how the documentary evidence either substantiates or refutes it. Citations follow in chronological sequence.

Much of the credit for establishing the Shenandoah National Park may be attributed to George Freeman Pollock. Pollock's father, who had never seen the land, was a principal stockholder in the Miners' Lode Copper Company, organized in an abortive attempt to exploit the meager copper deposits in the area. George Pollock acquired an interest in the area from his father and, eventually, a title to 5,371 acres in the center of what was to become the Park. In October, 1886, when he was 16 years old, young Pollock visited the area and returned the following spring, at which time he took a trip into Nicholson Hollow. He wrote:

The reason why this isolated community had been christened Free State Hollow was because it was really a free state. The mountaineers were seldom disturbed by outside officers, it being too rough and wild for sheriffs and their deputies....Free State Hollow, a center of the moonshine business, consisted of a group of log cabins scattered along the Hughes River, most of which were located on the Stony Man Tract [the 5,371 acres referred to above]....There was no reading or writing, the people being absolutely illiterate. Old Man Aaron Nicholson was the "granddaddy" of the entire clan and for that reason Free State Hollow was also called Nicholson Hollow....The cabin door, which was open, was filled with the massive, bow-legged form of Aaron Nicholson....He then walked out, feet bare (as, in fact, were the feet of all the Hollow people) and when he extended his hand, I knew that we were going to be friends.

Each hollow was more or less of a family stronghold and the residents of each of the several hollows had distinguishing characteristics. The Nicholsons...were mostly very large, heavy, intelligent men who had good log cabin homes; while the Corbins, in the very next hollow, were emaciated, could neither read nor write and were scarcely able to speak understandable English.

Before the Shenandoah National Park was conceived of, with the exception of Bailey Nicholson, the Mountain Preacher, not a mountaineer in my neighborhood had been to school and only a few, who had either been taught by me or else had been given instructions by my guests, could sign his or her name.³⁵

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The next people to comment on Nicholson Hollow (1929-1931) were Mandel Sherman and Thomas E. Henry, the authors of *Hollow Folk*. This book purports to be a work of social scientific scholarship and has been widely cited in college psychology courses. But the authors were unable to view the mountain people in anything resembling an objective manner and the result is at best insensitive reporting and at worst falsified data.³⁶ Sherman and Henry thought the "hollow folk" were the end product of "many generations of close inbreeding and at least two generations of almost absolute illiteracy."

The dark interior valleys of the Blue Ridge Mountains are realms of enchantment. Here, hidden in deep mountain pockets, dwell families of unlettered folk, of almost pure Anglo-Saxon stock, sheltered in tiny, mud-plastered log cabins and supported by primitive agriculture.

There is no record of the religious beliefs of the earliest settlers. Presumably they were Scotch-Irish Presbyterians. Religion of any sort was at a notoriously low ebb in the surrounding lowlands at the time the population began to drift into the mountains. They brought with them no clergyman and built no church. Whatever religious observance there was took place only within the family.... The Regular Baptists were established in the hollows about 1907 when a tiny log church was completed. [Actually this date is off by 129 years as will be seen below.]

Neither the recent World War nor the Civil War signified anything to any of the children. Although there were men of draft age in the community, they were so securely hidden in the depths of the hollow that they were unregistered and scarcely knew that a war was in progress.³⁷

As the Park dwellers began to move out and Park Service personnel to move in, the question of what should be done with the homes of the mountain people was considered. A Park Service Engineer reported in 1935:

There is nothing distinctive or outstanding in their manner of living, transportation, social life, or hand crafts. The mountain people, as a whole, merely exist under conditions that are prevalent in any large city, varying from the lowest type slums to the less prosperous of what is generally termed the middle class.

As I see it, all that we should endeavor to preserve of conditions as they exist should be a nucleus in one or two hollows where the few mountain people permitted to remain in their houses as "museum pieces," could enjoy the same limited social life they have had.... The upper end of Nicholson Hollow will, I think, best fulfill the requirements for this type of exhibit.³⁸

A Park travelogue speaks of preserving the house of Aaron Nicholson:

a giant of a mountain man—King of Free State Hollow—where "nary revenooer" ventured. There for 33 years, "he lived off'n the bark." "It's all my land," he roared with a sweep of his huge arm. "I surweyed [sic] it—chopped 'round it m'self—from Peak to Peak—as fur as I can see."³⁹

Many homes were razed by the Park Service with the help of the men of the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the passage of time made the question of preservation of some buildings irrelevant as they tumbled in decay. By 1944 many of the buildings remaining in Nicholson Hollow were in a bad state of repair. A survey dated January, 1945, showed photographs of the homes of Russ, John R., Aaron, John T., Haywood, Charley, and William Nicholson, and stated that the buildings either had no historical significance or were only of interest historically in connection with early folklore of the hollow. The survey recommended either razing the buildings or, in some cases, leaving them "to mold away or be disposed of by burning during winter periods." One home was reputed to be the first cabin built in the mountains, "on land granted by royal patent to Archibald Dick in 1750." The cabin was believed to have been built at that time but the recommendation was made to raze the building and salvage any usable material.⁴⁰

Gene Wilhelm, Jr., Associate Professor of Geography at Slippery Rock State College, Pennsylvania, has spent much of his time since 1964 "reconstructing mountain settlements in Shenandoah National Park." He has published widely on Nicholson Hollow and adjacent hollows and his comments are, therefore, of particular significance:⁴¹

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Aaron Nicholson apparently was the first settler in the hollow, arriving sometime in the early nineteenth century. He immediately claimed all the land between the headwall and the mouth of the valley. Aaron was an extreme individualist [in another reference by this author, Aaron is "an extremely individualistic squatter"]⁴² who appreciated his privacy and exercised a patriarchal rule over the valley. He soon gained the title of "King of the Free State."

The "King" built his spacious log house at the very top of the valley. As his children married they erected their log houses within a 2,500-foot radius of the "big house," forming a family cluster.⁴³

Wilhelm describes the houses of Aaron, John T., and John R. Nicholson, but does not give the relationship of John T. and John R. to Aaron. Further, Wilhelm noted that:

