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THE EVOLUTION OF FUNERAL PRACTICES  
IN GRAYSON AND ASHE COUNTIES

A Thesis

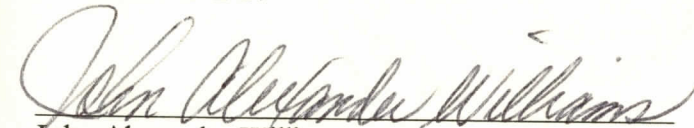
by

Dwight David VanHoy

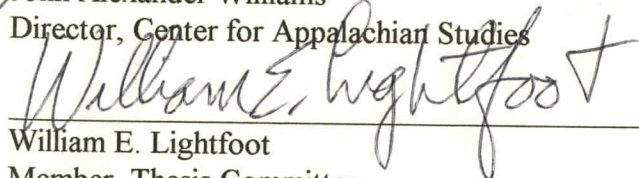
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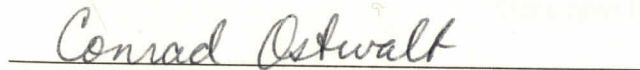
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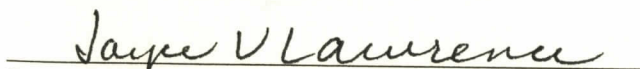
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THE EVOLUTION OF FUNERAL PRACTICES  
IN ASHE AND GRAYSON COUNTIES

A Thesis

by

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Submitted to the Graduate School

Appalachian State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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## ABSTRACT

### THE EVOLUTION OF FUNERAL PRACTICES IN ASHE AND GRAYSON COUNTIES. (December 1996)

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In America, the chasm separating death and life has become so enlarged that the bridges of cognition and understanding which once allowed interaction to flow between the two worlds have collapsed. As a result, the attitudes associated with death, as well as the responses and the rituals affiliated with it, have undergone transformations reflecting the new attitudes and perspectives dictated and absorbed by modern society. To observe the evolution of this new perspective, ranging from images of the grim reaper and skulls and crossed bones to Cadillac hearses and satin lined copper caskets, one simply needs to turn to the American subculture of rural Appalachia.

The Appalachian mountains generated a culture that has traditionally been characterized as resistant to change and social renovation. The old traditions and customs associated with rites of life, birth, marriage, and death were so strongly integrated into the culture, that they survived by adapting and modifying themselves to find their place in modern Appalachia. Because of social and cultural isolation, Appalachia remained socially and culturally intact, maintaining traditions and customs with origins dating back to ancestral countries. It was not until the early 1900s that the abundant natural resources prompted an invasion of the Appalachian region by the

surrounding mainstream culture. This assault on the mountain region required rapid change in the social and cultural features of the area. In observing the impact of these changes, one is provided with a framework to observe the traditional culture, by comparing it to the changes. More importantly, however, one is able to see which traditions were valued to the degree that they were not totally abandoned, but modified and refined to meet the specifications of a modern society and culture.

For this project, information was collected from Grayson County, Virginia, and Ashe County, North Carolina. The data presented here span the neighboring counties' histories for over a century. The author has attended several funerals and scanned the remote areas of Ashe and Grayson counties seeking information relating to death rituals.

This project is about the Appalachian response to death. Any study relating to death rituals and responses proves helpful in outlining the social, psychological, and religious mores of that culture. An investigation into the death responses of Appalachia proves rewarding and revealing as it provides one with insights into the psychological, sociological, and religious characteristics of mountain people. An inquiry into the funeral customs and traditions of Appalachia offers a view of the basic nature of mountain people.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The successful completion of a work of this nature is never a single-handed accomplishment. I am indebted to a host of individuals.

First and foremost I shall always be grateful to Mrs. Ruby Edith Reeves McMillan. Her unfaltering confidence and encouragement could not be confined with her in the grave, but continue to be a sustaining support to me. A special word of appreciation goes to my wife, Sarah, for her encouragement and support throughout every aspect of this project.

For the faculty of the Center for Appalachian Studies, I am grateful for your kind direction. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Conrad Ostwalt and Dr. William E. Lightfoot for serving on my Thesis Committee. Your enthusiasm and support are greatly appreciated. I would like to offer a special thanks to Dr. John Alexander Williams, the director of my work. I am thankful for your patience and invaluable criticism.

Last, I would like to express my "thank you" to those countless individuals who share my passion for Appalachian deathlore. I hope that this work will provide a better understanding of the beautiful funeral traditions and customs associated with the people of Appalachia.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to a lady of the Appalachian mountains,

Mrs. Ruby Edith Reeves McMillan.

1901-1990

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## INTRODUCTION

Ritualistic responses to death seem to be among the few rites that span not only the globe, but the duration of time. There is yet to be a group of people who have failed to establish some ceremonial response, celebrating and/or lamenting the death of its own. These reactions and responses to death might extend themselves to ostentatious and pompous pageantry, or be limited to a simple and modest service of commemoration. The timeless and universal endurance of death responses suggests that funerary rituals stem from human nature. One might easily argue that reactions and responses to death are perhaps an attempt for humans to face and come to an understanding of their own mortality. Regardless how one approaches a study of death rituals and responses, in the end, he/she is sure to gain revealing insights that can be achieved no other way.

William E. Gladstone, a great British Statesman, once wrote: "Show me the manner in which a nation or a community cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender sympathies of its people, their respect for the law of the land and their loyalty to high ideals" (qtd. in Mitford 221). Even America's great statesman, Benjamin Franklin, was quoted as saying: "To know the character of a community, I need only to visit its cemeteries" (qtd. in Mitford 221). To achieve the "mathematical exactness" described by Gladstone and to understand the "character" mentioned by Franklin require intensive study emphasizing several distinctive features of a particular group or community.

Unlike many inquiries limited toward a single feature of a people, such an investigation demands an understanding of many facets of that culture. For example, death responses are often influenced, if not dictated, by the religious affiliations of that

culture. Therefore, an understanding of the religious distinctions seems necessary to gain a full understanding of death rituals or responses as a passage from this world into the next. The degree of participation by the family and community usually is strongly influenced by the traditions and customs of that culture. These traditions in most cases evolved over several decades. Understanding the evolution of these traditions requires an extensive knowledge of the folklore of the people who live in the area. Last, a firm understanding of the psychological character of the people offers a foundation for understanding the ways in which the many associations of death responses are linked to one another. The study of death responses and rituals is much like a window. Each pane allows one to view one aspect of the death response. To look, however, in one pane gives a limited and often false impression of these responses. Yet, to look through the window in its entirety offers a clear and complete picture emphasizing the implications of the death rituals. It is in viewing the death rituals, traditions, and customs in this fashion that one is given an overall view detailing the sociological, psychological, and spiritual evolutions and changes which have occurred in that group and are therefore reflected in the funeral practices.

By presenting an analysis that compares and contrasts older traditions to the newer ones, one is able to see the social, psychological and spiritual significances that dominated the old culture and the remnants of those traditions which remained.

For this study, information was collected from two Appalachian counties: Grayson County, Virginia, and Ashe County, North Carolina. A brief description of these adjoining counties and their histories will prove helpful in defining them as communities typical of rural Appalachia.

Grayson County is an Appalachian county with boundaries of Whitetop Mountain, Buck Mountain, and Mount Rogers, Virginia's highest peak with an elevation of 5,720. Created in 1792, the county's present boundaries date from 1842 following a

division which formed Carroll County. The county was named for William Grayson, Virginia's first United States Senator. Independence would later serve as the county seat. In the mid-1800s, construction of a court house began and small businesses sprung up around it. The Civil War halted the progress of the new town. During the years of reconstruction, the small hamlet survived. However, almost seven decades would pass before the county would have its first paved roads. In 1884, the county had its first factory in Mouth of Wilson. The towns of Galax, Fries, Whitetop City, Fairwood, and Troutdale soon began to develop. Following the years of the Great Depression, only Galax and Fries survived. In recent years, Galax has achieved city status while Fries has all but disappeared (Fields 9-10).

World War II struck the small mountain county hard, depleting the population from 20,000 to the 1897 population of 15,000. The years following brought modernization, electricity to the most remote areas, new factories, and improved roads (11).

Today the town of Independence has a population of 988 and the city of Galax a population of 6,670. The total county's population is presently 16,278, according to the 1990 census. One of the few characteristics of the area that spans the county's history is the sustaining force of the economy which continues to be agriculture. Grayson County abounds in beautiful farmlands. Cattle and sheep dot the hillsides surrounding ancestral farm houses and barns.

The history of Ashe County, North Carolina, is much the same as Grayson County. The neighboring counties share many unique similarities, promoting a flow of harmony and interaction between the two counties. In 1914, a school was constructed on the dividing line between the two states. Known as Virginia Carolina, the school achieved great success. A new facility was constructed in the late 1940s. The school was destroyed by fire in the mid 60s and was never rebuilt. This ill-fated incident marked an end to the collaboration between Ashe and Grayson counties.

In 1799, Ashe County was created by an act of the North Carolina General Assembly. The county is surrounded by the Blue Ridge western slopes bordering the states of Tennessee and Virginia. The county was named for William Ashe, a Revolutionary War Patriot. In his book, The Past Is Another Country, William Stephen Foster describes Ashe as one of North Carolina's "lost counties" (19). The area was remote and considered backward by outsiders. Like Grayson, Ashe county has remained an agriculturally based economy. The current population of the county now stands at 22,400. The county had two small towns: Jefferson and West Jefferson. Based on the 1990 census, Jefferson had a population of 1,324 while West Jefferson, the neighboring town had a population of 1,089. While Ashe county is predominantly rural, there are signs of modernization. West Jefferson is considered to be the commerce area because of its large number of hardware stores, banks, and other commercial establishments. Jefferson, on the other hand, maintains a larger population and serves as the county seat. Though the two towns were once a few miles apart, they have merged creating a "between the towns" suburban area. West Jefferson evolved because of the railroad station which came in 1914. The scenes of Ashe County are pastoral. The county is home to part of the New River which brought national attention to the area when the existence of the river was threatened by dam builders in the 70s. Following a heated battle which lasted for almost a decade, the river was protected under the National Wild and Scenic River Act. The struggle of the "New River Controversy" was also a link which joined Ashe and Grayson counties (Schoenbaum 143).

In the past twenty years the gap between Ashe and Grayson counties and the conventional culture has all but diminished. There are no particular traits which separate these counties from other rural Appalachian counties. Therefore, in exploring

the death responses, rituals and traditions of these two counties, one is provided with an understanding that is relevant to the larger region.

## CHAPTER ONE CROSSED BONES AND SKULLS--CADILLACS AND SATIN

America is a death-denying society. Actually, it is so good at denying death that the ultimate attempt in caring for the dead is to give the dead the appearance of being alive. There are several reasons why this country receives world-wide attention involving its reactions and responses to death. Perhaps one of the most eminent arguments is the increase in life expectancy over the past century. Due to increased and improved medical technology, people are simply living longer. According to John Updike in his article "Facing Death," child mortality ran between thirty to fifty percent shortly before the turn of the century. Of every thirty births, one mother would likely die. Ten percent more soldiers died from disease than died on the battlefield (Updike 102).

