Morgantown Fairmont Union Graftor Clarksburg St m "We Were an Oddity": A Look at the Back-tothe-Land Movement in Appalachia Jinny A. Turman-Deal ARLESTON Hunters Nicholas intop niono

## **ABSTRACT**

In Appalachia the back-to-the-landers found natural beauty, peace, sanctuary from the fast-paced urban life, inspiration, and friendship. But many also realized that full self-sufficiency was an unrealistic goal, especially without the assistance of neighbors who had the knowledge and experience to guide them in their agrarian endeavors. While the neonatives may have been a bit shocking at first, the ones who settled permanently in Appalachia seem to have overcome any negative perceptions that initially hindered their ability to develop relationships with long-term residents.

## **ARTICLE**

In 1975, attendance at the annual Mountain State Folk Festival in Glenville, West Virginia, swelled above five thousand. Young folk enthusiasts joined the ranks of old-time musicians and local residents to celebrate Appalachian traditions. Most festival promoters would have been beside themselves with joy knowing that their event attracted such a sizeable crowd. But something about the new people who attended the Mountain State Festival bothered long-time attendees. Festival promoter Mack Samples was not only concerned about the growing size of the event, which he feared would outgrow the small town, but he was also worried about the effects that the newcomers would have on mountain culture. Not only were they showcasing new styles of music, but also, much to the shock of old-time musicians, female festival attendees were playing the fiddle! Even more problematic to Samples, however, was that these people were not merely attending the festival. They were coming to Appalachia to live.1

"Appalachia is 'in' and has been for five years or more," wrote David A. Peyton in 1975. "The arts, crafts, the Appalachian life style are a lure to those from outside the region." During the 1960s and 1970s, countless thousands of Americans moved into the hills and hollers of Appalachia to live out their dreams of a simpler existence. Many aimed for self-sufficiency, believing that simple living and oldtime practices had the potential to heal a broken America. As Peyton explains, the settlers who came to Appalachia felt that certain aspects of the region's culture and environment would be conducive to realizing their Arcadian dreams: "Thousands of them are lured to Appalachia annually. Many buy inexpensive hillside farms and vow to build lives based on the Appalachian values and traditions they have found at folk festivals."<sup>2</sup> Of course, festivals were by no means the only regional features attracting would-be back-to-the-landers. A number of pathways led them into the southern highlands. Once they arrived, their desire to achieve self-sufficiency was met with more than a few raised eyebrows from mountain residents. What many residents knew that the newcomers did not was that mountain

living was rife with challenges. In time, many of these idealists discovered that the realities of rural living, particularly in terms of financial opportunities and physical hardship, were more difficult than they had anticipated.

This essay explores the back-to-the-land movement in southern and central Appalachia. It is not meant to answer questions about whether back-to-the-landers' experiences were unique *because* they came to a region with perceived unique cultural traits and traditions; rather, it investigates some of the regional attributes, both romanticized and real, that were likely to have attracted new settlers in the first place. This analysis also considers how both natives and newcomers perceived each other and how those perceptions influenced their relationships as neighbors. Finally, it profiles life on the land in Appalachia and attempts to determine whether back-to-the-landers' experiences lived up to their ideals. But, before exploring the movement in Appalachia, it is necessary to understand who the back-to-the-landers were and what circumstances gave rise to the movement in the 1960s.

The folk festival attendees who moved to the region represent a subset of the counterculture that abandoned metropolitan lifestyles for more simple, agrarian ones during the 1960s and 1970s. These back-to-the-landers-also called "neonatives," "homesteaders," or "alter-natives,"—were, as anthropologist Patricia Beaver notes, typically from middle-class households, well-educated, and environmentally conscious.3 Scholars Merlin Brinkerhoff and Jeffery Jacobs describe them as "former urban residents . . . returning to the non-metropolitan countryside to take up residence and practice simple, semi-subsistence agriculture on small parcels of land." Corley Malone, a fictional character in Mack Samples's murder mystery *Hippies and Holiness*, has a somewhat different definition: "We call them hippies. . . . They are mostly young folks from the colleges up in the northeast who are running from this war over in Asia. Some of them have moved into these old abandoned shacks up the hollers, places the natives gave up on years ago. They are into drugs and everything else under the sun."5

Corley Malone's generalization of back-to-the-landers as "hippies"

is representative of how some Appalachian residents viewed their new neighbors, at least during the movement's early years. But, as Samples acknowledges, the homesteaders were not all "hippies," drug users, or draft dodgers.6 Many indeed harbored some of the hip ideals that Timothy Miller identifies in The Hippies and American Values: affinity for nature, preference for rural life over urban, antimaterialism, and tribalism, meaning desire for membership in a larger community of like-minded people. The homesteaders who identified more with the New Left than the hippie movement would have generally agreed with those ideals. But while many back-to-thelanders shared similar backgrounds and ideologies, it is important to note that they were of all stripes: activists, educators, faith practitioners, decentralists, teetotalers, drug users, communitarians, doctors, politicians, elderly, youth, and even, occasionally, native Appalachians, Indeed, when back-to-the-landers are lumped under the generic term "hippies," it becomes difficult to imagine where folks such as former Barry Goldwater speechwriter Karl Hess fit into the picture.

Some back-to-the-landers became rather critical of the hippies and the New Left prior to moving to Appalachia. Jayn Avery, a Floyd County, Virginia, alter-native who had participated in the student movement and lived in Berkeley at the height of what she calls "absolute hippiedom," shed her hip connection after attending the ill-fated Altamont Music Festival in 1969. She recalls: "That, to me, was the opposite of Woodstock. It was the closing of the gate. . . . I walked out of that, just before, thanks to David Crosby I think it was, or one of those guys who said, 'If you have it together at all, leave now' in the middle of the concert. And Grace Slick and all those guys were doing their thing and saying, 'This is not right. Something's not happening." She left the festival just prior to Meredith Hunter's stabbing and considers that moment of departure as her "conscious shift to the back-to-the-land movement."

Others felt that the civil rights, student, and peace movements neglected a vital issue: the environment. Paul Gallimore, director of the Long Branch Environmental Education Center in Leicester, North Carolina, indicates that, while he had been involved with the peace movement, he realized by the late 1960s that the environment transcended all of those issues. By the first Earth Day in 1970, Gallimore believed the environment to be

the ultimate cross-cutting issue . . . because it cuts through civil rights issues, and it cuts through peace and war issues. Civil rights is civil rights, but then war and peace issues are human rights, and then environmental issues and rights are the rights of future generations. If we don't act responsibly now then future generations are going to suffer. And we're going to suffer with civil rights abuses and war issues and stuff. But then with pollution and habitat destruction and everything, future generations are going to suffer as well as other species. Other life forms are going to suffer. And I just thought, no, no. We've gotta be able to do better than this. So that's what really launched me in this direction.9

Yet other back-to-the-landers were even more critical of the counterculture. In 1972 Dr. Ralph Borsodi, advocate for simple living since the 1920s and founder of the School of Living, wrote an article that highlighted the problems plaguing countercultural subgroups. 10 He argued that, while the "hippies, yippies, and the crazies" and the "violent revolutionists like the SDS, the Weathermen, and the Black Panthers" were against modern materialism and "hypocritical morality," their internal squabbling prevented them from presenting a united front against the established regime. Borsodi believed that only the "fundamentally sane and sound and working counterculturists," or back-to-the-landers, had the potential to create widespread change by modeling for people alternate ways of living. This meant formulating "economic and political" alternatives such as land reform that could be embraced by the rest of society.11 Neonative-turned-scholar Paul Salstrom, who resided for a time at the School of Living's Heathcote Mill in Maryland prior to moving to West Virginia, also rejected the hippies for their "juvenile, immature drug culture."12 In 1975, he even referred to his cohorts as

"ex-hippies" and suggested that they simply wanted to assimilate to the mountain culture. 13



Paul Gallimore moved to Buncome County, North Carolina, in 1974. He is the founder and executive director of the Long Branch Environmental Education Center in Leicester. Credit: Author.