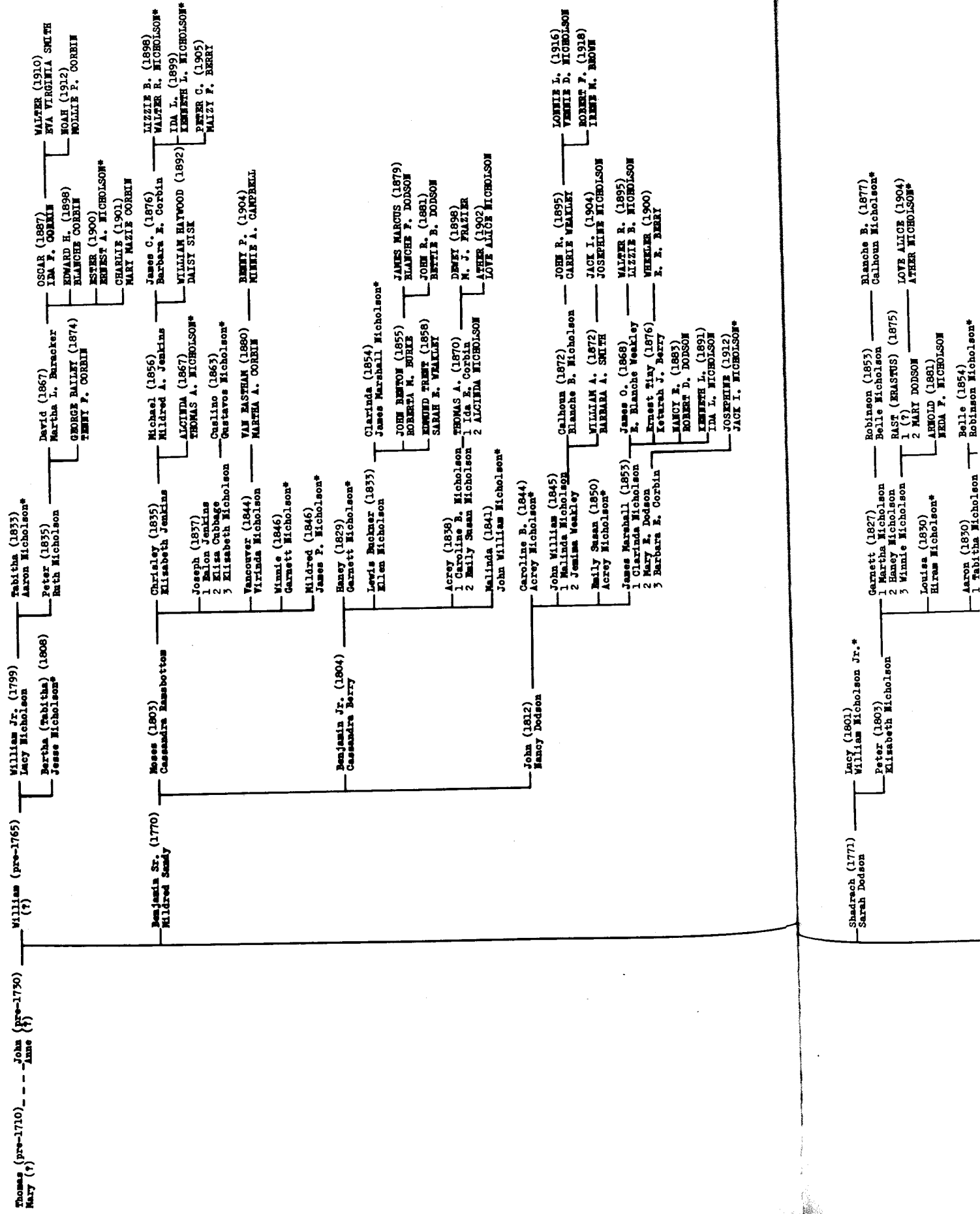
Nicholson Hollow was well-named. Of the 32 families known to live in the hollow in 1930, 24 were descendants of Aaron Nicholson. Family names like Corbin (adjoining hollow), Dodson, and Sisk married "into the hollow" by choosing Nicholson women.⁴⁴

In a more recent article in the *Appalachian Journal*, Wilhelm repeated many of his earlier statements on Nicholson Hollow, but observed that Aaron Nicholson arrived there "sometime after the Revolutionary War."⁴⁵ It is not clear whether this statement is supposed to mean the same thing as "the early nineteenth century" or not, but both statements are incorrect since Aaron Nicholson was *born* in the area in 1830 as the following discussion will show.

Thus the available literature presents a picture of a hollow along the Hughes River, populated by the Nicholson family, most of whom descend from Aaron Nicholson, a squatter, who settled in the area sometime after the Revolutionary War. The Hollow is a center of the moonshine business. The people are churchless (for most of their history), lawless, clannish, illiterate, barefooted, squatters, closely inbred, isolated, and unaware of the Civil War and World War I. Their culture, such as it is, is undistinctive and not worth preserving. There is an element of truth in a few of these assertions; others are totally unfounded. The information that follows on the Nicholson family and Nicholson Hollow is based totally on documentary sources and will enable us to comment on the picture presented in the literature.⁴⁶

Genealogy and History of the Nicholson Family: The apparent original Nicholson immigrant of the Nicholson Hollow family is Thomas Nicholson, mariner, from Whitehaven, Cumberland County, England, who patented 1,000 acres of land in Virginia on June 23, 1732. The land lay in what was then called the "Great Fork of the Rappahannock River"—that is, somewhere in what was to become Culpeper, Madison, and Rappahannock Counties. The land was further described as being "contiguous to the Stonehouse River."⁴⁷ "Stonehouse" was a then current name for the Hughes River, which flows through what is now called Nicholson Hollow.⁴⁸ On June 15, 1736, Thomas Nicholson requested that someone examine the improvements he had made on his land.⁴⁹ On September 20-21, 1749, John Nicholas (an oft-used spelling of the Nicholson name) was witness to a deed involving land on the north side of the Robinson River, a few miles from Nicholson Hollow.⁵⁰

By 1750, Thomas Nicholson was dead, and his wife Mary and eldest son John authorized John Champe to dispose of the 1,000 acres of land. They received 150 pounds for the property.⁵¹ If John Nicholson bought other land with the 150 pounds, we have not found the deed, but he apparently remained in the area. He is involved in a suit in Culpeper County in 1763⁵² and is listed in the Continental Army Recruitment Classes in Culpeper County in 1781.⁵³ John Nicholson occurs fairly regularly in the personal property tax lists in Culpeper County, 1782-1792, and then in Madison County lists from 1793 until he dies in 1810 (Madison County was formed from Culpeper County in 1793).⁵⁴ As one reads chronologically through the tax lists, the names of John's sons begin to appear: first, Aaron and John, Jr., in 1792; then William in 1793; and by 1802, the names of eight sons are shown, including Thomas, Michael, Shadrach, Benjamin, and Moses (in addition to the three already named above).



James Marshall (1853)
 1 Clarinda Nicholson
 2 Mary E. Dodson
 3 Barbara E. Corbin