While statistics support that the average person experienced many more death-related experiences a few decades ago, such as the death of a close relative, there are a host of other complex factors which strongly contribute to America's denial of death.

Over the past century, a host of transformations occurred relating to where the aging and dying processes occur. A century ago, people aged and died at home while their family members served as primary care givers. Caring for the dying offers great psychological advantages in understanding and dealing with the aftermath of the death.

Further disassociating society today from the aging and dying process are retirement and nursing homes. Grayson County has no skilled-care facility for the

aging, yet many of the county's citizens are in nursing care centers in the surrounding counties of Smyth, Ashe and Allegheny. Ashe County is home to three professional care giver centers. While the majority of the patients are native to Ashe County, many are from other areas and are placed there because of children or other relatives living in the area. Discussion is presently under way for the construction of a care facility in Grayson County. As the demand for such facilities seems to be on the increase, one might assume that family members no longer care for their aging and dying. These members have been excluded from our society. Yet one might argue that the greatest sheltering is in denying oneself the experience of caring for one's own. Hospitals now perform the role that was once provided by the family. The care hospitals provide for the terminally ill also shows how America has removed the place of death away from the home.

With the loss of rural daily activities, children no longer encounter the slaughter of farm animals for food and the death of animals from accident and disease. In early rural Appalachia, even as late as 1950s, a large percentage of all children lived on producing farms and faced different facets of death. The exposure to the death of farm animals helped children view death as a part of life's cycle.

A century ago, children often witnessed the death of their grandparents and siblings. In Appalachia, it was common for one of the younger children to remain with his/her parents, rearing his/her own family in the same house. They would be responsible for the care of the aging parents until their deaths. In most cases, this child would inherit the family farm as payment for his/her services. The aging and dying process was witnessed by the grandchildren which helped them develop healthy attitudes toward death. Many changes have also taken place regarding the care of the body once death took place. Perhaps the greatest changes which influenced the denial of death was the development of professional funeral



establishments which brought about drastic changes in regard to who provided care for the dead.

Most families in the Ashe and Grayson areas, as well as most of Appalachia, had a family cemetery located near or on the family farm. These sections of land were considered sacred and received the best of care. Most family cemeteries were located on top of a hill. This was not for ecclesiastical or aesthetic reasons, as some have suggested, but for drainage purposes. Grayson County alone was home to several hundred of these small family cemeteries (Herndon). Many of them have disappeared in the name of "progress," and many have become obscure due to neglect.

Today's commercial cemeteries offer perpetual care from professional caretakers. In Grayson, most of the larger cemeteries are affiliated with area churches, and the grounds are maintained through a cemetery fund. Proceeds for these funds come from the donations given by families and friends of those buried in these cemeteries. A growing trend in the area is for families to request, in lieu of flowers, memorials of money to the cemetery fund. The largest cemetery is Pleasant Grove, encompassing four acres and over two thousand graves. This cemetery is associated with the Pleasant Grove Baptist Church which had its beginning in 1885 (Jennins). The Ashe County area abounds with family and church/community cemeteries. However, Ashe Lawn Memorial Gardens and Mausoleum offers the only perpetual care cemetery in the area. Ashe Lawn spans five acres and has over three thousand graves with plans and room for expansion.

The changes which have developed concerning the care of the grave also support that America is a death-denying society. Modern care of the grave suggests that there is no grave at all. During the committal service, artificial grass adorns the

surrounding area of the grave hiding exposed soil. It is a different treatment from the practice prior to industrialized funerals. Up until the 1920s, grass was never allowed to grow on a "properly" attended grave. It was important then that each grave look freshly filled. Care for the grave just before the memorial decoration service included pulling any vegetation from the grave and heaping the soil up around the grave area to appear that the burial had just taken place. In contrast to the care and attention given to the grave sixty years ago, whether one resorts to the burial of his/her family member in the traditional family, church/community or commercial cemetery, he/she and other survivors have little contact or input as to the immediate care given to the grave.

It is interesting to note the changes that have transpired which concern the public viewing of the body. Regardless of its condition, the tradition was to have a public display of the body. Today this tradition has been displaced by the practice of a closed casket. One local funeral director stated that people are requesting a closed casket more often than ever before. He attributes this to the great influx of retirees or new-comers to the area who practice other traditions. Religious traditions now play a role in funeral choice, as certain denominations discourage open caskets in the church.

Words that once summoned up the physical aspects of death have become archaic. For example, the word "coffin" has been replaced with "casket." Such distinctions came about during the 1920s when the funeral industry began to realize its economic potential. The word coffin is defined as a box for the burial of a corpse, while casket is defined as a small chest or box for the safe keeping of jewels. Now the two words have become interchangeable. The early indication of the dead body as something of great value was among the first changes produced by the funeral industry. Similarly, tombstones, once known as grave markers, are now called

"monuments." A monument denotes a lasting evidence or reminder of something notable. The graveyard, suggesting a burial place for the dead, is now a cemetery or memorial garden which indicates a place of reverence and memory. Other aspects of the changes in funeral vocabulary include the replacing of "dead" and "die" with "pass away" or "pass on." Many attribute the flowery and somewhat poetic language used in funerary vocabulary to Queen Victoria. The beloved monarch, who set the standards for many of the social aspects of Victorian social life, was no less influential in establishing many mourning rituals in lamenting the death of her Consort Prince Albert in 1861. However, by the time her lavish public displays of grief reached the remote Appalachian region, many modifications had occurred. One Victorian practice that survived here was the use of black as a color of mourning. Most adults in the Appalachian south wore black to funerals and wakes. Black continues to be the dominant color associated with the mourning family. It has long been the color associated with death. A remnant of this remained until recent years when one could easily identify funeral coaches and related vehicles by their dominant color of black. In the past decade, however, softer colors of gray and blue have replaced black. Color schemes have changed even in casket interiors, which traditionally were in black or white: black for men and white for women and children. Black is never used as a casket-lining color today. The soft colors of blue, pink, cream and ivory are now a part of funeral color schemes, replacing the traditional dark colors.

It is not difficult to point out the changes that have contributed to the great separation that has come between America's living and dead. Perhaps one can best trace the beginnings of this separation to the early days of the funeral market, an industry which had its humble beginnings in the back rooms of furniture and hardware stores and today is a booming multi-million dollar industry

## CHAPTER TWO ALL DRESSED UP AND NO PLACE TO GO

The changes in the American responses to death, compared to other social reforms, were quick in developing. In the early decades of the twentieth century, many established furniture and hardware stores began to experiment with the funeral business as an industry. Such was the case in Grayson and Ashe counties. Unlike many Appalachian communities, Ashe County has supported a funeral tradesman since 1854. The Billy Badger family introduced the county to the industry by constructing caskets and providing casket hardware for sale as a back-door operation to the family mill. In 1929, Roy Badger assumed the family business and moved to West Jefferson. The family business changed to meet the demands of the industry. By the mid-1930s, homemade coffins, which the Badgers stopped providing in 1935, were replaced by factory caskets provided by The Bristol Coffin/Casket Company in Bristol, Tennessee. The establishment grew and in the 30s added its first motorized vehicle to the firm, a 1934 Essex. The business was so successful that during the years between 1936-1940 over one thousand funerals were conducted. Nineteen of these cost over \$200.00, with the average costs between \$45.00-\$85.00 (Badger 1996). The business continued to flourish and is still recognized as one of Ashe County's finest funeral establishments. The Jefferson area later became home for another funeral establishment in the 1940s. Today two funeral establishments are located in the West Jefferson area and one is located in the neighboring town of Jefferson. The town of Independence in Grayson County has a similar history. Names such as Barbery, Wright, and Vaughn were associated with the funeral

industry there. Grayson County supports one funeral establishment in Independence (Fields 149). This establishment and others like it were so successful that less than half a century later the consciousness of death and the traditional symbols and customs associated with it became submerged and hidden. Today's death symbols are concealed in satin-lined bronze caskets and Cadillac hearses bearing silver-plated laurel wreaths. According to Forbes magazine, Americans spend an average of \$4,470.00 on a funeral (Palmeri 45). Norma Higgins of Vaughn Gwyn Funeral Home in Galax, Virginia, and David Boone, owner of Boone Family Funeral Service in Ashe County, agree that the Forbes estimates are an accurate reflection of funeral expenses in the Ashe and Grayson county regions.

One of the most important aspects of the funeral preparations is the preparation of the body. This was once a simple process performed in the home of the deceased. Early attempts to preserve the body were somewhat crude and ineffective. Yet, this process was viewed as important. In no other aspect of the Appalachian response to death does one see greater care and concern for keeping the body as natural as possible and keeping it from harm. This concern began as quickly as death was determined. Donna Loughrige, in her article: "A Perspective on Death in Appalachia," writes: "attempts to keep the body natural were seen in the careful attempt to tie the hands and feet with ribbons just after death to obtain a natural position when rigor mortis had occurred" (25). Joan Howard, in her article "Death and Burial in the Mountains," further describes attempts to prepare the body so that a life-like appearance might be obtained: "Two boards were placed together for cooling boards. The hands and mouth were bound with ribbons . . . and pennies or small coins were used to keep the eyes closed" (58).

The mountaineers placed great emphasis on the preservation of the body. According to James Badger, a retired funeral director, embalming did not become

general procedure in the Grayson and Ashe county region until the 1930s (Badger 1990). The mountaineers, however, had several crude procedures that seem almost symbolic in an attempt to preserve the body. Sometimes camphor was used for bathing the body to keep down the deathly pallor. Often the body was washed in alcohol or sprinkled with salt. These procedures were also helpful in keeping away insects and cats (Howard 59). Atlas Hall, in his article "Home Comfort: Memories of Mountain Customs," states that whisky was sometimes used as a preservative (19).

Even in the deep distress of losing a loved one, the mountaineers did not lose their resourcefulness. Most mountain people were buried in clean work clothes even though they had good "Sunday clothes." The best clothes would often be given to a family member who could use them. It was common, however, for women to prepare a special dress for their own burial. This suggests that mountain people peacefully accepted their own death. Children were usually buried in white and adults in black. Once the body had been prepared, usually within the first few hours of death, it would be placed on the cooling boards.

Unlike the traditional preparation of the body, modern techniques are performed by a trained embalmer. The modern embalming process involves a two-phased procedure. The first phase involves a two-hour procedure known as arterial embalming. It is during this operation that the blood in the vessels is removed and replaced with a formaldehyde solution. Spreading into the body tissue through osmosis, the formaldehyde gases neutralize the body protein which halts the decomposition process. The second phase of the embalming procedure is abdominal embalming. A long tubular instrument known as a trocar is inserted in the abdomen removing any liquids in the abdomen through hydraulic suction. Through

gravitational flow, a special chemical is injected into the abdomen and the point of injection is sealed. Several factors influence how long the body will remain preserved. Such factors include the degree of success achieved by the embalmer, the condition of the body at the time of death, and, most importantly, the place of burial and the type of burial container.

