

# INTRODUCTION

People who teach, write, or speak about the Appalachian Mountains, about the land itself or the people who live there, are often asked to recommend a single book, *the book*, that explains in one volume every aspect of the history and culture of Appalachia. At least a dozen worthwhile titles could be listed for each of at least a dozen academic disciplines, with little overlap. No single full-time scholar, let alone student or professional working in the region, could read all the books, hear all the recordings, or view all the images necessary for a complete knowledge of the events and conditions, both human and natural, that shaped, and continue to shape, this place and the people who live in it. Nor could a single writer adequately condense this knowledge into a form compact and accessible enough for use as a handbook for professionals or as an introductory, interdisciplinary text for a secondary- or college-level course in Appalachian Studies. And finally, no single writer could anticipate the needs or inclinations of disparate thoughtful readers in perceiving that any single event or series of events, such as the Civil War, the unionization of coal mines, or out-migration from central Appalachia, has significant and lasting implications for the entire region.

The solution offered by *A Handbook to Appalachia* is a collection of concise, introductory overviews of the region as seen from thirteen different academic perspectives, all directed at a general audience yet necessarily flavored by the methods of inquiry and prose style characteristic of each discipline. While each essay stands alone and may profitably be read in isolation from the others, there is by design and by necessity much overlap. Perhaps the greatest revelation in editing the essays is that each is unique and yet all are interconnected.

Without doubt, the common goals of the contributors in writing their respective essays have led to this result. From the outset, authors and editors alike have aimed toward the following objectives: that the book reflect the thinking and input of as many Appalachian scholars as possible; that it be written in a prose style and layout appropriate for, and appealing to, a diverse audience, most of whom are not academics; that it include sources and resources for

those who wish to know and do more; and that it be affordable to institutions and individuals. We believe the product reaches those goals.

In a beginning study of Appalachia, invariably the questions arise: Where is Appalachia? Who lives there? The simple answer to the first question is that it is the region upon and alongside the Appalachian mountain range, which extends from Quebec to the southernmost foothills in Alabama and Mississippi. However, the area called Appalachia does not include the entire Appalachian range. In the mid-1960s, as part of the War on Poverty effort, the federal Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) was formed and charged with delineating the boundaries of Appalachia. Commonly accepted today as the political definition of Appalachia, then, if not the geographical and cultural, the region encompasses all or part of thirteen states. These include portions of New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Maryland in the North, and in central and southern Appalachia, all of West Virginia (the only state entirely within Appalachia) and portions of Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi.

In the 410 counties that make up official Appalachia, some twenty-three million people live. A common misperception is that the inhabitants are largely homogeneous, but that is far from the truth, as several essays in the *Handbook* show. The people are a mix of racial and ethnic backgrounds, just as in America at large. They have, however, generally displayed characteristics and values that apply to a large segment of the population, with, as is always the case, some notable exceptions. These character traits, along with the rich cultural heritage, the natural resources, and the economic conditions of the region, make Appalachia a fertile and fascinating ground for study.

The topics of the essays in the *Handbook* have been chosen to encompass general areas of interest to students, scholars, and other readers. The essays are placed in an order designed to show roughly a chronological development of the Appalachian region and to show content relationships between essays. The authors reveal writing styles distinctive to their respective disciplines and voices unique to each individual writer. In most essays, the approach is relatively objective, as in “Appalachian History” or “Natural Resources and Environment of Appalachia,” but in some, the writers’ advocacy of a cause is evident, as in “The Politics of Change in Appalachia.”

Richard Straw in “Appalachian History” provides an overview of the development of the region from the days of habitation solely by Native Americans to the industrialized society of the new millennium. He traces Appalachia through its agrarian beginnings into the harvesting of resources and subsequent industrialization. He focuses a considerable amount of attention on the



coalfields but does not neglect such activities as tourism and second-home development in non-coal-producing areas. Stevan R. Jackson in “Peoples of Appalachia” complements “History” by adding detail about the various groups who inhabited the region in the earliest recorded history and those who continue to live in it. This essay dispels the myth of a homogeneous Appalachia through its enumeration of the variety of ethnic and racial groups populating the area. In “Natural Resources and Environment of Appalachia,” David L. Rouse and L. Sue Greer-Pitt outline the conditions of waters, forests, wildlife, and minerals. Their essay links to both “History” and “Peoples” through its revelation of how resources have been used and, in many cases, abused.

Thomas R. Shannon in “The Economy of Appalachia” takes the foregoing information to the next step by analyzing how the resources and people have been utilized and exploited to create the economic picture in place today. “The Politics of Change in Appalachia,” by Stephen L. Fisher, Patti Page Church, Christine Weiss Daugherty, Bennett M. Judkins, and Shaunna L. Scott, relates well to “Economy” as it details ways in which contemporary Appalachians have taken matters into their own hands to shape their communities and their means of livelihood, in contrast to years of exploitation largely by industrialists from outside the region. If Shannon’s essay leaves a note of despair in the reader’s mind, Fisher and company show another view of those who are fighting back to reclaim their own.