James O. (1868)
 E. Blanche Weasley
 Ernest Kay (1876)
 Keturah J. Barry

NANCY E. (1883)
 ROBERT D. DODSON
 KENNETH L. (1891)
 IDA L. NICHOLSON
 JOSEPHINE (1912)
 JACK I. NICHOLSON*

WALTER R. (1895)
 MIZZIE B. FLODOLSON
 WENDELL (1900)
 E. E. BERRY

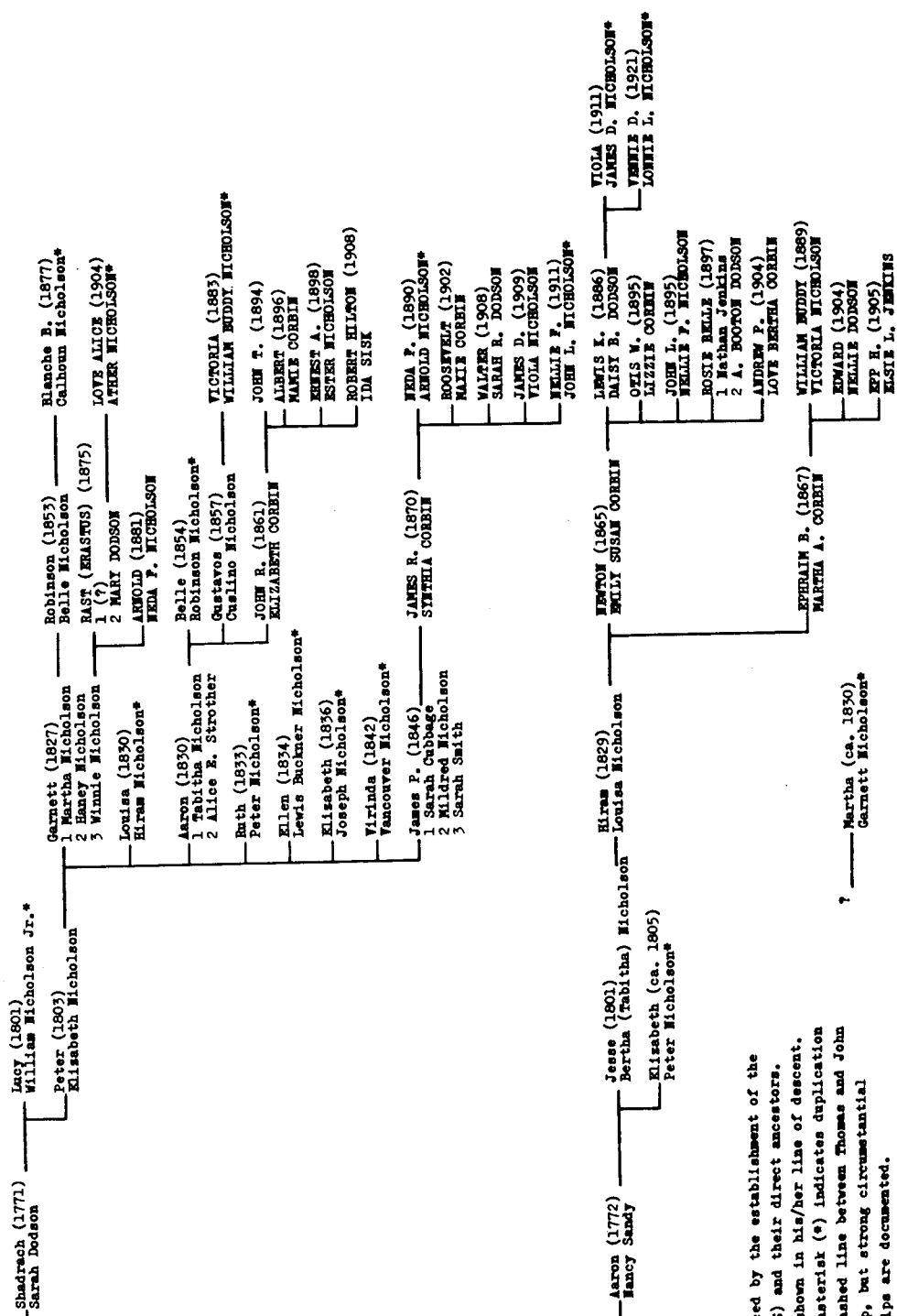


Figure 1. NICHOLSON FAMILY CHART

This chart shows ONLY those families displaced by the establishment of the Shennadoah National Park (in CAPITAL LETTERS) and their direct ancestors. The top name in each couple is a Nicholson shown in his/her line of descent. The bottom name is that of the spouse. An asterisk (*) indicates duplication of a name by reason of dual descent. The dashed line between Thomas and John Nicholson indicates an inferred relationship, but strong circumstantial evidence supports it. All other relationships are documented.

The elder John Nicholson acquired 327 acres of land on the Hughes River near the mouth of Nicholson Hollow, and it was surveyed for him on May 1, 1797.⁵⁵ On June 7, 1799, John bought another 170 acres from Mark and Eve Finks for the price of 5,000 pounds of tobacco. This land was also located along the Hughes River in Nicholson Hollow. On March 7-16, 1805, John Nicholson and his wife, Anne, sold 80 acres to three of their sons: 20 acres to Benjamin for \$50; 20 acres to Aaron for \$50; and 40 acres to Shadrack for \$100.⁵⁶ In 1810, John Nicholson died and disappeared from the record.⁵⁷ A glance at the Nicholson Family Chart (see Figure 1) will show that it was primarily the descendants of the above three sons of John who populated Nicholson Hollow. The Nicholsons were thus in the Hollow from 1797 for certain, and possibly earlier, until the removals in the 1930's.⁵⁸ Nicholsons are still in Nicholson Hollow outside the Park boundary.

George Pollock reported meeting "King" Aaron, but we know that the first Aaron, son of John, was born in 1772 and died in 1856, 30 years before Pollock came into Nicholson Hollow.⁵⁹ Therefore, the Aaron Nicholson referred to as "King" of Nicholson Hollow and (erroneously) as the "granddaddy" of all (or most) of the Nicholsons had to have been the Aaron who was born in 1830 (John/Shadrach/Peter). As can be seen from the chart (Figure 1), only 6 displaced families descend from "King" Aaron. This is only about 12 percent of the total of 48 families displaced, not the "24 out of 32 families" as indicated by Gene Wilhelm and referred to earlier. The addition of female lines would add 3 or 4 families, but even with this increase the number of displaced Nicholsons descended from "King" Aaron would not come close to the 75 percent figure indicated by Wilhelm.

Marriage and Family Patterns: There are 91 marriages indicated on the Nicholson Family Chart (not counting the 31 Nicholson marriages listed by reason of dual descent—indicated by an *). Of the 91 marriages, all but 6 are documented by marriage bonds on record in the county courthouses in the area. Three of the six unions for which we do not have records occurred in the 18th century, and these bonds may have been lost or never recorded: Whether the remaining three cases involve lost or unrecorded bonds, records in counties which we have not yet checked, or common-law marriages, we have not yet determined. For two Nicholson families for which there are marriage bonds, the census records and the ages of the children given later on *their* marriage bonds indicate that common-law marriages existed for several years in each case, but both were eventually solemnized by marriage. Beyond this, there seems to be little evidence for statements made in the past indicating a high percentage of either common-law marriages or of illegitimate births. From the documentary evidence, it would appear that these people did accept and abide by the conventional mores held by the general population.

Marriage records indicate a relatively high degree of cousin marriage in the general area (not just in the Nicholson family). While we are not qualified to speculate on the genetic significance of inbreeding, we would argue that careful genealogical research can provide data for such a study, and objective statements can be made on the subject in lieu of off-hand comments and broad generalizations. If we consider only the Nicholson = Nicholson marriages on the Family Chart (Figure 1), it is possible to indicate that 9 Nicholsons married 1st cousins; 8 married 2nd cousins; 2 married 3rd cousins; 3 married 4th cousins; 1 married a 5th cousin; 3 married 1st cousins once removed; 2 married 3rd cousins once removed; 1 married a 4th cousin once removed; 1 married a 2nd cousin twice removed; and the relationship in one marriage is unknown at this time. Analysis of the significance of these facts must simply wait for further work. However, we would emphasize again the value of careful genealogical research for working out the details and complexities of a group's kinship structure and rich social networks. To accept simplistic and unexamined explanations of a group's origins is to create a fable about their past. To substitute a stereotype for the group's actual heritage is not only demeaning but constitutes a denial of that group's history.

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Land Ownership and Squatters: All land in Virginia between the Potomac River on the north and the Rappahannock River (at the time meaning the Rapidan River) on the south, from the Chesapeake Bay to the head springs of these two rivers, came through gift and inheritance to Lord Fairfax in the early 1700's.⁶⁰ This amounted to some 5,000,000 acres of land and included all of what now constitutes Culpeper, Madison, and Rappahannock Counties, as well as other counties. Both before and after Lord Fairfax took over management of the "Proprietary," grants of land were made which included portions of the Blue Ridge. At the same time, there was disagreement over the boundaries of the Proprietary, and grants involving some of the same land were also made by the Governor of Virginia.

