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## **Cultivating the Wilds: Culinary Reform in Appalachia**

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### **Abstract**

Examination of Appalachian foodways reform initiatives from the early 1900s reveals the persistence of an Appalachian myth that casts mountaineers as Anglo-Saxons ignorant in the cultivation and preparation of food, yet analysis of archival materials reveals a diverse population with extensive culinary know-how. At the turn of the twentieth century, missionaries and industrialists approached Appalachia with the mindset that the land and people were a wilderness in need of proper cultivation that once reformed, would yield a pure Anglo-Saxon American ideal. This mindset contributed to the formation and execution of cultural reforms which disregarded diverse expressions of mountain culture. Cultural reform efforts targeted Appalachian foodways in particular, and tracing the social dynamics at play in these initiatives reveals startling misconceptions about the region and its people. Drawing on research of Appalachian studies and foodways scholars, this research delves into underutilized areas in new strands of scholarship. Comparing archival resources reveals a staggering discrepancy between missionaries' perceptions of Appalachians' knowledge and Appalachians' actual knowledge. This essay considers how this damaging discrepancy limits the ways in which both multi-ethnic and Caucasian Appalachian people represent their own foodways.

### **1. Paper**

Cynthia hated the corn. From the time the earliest spear thrust itself above the ground until the last withered stalk was felled by the hoe, she felt for it much the same hate she felt for Ryal the day he planted it. It seemed that the two, Ryal and his corn, were leagued together against her to destroy the one little bit of beauty in her life. Ryal could not understand.

“What’s flowers?” he would ask with contempt. “Ye cain’t eat ‘em an ye cain’t wear ‘em. What ye want ‘em fer?” And Cynthia, unable to explain to his satisfaction, would sit on the step and cry while he laid off the furrows which later, she must follow with a hoe. And this was the hardest part of it all, for she felt as she worked, a little sense of treason to her own soul.<sup>1</sup>

During the course of this 1930 short story by May Justus, protagonist and mountain girl Cynthia destroys the corn crop she begs her husband Ryal not to plant. By the final page, Ryal acquiesces to her desire for the flowers she covets—and the aesthetically pleasing Progressive American family they symbolize—by ripping up the corn patch and planting a flower patch in its spot. In this story flowers and corn represent two dramatically opposed ways of life and identities. According to May Justus, and by association her publisher, *Mountain Life and Work*, a leading missionary publication supported by Berea College which began quarterly publication in 1925<sup>2</sup>, flowers come to represent the modern prosperous family, while corn comes to represent backward amorality. The fictionalization was featured in a publication endorsed by forerunners in aid work, and this story exhibited the ideal reformation of the mountain woman. Cynthia represents what missionaries and aid workers hoped every mountain woman would feel like: discontent with tradition and desperate for Progressive ideals. Anyone can grow as tormented as Cynthia

when extreme expectations are tied to objects, food in particular. As scholars such as Elizabeth Engelhardt have suggested, in studying missionary organizations' cultural reform efforts and the industrialists who funded them, the meaning held in venerated or demonized objects represent valuable microcosms of larger dynamics at play. Though any objects central to reform efforts can potentially trace these dynamics, food's inherent intimacy and frequency make it especially poignant. Food is a key aspect of an environment, and by extension the culture and people who inhabit that environment. Existing as a major aspect of identity, it is also connected deeply to peoples' lives, memories, and experiences.

Utilizing research by Appalachian studies and foodways scholars, as well as original archival research, this article first explores the unique goals that reformers aimed to meet through reform efforts. Missionaries and industrialists largely approached Appalachia with the mindset that the land and people were a wilderness that, after cultivation, would yield a pure Anglo-Saxon American ideal. To a middle and upper class who venerated the pure Anglo-Saxon and the concept of America for which it stood, planting this ideal in reality would save a nation in the midst of a rapidly changing society. The mindset contributed to the formation and execution of cultural reforms which disregarded the culture, ethnically cleansed the region and its food, and replaced Appalachia's unique history with a myth.