“Health Care in Appalachia” by Anne B. Blakeney depicts a region lacking essential medical facilities in many largely rural areas. The good news is that several regional and state universities have made improved health care a central mission and are currently implementing counteractive strategies. In “Education in Appalachia,” Sharon Teets gives an overview of the regional history of education, moving from home schooling in the early days to one-room schools to a plethora of higher educational institutions today. Melinda Bollar Wagner in “Religion in Appalachia” outlines the history of religious movements and provides surprising numbers for the large variety of denominations currently in the region. Her essay draws on the values and characteristics of Appalachian people to explain the inherent propensities of various religious sects.

Since religion and folk belief are often closely intertwined, Deborah Thompson and Irene Moser’s essay on “Appalachian Folklife” complements “Religion” in several ways. In addition to examining beliefs, superstitions, and other customs, the authors explore storytelling, music, dance, handcrafts, and more. Their essay is followed by Ted Olson and Ajay Kalra’s contribution on “Appalachian Music.” Olson and Kalra offer a history of musical development, taking the reader far beyond the expected traditional ballads, instrumentals, gospel,



and bluegrass. Danny Miller, Sandra Ballard, Roberta Herrin, Stephen D. Mooney, Susan Underwood, and Jack Wright in “Appalachian Literature” provide a broad look at multiple genres with numerous authors and titles as examples. This essay offers a starting point for reading opportunities in virtually any category of creative literature, including fiction, poetry, drama, and children’s literature. In “Visual Arts in Appalachia,” M. Anna Fariello surveys art history to dispel yet another stereotype about the dearth of artistic productivity in the region. She details examples from fine art on display in museums nationwide to hand-crafts produced for sale today.

Finally, the last essay in the collection is “Appalachians Outside the Region” by Phillip J. Obermiller, Michael E. Maloney, and Pauletta Hansel. They trace those who have migrated to urban areas, usually out of economic necessity. They give historical accounts of early out-migrants and current data from the 2000 census to show a picture of contemporary Appalachian out-migrants and their descendants. By necessity the last essay draws from many of those coming before since it combines a variety of topics to explain the present situation. It offers a fitting close to the *Handbook*.

Each essay is followed by suggested readings, provided in most cases by the authors and occasionally supplemented by the editors. All of the contributors to this book, including the editors, consider the essays to be starting points for the study of Appalachia; thus each essay concludes with suggested readings for greater in-depth exploration of any given topic.

The text of each essay is complemented by photographs that illustrate as much as possible the span of time and subject matter covered in the essay. In many instances, the photographs themselves tell a story that viewers/readers will want to know more about.

As indicated earlier, the editors believe this *Handbook* fills a void in the study of Appalachia. While it cannot possibly cover every topic of interest, it offers a wealth of information from authors whose careers are devoted to examination and analysis of the region. We extend to every reader a welcome to these pages and a wish that their reading experience will be rich and fulfilling.

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# APPALACHIAN HISTORY

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Appalachia is a place, a people, an idea, a culture, and it exists as much in the mind and imagination as on the map. While it can be defined in any number of ways depending upon the person defining it, its story is rich in everything that makes human history exciting and compelling. What ties mountain people together across the region is their shared geography, cultural traits, and common historical experience.

## Native Americans

Long before adventurous Europeans set out to discover what lay in the backcountry of their coastal colonies, a diverse population of Native Americans had been living in the Appalachian Mountains for about three thousand years. The Iroquois, the dominant group in the region, entered from the West about 1300 B.C. and split into the northern Iroquois and the southern Cherokees. Like most eastern woodland Indians, the Cherokees were farmers and hunters who lived in small, separated, independent villages.

While Indians in the Appalachians had sporadic contacts with Europeans as early as 1540, it was not until the period from 1700 to 1761 that contact and conflict between the two cultures accelerated. The Europeans looked into the backcountry for room to expand their settlements and for sources of skins for trading, and the Indians opposed them in a desperate and ultimately futile attempt to save their homes and hunting grounds. The final defeat of the Cherokees by the British came in 1761, and after this date the number of whites on the Appalachian frontier grew rapidly.

Although there were some broad similarities between the European and Native American cultures, the main theme of their historical interaction was conflict. Perhaps the greatest difference between the two cultures was their contrary perception of the place people should occupy in relation to nature. For the Cherokees, language, names, and religious beliefs were based upon a special relationship between people and their environment. In a view characteristic of Native Americans in general, the Cherokees believed that humans were not superior to the natural world but were simply another part of it. They did not believe that people were superior to nature and the animals, but that man was a part of nature and its caretaker. Unlike Europeans, who believed that they were urged by God to conquer nature and be its master, the Indians acted on the belief that they were as dependent on nature for their well-being as any of the animals.