As Jayn Avery suggests, there seems to have been a "closing of the gate" on the 1960s hip and radical youth cultures that resulted in a flight to the countryside. Alternative magazines urged people to "drop out" of society, sometimes with alarmist or survivalist tones. "The famous 'American way of life' . . . is going to change drastically," cautioned Robert Rodale, editor of *Organic Gardening and Farming*. With natural resources depleting on "spaceship earth," he believed it better to prepare for a crisis than to react to one. <sup>14</sup> The editor of *Whole Earth Catalog* also sounded the alarm: "The time to get out of the city onto a plot of ground may be NOW. Even poor ground may be better than no ground at all." <sup>15</sup> People

apparently listened. For the next decade, America witnessed an unprecedented reverse in the rural-to-urban migration trend that defined the twentieth century. Suddenly people were rushing back to the countryside either as weekend residents, members of rural communes, or as part of a homesteading phenomenon that provided a benevolent, agrarian dimension to the "Me Decade."

Brinkerhoff and Jacob observe that the 1970s was the first decade since the inception of the U.S. census that the rural growth rate exceeded that of urban areas. One of their sources estimates that over one million people had moved to the country as part of the back-to-the-land movement.<sup>16</sup> Some estimates went even further. Elinor Agnew, author of a reflective study of back-tothe-landers, claims that "several million or more" individuals returned to nature.<sup>17</sup> Regardless of the numbers, the phenomenon was large enough to create ripple effects felt nationwide. Oddly enough, a canning-lid shortage became a hot issue in the summer of 1975 as the Ball Corporation, which claimed to be operating at full capacity, was unable to meet supply demands. The company blamed consumers for hoarding the lids while consumers accused the company of withholding lids to inflate the price. The problem became so great that it garnered the attention of West Virginia Senator Robert C. Byrd and resulted in an investigation by the Federal Trade Commission.<sup>18</sup>

What is most remarkable about this trend, as Brinkerhoff and Jacobs note, is that there were largely "noneconomic factors" prompting the back-to-the-landers to move. Throughout American history, mass migrations have been spurred by economic trends: job opportunities pulled people toward an area whereas lack of opportunities pushed them away. The Great Migration of southerners to the North and Midwest, which, coincidentally, helped to open up Appalachia's land to later homesteaders, serves as a prime example. But, as indicated above, the homesteaders' ideology dictated that they should reject financial advancement or, as "Michael" in Hacker Valley, West Virginia, phrased it, "greed, capitalism, and general rip offs. Palph Borsodi believed that the "sane" counterculturalists had grown weary of constantly striving

for material wealth: "They want to get out of the 'rat race,' they want to get out of the urban and industrial quagmire . . . and they loathe what the corporate polity and the corporate economy of today are doing and what it represents."<sup>21</sup>

The turmoil that arose from war protests, the burgeoning drug culture, racial tension, and crime also frustrated city dwellers. "For about 150 years," wrote Robert Rodale, "young people have headed to New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and other large to medium cities seeking their fortune—with the certainty of finding it." Then, he claimed, many urbanites found city life to be less fulfilling than they had hoped. The cities had become prisons. So they moved to suburbia only to find that it, too, gradually fell victim to the overcrowding, overdevelopment, high taxes, and crime inherent in urban areas. These ex-urbanites thus turned their eyes toward greener pastures. They followed Rodale's advice: "put some distance between" themselves "and the mob," and "generate self-sufficiency."<sup>22</sup>

Of course, rising oil prices, inflation, and environmental degradation further ignited agrarian impulses. Agnew mentions a "spiritual malaise" that had befallen many of her fellow back-to-the-landers before they migrated to rural America. Some believed that the capitalist economy was on the verge of collapse and that in order to survive, one needed to be self-sufficient. Others were disgusted by the rampant abuse of the nation's natural resources.<sup>23</sup> Bill "Hogwild" Byers, a Rutherford County alter-native, was astonished by the "environmental atrocities" that he witnessed in western North Carolina. He recalls seeing foam floating on the Tuckaseegee River and an unnatural blue hue that sometimes spread downstream from area textile mills. He attributed the problem to "egregious environmental lack of consideration."<sup>24</sup>

Despite their alarm at inflation, urban atrocities, and environmental conditions, it should be noted that the late twentieth-century back-to-the-landers were by no means the first to challenge American materialism or to romanticize rural simplicity. American history is full of agrarian, antimaterial, and environmental sentiments that have informed political, religious, and civic leaders alike.<sup>25</sup> Not all homesteaders were versed on such impulses, but

some, like Paul Salstrom, were well aware of the continuity that existed between these historical movements. Salstrom was exposed at an early age to social activism through his grandfather and father, and his uncle was a member of the Quaker utopian community Celo in the Black Mountains of North Carolina. He was also steeped in the writings of John Burroughs, John Muir, and Lewis Mumford, employed for a time by the Sierra Club, and active in the peace movement. Therefore, he believes that the 1970s-era back-to-the-land movement was never its own entity; rather, it was a continuation of an agrarian tradition that has existed throughout American history. In fact, he chided me when I asked him when the movement took hold. "Take hold?" he repeated with a mixture of humor and shock. "It goes all the way back to Thoreau and before!" 26

"WHO EVER FOUND A HILLSIDE TO BE AN OBSTACLE FOR GOATS?": COMING TO APPALACHIA

In 1975 Robert Rodale noted a U.S. Department of Agriculture report that highlighted four rural areas enjoying new population growth. First on the list was eastern Kentucky and southern Appalachia. Rodale indicated that the Bluegrass State had seen growth from the coal industry but then added, "that's not the whole story of rural population growth by far." Indeed it was not. Across Appalachia, back-to-the-landers were establishing homesteads on land left available in the wake of the region's Great Migration. New homesteaders settled in almost every corner of the region: southeastern Ohio, western and central Pennsylvania, eastern Kentucky, West Virginia, western North Carolina, the great valley of Virginia, eastern Tennessee, northwestern Georgia, and, to a lesser degree, northern Alabama. Neonative populations were plentiful in northern Appalachia as well.28

While regional reports of population growth do not necessarily mean that homesteaders were moving into those areas, they are suggestive that the "rural migration turnaround" was occurring in Appalachia. The *Glenville Democrat* announced that, between 1970 and 1973, West Virginia's nonmetropolitan areas had seen their

first growth spurt in over three decades. During those four years rural locations in the Mountain State had witnessed a 4.5 percent surge in population. This rate exceeded the 4.2 percent national average for nonmetropolitan areas. In 1972 the *Lincoln Journal* reported a 17 percent spike in land prices, partly due to increased demand from part-time farmers. The *Floyd Press* also reported that a number of southwestern Virginia counties, including Floyd, Franklin, Botetourt, Henry, Craig, and Roanoke, had seen significant population increases between 1970 and 1974.<sup>29</sup> Patricia Beaver, who documented back-to-the-landers living in Watauga, Ashe, and Yancey Counties, North Carolina, notes that by 1977 available land was scarce and expensive due to the influx of people into that part of the state.<sup>30</sup>