Foodways formed a key component of cultural reform. Missionary leaders, in establishing settlement schools, thought food so crucial to their goals that cooking classes became one of the first initiatives established, concentrating on teaching beaten biscuits to take the place of cornbread<sup>3</sup>. In talks with other leading reform workers, Reverend J. T. Mitchell stated that "books were fine, but what was really needed was some women to teach mountain women cooking, sewing, and similar skills"<sup>4</sup>. Comparing articles of missionary publications, letters between reverends and their missionary workers, and oral history interviews reveal a huge discrepancy between missionaries' perceptions of Appalachians' knowledge and Appalachians' actual knowledge. Three initiatives stand out as strong examples of this discrepancy and the dynamics that led to it: access to and cultivation of fruit and vegetables, hygiene and sanitation in the kitchen of a well-managed home, and the campaign to replace cornbread with wheat bread and biscuits. After a thorough explanation of how the dynamics developed and their long-lasting consequences, the third part of this article explores where and how these dynamics exist today in media representations of Appalachian foodways.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, when the first missionaries and industrialists turned their attention to Appalachia, America was a society in the midst of great change. Cities across the country swelled with a flood of immigrants, suffragists verged on winning the vote, industrialists controlled an economy that seemed indomitable, African Americans in the South in particular embroiled in racial strife precluding a Great Migration, and railroad tycoons funded new rail lines puncturing vast regions of America to make quick transportation possible. As this occurred, America's dominant culture was largely controlled by middle-upper class Caucasians deeply invested in maintaining their status quo. The dominant culture felt rightly threatened by the changes surrounding them. Social structures that were already cracking under pressure of a barely-completed Reconstruction and with newfound industrialism these structures seemed doomed to splinter and fall. As these and many more changes shifted American society toward unpredictable ends, missionary organizations and industry aimed to protect the interests of an increasingly precarious dominant culture.

Missionary associations shifted focus of aid efforts from southern African Americans to "poor whites" of Appalachia in order to secure competitive funding that would support efforts to inoculate parts of American society with values of the dominant culture. Literary critic Chris Green asserts that in previous decades, the American Missionary Association focused their resources on efforts to segregate southern black churches. When the initiative failed, they turned to the mountains<sup>5</sup>. Likewise, David Whisnant contends that the pure Anglo-Saxon stock of Appalachia reminded dominant culture of America's roots and seemed a natural place to cultivate as immense social turbulence threatened the American ideal they saw buried in Appalachia<sup>6</sup>.

In order to support their efforts, both missionaries and industrialists were invested in portraying Appalachia as a dangerous wilderness needing reform. As much as the threat of social change, this deep rooted mentality drove missionaries and industrialists to the rugged Appalachian region and what they viewed as its equally rugged people. According to Christian mythology that informed the dominant culture's perception, the mountains of Appalachia were evidence of wilderness that needed to be tamed. The Christian mythology of wilderness that scholar Jill Fraley explores motivated missionaries' reformation of the region. An untamed forest, like those Appalachians inhabited, was a place "without God, a place to be tempted by devils, and a direct contrast to civilization... People might be Christian when they entered, but if they did not tame the wilderness, they would not be so for long"<sup>7</sup>. While missionaries saw the region as a heathen wilderness in need of saving, industrialists saw a resource-rich land, ripe for extractive industry because of its supposed lack of cultivation. It was easy for both to position themselves as saviors by pointing out the supposed cultural and culinary deficiencies of mountain people, though each pointed out

Appalachian deficiencies for different reasons. When the two groups looked at Appalachia, they saw a lot of things: untapped resources held by uncivilized people living in an era that reminded them of the fast-fading pre-Civil War past, a wilderness and a homogenous people in need of taming, an underdeveloped culture and its barbarous tri-ethnic foodways, and a lot of profit to come from acts of cultural reform and land reclamation they deemed necessary for American preservation<sup>8</sup>.