To achieve the third goal of the modern embalming procedure, restoration, great emphasis is placed upon the instruction of cosmetic reconstruction. It is not uncommon for a family member to produce a picture of the departed to aid the funeral director in restoring the body to a lifelike appearance. Such extreme measures to restore the dead body to a lifelike appearance were never carried out in traditional Appalachian funerary practices.

The time of the burial was often determined by the cause of death. For example, people who died of heart disease usually swelled. Therefore, their funerals were held as quickly as possible, usually within twenty-four hours.

By the time the body was ready for public display, whether it was a century ago in rural Appalachia, or today in a modern funeral home, the news of death quickly spread throughout the community and surrounding area. Relatives and friends who lived too far away to attend the funeral service were informed of the death by a letter edged in black. Framing the envelope in black ink was an indication that the enclosed message relayed the news of a death. The postman would take careful pains to deliver the letter as quickly as possible (Wigginton 345).

Ringling the dinner bell is another tradition associated with spreading the news of a death in Appalachia. However, according to James Badger, in rural areas such as Ashe and Grayson Counties, the ringing of the bell did not serve to inform of a death, but was simply a ceremonial act of respect toward the dead that was done at the funeral or the day of the death. A family member would toll the bell one time for

each year of the deceased's life. Margaret Coffin, in her work Death in Early America, explains the spreading of the news in the following manner: "When there was a death, the family concerned notified four neighbors; in turn, these four let their immediate neighbors know what had happened. In this way, the news was carried for a fifty-mile radius" (92 ). In Bertram Puckle's 1926 account of funeral customs, he states that the act of spreading the news was left to the family and that the tolling of the bell was a ceremonial act of respect for the dead (Lambert 49). Lambert writes: "If there was a school bell in the vicinity, a boy would often toll it during the entire funeral, sitting in a position where he could strike the clapper against the bell at a slow tempo, usually about once every fifteen seconds" (49). Spreading the news in modern Appalachia is less complicated, thanks to the convenience of the mass media. Each morning in Ashe County, the local radio station, W.K.S.K., airs the funeral announcements at 9:10 a.m. W.K.S.K. began airing these announcements in 1959, when the station began (Caddell). The county did not have a daily paper which would normally do away with the need for aired announcements. Neither Grayson or Ashe county has daily papers thus the morning funeral announcements continue. Each of the three Ashe County funeral establishments offers a listing of the deceased, survivors, place and time of services and visitation. The report also includes the place of burial and often the officiating ministers. The following is a typical funeral announcement aired on W.K.S.K.:

Johnson Funeral Home announces funeral services for John H. Miller, age 85, of Jefferson, who passed away at the Ashe Memorial Hospital Saturday afternoon. He is survived by his wife, Lillian Farmer Miller of the home, one daughter, Rebecca M. Cox of Wilkesboro, two sons Frank of Dayton, Ohio, and Ralph of Mouth of Wilson, Virginia. He



is also survived by one brother, Howard Miller of Miller's Creek, North Carolina. Six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren also survive. Services will be conducted at the Pine Hill Baptist Church with the Rev. Wayne Jones officiating. Burial will follow in the church cemetery. The family will receive friends tonight from 7:00 until 9:00 at the Johnson Funeral Home. Flowers will be accepted or memorials may be made to the Ashe County Hospice in care of Hospice of Ashe P.O. BOX 319 Jefferson, North Carolina 28640.

Similar announcements for the funeral home in Independence are broadcast over W.B.R.F. in Galax, Virginia, and W.C.O.K. in Sparta, North Carolina. It is also common for individual funeral homes to broadcast "courtesy announcements." These are usually presented for people who have died outside the region but who at one time lived in or near the area or who has relatives living in or near the region. Both towns have local newspapers which include weekly funeral announcements, obituaries, and memorials. Most Ashe County obituaries appear in the *Winston Salem Journal*, while the Grayson County obituaries appear in *The Roanoke Times*. Once the news was carried into the community and to all the concerned people, the death was met with a response from the entire community. It is often at a death that a family and community are united in a common purpose, to console, support, and comfort the grieving. While modern day funeral establishments have taken over many of the tasks that the community once performed, the unity of purpose is much the same: to show concern and sympathy for the family and to provide care and proper disposition of the body.

Just as the self-sufficiency of mountain women was displayed by making their own burial garment, the same self-sufficiency can be seen in the men's role of building their own coffins as well as the coffins for their spouse and children. The coffins were stored in a barn, attic, or other place where they were protected until the time they were needed. It is still common to find a homemade coffin at an estate auction in rural Appalachia. Many farmers made their own coffins, but lived into the early 1940s, by which time funeral establishments were prominent, and survivors refused to use the handmade coffin, preferring to use the factory-built casket. In Grayson and Ashe counties, the craft of the woodworker craftsman was bountiful. Therefore, a local carpenter or cabinet builder took the responsibility of providing the community locals with coffins. In the Grassy Creek Community of Grayson County, several people assumed this role. Among the more popular coffin builders was Estele Waddell and Avery Wood, and among the last to perform this duty was Roy Rutherford. These craftsmen provided the Grassy Creek community with coffins from 1890s until the 1930s (Wells). Each of these men kept a supply of coffins handy to fit a particular need. While the caskets were handmade, they were adorned with mail-ordered hardware, handles and embellishments. Even in the earliest days of Appalachia, some attempt was made to provide a burial container for the dead. This might include a hollowed log or peeled bark (Loughrige 25). The six-sided coffin was used until the late nineteenth century. During the Civil War, the rectangular box began to be the accepted shape for a coffin. The six-sided coffin was later replaced by the rectangular box with perpendicular sides popularized by William Smith, of Meriden, Connecticut, a coffin/casket builder. Thus, the traditional six-sided coffin was transposed and modified into the popular straight sided casket design of William Smith which remains popular today. (Coffin 101). (See Fig. 1). In

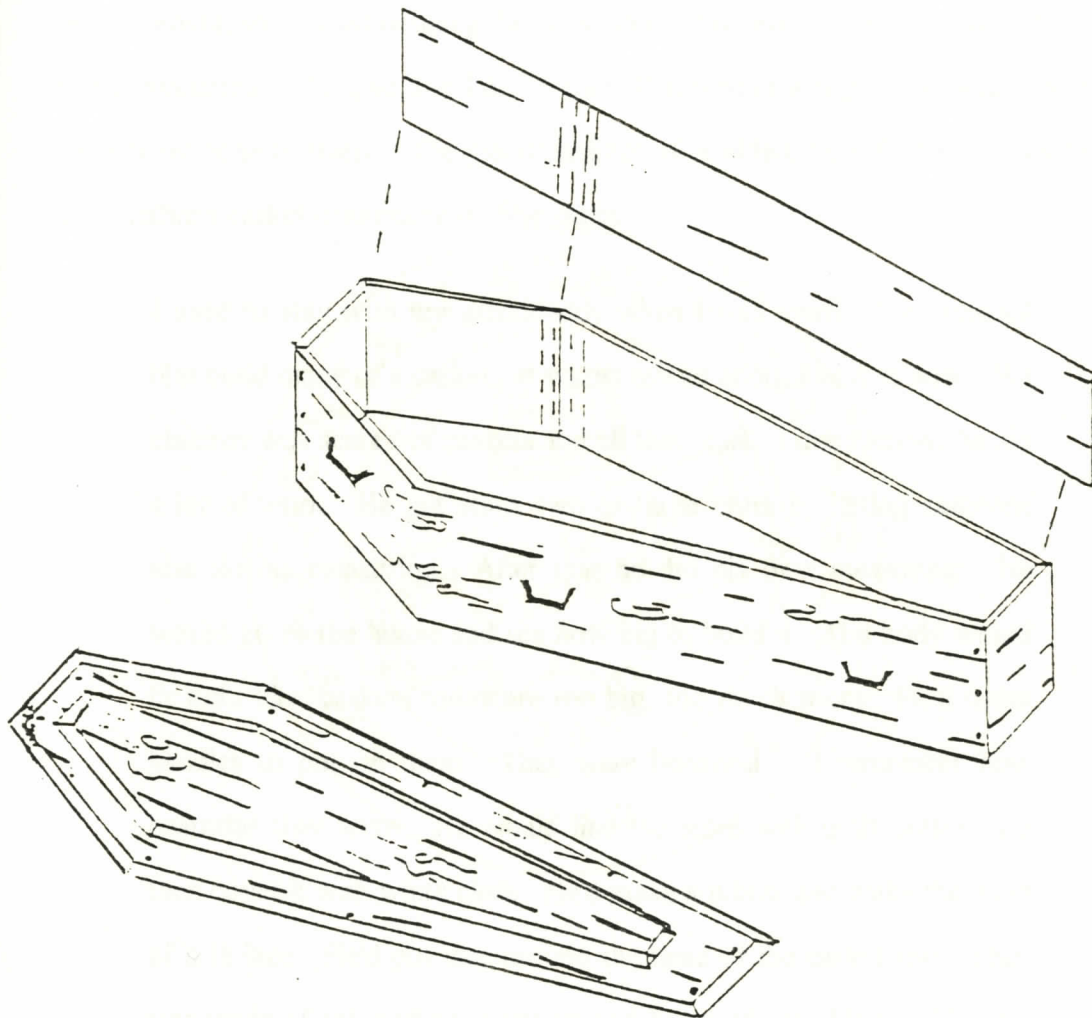


Fig. 1 This traditional coffin shape was popular among craftsmen in Appalachia.

the Appalachian regions, most of the wood used in coffin construction included walnut, cherry, oak, or pine (Wigginton 312).

A local Grayson County native, Zetta Hamby, recalls spending the night at the Estele Waddell home and sleeping in a bedroom she entered after dark. Awaking the next morning, she recalls noticing the back wall of the bedroom stacked with caskets. She commented: "I'm glad that I didn't know that when I was going to bed. I would have never gone to sleep." The granddaughter of Waddell, Lola Stump, recalls her grandfather's casket construction. She states:

I used to stay with my granddaddy when I was small. I've watched him build many of a casket. It wasn't talked about like it is now. We children was scared of caskets and all that stuff. I don't know, he did a lot of work. He got stuck two or three times by letting someone else do his measuring. After that he did his own measuring. He would go to the house and see how big to build it. The body would fit tight like, caskets today are too big, too much room. He'd order handles to put on them. They were beautiful. I remember how beautiful they were. He would line the sides with quilt cotton and then cover it with white cloth. He'd make a pillow and make the edge of it in lace. He'd put lace around the head of the casket too. They was made of oak and any pretty wood he could get. He would put a wood sealant on and then stain them. When he was done they were pretty.

Casket construction, like any other craftsman's art, varied according to the styles and techniques accomplished by the artist. Some craftsmen used a variety of

stains such as a linseed oil, or painted the casket with a combination of lamp black and glue. Often the inside of the casket was coated in beeswax before the cotton batting was tacked in and covered with a white material. As suggested by Mrs. Stump, casket handles were available through mail order.

