TRIBUTARIES

JOURNAL OF THE
Alabama Folklife Association

ISSUE NO. 14

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ON THE COVER
Rock Springs Missionary Baptist Church and Rock Springs Cemetery
Cleburne County, Alabama | *Photo by Karen Singer Jabbour*

DESIGNED BY Valerie Downes

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Contents

Alabama Folklife

ASSOCIATION

Alabama Folklife

Folklife includes cultural products and artistic expressions passed down through the generations via families, communities, and work life. It includes topics like food, music, dance, stories, remedies, hunting and fishing customs, religious rituals, and traditional arts like pottery, quilting, woodworking, and basketry. Folklife is comprised of living traditions that evolve as new groups arrive, environments change, and individual personalities leave their mark.

Alabama holds a rich array of folklife that includes both rural and urban traditions and contributions from diverse cultures and art forms. Alabama's geography, including the Gulf Coast, Black Belt, Tennessee Valley, Wiregrass, and Appalachia, yields folkways representing distinct environments and histories. Alabama folklife includes practices as wide ranging as shrimp net building, Watch Night, old time fiddle, ofrendas, gospel singing, the Vietnamese lion dance, storytelling, Poarch Creek shell carving, Korean paper fans, pine needle basketry, Rangoli, duck decoy carving, layer cakes, and much more.

TRIBUTARIES

Alabama's waterways intersect its folkways at every level. Early settlement and cultural diffusion conformed to drainage patterns. The Coastal Plain, the Black Belt, the Foothills, and the Tennessee Valley remain distinct traditional as well as economic regions today. The state's cultural landscape, like its physical one, features a network of "tributaries" rather than a single dominant mainstream. **JIM CARNES** | 1994 | *TRIBUTARIES NO. 1*

The Joyce H. Cauthen Fellowship Fund

The folklife scholarship comprising this volume of *Tributaries* was supported by the Joyce H. Cauthen Fellowship Fund, established in 2010 to honor Cauthen's contributions to Alabama folklife by providing grants for the documentation and preservation of Alabama's traditional music and other folkways. For this issue, the AFA awarded five fellowships to scholars who conducted fieldwork on bare-earth cemeteries, quilting, wart healing, and labor culture.

Joyce Cauthen, a native Texan, moved to Birmingham in 1971 to marry Jim Cauthen who soon took up old-time fiddling. Besides learning to accompany him on guitar, Joyce decided it was important to learn about the history of fiddling in the state, locate older fiddlers, and find rare Alabama fiddle tunes. In 1989, after the University of Alabama Press published her book *With Fiddle and Well Rosined Bow: The History of Old-Time Fiddling in Alabama*, Joey Brackner of the Alabama State Council on the Arts (ASCA) encouraged Joyce to research other aspects of folk culture and to establish a state folk festival under the auspices of the Alabama Folklife Association (AFA). She worked as a freelance folklorist until 2000 when the AFA became a partner organization of ASCA and she was named Executive Director.

Among Joyce's achievements are the Alabama Folklife Festivals held in Birmingham and Montgomery as well as ten years of the Alabama Sampler Stage held in Birmingham. She established yearly AFA gatherings focusing on local culture in Mobile, Selma, Talladega, Grove Hill, Leeds, Fort McClellan in Anniston, Camden/Gee's Bend, Old Alabama Town in Montgomery, and Belk. She also founded the Alabama Community Scholars Institute to teach Alabamians to recognize aspects of traditional culture around them and to document it.

Joyce worked long and steadily to establish the Archive of Alabama Folk Culture in conjunction with the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture

(ACTC) and the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH). Between events and programs, she researched Alabama's traditional folk music and worked with other state folklorists to produce books and recordings on Sacred Harp singing, Southern gospel convention singing, Primitive Baptist hymn singing, African American gospel quartet singing, and, of course, Alabama fiddling.

Joyce states that anything good she did for the AFA was made possible with the sincere encouragement, muscles, and tech support of Jim Cauthen, the wisdom and support of Joey Brackner, and assistance from the staff of the ACTC, ASCA, and some fantastic AFA board members.

IN GRATITUDE

The Alabama Folklife Association recognizes **Mary Allison Haynie** for her remarkable leadership of the AFA from 2010 to 2019. Under her guidance, the AFA provided hands-on community and school programming in art forms as wide ranging as the blues, quilting, Sacred Harp singing, and storytelling; trained leaders through the Alabama Community Scholars Institute; created two traveling folklife exhibits; and championed Alabama's traditional artists. Ms. Haynie's steadfast contributions to folklife will surely resonate in Alabama for years to come.