Reduction of economic agency by industrialists is analogous to the removal of foodways during cultural reforms. With the creation of the broad form deed, many Appalachians lost control of perhaps their most precious resource. This legal document allowed land owners to sell the “mineral rights” of their land for next to nothing with the assurance that their “surface rights” would remain with the seller. When the mining companies’ mineral rights gained favor over land rights in the legal system, companies forced the sellers off their land and land owners were left homeless. The federal government also bought land at below market prices to create national forests that tourists still frequent. In large part, Appalachians’ economic agency was snatched away and parceled off largely by outside forces who felt their resources had not been cultivated<sup>9</sup>. The approach that aid workers took to reforming foodways was similar, though the intention was different.

While industry utilized what they considered underdeveloped land, aid organizations utilized what they considered underdeveloped people. The inhabitants that travelers found in the mountains were succinctly and inaccurately dubbed “mountain whites,” a phrase created by the American Missionary Association to raise funds that came to define the region’s people<sup>10</sup>. Though “mountain whites” existed in Appalachia, this designation ignores cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic complexity in a vast region. The phrase itself explains the image that missionary and aid organizations hoped to portray – the ideal Anglo-Saxon American held back only by a lack of cultivation the missionaries thought they could cure. Competitive funds for their organization were gained from creating a false image that soon captured the nation’s imagination. Missionary publications, local color fiction, and articles running in national publications ranging from *Atlantic Monthly* to the *New York Times* ran stories that emphasized the intellectual and cultural inferiority of Appalachians. Derogatory portrayals of Appalachians also explicitly targeted and belittled foodways<sup>11</sup>. By the early 1900s, these portrayals used to gain funds were not the exception – they were the norm.

Both industrialists and missionaries utilized stereotypes already in the public consciousness to justify their actions to themselves and the nation. One-dimensional images of an unintelligent, backwards, ethnically homogenous people and their equally ridiculous food played out in academics, journalism, and entertainment media. Stereotypes consisted of a number of extreme positives, like the Jeffersonian ideal of pure-blooded whites earning their living by subsistence farming, and extreme negatives, like constant inebriation, disregard for the law, inbreeding, bizarre foods, and senseless violence<sup>12</sup>. Positive and negative stereotypes held specific implied meanings. First, the “ideological appeal to the value of mythicized old-stock mountaineer Americans who could be diked against the unkempt (and possibly radical) European riffraff flotsaming into cities”<sup>13</sup> and second, a wild people whose uncultivated society caused this ideal’s fall but whose salvation could be achieved by being tamed<sup>14</sup>. Fraley notes the insight of historical and environmental scholar Nash: “Of the wilderness areas, mountains were particularly suspect, having been ‘regarded in the early seventeenth century as warts, pimples, blisters, and other ugly deformities on the earth’s surface’”<sup>15</sup>. In aid workers’ minds, through efforts of good Christians and industry funding, the nation could be perfected by correcting Appalachia’s perceived deformities and championing its perceived virtues. In reality, the white ideal created by these portrayals erased diverse Appalachian voices, creating a blank canvas on which the nation could paint a myth. Foodways deemed in need of reform were treated similarly, resulting in demonizing diverse Appalachian foodways to justify re-teaching a whole region’s culinary tradition.

The reality in opposition to the imposed myth reveals a multi-ethnic tradition that forms the culture – and with that diversity came an equally diverse tradition ethnic mixing of culinary practices. Scholarly exploration of Appalachia’s actual history reveals a rich story that flies in the face of the Appalachian myth of the isolated, backward blue-collar worker of European descent. In reality, ethnic and cultural mixing dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century led to the kind of unique society of sharing and co-mingling that the dominant culture thought might be the downfall of America<sup>16</sup>. Spanish conquistadors penetrating the mountains in 1540 and 1567 did not find gold, but they did find a ripe fur trade among enthusiastic tribes<sup>17</sup>. Long before drover markets created a massive interstate trading route, Native American tribes traded furs internationally, and their wares were in high demand abroad. Slaves of traders and conquistadors, as well as the traders themselves, often found new homes in the New World. Some scholars theorize that the Melungeons, an ethnic group of mysterious origin specific to Appalachia, originated when African Americans, Spanish, and Portuguese mingled with Native American tribes. As the European settlers arrived hundreds of years later and more African Americans after them, these cultures co-existed by sharing foodways, construction techniques, hunting skills, and cultural traditions, among which include: cornbread and cornmeal, sweet potatoes, okra, livestock herding, and the banjo<sup>18</sup>.