Large grants were made by the Governor to Larkin Chew and Augustine Smith of Essex and King & Queen County, Virginia in 1712; these lands were subsequently purchased by James Barbour. Barbour sold much of this land in small tracts, but many purchasers were said to have moved away and the land reverted to Barbour. In 1795, James Barbour (likely the grandson mentioned in the earlier James' will) had the land surveyed and the resultant "Big Survey" included 42,700 acres, most of which lay in what is now the Shenandoah National Park.⁶¹ But Lord Fairfax also made grants on some of the land, and there were 33 individuals listed on Barbour's survey as "squatters" who had over 12,000 acres—over ¼ of what Barbour claimed.⁶² These men had been granted land directly from Lord Fairfax or purchased it from others who had received grants. Among the 33 names on the list was Mark Finks who sold 170 acres to John Nicholson in 1799. Thus in many cases, accusations of "squatter" simply reflected conflicting land claims which were equally legitimate from the point of view of either of the claimants.

The Big Survey was ultimately acquired in the late 1700's by Thomas Shirley of Madison County, who died with no will, ca. 1846.⁶³ The Chancery papers for the resulting suits over this tract of land fill several drawers in the Madison County courthouse, and these suits extended on for more than 50 years. Much of the Shirley Big Survey land was eventually sold in parcels of various sizes by order of the Madison County officials. The 5,371 acres referred to earlier that George Freeman Pollock acquired came out of this Shirley land—complete with people living on the land and conflicting claims of ownership. Although Pollock referred to these people as "squatters," it is of note that he quit claimed his interest in several tracts of land to the occupants, including 50 acres to John Rust Nicholson, 40 acres to Ephraim Nicholson, 75 acres to Arnold Nicholson, and land to several other families of Park people.⁶⁴ The point here is simply that most of the earlier references to squatters came out of legitimate conflicts which were often resolved in favor of the claimant with the most money and influence at court, but which were also sometimes settled in favor of the so-called "squatter." Beyond the issue of conflicting claims, it should be pointed out that in Madison Co. between 1799 and 1930, there were 267 deeds involving Nicholsons buying land and 209 deeds involving Nicholsons selling land—hardly the activities of squatters.

The average amount of land owned by the Nicholson heads of household on the family chart (see Figure 1) has been rather consistent over time with one exception which we will discuss. In 1852, five Nicholsons owned 273 acres (average = 55 acres); in 1862, four Nicholsons owned 549 acres (av. = 137 acres); in 1865, four Nicholsons owned 449 acres (av. = 112 acres); in 1924, thirty Nicholsons owned 1,618 acres (av. = 54 acres); and in 1930, at the time the land acquisition appraisals were made, forty-one Nicholsons owned 2,266 acres (av. = 55 acres).⁶⁵ The increase in land ownership in the 1860's resulted from the acquisitiveness of John Nicholson (John/Benjamin, Sr.) who, when he made out his will in 1872, left 9 farms totaling more than 700 acres to his 6 children.⁶⁶

Aaron Nicholson, the "King" of Nicholson Hollow, who was referred to previously as an individualistic "squatter," owned 67 acres of land in 1852 when he was 22 years old.⁶⁷ In 1872, Aaron put 75 acres and a good deal of personal property under the newly passed Homestead Exemption Law.⁶⁸ In 1896, Aaron deeded 20 acres of his land to son James Howard; 20 acres to daughter Belle; 5 acres to son Augustine (sometimes recorded as

Gustavos); 20 acres to daughter Mollie Corbin; and some personal property to son Edmund.⁶⁹ When he died in 1911, he owned about 5 acres on which he was living.⁷⁰ Chancery records indicate that he was indeed wont to claim that he owned everything from mountaintop to mountaintop.⁷¹ Whether he did so because he wished to impress (or mislead) George Pollock, because he genuinely felt as though he owned everything in sight, or because he was simply a liar we may never know. But that he was not a squatter is indisputable. He farmed for a living until he got old, then deeded his land to his children as was often done, and retired to end his life gardening and making baskets.⁷²

Census records indicate that the Nicholson men usually began their working lives as laborers and, as they grew older, often acquired land through purchase and/or inheritance—land they, in turn, passed on to the next generation. Further, renting was fairly common. The 1900 Census records indicate that, out of 23 households on the Family Chart (see Figure 1), 8 owned farms clear of mortgage, one owned a house, 6 rented farms, and 8 rented houses.

Literacy: The definition of literacy has sometimes meant, simply, that a person could read and write, and sometimes that he or she had completed a certain amount of formal education. Generally, the census has recorded as illiterate adults who could not read or write. Eight households from the Nicholson Family Chart appear in the 1850 Census records. Of these 14 heads of household and spouses (2 were widowed), 7 were literate, 6 were illiterate, and 1 was not given. Sixteen children were listed as literate, 11 as illiterate, and 4 were at school during the year. For the 10 households in the 1880 Census (2 heads were single), 8 heads and spouses were literate and 10 were illiterate. Seventeen children were listed as illiterate and 2 were in school. The 1900 Census lists 12 literate heads/spouses and 26 illiterate heads/spouses. Seventeen children were literate, 16 children were illiterate, and 11 children attended school within the year. These figures indicate a declining literacy rate among heads of households and spouses (from 50 percent in 1850 to 32 percent in 1900), but at no time was the frequent claim of total illiteracy substantiated.

Health and Disease: The mountain people were often perceived from the outside as living a squalid existence with high incidence of venereal disease resulting from "loose morals." We are not prepared to make a definitive statement here regarding the Nicholsons, as we are still searching for medical records which may yet be extant. However, we have located and interviewed a medical doctor who examined 1,300 (about $\frac{1}{2}$) of the Park dwellers in 1936. Without the records we cannot focus strictly on the Nicholson families, but the doctor's report of his findings is significant:

There were only three cases of syphilis found. Two of these in a sixty-five year old lady and her forty-five year old daughter. The latter, I assumed, was inherited. The third case was from a lady who gave birth to an illegitimate child three weeks after the examination. She was known to have friends in the local C.C.C. Camp. There were an abnormal [higher] number of goiters found in this group.... Round worms were rather prevalent among the young people.⁷³

In a telephone interview on March 20, 1979, the doctor recalled a high incidence of bad teeth and occasional deformities resulting from improperly set bones, but expressed amazement over the general good health of the people.

Isolation: The "Hollow Folk" were sometimes seen as geographically isolated, sometimes culturally isolated, and sometimes a combination of the two. People who lived in the coves and hollows of the Blue Ridge were without doubt more isolated, both geographically and culturally, than people living in the small towns such as Madison or Sperryville, but the nature and degree of this isolation seems to have been rarely understood and frequently overstated.