IN MEMORIAM

The Alabama folklife community mourns the loss of **Dr. Alan Jabbour**. A folklorist, fiddler, fieldworker, author, scholar, and distinguished leader, Dr. Jabbour was a good friend and inspiration to many in Alabama. He leaves us with a profound and enduring legacy. Learn more about Dr. Jabbour in his biography on page 82.

A Tour of Alabama Bare-Earth Cemeteries

ALAN JABBOUR AND KAREN SINGER JABBOUR

Few 21st century readers realize that the classic old style for Southern cemeteries was a bare-earth landscape: the entire cemetery was grassless, and earthen mounds ran the length of each grave. The cemeteries not only lacked grass but shunned it. In 1867, just after the Civil War, the minutes of the Petersburg (Virginia) Ladies Memorial Association refer to bare-earth style, mounding, and an experiment with grass at Blandford Cemetery, a major site for Civil War burials and an apparent inspiration for Memorial Day:

The executive committee having resolved to remound the graves in Blandford and sow them with grass seed, I ordered the same to be done, but the heavy rains and the barrenness of the soil ... have prevented the grass from coming up ... and I respectfully suggest to the Association whether it would be advisable to repeat the experiment and the expense.[1]

This inconclusive experiment with planting grass at Blandford reflected a radical change underway in urban cemeteries and just beginning to appear on the cultural horizon of the South during the later decades of the 19th century. Southern cemeteries had heretofore been maintained in the bare-earth and mounded style, but gradually the new cultural idea of a grass-covered cemetery began to make its way into the small-town and rural South. By the later 20th century, most rural Southerners, like Americans generally, would imagine a grassy park-like lawn, similar to the yard around their home, when they thought about cemeteries.

The bare-earth style has its roots in the clean-swept dooryard that historically characterized Southern rural dwellings. The dooryard around a rural home was plucked clean of grass and regularly swept clean with a broom or rake as an exercise in tidiness. Visiting the Hammons family in the early 1970s to document their traditions in the mountains of Pocahontas County, West Virginia,

FIGURE 01 Macedonia Cemetery, Tuscaloosa County. *(Photo by Karen Singer Jabbour)*

we noticed that Maggie Hammons Parker regularly swept the grassless earth in front of her front door as a morning chore. The mental analogy between dooryard and graveyard is revealed in the parallel construction of their names. The cultural reasoning seems to have been that a graveyard, as the dooryard for the home of the dead, should logically be kept in the style of a dooryard. But as changing styles brought grass to the dooryard, the graveyard followed suit.

The dooryard-graveyard analogy is compelling, but there is another analogy to consider. Managing a bare-earth cemetery, or one's family area within it, is like managing a vegetable garden, which requires periodic scraping and hoeing to suppress weeds. The cemetery is mounded in a style that resembles the rows of a vegetable garden, and the cemetery's flower decorations are often inserted in a single-row style, much like planting a garden. Thus scraping a cemetery symbolically replicates the act of gardening at the heart of rural life.

A few scholars have turned their attention to the bare-earth style. Cultural geographer Fred Kniffen describes it using the term *scraping* to describe the community events during which, for a bare-earth cemetery, community members remove grassy or weedy volunteers that appear unbidden.[2] Terry Jordan, adopting the same terms, makes a case for the African and African American origin of the bare-earth style. His case is oddly qualified by his associating the custom mainly with the Gulf Coast and South Atlantic coastal plain: "The custom is apparently unknown or very rare in the hills of western North Carolina and in Middle Tennessee."[3]

Regarding African American influence on the bare-earth style, Jordan may be right, but we have documented the bare-earth style and its modifications (such as white sand or gravel treatments) not only in Alabama but rather extensively in western North Carolina, mainly in Jackson, Swain, and Transylvania Counties. The bare-earth and mounded family gravesites in otherwise grassy modern cemeteries are further evidence of the old style's lingering influence throughout the South. Combining our own documentary evidence with the Texas evidence Jordan presents and the research he cites from other scholars, it seems clear that the style was not limited historically to the Southern coastal plain. The bare-earth style and the closely associated custom of mounding, which the Petersburg example alluded to in 1867, were virtually pan-Southern in both white and Black cemeteries in the 19th century, and the style has survived into the 21st century.