The primary groups of the region during formative years of America were reduced to one by the missionaries' myth. In public imagination Appalachians were of Western European descent, whereas in reality primary groups included various Native American tribes, Melungeons, European settlers, and African Americans, and later Italian and Eastern European immigrants<sup>19</sup>. By reducing representation drastically, the image of Appalachia became homogenous, tamed of the multi-ethnic origins which some reformers believed would result in "national cultural suicide"<sup>20</sup>. Though now somewhat tamed for the people who needed to image it as a cradle of Anglo-Saxon purity, the mountaineer was a far cry from civilized. Much like the mantra of "Kill the Indian, Save the Man" that Richard Henry Pratt projected when founding the infamous Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania in 1879<sup>21</sup>, the goal of missionaries in Appalachia was to Kill the Barbarian, Cultivate the Man. The land's image became conflated with the people's image in national discourse, and "[b]y confusing ideas about the wilderness with ideas about the people of the region, the missionaries increasingly divided the Appalachian people from the rest of the nation"<sup>22</sup>. Food grown, prepared, and consumed in such a wild place would likely also need taming. The division resulting from missionary and aid workers' misconceptions created the image of a region the nation agreed was in need of reform, conveniently provided by the same organizations that established this image and funded by the industrialists who cultivated the land<sup>23</sup>.

A multi-ethnic Appalachian culture, misrepresented to the rest of America in popular media outlets as predominantly white, was tamed further with reform efforts, which included settlement schools, aid programs, and various domestic courses. Food became demonized, which justified replacement with accepted, and distinctly white, alternatives. Though missionaries initiated these efforts, other aid organizations quickly followed suit. Since, in David Whisnant's words, culture is "the handiest standard to which everything may be referred, by which everything may be measured"<sup>24</sup>, culture became the target of reforms. The majority of cultural reforms focused on the domestic sphere and initiatives were led primarily by women. Food reforms were emblematic of these domesticity-centric efforts.

Connected with all the major players of this era, their programs aimed to preserve favorable elements of Appalachian culture and correct undesirable elements while providing a practical education. The Hindman Settlement School started by Katharine Pettit and May Stone became the most exemplary of these missions. Among the first classes taught were cooking and sewing classes, and many classes followed in this domestic and technical vein<sup>25</sup>. In the words of the ladies themselves in a report on their efforts, the ultimate goal was to "show by example the advantages of cleanness, neatness and order, and to inspire them to use pure language and to lead pure, Christian lives will be our effort, hoping thereby to elevate and uplift them"<sup>26</sup>. Though addressing real issues including food scarcity and illness, these women and their contemporaries tried to make their ideal exist in reality but never sought the origin of the ailments they set out to cure.

## 1.1 Discrepancies in Foodways Representations

Culture was the key to all missionary efforts, and inseparably intertwined with culture was food. Various foodways reforms served the American Missionary Association's larger goal of cultural rehabilitation and ethnic erasure. Operating under the strong "belief that they...had both the duty and the ability to rectify certain moral institutional evils"<sup>27</sup>, even small changes became morally charged. Because of the poignant value attributed to smaller changes, especially domestic ones, dynamics that exist in microcosm in foodways reveal larger social structures and ideals under attack. Missionary workers found it their duty to present "*the* path for southern mountain women to follow to reach the intellectual and moral positions occupied by Pettit, Stone, and their teachers"<sup>28</sup>. This uplift of the Appalachian domestic sphere required an invasion and reform of the home, especially of the kitchen. Creating, eating, and sharing food is an act of frequency and intimacy. By overturning a person's kitchen, they overturned many aspects of Appalachian culture. Cornbread as well as fruit and vegetables composed the bulk of popular food-based reforms; therefore the bulk of this section's focus will be on the overwhelming material surrounding these two reforms. Both agendas aimed to culturally rehabilitate mountaineers, and each act of reform reinforced a different facet of this ideal.