Many factors attracted back-to-the-landers to the region. The most obvious draws were incredible scenery, abundant natural resources, plentiful springs, and wildlife. Appalachia provided many of the new residents with the remoteness and scenery they craved. Artistically and musically inclined neonatives found inspiration in the landscape. According to Colleen Redman, Floyd native Catherine Pauley understood why so many artists and musicians moved to the county: "Her idea was that a lot of people came here as artists because that's what nurtures creativity, and that's what artists needed: quiet and the rural settings." Javn Avery agreed, adding her perspective on the region's reputed isolation: "In its own way it's isolated, and isolation culturally is considered a bad thing, but it's what artists need." The region's climate was also favorable to homesteaders. Avery considered settling in the Northeast but understood that Maine's "weather was not conducive to supporting yourself with goats and garden."31 When Charlotte native Garry Biggers was shown the land he eventually purchased in McDowell County, North Carolina, the amateur herpetologist was thrilled by the fact that he spotted two blacksnakes.<sup>32</sup> Wildlife and scenery were also vital to Lincoln County, West Virginia, neonative Ric MacDowell. "For me," he claims, "being able to live in a much more natural environment has just been so important.... Not that this is pristing or untouched or anything, but to be able to have birds flying

around and see the stars at night, and see a turkey or a fox . . . that has a real grounding, key kind of component of all this."33

The region's topography could be both an attractor and a repellant to back-to-the-landers, particularly those interested in attempting full self-sufficiency. In November 1970, Mother Earth News published one of many articles on searching for land that mentioned Appalachia. "Don't pass up rolling countryside or hillside acreage," the magazine advised. "Those Appalachian farmsteads are not only beautifully scenic and remote . . . the land is generally excellent for gardening." The magazine touted the benefits of the topography for soil drainage and fending off frost and added, "Besides, who ever found a hillside to be an obstacle for goats?"34 Not everybody was convinced that the rugged terrain and rocky soil was workable, however. One man, who identified himself only as "Travelling Friend," vented his frustration in a 1973 issue of Communities. During his search for land in Tyler County, West Virginia, his car repeatedly got stuck in the mud and, more importantly, he could not find any flat, affordable land. He ended up settling in upstate New York.35

The authors of the entry on the regional back-to-the-land movement in The Encyclopedia of Appalachia observe that the region's proximity to the East Coast's major urban centers also attracted both permanent and weekend back-to-the-landers.<sup>36</sup> The convenient location allowed many homesteaders the opportunity to prepare for life on the land while keeping their jobs in cities. Ohio alter-native Paul Edwards needed to maintain his urban job in order to pay for his family's homesteading dream. As he told the readers of Mother Earth News, he continued working to purchase their farm and livestock and to ready their home. Though he admitted his frustration with having to continue the "rat race," he cheerily projected that they had "12 to 18 months to go before" they could become "completely self-sufficient." Garry Biggers continued his job with a television station in Charlotte until he and his wife completed their cabin.<sup>38</sup> The publishers of Communitas (later Communities) touted additional benefits for the six communes that had formed by 1972 in Virginia's Piedmont and Blue Ridge regions. Their proximity

to Washington, D.C., Charlottesville, and Richmond allowed members the opportunity to sell their produce, find work, and keep themselves from "becoming too isolated and provincial." <sup>39</sup>

Media attention was also a significant factor in attracting people to the region. Magazines such as Mother Earth News and the Green Revolution regularly featured articles highlighting the region's suitability for the movement. In 1970, Lawrence Goldsmith abandoned communal life at the School of Living's Heathcote Mill to become an individual homesteader. In June of that same year, Goldsmith wrote about his search for land in both publications. He had contacted the United Farm Agency in Kansas City, Missouri, for information on available, affordable land. The agency sent him flyers on two locations that caught his eye: "northcentral Pennsylvania and almost the entire state of West Virginia." Considering such factors as "size, location, climate, price, farmable land, water, access roads, and neighbors," Goldsmith set his sights upon southern West Virginia, and, after meeting with some locals and the county agricultural extension agent, he settled on a "93 acre farm with a nice log house priced at \$2,700 (less than \$30 an acre)." For Goldsmith, the dream of being a self-sufficient landowner became a reality in central Appalachia. Having worked up the deed through a local attorney, he cheerily forecasted that "soon we shall set up housekeeping and homesteading" deep in Lincoln County, West Virginia.40

Paul Salstrom identified Goldsmith's *Mother Earth News* article as being the major impetus behind a significant influx of homesteaders to Lincoln County. In fact, the magazine aired parts of Goldsmith's article on the radio to support its sales. The result was "a minor stampede" to the county. Indeed, Salstrom estimates that between three and four hundred eager homesteaders moved into the county after the first neonatives, Ric MacDowell in 1968 and members of a Catholic Worker farm in 1969.<sup>41</sup>

Goldsmith's articles were by no means the only boost that the Appalachian region received from *Mother Earth News* or from other movement literature during the 1970s. *Communities*, a magazine focused on North American communes, regularly ran articles and advertisements pertaining to Appalachia. Several of

the advertisements came from regional activist groups selling crafts as fundraisers. These ads drew attention to Appalachia as a place to settle; the image of handmade quilts, dolls, hammocks, and other items appealed to back-to-the-landers' romantic ideas about mountaineers' self-sufficiency. But they also raised awareness about the environmental and social issues confronting the region. The Grassroots Craftsmen of the Appalachian Mountains, based in Breathitt and Wolfe Counties, Kentucky, sold guilts and clothing to raise money for local women. The Pike County Citizen's Association, which served counties in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia, also sold locally crafted quilts to raise money. 42 In addition, Communities regularly published directories to help communes find people and people find communes. Many of these communes were located in or near Appalachian Ohio, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. The Green Revolution published numerous articles on West Virginia as well, particularly during Paul Salstrom's run as editor in 1975 and 1976.

Word of mouth also attracted people to Appalachia, and this is most easily witnessed through the number of group migrations. As historian John Alexander Williams observes, back-to-the-landers often migrated to the region "in small clusters." One such group migration occurred in Wetzel County, West Virginia. Lynn Stasick, who moved there in 1972, was among a dozen or so individuals from New Jersey, Massachusetts, and other northeastern states who followed a friend to the county. Likewise, Jimmy Savely and his wife moved to Ashe County, North Carolina, after hearing about available land from friends who already resided there. 44 Jock Lauterer and his wife, Maggie, joined Bill Byers and several others on a 300-acre farm in Rutherford County, North Carolina, in 1974.45 In addition, two neonatives, "Larry" and "Linda," served as scouts for other would-be homesteaders. To fend off potential social isolation, the couple envisioned creating "a counterculture community in the mountains" that could be realized by enticing other like-minded individuals to purchase land nearby.46

One rather impressive group migration occurred in West Virginia's Lincoln County. As indicated above, several hundred people moved to the county after Goldsmith's article appeared in the Green Revolution and Mother Earth News. In an update written to the Green Revolution in 1972, he indicated that he was not alone in his move to West Virginia: "April of 1970 I left Heathcote for the southern foothills of Appalachia. Drove my old truck through the hills and hollows and bought a beautiful 140 acre farm. Wife and child joined me and we began to get it together. No, that's not quite right. Wife and child and eight acquaintances joined me and none of us ever got it together [but] we sure learned a lot."47 Goldsmith did not say whether or not his eight friends came from Heathcote, but there were many from the commune who did take up residence in Lincoln County. Paul Salstrom explains that, with the commune explosion of the 1960s, Heathcote became an odd countercultural melting pot for "Reader's Digest-type housewives who were merely curious about organic gardening . . . bearded acidheads . . . and New Age gurus."48 According to Salstrom, Heathcote's permanent residents found the constant inflow of people to be troublesome:

A lot of people started looking for land because the communal way of life was a little frustrating at Heathcote because there were so many visitors. It was an outreach center, and it was very handy to Baltimore. Just 40 miles north of Baltimore on the Maryland line. And so there was burnout there, and people went to West Virginia looking for land.