Our tour of Alabama bare-earth cemeteries begins with two red-clay cemeteries. The first is Macedonia Cemetery, which lies next to Macedonia United Methodist Church in northern Tuscaloosa County (Figure 1). It is a striking sight—the sustained red-clay backdrop it creates for the individual graves, punctuated by several triangular "comb graves" is stark and commanding. One senses having entered a different

aesthetic surround; this cemetery's grandeur cannot be measured by comparing it to cemeteries in the modern style. It lies on a high ridge overlooking a valley and dam lake on a tributary of the Black Warrior River, offering a prospect to match the cemetery's beauty. Macedonia looks so utterly "other" to most 21st-century Americans that they may not catch one detail in which the cemetery has embraced modernity. The bare-earth style, which is usually conjoined with mounded graves in the cemetery, typically presents an earthen mound running from head to foot along the grave's surface.[4] But these graves are level instead of being mounded. Two small groups of graves still show evidence of having formerly been mounded, and, down the hill, a terraced row at the bottom of the cemetery is grassy, but otherwise the cemetery is entirely bare-earth and level.

The second bare-earth red-clay cemetery is Mount Mariah Cemetery, an African American cemetery in Marengo County (Figure 2). Most gravesites in the cemetery's older area use horizontal grave covers, which preclude mounding, but two graves lack grave covers. Though worn by rain, they show evidence of the style of mounding—a truncated triangular prism—that we observed in a bare-earth African American cemetery in west Georgia and in a white cemetery in western North Carolina.[5] Just behind the level plot beside the church, the land slopes downhill and the cemetery follows the slope down. This newer section is not bare-earth but displays patchy grass. The shift to a grassy style, as with the single row at the bottom of Macedonia Cemetery, can be accounted for by the desire to prevent erosion where the land slopes severely enough. It can also be explained simply as a modern style that prevailed in newer burials down the

FIGURE 02 Mount Mariah Cemetery, Marengo County. *(Photo by Karen Singer Jabbour)*

slope but did not affect older burials on top of the ridge.

New graves after burial are typically left with a large loose-earth mound heaped up along the grave to compensate for sinking caused by settlement of the grave's loose earth or collapse of old-style pine coffins underground. But mounding as a ritual practice is distinct from, though similar to, the usual after-burial mound. The ritual of mounding calls for painstaking restoration of mounds that have been eroded by wind and rainstorms. The shape of the mounds may be large and loose, like after-burial mounds, but ritual mounding is typically lower, more compactly constructed, and raked and packed down more carefully. Most such mounding is gently rounded, but occasionally the mound is more triangular and leveled on top in the truncated triangular prism style. Rake marks may be left on and around the mound—a graceful emblem of care and devotion.

The oldest bare-earth style uses whatever soil presents itself where the cemetery lies. But at some early date the idea arose in the American South of using white sand instead of ordinary dirt or clay to dress gravesites. White sand seems to have been chosen because whiteness is associated with cleanliness and holiness. Hence preachers often use white robes, and women tasked with tending people who faint in a church service often dress in white. In the cemetery, some people elect to whitewash family headstones, and horizontal above-ground tombs in southern Louisiana are often whitewashed. A backdrop of white also sets off nicely the colors of flowers and greenery used to decorate a gravesite. In this spirit, white sand is sometimes imported into cemeteries to dress gravesites, covering or mixing with the natural soil.

The six cemeteries presented below use white sand to dress the cemetery. Most contain an admixture of white sand with the native clay-tinged earth. Hence the white sand often has a tincture of pink. We do not know whether the sand was originally distributed evenly throughout the cemetery or whether it was applied annually to the mounds, worn down by rain and wind, and raked up to remound, resulting gradually in more even distribution.

In 2006 folklorist Joey Brackner introduced us to our first Alabama bare-earth cemetery: Spring Hill Cemetery in Talladega National Forest near the northeastern edge of Hale County (Figure 3). If

Scraping a cemetery symbolically replicates the act of gardening at the heart of rural life.

memory serves, he brought us there without saying in advance that it was a bare-earth cemetery—perhaps he hoped to surprise us. When we got there, his first words were an involuntary, "Oh no!" Since the cemetery is slightly higher than an adjacent parking area, all we could see from the car was a grassy area at the front. He must have feared that the cemetery had been reworked with grass since he last visited. But as we got out of the car, the big picture opened into view. Other than this grassy area at the front edge and another at the side margin, the cemetery was entirely bare-earth. One enclosed family site contained pure white sand, but most of the earth was a mix of sand and clay.