The intention of creating a pure Anglo-Saxon American who upheld Progressive values through changes in cultural norms maps out plainly and repeatedly in publications and correspondences. These values became tangible in sanitation, housekeeping, food choices and preparation, nutrition, education, child-rearing, and agricultural chores. All of these things culminate in the domestic sphere. Therefore, domestic practices were primary subjects of reform. Dr. Robert F. Thomas exhibits this mindset in his 1935 *Mountain Life and Work* article: "After a residence of eight years in the Great Smoky Mountains, I am sure that there are nutritional problems which are especially acute in this region. The cause lies in such factors as social customs, ignorance of proper diet, and economic conditions"<sup>29</sup>. Consensus among aid workers and activists like Dr. Thomas was that the culture was largely to

blame, and therefore the culture must be corrected in order to yield their ideal. By teaching elements of what reform workers considered a more acceptable culture, they focused on certain “redeemable” qualities of mountain people. In other words, in the post-Reconstruction, anti-immigrant, racist society that these workers inhabited, traits noted as positive—like the mountaineers’ supposed pioneer-like ways—were often viewed as evidence that further reform efforts would be successful. Food made an especially easy target for reforms and cooking programs were usually quickly established<sup>30</sup>. In spite of growing numbers of immigrants, changing family dynamics, increasing industrialization, and continual racial strife, many middle to upper class white Americans thought the Anglo-Saxon American ideal on which salvation hinged had a chance of existing in Appalachia.

But before the flaws could be corrected, they had to be identified. A deficit of fruit and vegetables was linked repeatedly in popular missionary publications to mental illness, preventable fatal illness, pellagra and other malnutrition diseases, and tooth decay. Though addressing actual problems of illness and food scarcity, they allowed specific regions’ afflictions to characterize all of Appalachia, or all of Appalachian coal mining towns. The economic origin of these problems was not explored, and culture was blamed instead. Looking at oral history reports of Appalachians alive during this time period reveals cultural and regional complexities as well as food knowledge and access that is often at odds with missionary publications’ accounts of the region. Through missionaries’ and aid workers’ accounts, a handful of aid projects and case studies come to characterize an enormous region. What aid workers reported was true for some groups in Appalachia, but certainly not the majority. Using reductive interpretations to root their values in physical symptoms meant that there were physical solutions. If these symptoms could be corrected simply by introducing a balanced diet through fruits and vegetables, a giant leap toward missionaries’ goals could be made.

Published mission reports and articles in *Mountain Life and Work* explain nutritional deficiencies of Appalachians as well as various physical and spiritual illnesses that the deficiency causes. The publication depicted Appalachian diets as consisting “too largely of carbohydrates and fats, and is not rich enough in proteins and accessory food factors”<sup>31</sup>, but with a little teaching “the advantage of planting more and better gardens and the advantage of having cows and chickens and consuming the products at home, the dietary problem will be largely solved”<sup>32</sup>. Traditionally, Appalachians canned and dried their fruit to preserve them for long winter months, but this method lacked a certain sophistication most aid workers could not abide. This sophistication comprised of tools that expressed markers of class, and access to cultivated fresh fruits and vegetables year-round. Properly managed, properly packaged food yielded, to missionaries, proper nutrition. Missionary Robina Kneebone’s July 1930 extensive list of Appalachian deficiencies includes: “(9) Green vegetables and fruits should be eaten by all. (10) Good teeth can be built by the right kind of food. We build two sets and no more”<sup>33</sup>. Though many did have access to fresh produce for part of the year, the bounty was not cultivated to missionary standards. Cultivated crops provided a solution to a larger problem of taming wilderness while maintaining the Anglo-American ideal. Some aid workers like Wilmer E. Kenworthy believed “[o]ut of the subsistence gardening projects will grow, we believe, one of the most important steps toward a real solution of the trouble – ‘Back-to-the-land’ movements”<sup>34</sup>, which harkened back to the original Jeffersonian ideal of the agrarian democracy. The bounty yielded from crops had to be cultivated and processed according to hygienic and moral standards in order to be considered adequate by missionary and aid workers. Just as in the previous solution to illness, better cultivation was the key to solving bad teeth, pellagra, preventable fatal illness, and many other ailments. Goals of well-cultivated gardens and hygiene were understandable and even admirable, though emblematic of certain ideals. Missionaries’ paths to these goals, which included the dismantling and artificial restructuring of an entire region’s culture, were problematic, not the goals themselves.