I had looked for land in other places. Other people were looking for land too, but West Virginia had the cheapest land. I wasn't the first from Heathcote to buy land there. But these others had preceded us by a year or two. But there was pretty much a Heathcote refugee situation in central Lincoln County in the early '70s. Kind of a pipeline from Heathcote to Lincoln County, and everyone wanted to have their own land and not live communally anymore.<sup>49</sup>

How many people arrived in Lincoln County because of media attention and how many came as Heathcote Mill defectors is unclear. What is clear is that, between the Heathcote "refugees," the Catholic Workers, and other early arrivals in the county, the neonative community soon multiplied as friends and friends-of-friends were introduced to the area.

As Salstrom suggests, cheap land may have been one of the biggest draws, especially for people eschewing the "rat race." Lawrence Goldsmith paid less than \$30 an acre for his land in West Virginia, while Salstrom paid \$400 for over twenty acres of land. Lynn Stasick mentioned that he received his sixty-one acres of land in Wetzel County, West Virginia, for \$2,500.50 "Travelling Friend" reported finding one hundred acres for \$3,000, while "some freaks nearby" purchased their "68 acres undeveloped land" for "\$1,500 cash." He also mentioned that a real estate agent had advertised "60 acres undeveloped for \$3,500," and then remarked, "These real estate agents carry the more expensive land!" Further south in North Carolina, land prices were higher and rising rapidly. Ashe County homesteader Jennifer Gardiner paid \$200 an acre for her land, and Jock Lauterer, who jointly purchased three hundred acres with two other families, paid roughly \$280 an acre for his plot.52

The perceptions that some back-to-the-landers had of the region's culture were also part of its appeal. Mountaineers were popularly known to be independent, self-reliant, and industrious, qualities that must have been attractive to people who wanted to rely as much as possible on their own efforts for survival. One article on the Alleghenies describes mountain residents in a stereotypical, albeit appealing, manner: "Mostly native-born, white Protestants, they've spent years in a geography and climate that invite an outdoor, un-confined lifestyle." Pennsylvanian homesteader Nancy Bubel saw West Virginians in the same romantic light. She praised "the spirit of the mountain people" and noted "the remedies and herbs and cookery of people who for years have been making it on their own."

Other newcomers believed that Appalachian residents were fairly open-minded. The reality of this perception depended on the neighbor and the location, but some areas were, and still are, reputed for having a high level of tolerance toward outsiders and alternate lifestyles. Becky Anderson, former director of Handmade in America, told *USA Today* that the diverse mixture of artists, musicians, writers, and dancers fostered cultural tolerance in western North Carolina. One Asheville neonative who came to the region in the 1970s remarked, "There's a tradition among the mountain people to live and let live." He was impressed by the fact that natives of the area had been more tolerant of his homosexuality than people in the larger cities of the North. <sup>55</sup> Jayn Avery echoes the same belief: "Live and let live is the Appalachian philosophy. You don't bother me, I don't bother you." <sup>56</sup>

The perception of tolerant Appalachians rang especially true in regional college towns. In the September/October 1971 issue of Mother Earth News, John Miller authored a piece on searching for land in and around colleges and universities across the country. Reflecting a general concern that back-to-the-landers had about potential culture clashes between themselves and rural residents, Miller suggested that homesteaders consider living in backwater college towns. He found those places to be more open-minded than the typical country town. "The rural university borough," he wrote, "is frequently a delightfully kinkier version of the more common straight country town." He opined that rural college towns had become more tolerant of "alternative life styles" and thus would make good choices for homesteaders seeking freedom to live as they chose.<sup>57</sup> John Alexander Williams confirms this pattern. He observes that "Athens, Ohio, Morgantown, West Virginia, Boone, North Carolina, and Blacksburg, Virginia," all became home to small populations of homesteaders.<sup>58</sup> It should come as no surprise then that one of the universities Miller recommended was Appalachian State in Boone, North Carolina.59

"WHILE HIPPIES TURN MOUNTAINEER, MANY A MOUNTAINEER IS TURNING HIPPIE": CULTURAL EXCHANGE IN APPALACHIA

Scant resources reveal how mountain residents initially responded to the presence of these countercultural homesteaders, but it can be assumed that reactions varied from house to house and location to location. The back-to-the-landers I have interviewed generally report having maintained good relationships with their mountain neighbors. Almost all of them recall developing especially close bonds with at least one or two local families. But David Pevton's article, a couple of works of fiction, regional newspapers, and an interview with Mack Samples suggest that locals may have felt more reservation toward their countercultural neighbors than the neonatives realized. In The Handywoman Stories, West Virginia author Lenore McComas Coberly provides a lively example of how some Appalachian residents may have reacted to the news that backto-the-landers were moving into their community. While her story is fictional, it is loosely based on real people and thus provides a window into one type of reaction that could have occurred behind closed doors.

"Well, Ruby Louise," exclaims Alma Ruth, "it has happened. I knew it would. It was just a matter of which out-of-the-way place it would be. A bunch of hippies has moved in up at Wysong's Clearing." Alma Ruth proceeded to tell Ruby Louise that the hippies intended to build a home out of homemade bricks from clay that came out of a local pigpen. "I never heard of such a thing," replies Ruby Louise. "I'd like to see how they do that." With exasperation, Alma Ruth responds, "You're as bad as Old Man Adkins. He just let them come in over his land back around on the other side of the hill and take their jeep right up to Wysong's Clearing. They are dirty and they are strange." "Well," replied Ruby Louise, "they don't have a corner on dirty and strange around here, Alma Ruth, but I do wonder who sold them that land. I never thought about it belonging to anybody."60

As the story progresses, one of the hippie girls comes to Ruby Louise's house, and after talking awhile they find common ground through their shared antiwar sentiments and Ruby Louise's cooking. Ruby Louise then invites the entire group of back-to-the-landers to her house for Sunday dinner, where the young people meet Alma Ruth and fawn over one of her quilts. They win her over.

As Alma Ruth, Ruby Louise, and Mack Samples's character Corley Malone suggest, mountain residents did not always understand who the back-to-the-landers were or why they were moving into their communities. Their initial assumptions about the homesteaders were often based on media reports, appearances, and rumors. Like the rest of mainstream America, many mountain residents watched the nightly broadcasts that documented the explosion of an urban counterculture during the 1960s. Sensational magazine headlines forewarned rural residents, the "Hippies are Coming."61 Mack Samples recalls, "You saw that on the television before they came here, the hippies in San Francisco. You saw that. I mean everybody saw that. And everybody thought, 'Well, here they come. They're here."62 Local newspapers chimed in by running editorials admonishing their readers about increasing drug use and marijuana production in rural areas and the un-Christian values being taught at universities by liberal professors. 63 Many Americans saw the freewheeling and radical youth as threatening to the traditional family structure, so to suddenly have what appeared to be that same group of wild, free-loving, pot-smoking hippies taking up residency in their backvards must have been somewhat unsettling.