For casket builders of Grayson and Ashe counties, the six-sided casket remained popular into the late nineteen thirties. The traditional six-sided casket developed several names to which it was referred. Some of them included: "squeezin' casket," "toothpick toed," "the pincer," "bent corner" and "heel squeezer." The six-sided casket was made by cutting half-way through the thickness of the wood into the side board one third way down the length. After soaking the board in water, usually in a nearby creek, it became flexible enough to bend and be nailed securely at the head and foot of the casket. The bottom was then nailed in place. (See Fig. 2) The lid was separated from the casket and was not attached to the casket until the final ceremony at the grave.

Of course, in modern Appalachia the casket is supplied by the local funeral homes. Based on an AARP survey of 250 funeral homes, casket prices range anywhere between \$220.00 to several thousands (Palmeri 45). In Grayson and Ashe Counties the least expensive casket, which is not displayed in the display room, sells for \$250.00, while the most expensive sells for \$6,000.00 and is constructed of bronze (Badger 1990). More expensive models can be purchased by special order. The majority of these caskets are produced in Ohio, which is considered to be the casket capital of the world.

Among the many traditional roles that have been assumed by the professional director is the preparation of the grave. In modern Appalachia, the grave is usually opened by a back hoe. The entire process is completed in a matter of minutes. Most

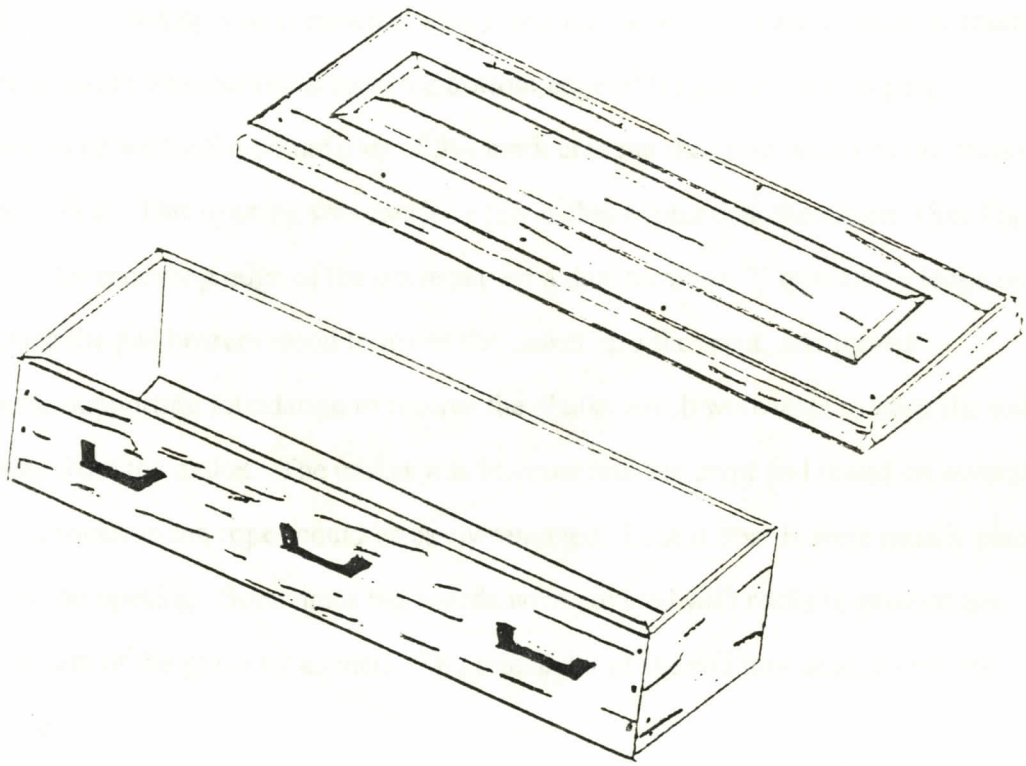


Fig. 2 This traditional casket shape gained popularity following the Civil War.

modern cemeteries now require a vault or grave liner to prevent the grave from sinking in future years. Compared to the mechanical manner of preparing the grave several decades ago, the preparation of a grave was considered a sacred time and participation was considered an honor. Men of surrounding communities would gather and begin the digging process which took several hours. The men worked in shifts relieving each other. Graves were dug about eight feet long and four feet wide. Once the opening was completed, about four feet down, a bordering edge of about eight inches was marked around the bottom edge of the grave. The digging continued within the boundaries of this mark creating the crypt which would receive the casket. This opening was usually a few inches bigger than the casket. (See Fig. 3). The encircling edge of the grave served a dual purpose. It provided a ledge on which the pall bearers stood to lower the casket into the crypt, and served as the supporting foundation to receive the planks which were used to keep the soil away from the casket. The casket was lowered into the crypt and rested on several small rocks so the ropes could be easily removed. Locust boards were usually placed over the opening. Sometimes the boards were covered with rocks to prevent any intrusion of the grave by animals. The remainder of the soil was heaped over the grave.

The many processes that were necessary to perform at the time of a death have undergone great changes. Even though the funeral industry now carries out the duties which were once a part of the family and community response, the role of family and community continue to provide an important part in the modern Appalachian response to death.

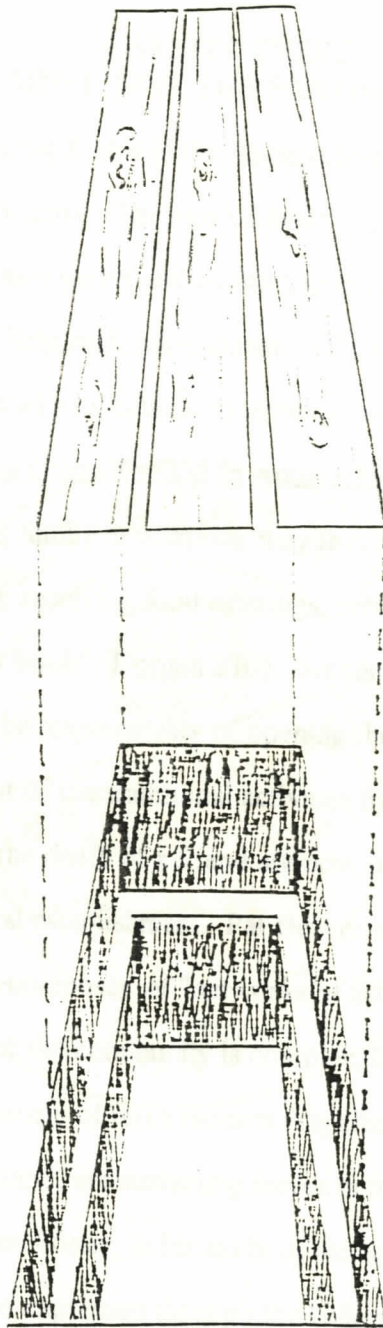


Fig. 3 This drawing shows the grave and crypt. Boards were placed over the crypt.



### CHAPTER THREE WE MUST TAKE THE PARTING HAND

Two of the most enduring forces in the Appalachian region are the affinity for family ties and community unity. The pain of death was made bearable for the mountaineer because of the support and comfort given from the community. Though the ways in which people help each other during the time of death have changed, the community is still recognized as a helpful contributor when a death comes to its own ranks. In his book, Giving Glory To God In Appalachia, Howard Dorgan writes "that friends . . . assist the family in whatever way they can . . . handling some arrangements, baby sitting, receiving food offerings, recording names and addresses, and officiating at the guest book" (Dorgan 210). Sometimes in modern Appalachia, the community still takes the responsibility of opening the grave. However, as previously mentioned, most of the traditional activities by which the early mountaineers helped with the death of a friend are now performed as services provided by the local funeral establishment. Pat Beaver has described the modern Appalachian community as composed of "networks of associations and organization" (16). As the organization of the community is complex, Beaver ascribes equivocal values indicative of the members of three modern Appalachian communities. The values, family, kinship, and land, are sustaining forces in the society of the mountain community. William Stephen Foster, in his study of modern Appalachia, writes: "Community identity is often expressed through the collective, kin relations, and what Beaver calls rootedness to place" (63). "The mountain community of modern Appalachia is not only a geographical entity but an ideological entity, a body of individuals whose members are linked by kinship relations, historical events, and the

requirements of making a living" (Beaver 140-141).

The Appalachian community at the turn of the century bears little resemblance to the community of today. Though today's communities retain the values ascribed by Beaver and fulfill the description of Foster, the Appalachian community of yesterday year was more rural, and people were required to depend on each other more than today. The fact that people were close and caring was eminently displayed in the community response to death. From the moment of death until the interment, the community was directly involved in the rituals and preparations for the funeral service and burial. There were many arrangements to be made at the time of a death, and the community responded overwhelmingly to these demands.

Prior to the 1890s, with the absence of medical professionals and advancements in medical technology, it was often difficult to determine if a death had taken place. Often people would slip into a cataleptic state where it was often difficult to find signs of life. Since the care for the sick was usually provided at home with their families as primary care givers, family members were usually with the sick at the time of death. It was the family who was required to perform tests of death.

The tests of death were performed on the body to be sure that death occurred. One test involved holding a mirror up to the mouth to see if any vapor appeared on the glass. While this was perhaps the most common and widely used test of death, another involved placing a glass of water on the chest to check to see if any movement occurred. Sometimes a string would be tightly tied around a finger. Any changes in the skin's pallor would indicate circulation of blood. If any doubt remained, especially in the case of small children where the signs of "false death" are exaggerated, the fire test might be administered. This test involved the placing of a small flame, such as the end of a candle, near the end of a finger. When a blister raised on the body, there was a strong possibility that the person was

still alive. A blister will not form unless blood is circulating through the body. Of course, lacking the necessary equipment affirming death, the fear of being buried alive was rampant in the Appalachian region. Some surmise that this was the purpose of the "wake," which involved sitting with the dead throughout the night prior to the burial. Zetta Hamby, a native of Grayson County, recalls a neighbor having been declared dead and placed on the porch to cool. The body, which appeared to be dead, revived when a niece accidentally hit the foot of the body with a milk pail.

Even though professional services have assumed many of the responsibilities that were once performed by the community, the community still performs many tasks. It is the community members who help mourning families by serving as ministers, choir members, soloists, and pallbearers. Even today, when a death occurs, the community responds with acts of love and concern such as house sitting, offering food and flowers, and opening their homes to out of town company.

The unity of mountain families was never more eminently expressed than during the time death claimed a family member. The mountain family included the husband, his wife, and their children. The unit often included a single aunt or uncle, and grandparents (Eller 29). Pat Beaver writes: "kinship and family in the rural mountains are highly valued and a central part of life. Kinship in the mountains goes beyond the 'biological or genealogical connectedness.' It is the adhering magnetism by which the community is trussed to the land and its people" (56). The loyalty of a mountaineer to his family was nurtured from birth. Within the family, particular skills were passed from generation to generation. Political and spiritual alliances were also endorsed within the family entity. The influence of a family was felt in almost every aspect of mountain life. In pre-industrial Appalachia, the family was the central force in the economic as well as social life. The family was a resource and a requisite for the community social order. Unlike the nuclear family, the extended family prevailed

in Appalachia. The family unit was the basic economic component in the rural farming areas of Appalachia. Family members cooperated among each other in useful activities such as gardening, farming, and building (61).