In many articles of this period, there is a distinct correlation between inadequate diet and inadequate family structure. It occurs in May Justus’ “A Patch of Corn” which starts this article, and is emblematic of a common ethical association between nutrition and family structure. Perceived inadequate family structure was often mentioned in the same articles that proclaimed nutritional deficiency due to lack of fruits and vegetables. Inability to cultivate a wilderness into Eden led to depravity and illness, which at the core of this mindset was a collapsing family structure. Aid workers’ ethical appeals to readers consisted mainly of these depictions of crumbling families. Aid worker Ruth Louise Parker painstakingly details a proper home undone due to malnutrition in “With the Friends in the Coal Fields.” “Their wretched hovels have had no repairs for months; their families are in tatters,”<sup>35</sup> a condition immediately corrected on the next page when hot lunches were provided for children by the missionaries. One such family administered to by aid workers “remarked the improvement of their children. One mother said, ‘Before Annie had the lunches at school, seemed like she was ailing all the time, but now she is right peart’”<sup>36</sup>. Though not all ailments could be corrected by providing simple nutritional solutions in these articles’ depictions, the next generation could be protected. Children undergo a transformation in economic potential with the simple addition of one hot meal a day. They become more attentive in school and stronger workers, and will therefore grow

up to become productive members of society. In this article, nutrition, economic potential, and the family unit are intertwined. The aid organization mends the broken family by stepping in the paternal role of the bread-winner. Once a family is held together by aid or by appropriate behavior, the economic potential of all involved (especially children) becomes assured. Parents will produce more at their jobs. Children will grow up to be strong workers, or leave to receive educations and become productive members of society. With what is considered proper nutrition, a whole region's economic potential skyrockets. Articles like Ms. Parker's sell this perspective without differentiating between diverse Appalachian regions and economies, associating a poor mining town with all of Appalachia in their readership's imagination. More perplexingly, no discussion existed about the absentee land ownership of coal companies that created the environments that the missionary publications feature.

Different, though equally loaded with meaning, is missionaries' crusade against cornbread. With the introduction of biscuits and soda bread, a household's choice between cornbread and other breads transformed into statement about class and ethnicity. Corn was a staple crop for many Native American tribes in the region and cornbread had roots in African American foodways<sup>37</sup>. Though a rational food solution to limited resources and time, to missionaries cornbread and cornmeal was likely viewed as evidence of ethnic mixing in what they thought was a pure Anglo-Saxon Appalachia. Perhaps in part to protect both what they believed Appalachia was and what they believed Appalachia should become, a movement "began in Appalachian eastern Kentucky, one that centered on social salvation through bread. A story of morals, hygiene, class, race, and gender-role alliances hides in the struggle over the choice between cornbread and biscuits"<sup>38</sup>. Each bread signed different sets of social values and ethnic markers that necessitated their preservation or correction.

Cornbread was economical: it was a cheap and easy staple to fix as the rest of the meal was cooking, and its ingredients were easily acquired and locally produced. It required only a skillet and an open flame to prepare, and was thus accessible to any income level. Corn could be grown easily in a mountain garden, sown at little to no cost, and the few other ingredients were easily acquired<sup>39</sup>. For a busy household on a budget, cornbread was the quick, efficient solution to grumbling stomachs.