We cited earlier the statement from *Hollow Folk* that the men of draft age in the hollows scarcely knew that a war was in progress—referring to both the Civil War and

World War I.⁷⁴ Nicholson men, Nicholsons who complete, but still were drafted, and

The Madison Nicholson men, Nicholson Hollow and 1946.⁷⁷

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World War I.⁷⁴ This information would have come as something of a shock to the 14 Nicholson men who served in the Army during the Civil War—particularly to the 4 Nicholsons who died in that conflict.⁷⁵ Information at hand on World War I is incomplete, but still it indicates that 5 Nicholsons fought in that War: two volunteered, two were drafted, and one's mode of entry into the service is unknown.⁷⁶

The Madison County Voter Registration list for 1902-1903 includes the names of 19 Nicholson men, presumably voting and having some knowledge of events outside of Nicholson Hollow. Subsequent lists show Nicholson men registering to vote between 1902 and 1946.⁷⁷

To ascertain the extent and nature of contact with the "outside" world by the people in the hollows, more research is necessary. For example, Ephraim Nicholson (see Family Chart) indicates on his marriage bond that he was born in Ohio in 1867; yet two brothers were born in 1863 and 1865 and his sister Mary was born in 1868—all in Madison County, Virginia. Other Nicholsons from the Nicholson Hollow area indicate births in North Carolina (1804) and in West Virginia (1859). Clearly, there was some migration out and back by some family members.

One Nicholson family moved from Rappahannock County, Virginia, to Holden, Johnson County, Missouri (ca. 1870), and carried on a correspondence with their cousin John, evidence of both contact with the larger world and of literacy.⁷⁸ Miriam Sizer's work indicates visits by Nicholsons in 1930-1932 to Madison, Culpeper, Sperryville, Luray, Washington, Charlottesville, Winchester, and Richmond, Virginia; Washington, D.C.; and Atlanta, Georgia.⁷⁹ All of these bits of information cast considerable doubt upon assertions of almost total isolation, and warrant further exploration of the complex interaction between mountain people and the rest of the world.

Religion: Early records for the pertinent Colonial Episcopal Church are not available; apparently they have been destroyed. However, the Separatist Baptist churches have been in this part of Virginia since at least 1773. The Ragged Mountain Church (later called "F.T." from the initials of Francis Thornton, an early settler) was established in 1778 at the foot of Old Rag Mountain just across the Hughes River from Sharp Rock.⁸⁰ The Church moved ca. 1792 across the River and downstream to a site in what is now Rappahannock County.

The earliest records of that Church are not available, but there are lists of members from 1805 to 1855. John Nicholson (Nichols in the list) and his wife Ann were members (this is the elder John, born pre-1730, son of Thomas). John and Ann were dismissed from the Church by letter of April 1806 (perhaps with intent to move somewhere else), but the two of them are later "restored," and John is listed as deceased August 1810. In later lists, we find Moses Nicholson, Benjamin and William Nicholson (both baptized July 14, 1833), Shadrach Nicholson, Christopher Nicholson (excommunicated May 1841), Mrs. Sarah Nicholson (March 10, 1833), Mrs. Lucy Nicholson and Mrs. Jemima Nicholson (August 11, 1833), Cassandra Nicholson, and others. (The latter dates evidently refer to baptism, since no other indication is given.)⁸¹ We have not yet found and examined records of other churches in the area, but the information above is enough to refute the statement of Sherman and Henry, which assumed the earliest Nicholsons to be "Scotch-Irish Presbyterians" and stated that there were no clergymen and no churches in the area.⁸²

Lawlessness: Our preliminary examination of criminal and civil court records suggests that there is little to support the view of Nicholson Hollow as either "lawless" or as not participating in the local legal system. Nicholsons could and did initiate law suits and were occasionally sued by others. A few got involved in serious altercations. For example, James Nicholson (son of Benjamin and Mildred Sandy, Figure 1) stabbed Jacob Cubbage in an argument over James's "manhood,"⁸³ and Jesse and Mason Nicholson (sons of Jesse and Bertha Nicholson, Figure 1) were found guilty of administering poison to one Joel Hurt.⁸⁴

Many of the Nicholson's encounters with the law involved the distilling of intoxicants. Many families had distilled whiskey for generations, but a changing social climate outside the hollows and the resultant change in the laws concerning the manufacture, transportation, and consumption of distilled spirits turned an honest occupation into a criminal act and honest men into outlaws. Apprehension and confinement in jail sometimes contrived to turn whiskey outlaws into real outlaws. George Freeman Pollock at Skyland complained on occasion about moonshining, but more often turned his back so his guests could purchase the illegal product. Nonetheless, he was not above having moonshiners arrested when it suited his purposes.⁴⁵ The *Madison Eagle* treated stories of prohibition violators rather humorously, apparently viewing moonshiners as trickster figures. Nevertheless, violators often received jail sentences.

Crops: One last example of information available from documents is the type of crops grown at various times. Sometimes contracts in Chancery Cause files give this information and occasionally it may be found in deed books. On March 17, 1826, Michael Nicholson leased 100 acres on the Blue Ridge at Milum's Gap for 1/3 of his crop of wheat, rye, corn, oats, buckwheat, barley, potatoes, turnips, and other produce.⁴⁶

IV SUMMARY

Given all of the documentary evidence relating to the Nicholsons and to Nicholson Hollow, one might reasonably ask, "How is it that all of the statements of 'squatters,' 'illiteracy,' etc., can be made in the face of contrary information?" We believe that we can give a partial answer to this question, but the answer is multi-faceted. There seems to have been little difference between the Nicholsons who first settled Nicholson Hollow at the end of the 18th century and the general population at the time, but changing socioeconomic conditions slowly brought about some degree of isolation—both geographic and cultural. The Civil War was certainly a disruption. On one level, it created a circumstance in which the demand for labor would of necessity, and progressively, be filled by white mountain people as the newly freed blacks began a long, outward migration.

The beginning of the public school system in 1870, and increasing awareness of and contact with the world outside of Madison County (reinforced later by the advent of automobiles and good roads) were important factors in the change. The more remote hollows got roads last, if at all, and it became increasingly difficult for the inhabitants to haul produce, such as apples, by wagon and compete successfully with orchardists in the lowlands who could haul by truck to market.

The advent of railroads in the general area in the late 19th century brought increasing dependence on the products of far-away factories and brought about the closure of local mills which had employed some of the mountain people. In the early 20th century, tanneries shifted to chemical tanning agents and precipitated the end of the tan bark industry. Finally, Prohibition in 1916 and the chestnut blight of ca. 1919 slowly curtailed two more aspects of the mountain people's economy.

The activities of the Commonwealth of Virginia and, later, the federal government put further restraints on the ways that the people could earn a living. People who did not move out early found themselves bound by stringent rules and regulations with regard to cultivation, grazing of domestic animals, cutting of timber and burning of brush to stimulate the growth of berries. In addition to the Great Depression, there was what local newspapers at the time referred to as the worst drought in the area in 100 years. By 1929-1936, the economic situation in Nicholson Hollow, as in other areas of the Blue Ridge, was quite desperate.

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Many of the Nicholson's encounters with the law involved the distilling of intoxicants. Many families had distilled whiskey for generations, but a changing social climate outside the hollows and the resultant change in the laws concerning the manufacture, transportation, and consumption of distilled spirits turned an honest occupation into a criminal act and honest men into outlaws. Apprehension and confinement in jail sometimes contrived to turn whiskey outlaws into real outlaws. George Freeman Pollock at Skyland complained on occasion about moonshining, but more often turned his back so his guests could purchase the illegal product. Nonetheless, he was not above having moonshiners arrested when it suited his purposes.⁵⁵ The *Madison Eagle* treated stories of prohibition violators rather humorously, apparently viewing moonshiners as trickster figures. Nevertheless, violators often received jail sentences.