The mountaineer's family enjoyed a strong feeling of security and belonging even though this security flowed from submissive to patriarchal authority. Ron Eller, in his book, Miners, Mill Hands, and Mountaineers, writes: "For the mountaineer the collective welfare of the family was a primary value, and individual needs were subordinated at the needs of the family" (28). The "strength and cohesiveness of the family, as reflected in religion, education, and political views, was made possible by the independence of age and sex roles in the mountains" (31). The white males were provided with the most power and freedom while the women were limited to a narrow and restrictive life entailing house work and child rearing. Many have argued that these strong emphases on family unity stem from the isolation of the mountaineer from other mountain families (Weller 40). Regardless of the factors contributing to family unity in the Appalachian region, this strong alliance is nowhere more evident than when a family member surrenders to death.

The role of the family was usually affirmed during the time of illness and death. The sick were cared for at home with tender affection (Garrity 102). Once a death had taken place, decisions about the funeral were limited to the immediate family and were dictated by tradition, customs, and religious practices. Often the request of the dead played a hand in the arrangements (Loughrige 26).

In the remote parts of the mountains such as Ashe and Grayson Counties, stories surrounding deathlore are common. These often involve accounts during the harsh winter weather. When a death would occur in midwinter, the dead body was often kept in the barn or other out building until the spring thaw. Margaret Coffin writes: "Joe had died in midwinter, when Mrs. Joe couldn't get even a message out, she

moved Joe's body into a back room, the summer kitchen, laid him out there and allowed the body to freeze so it would keep until spring . . ." (78). An Ashe County informant recalled that a dead body was once left in the barn until a grave could be dug in the frozen ground. Many today would find these accounts appalling, yet they are a reflection of the responsibility assumed by the family at the time of a death.

There were several ways in which the family bond was reflected in the funeral service. While the family assembled in the home or church for the service, friends would stand as the family members took their place for the funeral. This act of respect continues in mountain funerals today. It was also customary in the traditional Appalachian funerals for the family to view the body following the funeral service. Since the family was the last to view the remains, the congregation often remarked on the expression of grief that the family displayed. As the mountaineer felt death deeply, the expressions of grief were often quite audible (Badger 1990). Unlike many facets associated with the changes of funerary customs, the basic role of the family has not changed in drastically.

Many changes have occurred in traditions that were once observed by the family, such as the tolling of the bell. In a few instances, this is still observed. It was also common to stop the clock at the hour of death and not start it again until after the interment. Perhaps this was a gentle reminder of the eternal nature of death or perhaps just a pause in time as an act of respect. The placing of flowers or ribbons on the door of the home of the deceased is a tradition that stems back to the European plagues, when the house of the afflicted was marked. This tradition continues in Ashe and Grayson Counties. The flowers are provided by the funeral establishment. Signs stating "Slow Funeral" are also placed near the home, perhaps more of an act of respect, as traffic problems are not common in Ashe and Grayson

Counties.

Perhaps the task assumed by the family which demands participation from generation to generation is the ongoing duty of remembering. This initially involves the selection and purchasing of a tombstone. In the early years, the grave marker was simply a rock. In many cases crude attempts were made to carve a name or initials in the stone. However, in the Grayson and Ashe area, with the coming of the railroads in 1914, it was easier to obtain commercial monuments through mail-order (Foster 21). Appalachian cemeteries are testimonies to the care and sacrifice dedicated to the act of remembering. Stately markers adorn many hilltop cemeteries. Such markers surely entailed a financial sacrifice to the economically struggling mountaineers. The remembering process continues today and involves the organization and participation of an annual flower or memorial service. This service includes cleaning the graves and decorating them with flowers. Across Grayson and Ashe Counties, the Sunday mornings and afternoons of the summer months from May until September are busy with descendants visiting the cemeteries honoring their dead. Families often combine these Sunday services with a family reunion.

## CHAPTER FOUR FINALLY BRETHREN, FAREWELL

Community and familial relations are strong forces in Appalachia. Yet to discuss the Appalachian region without mentioning the mountaineer's deep-seated faith would be to ignore his most valuable attribute. The contrasting doctrinal beliefs represented in Appalachia allow for diverse ceremonial responses to death. These distinctions are best represented in funeral sermons and services.

There are three basic doctrinal influences in Grayson and Ashe Counties which dominate religious responses to funerals. The anti-missionary Calvinist sects include several Primitive Baptist churches in the area. The pro-missionary Baptist churches, which gained popularity throughout the South during the Civil War, include the Southern Baptist, Missionary Baptist, Separate Baptist, and the Freewill Baptist.

The strength that the mountaineers found in their faith offered hope when misfortunes came. When spring rains flooded the river banks, when summer hail storms destroyed crops, or when dark winter lasted too long, mountaineers were reassured and encouraged because of their strong religious convictions. Attesting to this strong faith are the rural cemeteries of southern Appalachia. One such conviction perhaps best summing up the mountaineer's all-accepting faith is a crudely carved stone in Beverly, West Virginia. The stone is a grave marker for the grave of eight children ranging in ages from three months to eight years old. The epitaph simply reads: "Thy will be done" (Meyer 8).

### Primitive Baptists

According to Howard Dorgan in his book, Giving Glory to God in Appalachia, the Primitive Baptists trace their roots to the period from 1820 to 1830

when the anti-missionary campaign erupted. Dorgan writes: "The more strongly Calvinist Baptist theologians of those decades looked askance at the relatively new emphasis upon evangelism and missions, believing that human efforts to 'win souls' ran contrary to established positions on predestination and unconditional election."

(9). Dorgan continues to argue that the Primitive Baptists have remained more Calvinist than other Baptist sects with similar roots. The basic beliefs of the primitive Baptists have been outlined in the church's Articles of Faith.

#### Articles of Faith

We believe in the doctrine of eternal, personal, and unconditional election.

We believe in the doctrine of God's predestination in every sense as the Bible teaches it.

We believe that all the elect . . . chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, shall be called, regenerated and sanctified by the regenerating power of God's grace, and shall ultimately enjoy heaven and immortal glory . . .

We believe in the doctrine of eternal and particular election...

We believe that God's elect are called, converted, regenerated and sanctified by the Holy Spirit . . .

We believe in the doctrine of original sin and in Man's impotency to recover himself from the fallen state he is in by nature by his own free will or ability.

We believe that sinners are called, converted, regenerated and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and that all who are thus regenerated and born again by the Spirit of God shall never fall finally away.

We believe that God elected, or chose, His people in Christ before



the foundation of the world . . . We believe in the doctrine of original sin, and man's impotency to recover himself from the fallen state he is in by nature, by his own free will and ability.

We believe that God's elect shall be called, effectually regenerated and sanctified by the Holy Ghost, and shall be preserved in Grace and never finally fall away. (Dorgan 10)

During the funeral service the doctrine presented in the Articles of Faith is displayed in the funeral sermons and in the hymns.

It is with the following words that Elder Jess B. Higgins began his funeral sermon for 97-year old Grover Cleveland Reeves: "I know that we come here this morning with a heavy heart, realizing that we have gone the last mile we can go. I realize that there is One who is not limited as we are in this life and that is Jesus . . ." Mr. Reeves served as a deacon for the Elk Creek Primitive Baptist Church for several years. For the funeral service, Mr. Reeves's oak casket was simply adorned with a modest array of roses. Several arrangements of flowers were placed throughout the church. The fact that Elk Creek had been a successful church was obvious. Stained glass windows were throughout the church bearing the names of deceased and honored members. Oak pews rather than the usual pine pews were lined up on either side of the church. A picture of Christ hung directly behind the pulpit and the front of the church was lined with hooks used at the annual communion and footwashing in June. Though such ornamentation as stained glass and pictures are unusual for a Primitive Baptist church, the funeral service for Mr. Reeves was a beautiful reflection of the doctrine and simplicity these people advocate.

Elder Higgins, the first Elder to speak, told of a "simple man who had not demanded much of the worldly goods. He was a man who at an early age learned to live from the land." Higgins continued to expound upon some changes that Mr. Reeves had witnessed in his long lifetime. Following these brief remarks the sermon topic began to focus upon "a land called heaven." Elder Higgins continues:

... a land called Heaven. How great a God it is that He has created for His own a land of tomorrow where all things are new, a place of rest. I'm here to tell you this morning that it is going to be wonderful ... This morning we trust and believe that this is the land where you'll find brother Cleve this morning. Children, don't sorrow for your dad. He has gone to that far away place, a land called Heaven. How sweet that place must be to you this morning; how sweet it became to Cleve when that precious wife and mother slipped away. And I'll tell you this morning, it is but a short while, a short while till we all, all of God's own, can be together in that sweet forever, Amen.

Following Elder Higgins's twenty-minute address, Elder Curtis Hash immediately followed. Elder Hash, the present pastor of the Elk Creek Church, had only known the Reeves family for a few years. Elder Hash begins: "The Elk Creek Community has lost one of its older citizens this morning. As I think on the quality of life that Grover Cleveland Reeves lived, I'm just thankful to God for a good life and quality of life that God blessed to give."

Elder Hash talked about the care that Mr. Reeves had received from his children. He continued: "In a time when old people are cast away, you found Brother Reeves to be precious." The sermon topic was disclosed as Elder Hash began to speak about love. He stated that the same love that gave them such a precious home would

give a light to help them through this dark time. The remainder of the sermon was dedicated to God's love for His own.

Unlike the other funerals that were attended for this project, the writer did not have a personal friendship with Mr. Reeves. It was this reason that it became obvious how little the life of the deceased was discussed. This seemed to be unusual and the same seemed to be true at other Primitive Baptist funerals.

For the purpose of preaching funeral services, Elders seem to direct their attention toward the actions of God rather than the actions of the deceased. A devoted Primitive Baptist explained the main distinctions in the Primitive Baptist funeral service. Bobby Absher responded: "All of these other people will talk about how great somebody is or what great things he might have done, but in God's eyes we're nothing and nothing we do is great. You listen, any Elder will talk about the only one who can do any great thing and that is God. Now that is the real Elders and not these new ones that want to change everything."

A Primitive Baptist funeral in Nathan's Creek, North Carolina, was held at the Senter Primitive Baptist Church in 1989. The service was unusual in that the deceased was not a member of the Senter church but was reared in the church and requested that her funeral be conducted there as was her husband's seven years earlier. Officiating in the service was the Methodist pastor of the church in which the lady was a member and a Primitive Baptist Elder, Elder South. The Senter church had agreed to allow the family to have a piano moved into the church for the funeral service. The Primitive Baptists do not accept the use of musical instruments in the church as part of the church service. However, I later learned that this is no longer an unusual request.