Biscuits, on the other hand, required ample time and wealth. Though many breads were taught, including soda bread and light bread, beaten biscuits were intimately associated with a larger middle/upper class Southern identity. Beaten biscuits were the bread of the leisurely housewife with time to spare who could afford all it took to make them: wheat flour, sugar, salt, lard, and cold water. In addition to these, a person would need a large amount of expensive equipment, listed by chef Bill Neal in *Southern Cooking*: "mixing bowl; blending fork; wooden spoon; mallet, cleaver, or rolling pin; biscuit cutter; and baking sheet" in addition to a flat board or table sturdy enough for the beating process (marble was preferable) and an oven<sup>40</sup>. Proper beaten biscuits, the height of middle/upper-class womanhood, took hours to make. A dizzying array of equipment, ample leisure time, and hard-to-get ingredients was presented to the Appalachian people, but something else was presented along with them: an expectation of capital that many Appalachians lacked<sup>41</sup>.

If properly cultivated nutritional sources reinforced an ideal family dynamic, then preparing and consuming the proper bread also reinforced the ideal of the Anglo-American household. The process of cultivating food mirrored the process of cultivating people. This ideal was revered by those who sought to change a culture saturated with evidences of ethnic mixing. Like uncultivated crops or an ethnically diverse heritage, a bread grown roughly, ground nearby, and cooked quickly on open fires verged on being too wild and straying too far from the godly American household – it was almost savage. Engelhardt cites culinary historian Laura Shapiro's observations about turn-of-the-century perceptions of eating made in her book *Perfection Salad*: "[l]essons in home economics became a process of 'containing and controlling food, draining it of taste and texture'"<sup>42</sup>. Food was civilized and closely controlled just as Appalachians were being civilized and closely controlled. In the same way that Appalachians were often under surveillance by Progressive Era workers, so too was the food that composed such an intimate part of their lives.

The Appalachian home was under just as much scrutiny as Appalachian food. Workers often assumed that the people to whom they were ministering were ignorant of an ethical, sanitized, well-managed home environment. As with malnutrition from lack of fruit and vegetables, ignorance could begin to be rectified with a simple solution – cooking classes and, at times, donations of equipment some Appalachians lacked funds to purchase. Opportunity for betterment existed in classes, as an article published in the *Spirit of Missions* explains: "In the school they find an intellectual opportunity, and also a daily training in cleanliness, order and system which should enable them to rise above the crude conditions and dull drudgery in which their parents have lived"<sup>43</sup>. This concept of saving Appalachians by changing their culture permeated all teaching efforts. The mission house was a beacon, as missionary Miss Field explains to her mission's director, Reverend Norton J. Atkins in a letter, "From our attractive little Mission house the example of good housekeeping, wholesome cooking, and real family life have a vast influence. Their attempts at fixing up their own homes are pitiful. . . . these poor people in their ignorance are living"

<sup>44</sup>. Similar jibes and judgments specific to food lace Olive Dame Campbell's published travel diaries. When she enters a home, her first instinct is to evaluate it based on food and cleanliness. As Engelhardt points out, the social value of a household was determined by which foods adorned the table. In all of these discussions, native Appalachians of all ethnicities remained relatively voiceless, save where their accent could reach beyond the page and into popular imagination.

Yet the voices of Appalachians rang clear when they were interviewed in the mid-1970s; the collection is now housed in Appalachian State University's rare manuscripts collections. These interviews reveal a perplexingly stark contrast between popularized perceptions of Appalachians' knowledge and culture in widely distributed publications, and Appalachians' actual knowledge and culture, particularly where foodways are concerned. Though some discrepancies between families and regions are bound to occur, these largely unexplored oral history records reveal a trend regardless of social and regional variants. At the time interviews were conducted, subjects were in their 80's, placing the interviewee in the same time period as the articles explored above. It is important to note that while missionary publications were nationally distributed, the vast majority of oral history records remain unpublished and stored in various university archives.

Although missionaries worked hard to establish that Appalachians had a clear lack of sanitary and nutritional knowledge, Appalachians exhibited the exact opposite in oral history interviews. Subjects describe all tasks inquired about with technical accuracy and intricacy, and the large range of these subjects across both male and female subjects further displays the universality of this knowledge. In particular, oral history transcriptions reveal that many Appalachians were well versed in issues of sanitation, bread, canning, fruit, and nutrition.