Mack Samples's recollection of the movement confirms what is told through Coberly's story; as many mountain residents warmed up to the newcomers, relationships developed. "But immediately," he asserts, "the first impression was that you wanted nothing to do with them." Samples believes that most West Virginians could not get past the homesteaders' unkempt appearances. "They wouldn't clean up," he says. "They wouldn't take a bath, they wouldn't wash their clothes, and people just had no tolerance for that at all. Because the people they knew who lived off the land weren't like that."

The rumor mill was most assuredly abuzz in communities where

back-to-the-landers settled. This I know from personal experience; I was first introduced to the concept of back-to-the-landers by my grandmother who, for several years, complained about the "hippies" who set up a coffee shop in an old gristmill near my grandfather's homeplace in Floyd, Virginia. She had been told that they laced their products with "dope" so that customers would become addicted and continue patronizing their shop. The rumor about Lynn Stasick and his friends was even more outlandish. His neighbors believed they "had come down from New Jersey and bought this property and built all kinds of little buildings so women could come in and lay. In other words," his friends had developed "a farm-like whorehouse." Of course, it was not until Lynn bonded with his neighbors that he learned of this rumor.<sup>65</sup>

While there have been no confirmed reports of homesteading whorehouses, mountain residents and back-to-the-landers often had to navigate vastly different ideologies and lifestyle choices in their relationships. They typically maintained different religious beliefs, sometimes ate different foods, and lived in different dwellings farmhouses and brick ranches versus self-made cabins, vurts, geodesic domes, meditation huts, and glass pyramids—and viewed the land and its uses differently. Some back-to-the-landers preferred to keep to themselves to avoid any judgment or conflict with locals. Others were mindful of local cultural values and went out of their way to respect those boundaries. A Virginia neonative wrote an angry letter to Communities after having received an issue with nudity on the cover. Annoyed by the magazine's lack of consideration for homesteaders trying to assimilate to the local culture, the person wrote: "I hope to be able to enjoy 'Communities,' but find it difficult when I receive an issue with nude people on the cover through the small rural post office in my community. I am not uptight about nudity, but most of my friends and neighbors here are, and their friendship and trust are more important to me than your magazine." The Virginian proceeded to request that future magazines be sent in a paper covering and then admonished Communities to "take into consideration the reaction of people in those communities to the cover and other pictures."66 The members of Twin Oaks

commune also tread lightly because of the surrounding community's conservative, and in some cases extremist, values. *Mother Earth News* reported that Louisa County, Virginia, was a KKK stronghold, so the communitarians avoided any discussion about "the Vietnam war, sex, merits of grass, etc." with local residents. They also prohibited illegal drugs from being brought into their community to avoid confrontation with the police.<sup>67</sup>



A neonative, with the assistance of both newcomers and native community members, built this cabin, 1974-77, for his family in Lincoln County, West Virginia. Credit: author.

Other back-to-the-landers believed that they could change locals' attitudes toward their lifestyles. After finding one potential piece of land in West Virginia, "Travelling Friend" talked to the owner and his wife about the price. He noted that they were "real friendly," but the couple expressed their dislike of "hippies or communes." "Naturally!" he quipped. Still, he continued with optimism, "They were pretty reasonable and I felt they would've changed their minds

given a good example." In addition to facing negative perceptions of the counterculture, neonatives also had to adjust to local accents and speech patterns. Presumably employing incorrect grammar for effect, he wrote that "all them W. Virginians talked funny!" 68

There were, of course, inevitable culture clashes and awkward moments that occurred between regional natives and back-to-thelanders. Garry Biggers recalls having conflict with his immediate neighbors who, he claims, were bitter about the fact that somebody unrelated to them had moved into their remote valley. The conflict ultimately exposed differences in values regarding hunting. "They'd always hunted on the land," he recalls. "And we didn't go overboard to try to stop them, but they assumed we were going to, and when they asked, we said, 'We'd rather you didn't.' And so it was a tremendous hostility over that."69 Jock Lauterer clashed with a team of local construction workers. After failing to show up as scheduled several days before, they finally arrived to install a septic tank for the house that Lauterer and his wife were building. The workers, who needed heavy machinery to dig, were more concerned about accomplishing the job than about preserving the local flora. As Lauterer described the experience, "It was a collision between ideological opposites, between a young pioneer wanting to preserve his habitat and mad-dog industrial widget-construction mentality." After being reprimanded by the overseer for not having used a bulldozer to clear a pathway through the woods, Lauterer began dreading the time he would have to spend with the men. "And I had plenty to dread," he wrote. "These guys just didn't respect the Land. Trees meant obstacles to these men. Knock 'em down if they're in the way." Ruffled by the experience, he, like "Travelling Friend," mocked their accents in his journal entry.70

Ideology and lifestyle choices aside, mountain residents and back-to-the-landers did find common ground. Shared interest in art, music, farming, community development, environmental issues, and education often enabled the two groups to form bonds. Bill Byers claims that his interest in blacksmithing and organic gardening helped him form connections with other people in his community. A local organic gardening club, formed by an older generation of

regional transplants, joined together vacation homeowners, "stoned hippies," and Seventh Day Adventists.<sup>71</sup> Another bond was forged through a shared distaste for second homeowners. Patricia Beaver contends that some western North Carolinians preferred to sell their land to homesteaders rather than to summer homeowners or real estate developers because their views toward land use remained more in line with the former than the latter. Selling to developers often resulted in extreme environmental changes and cultural conflicts. Developers frequently built houses on the tops of mountains, planted streetlights that glared throughout the year, renamed local landmarks, and fenced off lands previously open to community residents.<sup>72</sup>

Back-to-the-landers were generally enthusiastic about learning from their mountain neighbors, a fact that at least partially explains why so many reports exist of positive interaction. Paul Salstrom theorized that they had been accepted "because they care." He understood rural Appalachian history as many did at the time, that it was made up of predominately Scotch-Irish and English settlers whose descendants had remained in place for nearly two hundred years—that is, until extractive industries drew people away from their farms. So he contended that, since back-to-the-landers shared similar concerns about the land and exhibited eagerness to learn from community elders, they had been welcomed into the region. "Unlike previous outsiders," he writes, "the 'hippies' (many of whom would prefer to be considered ex-hippies) have come neither to exploit nor change the hill people; they've come to join them, and learn their way of life, and eventually pass it on to their heirs." With over 350 neonatives living in Lincoln County by the time this article was penned in 1975, it was easy for Salstrom to assume that cultural exchange had occurred: "And behind the scenes, while 'hippies' turn mountaineer, many a mountaineer is turning 'hippie."73