Elder South began his sermon with a reading from Proverbs and John 14. He spoke of visiting the deceased in her home and that he enjoyed seeing her in many of

his Primitive Baptist services. He stated that he believed that she enjoyed hearing a "God-inspired message." Elder South, perhaps not to offend the Methodist minister, refrained from defending Primitive Baptist doctrine or preaching doctrine. Rather, he directed his sermon toward the life of a good mother and how valuable the role of the mother was to the future decades. It is important, however, to note that the deceased was not described as this role model nor did he ascribe her with any of the characteristics that he mentioned. Actually, other than his opening comments, his remarks would have made a fitting sermon for a Mother's Day service. Again, had the deceased not been known to the writer, very little information would have been learned about her from what Elder South presented at her funeral.

Funeral services for Mr. Dewey Fowler were conducted in the fall of 1987 at the Senter Primitive Church. The Fowler family has been associated with the Senter church for several decades. Like Mr. Reeves, Mr. Fowler had lost his wife a few years earlier and had spent his last years with his children. The service was conducted by the aged Elder Dewey Roten and Elder Steve Douglas, a recently ordained elder.

Elder Roten began his sermon with a reading of the Twenty-third Psalm. Other than thanking the congregation for their support of the family during their loss, his remarks totally revolved around the care a shepherd gives to his sheep. He continued: "Family, Hazel, Bill, and you other children, we are the sheep and God is the Shepherd . . . take courage that He is in control."

Following Elder Roten's lengthy remarks, Elder Douglas began: "I am nothing, I'm not even worthy to stand here and speak before you . . . but, with God's help I'll try to (unintelligible) a few remarks in way of thinking about brother Fowler." It was

later revealed in this sermon that Mr. Fowler had recently joined the fellowship of the Senter church. Yet, he attended the church all of his life. Elder Douglas' remarks were limited to a few minutes. He concluded his time by apologizing for the inadequacies of his remarks and closing with prayer. The service was then concluded.

#### Missionary Baptist Funerals

The Missionary Baptist of the Southern Baptist Association have lost their individuality since most of the churches have been absorbed into the Southern Baptist Association. Two of the churches visited for this project were direct breaks from the Calvinist doctrine; one other emerged from another church with similar links to the old Primitive Baptist churches.

The Missionary Baptist churches of the Southern Baptist proclaim their beliefs in the Church Covenant, a statement that is recognized in some of the Southern Baptist Churches.

#### Church Covenant

Having been led, as we believe by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and, on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church, in knowledge, holiness, and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the

support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotion; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred

and acquaintances; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, back-biting, and excessive anger; to abstain from the sale of, and use of, intoxicating drinks as a beverage; to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Savior.

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and Christian courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the rules of our Savior to secure it without delay.

We moreover engage that when we move from this place we will, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

(West Jefferson First Baptist Church Bulletin. January 1990, 4)

The doctrines of these two churches are presented in a grossly simplified manner and a variety of doctrinal differences are ignored. Yet, for the purpose of this study, the differences have been established. The Primitive Baptist funeral service tends to offer hope for the eternal salvation of the departed. It is in this hope that the family

takes comfort. On the other hand, the Missionary Baptists offer assurance of eternal salvation for the departed if they had left a testimony that would indicate that they had accepted the gifts of eternal life offered to them. If an individual did not leave such a testimony, the Primitive Baptists comforted the family with the hope that the individual has obtained salvation. The Missionary Baptists tend to leave the eternal destiny out of their sermons and direct their remarks toward the opportunity for salvation that remains for the living.

The Rev. Arnt Greer began the funeral service of Mrs. Mae Campbell with the following words: "Well, we've met again to show respect to sister Mae Campbell. Now, a lot of you younger people maybe don't know me, but I knew Will Campbell and Mae. I knew them. In fact, they used to be all over this country, used to come to this church."

The 94-year old native of Ashe County was returned near her childhood home for her funeral and burial. Even though a half a century had passed since she attended the church, it was regarded as her home church, and she requested her funeral to be conducted there. The sense of place seems to lie deep within the hearts of the Missionary Baptists. While the same could be said for the Primitive Baptists, they seem to settle near their childhood homes, requiring less need to be returned home for burial.

Greer continued with an emotionally stirring sermon detailing the death of his own mother. He offered comfort to the family with the reading of John 14. He spoke on the beauty and riches of heaven for the saved. He encouraged the family to take comfort because the departed had lived a life that would be pleasing to God. He stated that she had a hard life, but she put her trust in One who could help her.

Greer continued:

I hear Paul say we become heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ. We've got an inheritance in heaven. Why if we are born of the spirit of God, Jesus is in heaven and God is our heavenly father. That's the truth folks!, We just pray that the Lord will really bless you. You children had a wonderful mother, had a hard time just like my mother and your daddy had a hard time in this country . . . I hear Paul say in the scriptures, Paul says eyes not seen ears not heard neither has it entered in the heart of man the things that the Lord has prepared for them that love Him. Let that be your comfort, what the Lord has in store.

At the conclusion of Rev. Greer's remarks, the family pastor, the Rev. Reeves Jones addressed the congregation.

The Rev. Jones was a forceful speaker and began his sermon by reminding the congregation that "we are in the land of the dying. So often we hear that we are in the land of the living, but we are in the land of the dying." He spoke of recent visits he made with the deceased. He told how her faith allowed her to rear several children after the death of her husband. After several remarks reflecting upon past times and experiences he shared with the deceased, he began his sermon based on Psalm 116:15, "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." He argued that death was precious as it brought an end to suffering and sorrow. Death also was a key into the entrance of the heavenly kingdom. After spending several minutes on the joys of heaven, he mentioned a gathering of old friends in Heaven. Jones stated: "Don't you guess, children, there was a great reunion over on the other side the other morning, thank God, when your mother got home and all of those old



acquaintances; that dad and all of those that has been gone all these years? They said, 'well, Mae, you've made it at last.' Thank God for Heaven! I'm glad for immortal glory! I'm glad that it is precious to the child of God." Rev Jones continued to speak on the joy that the departed was now experiencing. His sermon ended with a brief prayer. Though the family was reserved in their expressions of grief, unlike many mountain families, the preaching was forceful and reflective of the evangelistic style of preaching.

I attended another Missionary Baptist funeral at the Grassy Creek Missionary Baptist Church. This church formed in 1923 following a revival of the New River Missionary Baptist Church. The deceased had been active in the church since it was constructed in 1923. She had served as piano player and Sunday school teacher for over fifty years. The deceased had lost her highly-respected parents several years earlier and had lost three children to accidental deaths within a two-year period. The officiating ministers were Rev. Kermit Goodman, the present pastor of the church, and the Rev. William Davis, a distant relative of the deceased. The deceased had been declining in health for the past several years and was unable to attend church. The present pastor limited his remarks to include a brief scripture reading and reflected on a visit he had with the deceased. The Rev. J.O. Spencer was mentioned several times during the service. Following a prayer, Rev. Davis began to talk about the life of the deceased. He recalled how she had been an inspiration to him as a child. Davis stated: "She came to visit mother and us children and told us that there was a meeting going on at Grassy. Mother told her that none of us had any clothes fit to wear to church. Sister Ruby did not allow that to stop her. We all know she was not a rich woman, but she went home and found clothes for us all. I was fortunate to be just the right age to

wear the clothes from Jimmy and Jack." His remarks continued to reflect the kindness and generosity of the deceased. He concluded his sermon with a poem that the departed had written.

Many Missionary Baptist funerals are now being conducted in funeral home chapels. I attended such a funeral in 1987 for a Mr. Campbell. Though the service was conducted in the chapel, it was still quite reflective of the traditional Missionary Baptist funeral. The aged Rev. Waddell introduced himself as a friend of Mr. Campbell. Waddell encouraged the family by telling them that, "suffering brings us through to victory and completes our salvation." He described the deceased as a neighbor and friend who took an interest in others. Rev. Waddell offered comforting words to the family when he told them that Mr. Campbell had made it clear that he "knowed in whom he believed." Rev. Waddell made a few comments on God's love for his people. Following a song, Rev. John Davis concluded the service. He opened with the following remarks: "We come this morning to pay respects to our friend and neighbor, one that we learned to love a long time ago. We've known brother Clip for years, and he worked hard for his family. He's had a hard time but he's at rest this morning. I believe that he is better off than I am cause he's done with the hardships of this old world and gone yonder to rest. The Bible says there remains therefore, a rest for the people of God." Rev. Davis continued in this manner for about fifteen minutes. He concluded with a prayer and invited the congregation to join the concluding phase of the funeral at the cemetery.

After listening to tapes of various funeral services and interviewing locals associated with Primitive or Missionary funerals, one is able to observe some distinctions between the funeral services of the two churches. Of the thirty or so Primitive funerals recorded for this project, all services were conducted in a church

rather than a funeral home, with the exception of the funeral of Elder Dewy Roten. Because of weather conditions, his funeral was conducted in the funeral home chapel. For the most part, only Primitive Baptist Elders officiate at Primitive Baptist funerals. Services last from thirty minutes to several hours. Musical selections for the funerals are selected from the Goble Hymnal, the hymnal of the Primitive churches. Families making funeral arrangements are now almost required to choose friends to perform

musical selections as most of the congregation attending a Primitive Baptist funeral are unfamiliar with the Primitive Baptist style of singing. When scripture texts are taken from the Old Bible, the twenty-third Psalm is a favorite. The writings of Paul seem to be a favorite if the New Testament writings are used. The interment of the Primitive Baptist usually occurs at the church cemetery. They, unlike other denominations, have not followed the trend of using perpetual memorial parks for their interment. Many Primitive Baptist cemeteries contain several generations of a single family. Even though most Primitive funerals do not have an abundance of floral arrangements, it is unusual for the family to request no flowers or to make suggestions for memorial contributions. The Primitive Baptists memorialize their dead at the annual associational meeting. Printed obituaries and pictures of the deceased are read and displayed at the annual associational meeting, and the congregation usually joins in a song in memory of their departed. I have found this to be a highly emotional time for the families of the recently deceased.

In a time when all the traditional practices of the Primitive Baptists are being threatened and as Appalachia tends to merge into a mainstreamed society, it is encouraging to see that many of the funeral customs of the Primitive Baptists resist the changes. Unlike the Primitive Baptists, the Missionary Baptists seem to accept any change that might appear to be stylish or "modern." The Missionary Baptists'

willingness to modernize causes a great deal of diversity in the funeral service.

The Missionary Baptists associate the death of a loved one with a time for reunion. Often funeral services reflect a reunion that has taken place in heaven and the gathering of families result in a reunion on earth. A great deal of symbolism is associated with the Missionary Baptist's funeral. For example, a casket floral arrangement might include a rose for each child or grandchild. Sometimes these arrangements include flowers or foliage from the deceased's own garden or home.

One funeral of a retired farmer illustrates personal identity even after death. Not only was the man buried in his everyday work clothes, but his casket flowers were tobacco plants. It has been noticed that many Missionary Baptists are buried in clothes that they owned such as a favorite dress or suit. It is common to see personal belongings placed in the casket with the dead. Some recall seeing photos of one's children placed in the lid of the coffin. Sometimes a favorite piece of jewelry or handkerchief will be placed in the hand of a lady, while a watch or Bible might be placed with a man. The funeral service is usually a time a great emotional expression. Some funerals where the expressions of grief were so disruptive, the minister could hardly be heard.