Discussion of sanitation techniques, food storage, and soap-making by Appalachian interviewees help disprove the concept favored by others that ignorance of sanitation practices was at the root of Appalachian ills. Foremost among these are varied discussion of sanitation techniques, which primarily occur in an interview of Mrs. Myrtle Shores. After giving detailed instructions on making lye soap, she then discerns between soap types for different kinds of cleaning. When her interviewer asked if she bathed in lye soap, Mrs. Shores responds, "Well, ye know we tried to have somethin like soap outa the store fer something like that, ye know, but our clothes was what we used it for... it washed good"<sup>45</sup>. Not only was sanitation a large component of life, but sanitation practices with high standards were also upheld, independent of missionary influence. Specific sanitation practices existed at the same time that missionaries were lamenting a lack of sanitation in mountain homes.

The interviews also exhibit knowledge of food storage techniques, especially canning. Meat products as well as fruits and vegetables were stored using the interviewee's mother's canning techniques, primarily by sealing goods canned in stone jars with beeswax<sup>46</sup>. If their mothers practiced these same sanitation and storage techniques, that places these practices well before introduction of missionaries to the region. Sanitation practices declared not to exist by aid workers and missionaries in publications are displayed uniformly in these oral histories as traditions.

Though not graced with the luxury of a cook stove, interviewees' mothers passed on many cooking techniques, which helps dismantle the notion that there was an untamable wilderness inherent in fire cooking. According to Mrs. Myrtle Shores, fireplace cooking was versatile and effective, and she was able to bake, fry, stew, and roast in one fireplace, all while engaging with a long family tradition<sup>47</sup>. Not everyone had the luxury of family tradition to fall back on, and women like Mrs. Stella Taylor taught themselves how to cook in these circumstances. Though region and knowledge source varied, methods of sanitation, storage, and cooking remained similar for both women. The universality of this knowledge signals a well of cultural tradition that, though deviant from missionaries and mainstream America, did not display the lack of sanitation and nutrition that publications claimed.

One of the more appalling disparities between perception and reality is nutritional knowledge and access. Without fail, each interviewee addressing food in any way listed the bounty of fruits, vegetables, and legumes available to them at all times. By drying or canning the excess during harvest, these foods were often available year-round, giving communities the very nutrition that publications claimed they lacked<sup>48</sup>. In an equally shocking contrast, Miss Cozie Taylor recollects that in her first few decades of life "the people then had more to eat than they have today... They didn't have no fancy food...but they had good nourishin' food and they didn't go hungry"<sup>49</sup>. Though this quote does not take into account regional diversity, nor do the publications of missionary and aid organizations.

By considering the discrepancy between Appalachians' knowledge and missionaries' perceptions of their knowledge, it seems clear that neither ignorance nor illness were the driving factors of cultural reforms. Missionary and aid workers' reforms targeted Appalachian culture, purported a false image to support those aims, and established an unreachable ideal of the pure Anglo-Saxon American among the Appalachian people. This was a tragic goal, because its false foundation meant it was wholly unachievable by either party. Expectation was projected onto reality, and reality suffered. On paper the reforms were beneficial, but the motivation behind the reforms had severe, lasting negative consequences for all Appalachians.



Media that forms the region's representations in American social discourse associate Appalachia intimately with an Anglo-American ideal. Good-intentioned missionaries and aid workers who published in national magazines such as *Mountain Life and Work* muted experiences and voices of Appalachian residents through misrepresentations of the region and its foodways. Travel writers, missionaries, and aid workers' good intentions resulted in a harmful, imposed Appalachian image that inflicted persisting damage.

In careful research and analysis, it becomes clear that perpetuation of this myth to any ends, no matter how good-natured, must become secondary to expressing diverse voices of Appalachians. The meaning inherent in Appalachian foodways is amplified by a dynamic history that is often sidelined in preference of a myth. The examples chosen for analysis here, though few of many investigated, reveal immense discrepancies in perception and understanding and the persistence of the Appalachian myth that causes these discrepancies. By tracing representations of mountain people and the food they consumed, and by listening to what mountain people tell us about their culinary traditions, perhaps then the voices of Appalachians and their foodways might reflect who they are, as opposed to who others wish them to be.

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