Farming and the natural environment seem to be the features that presented the most opportunities for creating bonds between neighbors. Nearly every neonative interviewed for this essay recalls having gained a wealth of information from local residents. Neonatives learned from neighbors how to can, quilt, operate

machinery, identify flora and fauna, create herbal remedies, and put up log structures. And from the neonative perspective, many of their neighbors were all too happy to pass on the information. Jayn Avery and Paul Gallimore both talk about community elders who shared an immense amount of information with them. The elders' children had left the rural countryside as young adults, preferring instead the financial opportunities and amenities that city life offered. The parents were therefore excited to find people who wanted to learn from them. Avery recalls: "There was one family on the road that just loved the new people coming in because they recognized our wanting to live on the land, and, in fact, the old farmer whose wife's parents our house had been, he would come over and talk to my husband who was raising the goats and taking care of them. . . . You could tell that he and his wife were so proud that there was a young couple over there that were into canning and gardening when their kids were not. Their kids wanted to go to Wal Mart and wanted to become upgraded in the American culture, and we were honoring the way they grew up."74 Gallimore believes that some of his neighbors "realized we were more like them than their own kids." As he explains, "Their own kids wanted to get a car or pickup truck and go to town or get a job and go to NASCAR or just live . . . an urban life." He feels that his sincere interest in their farming heritage eventually gained their respect.75

Mack Samples admits that, once he got past appearances, he found that many of the back-to-the-landers were good people. "As I continually point out," he says, "some of them . . . were well-intentioned and pretty decent people. You just had to get by that first barrier of, 'What the hell are these people doing here?' . . . Once you got past that you could look at the individual. Some of them were okay." He claims that the ones who remained in the region became fairly well-accepted and assimilated to the local culture. They joined PTA and civic groups, became local leaders, and sometimes even married locals. But, he adds, the ones in his community never did become fully integrated because they did not go to church. "They didn't merge that far," he says.<sup>76</sup>

## "YOU CAN'T CUT DOWN A TREE WITH A NAIL FILE": LIFE ON THE LAND

David Peyton contends that the romanticized accounts of folk culture presented at regional festivals did not prepare Appalachian homesteaders for the challenges associated with poor infrastructure, a weak economy, and lagging education systems. Indeed, life in Appalachia could be challenging, especially for individuals without a steady income. So how did the back-to-the-landers' dream of self-sufficiency live up to the reality? Jubal Stuki discusses this very question in a 1976 issue of the *Green Revolution*:

Simple living embodies the concept of getting closer to nature, of homesteading, of eating good organic foods, of getting along with less instead of more, of becoming less dependent upon others and more dependent upon self, of raising our own food, making our own clothes and our own entertainment.

Unfortunately, the realities of 'simple living' are not as simple as the dream.

Simplicity is generally defined as the absense [*sic*] of complexity, intricacy or artificiality. But anyone who has tried a life of self-sufficiency has soon learned that the amount of knowledge and skill, fortitude and hard work—combined with the ability to improvise—that are required sometimes make simple life very complicated.<sup>77</sup>

Despite the joys that came from living close to nature—the starry summer evenings, peaceful isolation, and, for Garry Biggers, resident blacksnakes—life on a subsistence farm was difficult, particularly for those ex-urbanites who had little to no previous farming experience. Ed Grant from South Bloomington, Ohio, tried to coach regional back-to-the-landers through how-to guides in the *Green Revolution*. He said he had seen too many would-be homesteaders fail because they did not have the right tools. "Well, you can't cut down a tree with a nail file," he wrote, "nor can homesteaders make it without many tools to work their new land."<sup>78</sup>

As Lynn Stasick keenly observed, "How could you expect somebody coming from another area, never having done this sort of thing before, [to] come in and do this when others can't?"<sup>79</sup> Indeed, small Appalachian farmers had been struggling to make ends meet for years. Their numbers declined throughout the twentieth century due to soil exhaustion, the limited availability of large farms, and increased work opportunities outside of agriculture. Plus, the lifestyle was fraught with hardships. Farm labor was physically demanding, crops and livestock were subject to the whims of nature, and farming consumed an incredible amount of time.

A series of reports from *Mother Earth News* called "Them That's Doin" sheds light on the physical challenges that faced Appalachian back-to-the-landers. Alice Okorn's family enjoyed some success with livestock and crops, but she indicated that she had trouble keeping wild animals, including a "big, ole groundhog," away from her garden. Still, she was relatively sanguine about her experiences until the end of her report where she listed some additional challenges: "No indoor plumbing until the water recently piped to the sink; uninsulated frame house heated by a wood stove that periodically belches soot and smoke into the living room"; faulty equipment; an "old wringer washing machine"; leaky roofs; broken fences "that are always leaking pigs or cows"; and farm payments. 80 In another "Them That's Doin'," members of the Kharma Farm in Ulysses, Pennsylvania, sounded even more frustrated than Alice. "Couldn't someone have told us about all the suffering and hard work and hours of expended energy and all the disappointments and problems?" they asked. "Sure it's all worth it (we didn't say it wasn't!), but damn if it wasn't a hell of a struggle."81

In addition to the difficulties of farm labor, alter-natives quickly found that they, like the natives, had to have money and supplies coming in from places other than the farm. So One means of financial support came from bartering. Earl M. Clough discussed trade in *Mother Earth News*: "I was offered a Tri-Sport with its motor taken apart, in lieu of money owed to me. I carried it home on the top of my station wagon, a neighborhood boy put it back together, and I traded it for a nine-foot patio door." He also traded some walnut logs

for labor. "Well, that's the way we do things here in West Virginia," he explained, "and, until I started reading *Mother*, I'd never even thought of it as barter!"83

Bartering could only provide so much support for a farm, however. Some back-to-the-landers found themselves having to rely on food stamps to survive. Others patched together odd jobs to make ends meet. During his tenure on the land, Lynn Stasick played music in bars, taught guitar lessons through a continuing education program at a local school, cut lumber at a sawmill, and cleaned for a local gas station. His friend Richard DiPretoro went into the mines and later became a pilot.84 Ashe County, North Carolina, alter-native Jennifer Gardiner was a potter, but she also became a first responder with her local rescue squad.85 Karl Hess and his wife relied solely upon her work as a freelance editor because in 1968 Hess decided that the United States government "was no longer worth supporting." He stopped paying income taxes. And former VISTA volunteer Ric MacDowell worked as a county extension agent, a teacher, a director for an alternative wastewater project, and an amateur photographer.86

Among the most common enterprises for back-to-the-landers were small craft businesses and selling produce either individually or through local cooperatives. Judson Jerome's Fulton County, Pennsylvania, commune faced serious economic problems in 1976. The produce from their organic garden was not nearly enough to support the commune's nine members, and they were badly in need of "shop machinery, running vehicles, and, alas, A&P groceries." They had to sacrifice some of their self-sufficient ideals for the opportunity to earn much needed cash. "Indeed," he wrote, "in our formative years (which still continue), the practical demands of survival do take precedence over those of our various ideals and visions. Though our way of life was relatively simple, there was no way we could continue at all without some cash income." The membership thus began making handcrafted "Hollolog Planters" to sell.<sup>87</sup>

The struggle for money was often a problem for back-to-thelanders, and it is one of the main reasons why so many people eventually abandoned their homesteads. Going without health insurance or enough savings to cover potential accidents was an enormous risk. As Eleanor Agnew observes, rural residents had a thirty to forty percent greater chance of accidental "disability and death" than city dwellers. The risk may have been even higher for homesteaders who had little clue of how to operate machinery or work with livestock.88 After injuring his hip Garry Biggers realized that his simple life could not continue without a much greater income than he and his wife were receiving from their nine-tofive jobs: "If we had had a steady income from, say, a trust fund or something like that, we'd still be there. There's no doubt in my mind, because we wouldn't have felt the necessity to have a business. But we just weren't making enough money by working for somebody else. But if we'd have had, I don't know, access to maybe eight thousand, ten thousand dollars a month, we'd have never had to leave there. We'd still be there. And it would have been a lot of fun."89