This belief system had special importance for one issue of near constant conflict between Indians and Europeans in America. The Indians' ideas about land, their relation to it, and how the land should be used caused explosive cultural conflict up and down the Appalachian frontier and beyond. While Indians reserved certain areas for specific tribal uses and fought with one another over tribal land claims, they did not believe as the Europeans did that the land itself could actually be owned, bought, and sold. This difference posed a chasm between these cultures that would never be bridged.

Despite Cherokee prosperity and their attempts to adopt the economic, political, and educational systems of the dominant white population, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act in 1831 and pursued an aggressive policy of forced Indian emigration. The Cherokees and many other Native American people were given little compensation for their confiscated land, and at least one-quarter of them died on the tragic 1838 trek westward, known as the Trail of Tears. Some one thousand managed to escape removal and fled into the mountains of North Carolina, where eventually they were allowed to settle in what became known as the Qualla Boundary.

## European Settlement

The European resettlement of the southern Appalachians did not begin in earnest until the first half of the eighteenth century, and even then it was restricted largely to the Great Valley of Virginia. The push westward and southward was influenced by several factors. As life in the colonies became more settled and secure, immigrant populations began to grow, which put pressure on eastern towns and farmlands. The conquest of the Indian lands encouraged settlement, and land speculation on the Appalachian frontier ran rampant. Large tracts of



land were also given out by English royalty as favors to their friends and relations. Many colonial leaders urged westward expansion as a vital key to a prosperous future. As a result of this early speculative land development, the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Great Valley of Virginia became the Appalachian and the American frontier in the several decades prior to the American Revolution.

The areas from which the earliest European settlers in Appalachia came and the routes they took into the backcountry were important elements in the formation of Appalachian culture. There were three major reservoirs of population from which people flowed into the Appalachian region in the eighteenth century: the central valley of Pennsylvania, the Piedmont of North Carolina, and western Pennsylvania.

The earliest European immigrants to the Appalachian frontier came out of eastern Pennsylvania, where, beginning around 1720, a steady buildup of the German and Scotch-Irish populations around Philadelphia began to move, many of them first into central Pennsylvania and then southward into the Shenandoah Valley. Over time they and their descendants pushed toward the New River, but instead of crossing the mountains into Indian country, most turned southeastward and settled in the Carolina Piedmont.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, this area began to fill with people, creating a second reservoir of population that would feed migrants into the mountains. The area became the significant source of early settlers into far southwestern Virginia, western North Carolina, and upper East Tennessee after 1761. By 1760, a significant number of Germans and Scotch-Irish were also coming into Appalachia from western Pennsylvania. These people drifted down the Ohio River and then followed tributaries into the mountains.

## Appalachia and the New Nation

By 1763, settlers began to migrate into the western reaches of North Carolina, the river valleys of the Tennessee-Virginia border country, and even, just a few years later, into central Kentucky. The most important settlements were the Watauga settlements in East Tennessee founded by James Robertson and John Sevier, the Holston settlements of far southwestern Virginia and western North Carolina, and the Boonesborough and Harrodsburg settlements laid out by Daniel Boone in 1775. While many of these people did not own the land they lived on, it is nonetheless significant that on the eve of the American Revolution there were scattered settlements in the deep American frontier.

In addition, a smattering of British men and women, many from Wales, drifted into Appalachia directly from the east coast of Virginia in the mid-eighteenth century; some brought slaves. The British population in Appalachia



was not large until after the American Revolution, and the African American population remained at around 10 percent throughout the entire period prior to the Civil War, though the percentage was higher in some parts of Appalachia.

The population of the southern mountains grew steadily from the 1760s until the 1820s, largely through immigration. Much of this sustained growth can be attributed to the impact of the American Revolution. Mountaineers were worried about protection from Indian attacks and wanted the removal of the Indians to make room for further settlement. They were also concerned about clear title to land they claimed and protecting their homesteads from wealthy land speculators and absentee owners. Political and economic issues began to emerge as tensions between mountain residents who grew corn on small farms and flatlanders who owned plantations escalated.

A longstanding hostility to political elites among farmers in the backcountry contributed significantly to their alienated and somewhat ambivalent feelings concerning the American Revolution in its earliest stages. Most settlers in the mountains eventually supported the war against England either out of an interest in religious freedom, which was the case for most Germans in Appalachia, or as a result of long-lived hatred of the British royalty among those of Scotch-Irish heritage.