Crops: One last example of information available from documents is the type of crops grown at various times. Sometimes contracts in Chancery Cause files give this information and occasionally it may be found in deed books. On March 17, 1826, Michael Nicholson leased 100 acres on the Blue Ridge at Milum's Gap for 1/3 of his crop of wheat, rye, corn, oats, buckwheat, barley, potatoes, turnips, and other produce.⁵⁶

IV SUMMARY

Given all of the documentary evidence relating to the Nicholsons and to Nicholson Hollow, one might reasonably ask, "How is it that all of the statements of 'squatters,' 'illiteracy,' etc., can be made in the face of contrary information?" We believe that we can give a partial answer to this question, but the answer is multi-faceted. There seems to have been little difference between the Nicholsons who first settled Nicholson Hollow at the end of the 18th century and the general population at the time, but changing socioeconomic conditions slowly brought about some degree of isolation—both geographic and cultural. The Civil War was certainly a disruption. On one level, it created a circumstance in which the demand for labor would of necessity, and progressively, be filled by white mountain people as the newly freed blacks began a long, outward migration.

The beginning of the public school system in 1870, and increasing awareness of and contact with the world outside of Madison County (reinforced later by the advent of automobiles and good roads) were important factors in the change. The more remote hollows got roads last, if at all, and it became increasingly difficult for the inhabitants to haul produce, such as apples, by wagon and compete successfully with orchardists in the lowlands who could haul by truck to market.

The advent of railroads in the general area in the late 19th century brought increasing dependence on the products of far-away factories and brought about the closure of local mills which had employed some of the mountain people. In the early 20th century, tanneries shifted to chemical tanning agents and precipitated the end of the tan bark industry. Finally, Prohibition in 1916 and the chestnut blight of ca. 1919 slowly curtailed two more aspects of the mountain people's economy.

The activities of the Commonwealth of Virginia and, later, the federal government put further restraints on the ways that the people could earn a living. People who did not move out early found themselves bound by stringent rules and regulations with regard to cultivation, grazing of domestic animals, cutting of timber and burning of brush to stimulate the growth of berries. In addition to the Great Depression, there was what local newspapers at the time referred to as the worst drought in the area in 100 years. By 1929-1936, the economic situation in Nicholson Hollow, as in other areas of the Blue Ridge, was quite desperate.

Into this situation ultimately *Hollow Folk* of the researchers consider the culture of *Hollow Folk* was o Thomas Henry was for the *Washington* least some Federal Darwin Lambert, v *Folk* work, but also

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The 1935 tabula since no informati family members; n and debts were give families were). Ho were evaluated in 1' Nicholson owned 1 families owning 70 vive between paym only a short time an were not the end pr class created by the

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1. Henry D. Shapiro *Consciousness, 1870-19*
2. Bruce Ergood, "1 ed. Bruce Ergood and 1

Into this situation came Miriam Sizer, Mandel Sherman, and Thomas Henry to produce ultimately *Hollow Folk*. Under the best of conditions, the middle-class backgrounds of the researchers and the general tenor of the time precluded much of an attempt to consider the culture of Nicholson Hollow on its own terms. It is not clear just how influential *Hollow Folk* was on the attitudes of Commonwealth and Park officials at the time, but Thomas Henry was a journalist who also wrote very biased accounts of the "hollow folk" for the *Washington Star*.⁸⁷ It seems likely that his articles, if not the book, were read by at least some Federal officials. Park historian Edward Steere in 1935 and Park guide-writer Darwin Lambert, who came on the scene at age 19 in 1936, relied partly on the *Hollow Folk* work, but also saw conditions at their worst and wrote as if that were the norm.

It seems likely that numerous Park dwellers began to sell their land and move out when news of the forthcoming Park first appeared in late 1924. Other dwellers waited and later took the money offered them after the condemnation proceedings in the early 1930's. Some of these moved out and bought land and homes elsewhere, but a substantial number stayed in the Park and spent their equity money just to survive. In light of the drought and depression, which meant bad times generally, it is easy to understand why some people were likely to feel it more prudent to remain in an area they knew even when they no longer technically owned their land. By the time a tabulation of Park families was made in June 1935, only one of 21 Nicholson families remaining in the Park had any cash assets.⁸⁸

The 1935 tabulation lists 21 Nicholson families; 4 of these are apparently already gone since no information was given on them. For the remaining 17 families, age ranges of family members; number of children; education; assets in cash, equipment, and livestock; and debts were given with an indication as to whether or not the family was on relief (11 families were). However, fourteen of the 17 families *owned* land at the time the tracts were evaluated in 1930. The lowest figure was 11 acres owned by Oscar Nicholson; Lewis Nicholson owned 13 acres. The remaining families owned from 21 to 197 acres, with 7 families owning 70 or more acres. Clearly, these families spent their equity money to survive between payments, ca. 1933-34, and June 14, 1935. They were squatters in 1935 for only a short time and through force of circumstance over which they had no control. They were not the end product of multi-generational squatting, but the beginning of a welfare class created by the establishment of the Shenandoah National Park.

It is clear that what field research was done in this area was done when families were in economically depressed circumstances and that these circumstances were generally considered to be the norm. It is also clear that no documentary research was attempted which might have indicated otherwise. It would appear that officials and others involved in the Park removal—regardless of whatever sympathy they perceived themselves to have for the mountain people—could deal more easily with the idea that they were only dislocating squatters who would be better off in the mainstream of modern industrial society than the perceived isolation of the mountains.⁸⁹ The Shenandoah removal constitutes one more case of the misinterpretation and misrepresentation of Appalachian culture and one more case of cultural chauvinism. A final irony, perhaps, is the fact that today there are many well-educated young people of urban, middle-class backgrounds who are moving into this same area to pursue what they consider to be ecologically-sound, energy-conserving, subsistence-oriented, alternative lifestyles—which are not very different from the lifestyle of the Nicholsons of Nicholson Hollow who, 45 years ago, were considered to be backward, primitive, improvident, and lazy.

NOTES

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

2. Bruce Ergood, "Toward A Definition of Appalachia," in *Appalachia: Social Context Past and Present*, ed. Bruce Ergood and Bruce E. Kuhre (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1976), p. 31. See also,

John C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1969), and Thomas R. Ford, ed., *The Southern Appalachian Region: A Survey* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1962).

3. Ergood, p. 31, citing James Brown's "A Look at the 1970 Census," *Mountain Life and Work* (July-August 1970).

4. Personal communication from John Whisman in Appalachian Regional Commission offices, Washington, D.C., ca. 1972.

5. Jack E. Weller, *Yesterday's People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966); Mandel Sherman and Thomas E. Henry, *Hollow Folk* (1933; reprint, Berryville, Va.: Virginia Book Co., 1973). For a listing of a number of studies which reflect these assumptions, see: Stephen L. Fisher, "Folk Culture or Folk Tale: Prevailing Assumptions About the Appalachian Personality," in *An Appalachian Symposium: Essays Written in Honor of Cratis D. Williams*, ed. J.W. Williamson (Boone, N.C.: Appalachian State University Press, 1977), p. 23n. For further discussion of these attributes, see Cratis D. Williams, "Who Are the Southern Mountaineers?" in Ergood and Kuhre, pp. 44-8.

6. Charles E. Goshen, M.D., "Characterological Deterrents to Economic Progress in People of Appalachia," *Southern Medical Journal*, 63 (September, 1970), 1054-9.

