

Cemeteries and the Life of a Smoky Mountain Community



Throughout the cove, there are 27 cemeteries, 10 engraved stones that informed our research to reconstruct the community

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Cemeteries and the
Life of a Smoky
Mountain Community

Cades Cove Under Foot

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This is dedicated to all, the named and the nameless, who rest in the tranquility of Cades Cove. Think of them kindly as you walk among them in their beloved mountain cove. Read their names engraved on the gravestones, for they were names once spoken and familiar in this place they knew as home. Reflect upon, and wonder about the nameless buried in graves marked only by field or river stones, or not marked at all, for they were also named in life, and their names were spoken as well. Both the named and the nameless interred in Cades Cove knew it as home, and with their hopes and their heartaches, their joys and their sorrows, their aspirations and their disappointments, they were the threads that were woven into the fabric of this mountain community. This is dedicated to the memories of Jim Wayne Miller, Loyal Jones, and Cratis Williams, all Appalachian scholars who taught their heritage and not just about their heritage, and to (William) Lynwood Montell who continues to teach that heritage through prolific research and writing.

PREFACE

In *Spoon River Anthology*, Edgar Lee Majors (1916) offers a collection of poems narrating the autobiographical epitaphs of 212 deceased residents of the fictional Spoon River, delivered by the dead, themselves. In so doing, they reconstruct a picture of their community, demystifying rural and small-town American life. In our volume, *Under Foot*, we draw upon the methods of social science to read the 385 historical gravestones of Cades Cove in the Great Smoky Mountains. In so doing, we enable the dead to tell their story, reconstructing their community and demystifying rural mountain life in Appalachia as it was more than 100 years ago.

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park is the most visited in the National Park System, receiving more than 11 million visitors annually, and nearly 2.4 million make Cades Cove a destination. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park, more than 500,000 acres, was chartered by Congress in 1934 and dedicated in 1940 (Campbell 1969). This included the acquisition of Cades Cove by eminent domain (Dunn 1988, 246–250; Pierce 1998). The National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form, discloses the preservation of Cades Cove, including its cemeteries, as a historic district for its protection and for the benefit of visitors.

With the interest of Appalachian and regional scholars,¹ folklorists, regional historians, cultural geographers, ethnic scholars, demographers, social scientists, genealogists, and even tourists, Cades Cove narratives have been told through a variety of sources to reveal the mosaic pattern of this place as it *is*, but never again as it *was*. Some of the narratives occur in the personal perspectives, recollections, memories and personal accounts, and the oral histories of former residents and their descendants (e.g., see Maynard 2004; McCaulley 2008; Shields 1965, 1977, 1981; Weals 2002), not necessarily representative of the entire cove settlement. Other narratives occur as histories derived from secondary sources (e.g., see Dunn 1988 as the most comprehensive). Our research narrative is dependent upon a primary source, the residents, themselves, and though their voices are mute to our inquiry, we “interview” their gravestones that speak for them.

The cemeteries of Cades Cove, like cemeteries anywhere, are libraries of stone that archive data of former communities and their residents. Cemeteries are proxies of communities, and enable a reconstruction not facilitated by any other single source. The deceased tell their own collective stories, refuting the old adage that the dead tell no tales. Martineau (1989, 70–76, 112–116), in 1838, noted cemeteries as archives of socio-demographic data in the absence of public and vital records, and acknowledged them as informative sources in studying cultural values, beliefs, and social patterns across time. When interpreted meticulously, cemeteries give voice to the deceased as the once-living residents of a community that is no more. We entered the cemeteries to “interview” those “residents” to reconstruct a profile of the past community. Reading one gravestone tells something of the individual, but reading all gravestones tells something of the entire community.

This study is unique in several regards. First, given the ubiquity of cemeteries in the United States, relatively few studies have used cemetery data to reconstruct the social organization, social change, and community composition archived in those libraries of stone. Second, few studies have employed statistical analysis to interpret the data, most relying on impressionistic observation of the unique and different, but it is the

¹Appalachia as a region is 205,000 square miles, stretching more than 1000 miles along the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northeastern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia, home to more than 25 million (Appalachian Regional Commission www.arc.gov).

ordinary and the commonplace that cemeteries are best at revealing, and it is the ordinary and commonplace that typify community. Third, few cemetery studies have focused on small, rural cemeteries, at least outside New England, and particularly on southern Appalachian cemeteries. With little cemetery scholarship in the Appalachian region, we examine, in depth, an Appalachian community through its death culture. Finally, we have approached this study from a sociological perspective but have written for a diverse, interdisciplinary audience, and a lay public.

As a kind of public sociology, we hope our work is not sequestered and cloistered in any single discipline or interest. Sociology is the least-offered social science in secondary education, and has little exposure in the public arena. A public sociology, long overdue, *is* interdisciplinary and relevant way for multiple disciplines and interests. A public sociology or a public “any discipline” is the best democratization of that discipline. All disciplines should write not only for colleagues, but also for siblings and parents and adult children to let them know what we are doing and that it is relevant.

Appalachian research and literature are extensive. The multi-volume dissertation of Cratis Williams (1961) was an annotated, exhaustive compendium of virtually everything written about Appalachia up to that time. Since then, more has been written. Still, regarding “the life and character of the mountain people...more has been written and less actually known, than about any other people on this continent” (Powell 1966, 24). To assuage that, we go directly to the people of Cades Cove, now gone nearly 100 years and more, and enable them to tell their own narrative via their gravestones.

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creation of the CCPA in 2001, which provides orientation and education to visitors before and after their visit to the cove through the Cades Cove Museum located in Maryville, Tennessee. The CCPA is a valuable resource and asset for tourists, scholars, and researchers, reflecting the history of Cades Cove and the culture and traditions of East Tennessee and the Upland South.

Steve Di Naso and Vince Gutowski, physical geographers from Eastern Illinois University, and Doug McClintic, formerly of the Kara Company of Chicago, Illinois, conducted the remote-sensing surveys (using a variety of technologies, including Leica Viva GPS instruments, base station, Leica Scanner, peripherals, and 3D Scanner) that produced accurate maps of the burials in the three church cemeteries, a supplemental product of our research permit. Their selfless participation fully merged with and created a partnership between the “hard” sciences and the “social” sciences that enhanced the integrity of our research. To that end, we are also indebted to the Kara Company for its generous and kind support in lending the equipment and personnel for this research. We were saddened by the sudden passing of our friend and colleague, Vince Gutowski, shortly before the completion of this project.

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