Having children could also change back-to-the-landers' minds about living without stable incomes. As Ric MacDowell keenly observes, "It was one thing to struggle and eke out a living and not have running water or electricity when it was just the two of you, but when you had babies, it just altered stuff." Caring for children is laborious; caring for children when you have to haul buckets of water in from a well, heat the water, and hand-wash dirty diapers and clothing is another situation entirely. And when those children become teenagers, they typically want to assimilate to their peers. MacDowell recalls having a conversation with one woman who was upset because her daughter came home crying when her classmates discovered that she used an outhouse. Enjoying the same material comforts as the rest of America thus became a much bigger factor when children were introduced to the homestead.90

One cooperative formed by regional neonatives in 1988 makes uncomfortably clear how easily back-to-the-land ideals could be sacrificed for money. In her report on a multi-county organic food cooperative in south-central Pennsylvania, Amy Trauger uncovers a disturbing contradiction in this organization's "agrarian ideal." First, she notes that the co-op's president felt that the participants'

reasons for farming organically were economic rather than "philosophical." They could command more money by growing organic produce. In addition, a number of these back-to-the-land farming families employed migrant laborers and, in the case of one family, child labor. While it was not uncommon for families to enlist their children's assistance, these back-to-the-landers also hired Mexicans under the assumption that they were much more willing to engage in physical labor than Americans. Further, she finds that women were rarely included in decision making about the farms. Even if they co-owned the farm, they were relegated to traditional women's work including housekeeping and accounting, or, if they were unskilled laborers, they engaged in "labour-intensive . . . tasks." Trauger contends that this labor system went against the premise of the back-to-the-land ideal, particularly since many of them claimed to "seek a vision of a rural lifestyle and community and . . . pursue 'an inclusive rural future; a rural of Others, rather than an exclusive rural of the Same." As she asserts, these unjust labor practices placed this particular co-op squarely within the capitalist tradition, thus undercutting the "agrarian ideal" that so many back-to-thelanders held dear.91

Trauger's observations about women's roles are significant because there is not much literature that analyzes how female homesteaders navigated what appeared to Patricia Beaver to be gravitation toward traditional, gendered divisions of labor. Beaver believes that back-to-the-landers, whether intentionally or not, often mirrored gender roles practiced by native community residents. 92 It could be argued that the earliest back-to-the-landers, those who arrived in the mid-to-late 1960s and early 1970s, came before the women's liberation movement achieved widespread awareness. Timothy Miller contends that the counterculture was maledominated, so it would stand to reason that back-to-the-landers carried the same patterns with them to the land.93

There was, of course, growing awareness of gender inequality in the 1960s, so there are some indications that neonative women were not always satisfied with conventional gender roles. The women that Beaver observed generally bore the "daily burden of survival":

that is, they managed all of the domestic chores, gardening, meal preparation, and childcare. This responsibility coupled with their regular employment—for many of them eventually had to work led to feelings of exhaustion and isolation.94 Jock Lauterer's wife, Maggie, was interviewed for an article on the women's liberation movement in the Charlotte Observer in 1975, and Jock recorded her comments into his journal: "Maggie told Lew [the reporter] that she tried at first to be a traditional stay-at-home wife but that 'something else in me had to have a chance to breathe. I didn't understand at first, why I felt so frustrated. I loved my home and my child, but I resented the he's-the-Papa, I'm-the-Mama thing." In 1972, Kate Mewhinney opined that modern utopian communities were still perpetuating "the worst sex roles of society." The woman, she noted, "is chained to her pedestal . . . restricted to 'womanly' occupations, including mindless, subservient jobs" even in supposedly liberated communes.95

It should be noted that there were still plenty of women who relished traditional women's work. "I saw some women really go to an extreme with it," says Garry Biggers. "It was like they did almost revert back fifty years, seventy-five years to the roles of simply being the garden tender, canner, and all those things." But he insists that their actions were purely voluntary. The women maintained a firm hand in the decision-making, and "their husbands didn't cross them or anything when it came down to it." <sup>96</sup>

Despite any misgivings about countercultural lifestyles, native Appalachians were often willing to help neonatives adjust to life on the land. Nowhere is this presented more vividly than in Beaver's observation of mountain "patrons." These were individuals, usually a "neighbor, landlord, or person from whom land has been purchased," who took it upon themselves to see that the neonative was getting along. The patron sent food items to the newcomer or assisted with projects around the farm, often unsolicited, and kept the newcomer informed of goings on in the community. Even though the back-to-the-landers in Beaver's study kept to themselves upon arrival, each one found that gardens were being plowed, trash was

being hauled, and snowy roads were being cleared without their solicitation for help.<sup>97</sup>

The Virginian who wrote in to complain about nudity on the cover of *Communities* indicated that there was a general willingness among natives to assist newcomers "if they are not alienated by inconsideration of their feelings and values."98 In West Virginia, Lynn Stasick found himself under the care of many people, including two patrons, "Red" Shuman and Rex Hemilrick. He recalls that Shuman was "a great help" and that Hemilrick, while extremely helpful, was a bit of a jokester whose advice could not always be trusted: "He gave me some advice when we were up there and we were going to plant potatoes. He said, 'Now you've gotta wrap them in newspaper,' and I said, 'Okay.' And I'd never heard that before, and my grandmother was agrarian. And he said, 'You know why?' And I said, 'No,' and he said, 'To keep the dirt out of their eyes. Waaahh!'... So you've got to take this with a grain of salt, what they're teaching. Don't plant too close to the carrots, or the onions. It'll make their eyes tear up, and all that stuff. But once they figure they can't put over on you anymore, then you start getting the honest stuff."99

Like Stasick, Fred First of Floyd, Virginia, has fond memories of his mountain patron. First and his wife initially moved to Wytheville from Birmingham, Alabama. The first April after they arrived, they eagerly began planting their garden. First's neighbor watched as he put in his tomatoes. "Whatcha doin'?" the man asked while smoking a pipe. "Getting some tomatoes in the ground!" replied First. "Well, they're gonna die," he responded. Then the man turned around and walked off. It had not even occurred to First to consider that Virginia's mountain climate was much colder than Alabama's, and sure enough, he admits, the tomatoes perished. Despite the initial short exchange, First's family and his neighbor became extremely close: "They were so supportive and our kids looked on them like grandparents, and they taught us so much about so many different things." 100

The unsolicited kindness of mountain neighbors seemed to have been both a blessing and a curse to some back-to-the-landers. These relationships were based on reciprocity, so the neonatives often became integrated into the community's social fabric. For some, this was clearly fine. As both Salstrom and the upset Virginian indicated, many people wanted to blend into the local culture and shed their countercultural connections. Others, however, found relinquishing their privacy and their convictions about alternative lifestyles to be problematic. Larry and Linda eventually left Ashe County because they had not expected to become so intertwined in their community. They moved there anticipating freedom "from the bounds, rules, and norms of mainstream" culture. What they found, however, was that in order to survive, they had to become part of the community. "Survival was dependent on mutual aid," says Beaver, "and aid was returned in neighborliness." In this particular area, neighborliness meant participating in social activities, conforming, even if only publicly, to social norms, and returning favors. This level of social engagement was more than Larry and Linda had bargained for.<sup>101</sup>