Following the war, attitudes in the region over the adoption of the Constitution were mixed, and many of those who initially opposed the new Constitution were from the mountainous portions of the Appalachian states. They feared that a strong central government might limit local freedom and liberty. Significant support for the federal government came from Appalachia only after the election of Thomas Jefferson as president in 1800. Jefferson's political ideas, which emphasized small government, local power, widespread land ownership, an enlarged electorate, and self-determination, were immensely popular in the mountains. With the election in 1828 of Andrew Jackson as president, and the subsequent forced removal of the Cherokees, support of the federal government in Appalachia became even stronger.

As sectionalism began to emerge in the South between 1830 and 1861, the mountain counties, where the percentage of white slaveholders was typically only around 10 percent, and in the westernmost areas of the region as little as 5 percent, came into increasing conflict with their state governments. As a result, many mountaineers would carry strong feelings of support for the federal government into the coming disaster.

The decades prior to the Civil War set the stage on which the great drama of industrialization would be played out in Appalachia. It is important to know



what the lives of the people in the southern mountains were like before industrialization, because their communities, their work patterns, their families, and even their images of and ideas about themselves would be altered dramatically by the coming of the railroads and various industries from about 1870 to the 1920s.

## Preindustrial Society

The society that emerged in the mountains in the 1820s and 1830s was not unlike other rural American farm societies that were close to their frontier origins and dominated by the connections between land, family, and work. Until the era of industrialization, Appalachia was a region of small, open-country communities, or scattered settlements, concentrated in valleys and up into mountain coves and hollows. The separate settlements were integrated by transportation and communication systems, but only loosely. Each community of farmsteads was relatively self-sufficient socially and economically, and people tended to avoid routinely crossing mountains to reach another community.

What held these scattered farms together and molded the dispersed settlements into some semblance of community was a shared sense of identity, common ideals and values, and shared work and church. People exchanged food and shelter, worshiped in small, independent congregations, engaged in cooperative community service, had a sense of belonging to a larger family of friends and neighbors, and were united in their love of the land and the place they lived.

It has been widely asserted that the development of a strong sense of community in Appalachia was the result of longstanding cultural and geographic isolation. But in fact, for the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, the Appalachian Mountains were not much more isolated than other rural, open country areas of the nation. Roads were as good, or as bad, and it was only with the marked increase in commerce in the rest of the nation that the mountain communities of Appalachia would appear to be more remote. Before railroads, a fairly constant stream of traffic eastward and westward kept the mountains in close touch with the low country. Marriage records, trade routes, and market reports make it clear that mountain people, especially men, had access to and contact with areas outside the mountains. Family histories also point to the fact that many people moved around a great deal within Appalachia.

The mountain economy was also similar in many ways to other preindustrial, traditional economies in rural America. There was a preponderance of noncommercial, self-sufficient farms, although there is reason to believe that in some areas of Appalachia, farming for an external market was more common than previously believed. Some small industries such as salt works, iron foundries,



copper mines, and tanneries emerged in the mountains before the Civil War, but they had only a marginal effect on the total economy.

On the eve of industrialization in Appalachia, farm size averaged around two hundred acres each, with most of the acreage in woods and only a small amount of cultivated crop land. In some of the broad river valleys of Virginia and Tennessee there were much larger farms, and some used slaves to cultivate crops and raise livestock for sale at regional markets. Most Appalachian farmers relied on family labor to build homesteads along streams, cultivate orchards and small livestock pastures, grow large kitchen gardens, graze hogs in the woods, and sometimes raise flocks of turkeys and geese for market sale. The most commonly grown crop for both personal and commercial use was corn, which was milled locally and often sold for feed or made into liquor.

While most mountain communities were not divided rigidly between rich and poor, and while there were few hard and fast barriers to modestly improving one's economic position in society, mountain elites did exist. Usually they were the descendants of the earliest settlers in a particular region. They tended to have more frequent contacts outside the mountains.

In Appalachia, the family was at the center of preindustrial life, as it is in most traditional societies. The nuclear family was the basic social and economic unit around which nearly everything else revolved. Families were large—eight to fifteen children were common—and they provided the primary labor source in this agricultural world. The family was a working and consuming unit that functioned smoothly through the cooperation and interdependence of all its members.

Families also provided the framework within which education took place and social order and control were maintained. Politics and government also generally revolved around supporting and looking after the needs of the kin group. Gender and age roles were clearly defined and distinct in this society, and influence and respect grew with age for both men and women. While this was clearly a patriarchal society, women maintained strong and influential positions within the most important social unit in the mountain community.

Social activities for mountain residents involved either church, which tended to last all day, or community work, such as house and barn construction, clearing new ground, harvesting crops, preserving food, hog butchering, or husking corn. Road building and maintenance provided an opportunity for men to get together to work on the county's roads. Court and election days in the county seats were popular and festive events.