7. Freeman Junior Daniels, "The Mountain People of Virginia: Their Nature and Their Needs," MA thesis, University of Virginia, 1925, pp. 2, 8, 10, 13, 22, and 26.

8. For two examples, see Loyal Jones, "Appalachian Values," and Don West, "Freedom in the Mountains," in Ergood and Kuhre, pp. 101-05 and pp. 19-22.

9. Fisher, "Folk Culture," pp. 14, 23n.

10. Doris Deakin, "Appalachia - On the Way," *Appalachia*, 12 (March-April 1979), 2.

11. Fisher, "Folk Culture," pp. 14-25.

12. Charles L. Perdue, Jr., and Nancy Martin-Perdue, "From Independent Pioneer to Mountain Tackey: An Exercise in Ethnohistory," in "Man in the Blue Ridge: The Cultural Resources of the Shenandoah National Park—A Multi-Disciplinary Approach," a report prepared under U.S. National Park Service Grant No. PX 4000/5/0591 to Dr. Michael A. Hoffman, Laboratory of Archaeology, Dept. of Anthropology, University of Virginia, 1976, pp. 194-278; and, "From Independent Pioneer to Mountain Tackey: Socioeconomic Determinants of Cultural Paradox," a paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Folklore Society, Detroit, Mich., 1976. For a presentation of the arguments regarding application of ethnic group models to urban Appalachians see Phillip Obermiller, "Appalachians as an Urban Ethnic Group: Romanticism, Renaissance, or Revolution?" *Appalachian Journal*, 5 (Autumn 1977), 145-52.

13. Donald L. Noel, "A Theory of the Origin of Ethnic Stratification," in *Majority and Minority: The Dynamics of Racial and Ethnic Relations*, 2nd ed., ed. Norman R. Yetman and C. Hoy Steele (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, Inc., 1975), p. 33.

14. Ronald D Eller, "Toward A New History of the Appalachian South," *Appalachian Journal*, 5 (Autumn 1977), 79, and "Appalachian Oral History: New Directions for Regional Research," in Williamson, *An Appalachian Symposium*, p. 3. We agree completely with Eller's argument concerning the importance of oral interviews as a methodology; we take issue only with his statements regarding the availability of documents. For other such statements, see also the quotes from Steere and Wilhelm, notes 15 and 16, below.

15. Edward Steere, "The Shenandoah National Park, Its Possibility as an Historical Development," unpublished Park Service report, 1935, Shenandoah National Park Library, File 101-03.3, p. 2.

16. Gene Wilhelm, Jr., "Folk Settlements in the Blue Ridge Mountains," *Appalachian Journal*, 5 (Winter 1978), 243.

17. *Shenandoah National Park Travelogue*, published with the approval of Dr. H.J. Eckenrode, Director, Division of History and Archaeology, Virginia State Commission on Conservation and Development, ca. 1937, p. 11.

18. These eight counties are: Warren, Page, Rockingham, and Augusta on the west slope of the Blue Ridge and Rappahannock, Madison, Greene, and Albemarle on the east slope.

19. For an interesting perspective on the development of the "blanket condemnation Act," see *Shenandoah National Park Travelogue*, pp. 14-15.

20. Ibid., pp. 11-14. See also Dennis Elwood Simmons, "The Creation of Shenandoah National Park and the Skyline Drive, 1924-1936," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, May, 1978, p. 117; and William Porter McLendon, "Economic Aspects of the Shenandoah Park Project," M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 1930, p. 43.

21. For a discussion of the history of the Northern Virginia National Park Association and the Shenandoah Valley, Inc., and their membership, see *Shenandoah National Park Travelogue*, pp. 12-13; Fred T. Amiss, "A Sketch of the Early History of the Shenandoah National Park," n.p., Shenandoah National Park Headquarters files, Luray, Va.; and Simmons, "The Creation," pp. 11-31. There are many interesting connections between membership in these various groups and early fund-raising efforts on behalf of the Shenandoah National Park and eventual political position, which are not within the scope of this paper. One example is that of Arno Cammerer, who worked through the Virginia State Chamber of Commerce in Richmond to solicit \$163,631.05 in funds for the Park from John D. Rockefeller [information from Amiss' "Sketch," cited above], and who eventually became Director of the National Park Service.