Spring Hill has widespread but not universal mounding, suggesting (like the entirely white-sand family plot) that the cemetery relies on individuals and families for routine upkeep and offers them latitude in managing family gravesites. The nearby church building, once used by a Baptist church, now had a sign for the Spring Hill Holiness Church. A large pavilion serves for dinner on the ground and other outdoor church or cemetery gatherings. The varied and lively decoration—lots

FIGURE 03 Spring Hill Cemetery, Talladega National Forest. *(Photo by Karen Singer Jabbour)*

FIGURE 04 Pleasant Grove Cemetery, Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, Clarke County. *(Photo by Karen Singer Jabbour)*

of flowers and special decorative items, including a "Roll Tide" flag—points to the possibility of a Decoration Day event at Spring Hill and family visits in all seasons.[6]

In 2012 we returned to continue documenting Alabama's rural cemeteries with assistance from the Alabama Folklife Association. After visiting northern Alabama cemeteries in the spring, we returned to cover southern Alabama in the fall. Stopping at the Clarke County Historical Society's museum, we talked with its director, Kerry Reid, about two cemeteries in Clarke County. The previous day we had visited the handsome 19th-century brick family graveshelter in Airmount Cemetery, which the society has acquired, and we were eager to see the African American sculpted heads and busts in Mt. Nebo Cemetery, which we had heard and read about. After discussing Airmount, we asked Kerry Reid if she knew of any other Clarke County graveshelters. She thought a moment, and then mentioned a cemetery with a wooden graveshelter in the western part of the county: Pleasant Grove Cemetery (Figure 4). Leaving the society's historic home in Grove Hill, we decided to visit Pleasant Grove Cemetery next. As we arrived, the first thing that caught my eye was Pleasant Grove Baptist Church; the second was a large cemetery with a graveshelter at its far side; and the third was the cemetery's style—it was entirely bare-earth.

On closer inspection, we noticed an amazing consistency in Pleasant Grove's style. The visual field was varied, not only because of attractive decoration but because some gravesites were covered by

horizontal concrete grave covers, some had vertical headstones and monuments, and one had a handsome graveshelter, while others had bare-earth mounds. What was consistent was the fact that every bare-earth gravesite was mounded; none was left level. A few gravesites were coped with a concrete border and filled with gravel inside the border. One coped gravesite, however, had no gravel—its inside consisted of sand-clay like the outside. It too was mounded, like all the other bare-earth gravesites. Such a consistency must reflect either astonishing consensus within the local community or, more likely, the guiding curatorial hand of a cemetery committee or a single caretaker.

The cemetery's consistency neatly incorporates one stylistic irregularity. It is surrounded by a chain-link fence extending southward well beyond the present margin of burials. Within the fence, a paved driveway bounds the cemetery on the south side, and beyond that driveway lies a field of verdant grass, corresponding with the grassy church grounds outside the cemetery fence. Near the fence's southwest corner, set apart from the rest of the cemetery, a family has introduced a group of three recent burials. Did this happen with church and community assent? Perhaps so; the cemetery is essentially full, and the curators may have decided to open unused space. Or possibly, as sometimes happens in rural cemeteries, a family just decided to bury without advice or consent. In any case, this separate family area is now maintained consistent with the overall cemetery style. What is more, a long bare-earth corridor has been extended from the paved driveway to the family "island," thus providing a stylistic and spiritual "peninsula" connecting it with the cemetery as a whole.

Seeing verdant grass surrounding the bare-earth of the cemetery proper, it is hard to escape the conclusion that, to the shapers of this cemetery's style, walking from the outside greensward into the cemetery's bare-earth interior signifies moving from the secular to the sacred sphere. In light of the migration of most Alabama cemeteries into contemporary grass-based styles, which the curators of Pleasant Grove cannot have failed to notice, it is not credible that such a meticulously executed example of the classic bare-earth style indicates community inertia or lack of awareness. Rather, the cultural conservatism of this community must dictate a strong feeling that bare earth creates a sacred zone that best honors the memory of their loved ones. Thus Pleasant Grove is *prima facie* evidence that a cemetery may be considered a work of art, where piety, cultural values, aesthetics, and artistic discipline come together on a canvas writ large on the face of the countryside.