When the family chooses a minister for the funeral service, it is not uncommon to have more than one denomination represented especially if the family is large, and there are several denominational tastes to please. However, this is less likely to occur in the Primitive Baptist funerals. Even though some Missionary Baptists' funerals will have as many as five ministers, the service rarely goes longer than forty minutes. Unlike the Primitive Baptist, the Missionary Baptist funeral tends to reflect upon the past life of the departed. Close attention is given to the good deeds of the departed.

## CHAPTER FIVE OH MAY MY HEART IN TUNE BE FOUND

Just as the funeral sermons were of great importance to the mountain death responses, funeral music served a major role in the funeral process. Music is an important part of the traditional mountain funeral. Music used in Grayson and Ashe Counties display three basic themes: songs of hope and comfort, songs of family, and songs of home. The songs of hope and comfort reflect the deep religious convictions of the mountain communities. This faith is displayed in the hope offered by the non-missionary Calvinist and the assurance offered to the pro-missionary sect, the Missionary Baptist. The family songs reflect the affinity for kin and family relationships. These songs often mention mother, father, and perhaps brothers and sisters. The songs of home are a reflection of a sense of place, home, and the mountaineers' special affinity for land. These songs sometimes include themes of rivers, mountains, meadows, and other familiar terrain associated with the Appalachian region.

### Songs of Hope, Comfort, and Assurance

The deep spiritual ties that are nurtured in Appalachia are reflected in the funeral hymns of hope, comfort and assurance. One of the most popular hymns common among all three denominations reflecting these themes is "Amazing Grace." While this hymn is popular among all denominations, each has different versions. Included are the different version of the hymn text.

"Amazing Grace"

from Primitive Baptist Hymn Book

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound!

That saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

"Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace my fear relieved:  
How precious did that grace appear,  
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares,  
I have already come:  
"Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.

The lord has promised good to me,  
His word my hope secures;  
He will my shield and portion be  
As long as life endures.

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,  
And mortal life shall cease,  
I shall possess within the vale  
A life of joy and peace.

The Earth shall soon dissolve like snow,

The sun forbear to shine,  
 But God, who called me here below,  
 Shall be forever mine. (Newton 1887: 165)

"Amazing Grace"

(from Baptist Hymnal)

(verses 1,2,and 3 the same as above)

When we've been there ten thousand years,  
 Bright shining as the sun,  
 We've no less days to sing God's praise,  
 Than when we've first begun. (Newton 1975:165).

Arguments could be made that the various versions are reflective of the Calvinist's doctrine adhered to by the Primitive Baptist and the strong pro-missionary stand upheld by the Missionary Baptist. The basic theme of this song centers around the unmerited grace given by God, a popular theme among Calvinist sects. Grace, interpreted as a gift by pro-missionary groups, is not completed, even after "ten thousand years." The Calvinists do not offer such assurance of eternal rest. The joys of heaven are but a hope, offered to the elect. The singing style of this hymn is typical of the Primitive Baptist religion, unaccompanied and occasional attempts at harmony. In most all other denominations, the accompaniment of musical instruments would be used.

Popular among the Missionary Baptists is the funeral hymn "Beautiful Isle of Somewhere." In a very lyrical poetical sentiment, this funeral hymn compares Heaven to a far distant island where the troubles of life are no more. The hope and comfort offered by this hymn are reflective of the Victorian sentiment popular during

the 1900s. Songs of this nature are not found in the Primitive Baptist tradition. In his preface to the 1887 edition of The Primitive Baptist Hymn Book, (sometimes referred to as the Goble Hymnal) the editor, D. H. Goble, states, "care has been maintained in the selection of hymns and spiritual songs, to not only include all the old familiar ones, and favorites of our brethren in the different sections of the country, but especially that no unsound sentiment be found in any selection; and this is the only apology we would offer for numerous small changes made in a number of selections found in this book" (3-4). The songs of the Primitive Baptists are intended to reflect the doctrine of the church. According to Elder Calvin Yates, the doctrine is salvation by grace and not by works. In all the Primitive Baptist churches in Ashe and Grayson Counties, the Goble edition is the only hymnal in the church. The following song is typical of the "unsound sentiment" admonished by the Primitive Baptists and popular among Missionary Baptists.

"Beautiful Isle of Somewhere"

Somewhere the sun is shining,  
 somewhere the songbirds dwell;  
 Hush then, thy sad repining,  
 God lives, and all is well.

Somewhere the day is longer,  
 Somewhere the task is done;  
 Somewhere the heart is stronger,  
 Somewhere the guerdon won.

Somewhere the load is lifted,  
 Close by an open gate;



Somewhere the clouds are rifted,

Somewhere the angels wait.

(chorus)

Somewhere, somewhere,

Beautiful isle of somewhere!

Land of the true, where we live anew,

Beautiful isle of somewhere!(Pounds 248-249)

"Beautiful Isle of Somewhere" is doctrinally sound in both the Missionary and Primitive Baptists churches. However, the excessive sentimental view of Heaven is not part of the tradition of the Primitive Baptists.

One song that has long been associated with funeral services is "Rock of Ages." A favorite among many churches in the surveyed area, this funeral hymn affirms the mountain attitude toward religion. The strength derived from faith is compared to a rock that will endure throughout the ages.

"Rock of Ages"

Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee'

Let the water and the blood, from thy wounded side which flowed,

Be of sin the double cure, Save from wrath and make me pure.

Not the labors of my hands Can fulfill thy law's demands;

Could my zeal no respite know, Could my tears forever flow,

All for sin could not atone; Thou must save and thou alone.

While I draw this fleeting breath, When mine eyes shall close in death.

When I rise to worlds unknown, And behold thee on thy throne

Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in thee. (Toplady  
1975: 163)

This hymn is a favorite for funerals in both the Primitive Baptist and Missionary Baptist sects. It is not uncommon for verses to be added to meet the particular doctrines of a denominations.

It is interesting to note that all three of these verses appear in the Goble text. However, Goble includes another verse which proves to be doctrinally sound to the Calvinist beliefs adhered to by the Primitive Baptists. Again, it is the age old theme of unmerited grace, through which salvation is obtained. The verse reads:

Nothing in my hand I bring; Simply to thy cross I cling:

Naked, come to thee for dress; Helpless, look to thee for grace;

Black, I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die ( Toplady 1887:

42).

Another funeral hymn reflecting the strong-seated faith of the mountain region is "Oh For A Closer Walk With God." This song is from the Goble Hymnal. This song is a favorite among the Primitive Baptists and is often used at funerals. The lyrics read as a ballad and tell the story of one who strayed from God, losing the joy of salvation. Yet, the one who strays returns to repent of "the sins that cause my mourn." These lyrics are reflective of humankind's struggle with the spiritual values of Christian life. It can easily be argued that any hymn is reflective of hope, comfort and assurance, yet these hymns and others like them continue to be used for funerals, a time of great need for hope and comfort alike. This hymn does not suggest that salvation is through works or through salvation; therefore, it often appears in the hymn text of the pro-missionary churches.

"Oh For A Closer Walk With God"

O for a closer walk with God,

A calm and heavenly frame,  
A light to shine upon the road  
That leads me to the Lamb!

Where is the blessedness I knew  
When first I saw the lord?  
Where is the soul-refreshing view  
of Jesus and his word?

What peaceful hours I then enjoyed!  
How sweet their mem'ry still!  
But now I find an aching void  
The world can never fill.

Return, O holy Dove, return,  
Sweet messenger of rest;  
I hate the sins that cause my mourn,  
And so disturb my breast.

The dearest idol I have known,  
Whate'er that idol be,  
O come and tear it from its throne,  
I'll worship only thee.

So shall my walk be close with God,  
Calm and serene my frame;

So purer shall mark the road  
That leads me to the Lamb.(Cowper 60)

### Family Songs

The strong sociological ties ascribed to Appalachia are reaffirmed in the funeral hymns that reflect the allegiance of family, friendship, and community. It is easy to understand why the themes of family and friendship are popular in funeral hymns since these themes are strong in the mountains. It is also easy to understand why mourners would turn to these themes in a time of sorrow. The family ties are so strong in Appalachia that even in death, the ties are not severed. Rather than giving up loved ones to death, the dead simply become a bridge between earth and the afterlife. A favorite funeral hymn reflecting the family gathering in Heaven is "O Come, Angel Band." The song compares death to a final great triumph where a reunion of "friends and kindred dear" will take place. Those who have died earlier are identified as the "holy ones." The song is beautifully sentimental, and describes death as angels carry one away to a beautiful home where the dead can be reunited with family and friends. Again, however, the text of this hymn suggests the assurance of man's eternal existence-destroying the theme of "hope" which is popular among the Primitive Baptists. Therefore, songs of a sentimental nature are not in the musical tradition of Primitive Baptists.

"O Come, Angel Band"

My latest sun is sinking fast, My race is early run,  
My strongest trials now are past, My triumph is begun!

I know I'm nearing holy ranks, Of friends and kindred dear:  
I brush the dew of Jordan's banks, The crossing must be near:

I've almost gained my heav'nly home, My spirit loudly sings;  
The holy ones, behold, they come! I hear the noise of wings,

O bear my longing heart to Him, Who bled and died for me;  
Whose blood now cleanses from all sin, And gives me victory.

(chorus)

O come, angel band, come, and around me stand,

O bear me away on your snowy wings

To my immortal home

O bear me away on your snowy wings

To my immortal home. (Hascall 23)

Another favorite hymn, especially among the older people of the mountains, is "What A Friend." The role of a good friend in the community is especially important. People of these communities often trade work, share crops, and are available to each other in time of need. Therefore, the comparison to Jesus as a good friend is fitting. His help, as a good neighbor's help, is not only important, but necessary, in order to survive physically or spiritually.

"What A Friend"

What a friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry Everything to God in prayer!

Oh, what peace we often forfeit, Oh, what needless pain we bear,

All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged, Take it to the Lord in prayer:

Can we find a friend so faithful Who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our ev'ry weakness, Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, Cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Savior, still our refuge' Take it to the Lord in prayer:

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer;

In his arms he'll take and shield thee; Thou wilt find a solace

there. (Scriven 1975:403)

The Goble text omits the final verse of the hymn. This is probably because of the line "Precious Savior, still our refuge"- a refuge only if one numbers with the elect of God (Scriven 1887:300).

A very popular funeral hymn is "Precious Memories," which reflects and supports the role of family, kinship and community. There is a spiritual influence in the song other than a reference to angels and the soul. References to "precious father, loving mother" and "old home scenes of my childhood" provide evidence of the sacred nature mountain people hold to the past.

#### Precious Memories

Precious mem-ries, unseen angels, Sent from somewhere to my soul:

How they linger, ever near me, And the sacred past unfold.

Precious father, loving mother, Fly across the lonely years:

And Old homescenes of my childhood, In fond memory appear.

As I travel on life's pathway, Know not what the years may hold;

As I ponder, hope grows fonder, Precious memories flood my soul.

(Chorus)

Precious mem'ries, how they longer, How they ever flood my soul:

In the stillness of the midnight, Precious, sacred scenes  
unfold. (Wright 59).