22. Simmons, "The 75; and Shenandoah Franklin D. Roosevelt 23. *Shenandoah National Tourist Bureau*, 1929)

24. Miss Jean Stepl doah National Park I

25. George Freemu: Chesapeake Book Co.

26. Memorandum 1 dated December 27, 1 101-03.3.

27. Daniels, "The I

28. Quoted in Simrn

29. The figure of 50 official who made a co

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31. Steere, "The Sh

32. Simmons, "The

33. Zerkel to Carsor

34. Simmons, "The" generally useful.

35. Pollock, *Skyland*

36. For verification o and data in the Nationa

37. Sherman and He

38. Lassiter to Chate

39. *Shenandoah Natl*

40. "Old Park Buildi

41. Most of Wilhelr Mountains," *Appalachi*

42. Ibid., p. 226.

43. Gene Wilhelm, J 1970), 31.

44. Ibid., p. 40.

45. Wilhelm, "Folk S

46. Documentary rec Library of the Universit;

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47. Culpeper Co., De

48. Douglas W. Tanne Virginia Place Name Soc

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49. Orange Co., Orde

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22. Simmons, "The Creation," pp. 11-31, 108, 110, 112, and 117; McLendon, "Economic Aspects," pp. 56, 75; and *Shenandoah National Park Travelogue*, pp. 12, 13, 19. See particularly the quotes from President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Dedication speech on July 3, 1936.
23. *Shenandoah National Park, Official Pictorial Book* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Shenandoah National Park Tourist Bureau, 1929), n.p.
24. Miss Jean Stephenson, Trail History Editor of the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, quoted in *Shenandoah National Park Travelogue*, p. 9.
25. George Freeman Pollock, *Skyland: The Heart of the Shenandoah National Park* (Berryville, Va.: Chesapeake Book Co., 1960), p. 158.
26. Memorandum from J.R. Lassiter, Engineer in Charge, Shenandoah National Park, to Mr. Chatelaine, dated December 27, 1935, in Appendix to Edward Steere's report, Shenandoah National Park Library, File 101-03.3.
27. Daniels, "The Mountain People," pp. 24, 26.
28. Quoted in Simmons, "The Creation," pp. 129-30.
29. The figure of 500 families, which is the one most often cited on the subject, was arrived at by one federal official who made a count of the houses shown on topographic maps of the time, found 500 houses there and concluded that approximately 500 families were displaced. None of the various summaries found in the Park Service files or the records compiled by the Board of Appraisals Commissioners are complete unto themselves and they are often inconsistent. Further, these lists only indicate families whose land was condemned or who were otherwise directly removed by the state or the Park Service. The Condemnation Act was passed in Virginia in 1928, but the final federal removal policy was not announced until 1934. In the meantime, many families had already moved out of the area, some under the assumption of eventual removal, some because they were told by local officials that they would have to move, and some because they sold out to land speculators. There are no known records on the number of families affected in this manner. Thus, the total number of families affected directly or indirectly by the announcement of the coming Park and its development over the years 1924-1936 could well be double what is normally reported, but the actual number will likely never be known.
30. Letter from L. Ferdinand Zerkel to Hon. Wm. E. Carson, Chairman, State Commission on Conservation and Development, December 11, 1933, Shenandoah National Park Headquarters files, Luray, Va.
31. Steere, "The Shenandoah National Park," p. 1.
32. Simmons, "The Creation," pp. 122-4.
33. Zerkel to Carson, December 11, 1933.
34. Simmons, "The Creation," p. 125. Simmons' discussion of the removal and its problems, pp. 119-35, is generally useful.
35. Pollock, *Skyland*, pp. 2, 3, 11-13, 157, and 158.
36. For verification of this statement the book may be carefully compared to Miriam Sizer's manuscript notes and data in the National Archive, Washington, D.C.
37. Sherman and Henry, *Hollow Folk*, pp. 1, 61, 67, 113, and 122.
38. Lassiter to Chatelaine, December 27, 1935.
39. *Shenandoah National Park Travelogue*, p. 20.
40. "Old Park Building Survey," January 1945, Shenandoah National Park Headquarters files, Luray, Va.
41. Most of Wilhelm's publications are cited in Gene Wilhelm, Jr., "Folk Settlements in the Blue Ridge Mountains," *Appalachian Journal*, 5 (Winter 1978), 243-5.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
43. Gene Wilhelm, Jr., "Folk Geography of the Blue Ridge Mountains," *Pioneer America*, 11 (January 1970), 31.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
45. Wilhelm, "Folk Settlements," p. 226.
46. Documentary records are to be found in county courthouses, the Virginia State Library, Alderman Library of the University of Virginia, the National Archive, the Library of Congress, and the Library of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Documents employed in our study include: wills, inventories, estate sales, lists of heirs, deeds, deeds of trust, contracts, gifts, marriage bonds, birth and death records, insane records, military records (including pension applications), personal property tax lists, land tax lists, census records, criminal and civil court records, and more. Rather than include a 5-page footnote here, interested readers may write the authors c/o Dept. of Anthropology, 303 Brooks Hall, University of Virginia, Charlottesville 22903, and we will be glad to discuss the use of the records in greater detail.
47. Culpeper Co., Deed Book A, pp. 462-8.
48. Douglas W. Tanner, *Madison County Place Names* (Charlottesville: Occasional Publication No. 21 of the Virginia Place Name Society, 1978), p. 42, indicates that the Hughes River was called the "North River of Sherando" (1717-1739), the "Stonehouse River" (1739-1760), and then the Hughes. These dates are obviously somewhat arbitrary.
49. Orange Co., Order Book 1, p. 82.
50. Culpeper Co., Deed Book 1749-1758, p. 4.
51. Culpeper Co., Deed Book A, pp. 462-8.
52. Culpeper Co., Minute Book 1763-1764, p. 356.

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53. From "A List of Classes in Culpeper County for January 1781 for Recruiting this State's Quota of Troops to serve in the Continental Army," Virginia State Library. The men whose names appear on this list are thought to all have been in the Virginia Militia and appearance on this list is accepted by the DAR as proof of service in the Revolution.

54. Personal Property Tax Lists, Virginia State Library.

55. Culpeper Co., Old Plat Book, p. 35.

56. Madison Co., Deed Book 2, pp. 294-5, and Deed Book 4, pp. 93-8.

57. John's name last occurs in the Personal Property Tax Lists in 1809. Church records indicate death in August 1810.

58. There is no single complete list of people displaced (see note 29 above). We have combined Nicholson names from the various summary lists in the Park Service files at Shenandoah National Park Headquarters, Luray, Va., and added these to the names contained on the tract evaluation sheets which were compiled earlier and are found in the county courthouses. Although there may be a name or two we have not found, our list is as accurate as we can make it at the present time.

The Nicholson Family Chart (in Figure 1) was compiled by beginning with the families displaced by the Park and then tracing their ancestry backward in time as far as possible. Therefore, all siblings in each generation are *not* shown—*only* displaced families and their direct ancestry. Other Nicholsons lived in Madison and Rappahannock Counties outside of the Nicholson Hollow area and many migrated westward and to several urban centers at various times.

59. Madison Co., Deed Book 21, p. 580, April 3, 1856, shows Christopher Nicholson selling 50 acres he inherited from his farther Aaron, deceased.

60. Stuart E. Brown, Jr., *Virginia Baron: The Story of Thomas 6th Lord Fairfax* (Berryville, Va.: Chesapeake Book Co., 1965).

61. *Shenandoah National Park Travelogue*, p. 9.

62. Barbour's survey with the list of 33 "squatters" may be seen in Byrd Visitor's Center, Shenandoah National Park.

63. Numerous deeds transferring some of the Shirley land state that Thomas Shirley acquired the land from Thomas Barbour (son of the early James), but to date we have not been able to find a record of this transaction, although we have looked in both Culpeper and Madison County courthouses. A preliminary search of the voluminous Chancery records on the Shirley suit did not turn up a Barbour-Shirley deed there either.

64. Madison Co., Deed Book 40, pp. 147-8, 150; 41, pp. 600-1 (all in 1909).

65. From Madison and Rappahannock County land books and tract evaluation sheets in the courthouses.

66. Madison Co., Will Book 15, p. 391.

67. Madison Co., Land Book, 1852.

68. Madison Co., Deed Book 25, p. 212.

69. Madison Co., Deed Book 34, p. 79, November 10, 1896.

70. The land was still carried in the 1924 Madison Co. Land Book.

71. Madison Co., Chancery Cases, File No. 36, 1913.

72. Census records for the various years indicate occupation.

73. Letter of April 6, 1979, from Shockley Dewitt Gardner, M.D., to Charles L. Perdue, Jr.

74. Sherman and Henry, *Hollow Folk*, p. 122.

75. Madison Co., Muster Rolls in the courthouse; Madison and Rappahannock Cos., Death Records; indications of "Vet" on voter registration lists in Madison courthouse. At least 8 of the 14 men are shown on the Nicholson Family Chart.

76. Madison Co., Muster Rolls. At least 3 of the 5 are Nicholson Hollow men. One man's status as veteran of service in France was indicated only in Chancery papers (his name was not on the County list), which leads us to question the list's completeness.

77. Madison Co., Voter Registration Lists, in courthouse.

78. Rappahannock Co., Chancery Causes No. 149, Nicholson v Finnell.

79. Cited in Gene Wilhelm, Jr., "Appalachian Isolation: Fact or Fiction?" in Williamson, *An Appalachian Symposium*, p. 84.

80. Tanner, *Madison County Place Names*, pp. 64-5.

81. These Minute Books are to be found in the Baptist Historical Society, University of Richmond, Richmond, Va.

82. Sherman and Henry, *Hollow Folk*, pp. 61-7.

83. Madison Co., Law Cases 1823-1825, Commonwealth v James Nicholson.

84. Madison Co., Law Order Book 3, pp. 62-3.

85. Numerous references to this practice are given in Pollock's *Skyland*.

86. Shenandoah Co., Deed Book FF, p. 459.

87. One of Henry's articles is reprinted in the *Shenandoah National Park Travelogue*, ca. 1937, but no date is given for the *Washington Star* publication.

88. "Tabulation of Survey Data for Families Living in the Shenandoah National Park," June 14, 1935, Shenandoah National Park Headquarters files, Luray, Va.

89. See McLendon, "Economic Aspects."

Musicians and Administrators

by

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Jannelle Warren-Findle, University of Virginia, 1973. Her dissertation was Fulbright Le... 1976. She is currently employed at Washington University, hc... public patronage, and poli