It is not yet clear whether this issue of community involvement and conformity was experienced among all regional back-to-the-landers or whether it was an occurrence specific to Ashe County. But other sources suggest that it may have existed across the region. Certainly the upset Virginian supports this notion, as does Paul Salstrom. He concurs with Beaver's assessment that, in order to survive, neonatives had to open themselves up to developing relationships with their neighbors. He concludes, "The neonatives' dream of escaping social constraints by achieving self-sufficiency had proven to be a chimera." 102

Still, the homesteaders left their own distinct mark on the region. Thanks in part to their efforts, music venues, craft shops, farmers' markets, folk festivals, radio stations, and other creative economic outlets flourish. One Floyd native confessed to Jayn Avery his belief that the alter-natives saved the town's economy. "Because there were so many of us that were able to live independently of having to" work in Floyd, she says, they could make their money elsewhere, bring it into the town, and spend it locally. Floyd, a town of five hundred, now receives a steady stream of media attention and tourist dollars for its world music festival, eclectic shops, and happening music

venues. (The irony of Floyd becoming a popular tourist destination is not lost on the back-to-the-landers who came there seeking to escape the mob). 103 The neonatives have also helped to preserve the region's streams, rivers, mountains, and forests. Many back-to-the-landers have become valuable allies to regional environmental organizations battling chip mills, mountaintop removal coal mining, overdevelopment, and other unsustainable practices.

In Appalachia the back-to-the-landers found natural beauty, peace, sanctuary from the fast-paced urban life, inspiration, and friendship. But many also realized that full self-sufficiency was an unrealistic goal, especially without the assistance of neighbors who had the knowledge and experience to guide them in their agrarian endeavors. While the neonatives may have been a bit shocking at first, the ones who settled permanently in Appalachia seem to have overcome any negative perceptions that initially hindered their ability to develop relationships with long-term residents. Whether they overcame those barriers because they tempered their countercultural lifestyles or they maintained a strong enough presence in their communities to cease being "strange" remains to be seen. But one thing is clear; in addition to their activism and support for regional causes, they provided long-term Appalachian residents with companionship, fresh topics for gossip, fodder for the imagination, and, at times, a source of amusement. As Lynn Stasick says, "We were new and unusual, you know. . . . We were an oddity."104

## **NOTES**

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- David A. Peyton, "Appalachian Culture Boom: Loving It to Death," Nation, Nov. 8, 1975, 465-67.
- 2. Ibid., 466.
- 3. John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 355; Colleen Redman, interview by author, July 23, 2008, Floyd, VA; Patricia D. Beaver, *Rural Community in the Appalachian South* (1986; repr., Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press,

- 1992), 121. John Alexander Williams coined the term "neonatives" to describe both back-to-the-landers and "residential tourists" who came into the region in ever-greater numbers during the late-20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Floyd, Virginia, neonative Colleen Redman, Will Basin coined the term "alter-native." "Homesteader" is a term that is commonly seen in movement literature such as *Mother Earth News* and *Organic Gardening and Farming*.
- 4. Merlin B. Brinkerhoff and Jeffrey C. Jacob, "Quasi-Religious Meaning Systems, Official Religion, and Quality of Life in an Alternative Lifestyle: A Survey from the Back-to-the-Land Movement," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26, no. 1 (1987): 63.
- 5. Mack Samples, *Hippies and Holiness* (Marceline, MO: Walsworth Publishing Company, 1999), 45.
- 6. Mack Samples, interview by author, July 8, 2008, Duck, WV.
- 7. Timothy Miller, *The Hippies and American Values* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 91-92, 112.
- 8. Jayn Avery, interview by author, July 23, 2008, Floyd, VA.
- 9. Paul Gallimore, interview by author, June 12, 2008, Leicester, NC.
- 10. The School of Living, founded in 1934, advocates decentralization and self-sufficiency. It sponsors workshops on homesteading, local monetary systems, land trusts, organic farming, and appropriate technology, among other things. In 1965, the School took possession of Heathcote Mill in Freeland, Maryland, for the purpose of providing educational workshops to the public and publishing the *Green Revolution*. This was only four years prior to the onslaught of visitors that sent many Heathcote residents seeking individual plots of land in West Virginia. See Bill Mackie, "A Nostalgia Trip," *Green Revolution*, Nov. 1975, 2.
- 11. Ralph Borsodi, "The Green Revolution versus the Counter Culture," *Green Revolution*, Oct. 1972, 5.
- 12. Paul Salstrom, interview by author, Mar. 6, 2008, Morgantown, WV.
- Paul Salstrom, "From Rugged Individualism to a Community Land Trust: A Report from Lincoln County, West Virginia," Green Revolution, Feb. 1975, 7.
- 14. Robert Rodale, "Learn to Stand on Your Own Two Feet," *Organic Gardening and Farming*, Aug. 1973, 28-32.
- 15. "Your Editor," Whole Earth Catalog, Fall 1970, 23.
- Brinkerhoff and Jacob, "Quasi-Religious Meaning Systems, Official Religion, and Quality of Life in an Alternative Lifestyle," 64.
- 17. Elinor Agnew, Back from the Land: How Young Americans Went to Nature in the 1970s, and Why They Came Back (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004), 6-7.
- 18. *Glenville Democrat*, Aug. 7, 1975; Ibid., Aug. 17, 1975.
- 19. Jeffrey C. Jacob and Merlin B. Brinkerhoff, "Alternative Technology and Part-time Semi-subsistence Agriculture: A Survey from the Back-to-the-Land Movement," *Rural Sociology* 51, no. 1 (1986): 43-44. For information

- on the Great Migration, see Chad Berry, Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 12-17.
- 20. Jeffrey C. Jacob, *New Pioneers: The Back-to-the-Land Movement and the Search for a Sustainable Future* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 3; Michael, "Reach," *Communities*, Dec./Jan. 1974, 56.
- 21. Borsodi, "The Green Revolution versus the Counter Culture," 5.
- 22. Rodale, "Rural Renaissance on the Way," *Organic Gardening and Farming*, Sept. 1975, 44.
- 23. Elinor Agnew, Back from the Land, 6-9.
- 24. Bill Byers, interview by author, June 9, 2008, Rutherfordton, NC.
- 25. Jacob, New Pioneers, 6-10.
- 26. Salstrom, interview. David Shi argues that the Puritans and Quakers laid the foundation for an American consciousness regarding material wealth and the excesses of urban life. Their distaste for cities and material excess influenced Thomas Jefferson, who in small farmers found virtue, a word in his time meaning "wholesome, productive, public-spirited independence" (Howe, 44). The reverence for small farmers endured, resurfacing in Victorian and late-Victorian criticisms of capitalism, cities, and material wealth. Nature writers such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and John Burroughs also shaped the way Americans viewed the countryside by touting its potential for promoting physical, spiritual, and emotional renewal. Rural impulses reemerged during the early 20th century, most notably during the Great Depression. As historian Chad Berry notes, many southerners who had migrated to northern urban areas during the 1920s returned south to ride out the economic crisis. As the Depression eased, they returned north again.

For a comprehensive look at American simplicity, see David Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1985). See also Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1858-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 44; Peter J. Schmitt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America* (1969; repr., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture: 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Berry, *Southern Migrants*, 32.

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