While family, kinship, and religion are popular themes in funeral music, the mountaineers' connectedness to the land also provides a strong foundation for songs of the land.

#### Songs of the Land

Just as family, kinship, and religion are threads that provide a common theme for all denominations in the mountain ranges, the affinity for land, the appreciation of a stream, a field or meadow, or a hill completes this tapestry. Funeral songs with allusions to home, meadows, fields and rivers, and other common geographical descriptions of the Appalachian region are common themes that provide a psychological view into the mountaineers' view of the land. Perhaps it is the many hardships associated with the terrain of Appalachia that make such peaceful allusions to Heaven. A favorite funeral hymn for both the pro and anti-missionary sects is "On Jordan's Stormy Banks." This beautiful hymn tells of "sweet fields arrayed in living green, rivers of delight, and generous fruits that never fail . . . rocks, and hills, and brooks, and vales, with milk and honey flows" (Stennet 1975: 490). Such a beautiful place is described where the evils of weather will be no more: "no chilling winds, or poisonous breath . . . no sickness and sorrow, pain and death" (Stennet 1975: 490). All elements the mountain people face will be in the beautiful land of the afterlife. Perhaps the popularity of this particular hymn is due to the fact that Calvinist and pro-missionary sects alike agree on the celestial joy of an afterlife.

"On Jordan's Stormy Banks"

On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,

And cast a wishful eye

To Canaan's fair and happy land

Where my possessions lie.

Oh, the transporting, rapt'rous scene,  
That rises to my sight!  
Sweet fields arrayed in living green,  
And rivers of delight!

There gen'rous fruits that never fail,  
On trees immortal grow;  
There rocks, and hills, and brooks, and vales,  
With milk and honey flow.

All o're those wide-extended plains  
Shines one eternal day;  
There God the Sun forever reigns,  
And scatters night away.

No chilling winds, or pois'nous breath,  
Can reach that healthful shore;  
Sickness and sorrow, pain and death,  
Are felt and feared no more.

When shall I reach that happy place,  
And be forever blest?  
When shall I see my Father's face,  
And in his bosom rest?



Filled with delight, my raptured soul  
 Can here no longer stay;  
 Though Jordan's waves around  
 me roll, feareless, I'll launch away. (Stennett 1887:201)

Unlike the Primitive Baptists who adhere to one hymnal, the pro-missionary Baptists use several different hymn texts. While the Baptist Hymnal is popular in the town and city churches, many rural churches have a variety of hymnals. Therefore, it is difficult to compare many of the hymns. Yet with "On Jordan's Stormy Banks," the final verse is not included in the Baptist Hymnal text (Stennett 1975:490).

A fairly new funeral hymn in this area, "Beyond The Sunset," provides a beautiful depiction of the afterlife. Like "On Jordan's Stormy Banks," "Beyond the Sunset" tells of a "blissful morning . . . a glorious dawning where no clouds will gather, no storms will threaten." Since "Beyond the Sunset" is a fairly modern song, it is not common in the Primitive Baptist funeral service.

The songs reflecting themes of land and home are often used at funerals. One might surmise that this is not a coincidence but an affiliation of the connection between the mountaineer's view of land.

"Beyond The Sunset"

Beyond the sunset, O blissful morning,  
 When with our Savior heav'n is begun.  
 Earth's toiling ended O glorious dawning;  
 Beyond the sunset, when day is done.

Beyond the sunset no clouds will gather,  
 No storms will threaten no fears annoy;  
 O day of gladness, O day unending,

Beyond the sunset, eternal joy!

Beyond the sunset a hand will guide me  
To God, the father, whom I adore;  
His glorious presence, His words of welcome,  
Will be my portions on that fair shore.

Beyond the sunset O glad reunion,  
With our dear loved ones who've gone before;  
In that fair homeland we'll know no parting,  
Beyond the sunset, for evermore. (Brock 285)

It is important to note that funeral music is only one aspect of the mountain response to death. The results of this study seem to indicate that the family and community role and the strong values placed upon religion are reflected in the sentiments of the lyrics of popular funeral hymns.

Appalachia is a land that has long been associated with poverty, ignorance, and archaic manners that seem to put the region several years behind the mainstream culture. The many negative stereotypes ascribed to Appalachia have been misrepresented the area. Yet the images of Appalachia as a land with close family ties, strong religious affiliations, and a strong affinity for land and sense of place seem to be a positive and valid description. In approaching any study of the area, these attributes provide a framework in which one is able to delve into the deeper and underlying traits that generate unique mountain culture.

## CHAPTER SIX SIX FEET OF GROUND MAKE ALL MEN ONE SIZE

The awareness of land and the sense of place are strong forces that surface during the time of a death in the mountain community. The consciousness of land must lie deeper in the soul of mountain people than any other knowledge. Recognizing the importance of land for their survival, mountaineers are aware that they were bred of the earth before they were born to their fathers and mothers. For this reason, they maintain special ties to the land. Many mountaineers were required to live without their parents because of disease, accidents, and inadequate medical knowledge, which often resulted in death of young adults, leaving a host of grieving children. Mountain people could not live without the land or separate themselves from it. The mountaineer rarely turned from the land to concern themselves only with the works of man.

It would be easy to suggest the small family cemeteries that dot the rural scenes of Ashe and Grayson counties are a tangible and direct reflection of the mountaineers love for the land. Such an assumption would fit the romantic associations that would seem so appropriate. However, in reality, the lack of transportation coupled with the problems of inadequate roads made it difficult to transport a corpse over a long distance. Ineffective means of embalming required that a body be buried as quickly as possible. The nearby hilltop, not even considered the best cultivating land, seemed the logical answer. It is interesting to note that even though the family cemeteries developed because of necessity, the continual use of them today makes a clear statement regarding the mountaineer's view of the land. Many natives of Ashe and Grayson Counties left the region in the 1940s and 1950s to seek employment in the

northern states, especially Maryland and New Jersey. In the late 1970s and 1980s, ten percent of the local funeral home business was conducting services for individuals being returned home for burial. Dan Walters, the local funeral director in Grayson County, noted that the children of these people remain in the northern states, but fulfill the requests made by their parents to return their bodies home for burial. Therefore, one might conclude that it is important to return a body home for burial since hundreds of people have gone to the trouble and great expense to do so. Many of these rural cemeteries have been neglected as family farms have been divided and sold. Yet regardless of the conditions of the family cemetery, even if the burial ground is shared with grazing cows, funeral directors of the area often are called upon to prepare graves providing a burial place for those who maintained ties with "home."

Land was the most important asset to the mountain family. Without it, people were greatly diminished. The dream of any young mountaineer was to own his/her own farm. The fulfillment of the dream, however, was not without its price. Hank Garrity writes: "The price . . . was hardship, toil, and the ever-present possibility of death, death by accident, violence, sickness, starvation exhaustion, childbirth, and from hardy old age" (102). How appropriate it then seemed that when death had entered the home of the mountain people, the basic sustaining force, the land, provided a place for caring and protecting the dead. It was the soil that the mountaineer knew well. He turned it in the spring and reaped its harvest in the fall, year after year. He knew one day he would become one with it. One might argue that this factor alone was a major contribution in helping people understand and accept death.

The fact that the funeral industry is a thriving business in the Appalachian communities shows that the mountain people continue to maintain a high degree of

respect for their dead. It has been suggested that even though the funeral industry has replaced and assumed many of the roles that were once performed by the family and community members, many of the traditional reactions to death remain, if only in a modified manner.

Since history has been recorded, the common theme that links all cultures is man's fascination with his/her own mortality. The manner in which humans have paid final respects to the dead and the way in which they consign their dead to the grave, stands as one of the most momentous ceremonies of any culture.

The Appalachian region has often been depicted as a destitute area lacking in technological advances setting it far behind the other rural areas of America. Yet, to study the funerary rituals of Appalachia, one must conclude that the mountaineer showed in spirit, if not in resources, that he/she was fully abreast of his time, especially in the way he cared for his dead (Lambert 50).

An intensive study of Appalachian funeral rituals and customs shows that family ties, community ties, and the mountaineers affinity for the land were elements of a caring and progressive culture. Unfortunately, many of the funeral rituals only remain in remnants, as many traditional funeral practices fade. This leaves one with the question: What is the future of these funeral traditions and practices? It is a question that the entire funeral industry faces. In recent years, there has been a growing concern regarding the unscrupulous inner workings of the funeral industry. The alarms and fears that spread throughout the country most often had their origins in Jessica Mitford's The American Way of Death, a brilliantly written attack on the funeral industry. Most Americans would agree that too much money is wasted on funeral merchandise. Yet almost every American is grateful for the funeral director who performs the tasks that few care to do. However, there was a time, not so long ago that his role was performed in the home by the family and community. It was a

time when death was very much a part of life, not the opposite of it.

The Hospice movement has gained great popularity in the Ashe and Grayson areas. Local funeral directors stated that in the 1970s the only calls they made to homes were usually deaths that resulted from accidents near the home. Now, however, about twenty percent of all calls are for people who have died at home under the care of Hospice. The Hospice movement seems to be making a major impact upon the locality of the dying process. One might surmise that this fairly new development suggests that changes are once again occurring in the mountain responses to death. Even though this new outgrowth suggests that the winds of change are blowing in a new direction, hinting that a reverse in attitude is eminent, there are many more traits supporting the area as death-denying.

Other developments of interest include the recent attention directed toward small family cemeteries. Attempts are underway in both Ashe and Grayson Counties to locate and catalog the disappearing sacred grounds. The attempts have seen varying degrees of success. For example, The Grayson Historical Society has worked on the cataloging of county cemeteries for the past decade while Ashe County cemeteries have been catalogued and on computer for several years. Because of financial reasons, few attempts have been made to restore and maintain family cemeteries unless initiated by family members or other concerned parties.

In a subculture, such as Appalachia, it is easily argued that a study of death rituals offers a vision of a people who have undergone a great transformation in a relatively short amount of time. The manner in which the funeral practices and traditions have adapted themselves to meet the changes induced by the mainstream culture, as well as the manner in which some have resisted the changes, offers a valuable insight into the people of this region. The southern Appalachian funeral served, and in some

degree continues to serve, a dual purpose. Not only does the funeral provide an outlet to mourn a loss, it also provides a time to celebrate the life that has ended. It is during death that the characteristics which epitomize the Appalachian culture are displayed in a compact, yet concise, manner. Therefore, one might easily argue that it is often a funeral service which provides the outsider with a glimpse of the characteristics which epitomize Appalachia. These characteristics include strong allegiance to family and kinship, important community links and ties, and a deep-seated faith nurtured by strong religious convictions.

The recent developments involving the popular interest in the Hospice movement and the cemetery preservation suggest that the traditional values associated with the Appalachian response to death have not entirely disappeared. Rather, these evolutions are examples of how Appalachian culture conforms to accommodate the changes required for the survival of traditional mountain culture.

While the daily progression of modernization produced by the encroaching culture dissolves many of the mountain death responses, many remain intact, a testimony to the mountaineer's reluctance to change.

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