In 2013 we found two bare-earth cemeteries in southeastern Cleburne County. We arrived at the first one—not knowing what we would encounter—at the end of the day as sunset faded into dusk. Rock Springs Missionary Baptist Church faces a country road close to the Cleburne-Randolph county line. Next to the church, parallel with the country road, is Rock Springs Cemetery (Figure 5). Walking east from the church, the first two-thirds of the cemetery is pure bare-earth in style. Grass is abundant in the space between the road and the cemetery but abruptly stops at the cemetery's edge. Mounding is widespread

Rake marks may be left on and around the mound—
a graceful emblem of care and devotion.

but not universal. The white sand bare-earth treatment seems to mark entry into holy ground.

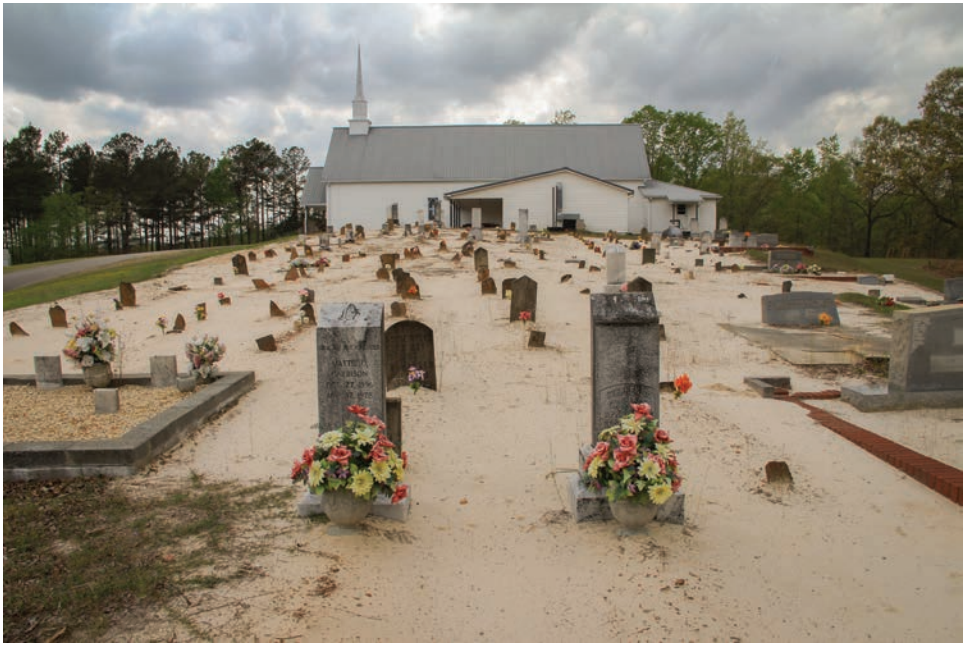
Then suddenly, as one continues eastward, the bare-earth changes to the coped-and-graveled style, an emblem of the 20th-century Piedmont South from the Carolinas through Alabama. "Coping" is a widespread rural Southern term for laying out borders for individual or family cemetery plots. White sand still appears, but now it is contained within enclosures, and what lies within the border coping is as likely to be white or gray gravel as white sand. Outside the coping on every side is green grass, and mounding mostly but not completely disappears. Clearly the cemetery filled up from the church eastward, and in a certain period the gravesites changed from bare-earth to coped-and-graveled style with a grass surround. Yet it is striking that in the old section, which from the church appears to be the cemetery's dominant style, the bare-earth treatment remains. It is as if the congregation could envision new graves in a newer style, but could not imagine the older generations of graves in any way other than the old way.

The next morning, we returned to southeastern Cleburne County, in part to photograph Rock Springs Cemetery in broad daylight. This time we approached Rock Springs from the east, turning off the highway at the small community of Union Hill. As we turned, our eyes were drawn first to the beautiful hand-crafted stonework of Union Hill Baptist Church. Then we saw to our surprise that the cemetery next to the church was maintained with white sand in the bare-earth style. Many of the graves, as one might expect, were mounded. The top of the hill where Union Hill Cemetery lies offers level terrain, and there is little to break the rhythm of the sandy earth, except for a few coped gravesite enclosures. In the bright sunlight of midday, it was a brilliant sight.

Strolling beyond the edge of the hill, however, the coped-and-graveled style suddenly becomes not incidental but dominant, and grass suddenly appears between the coped family enclosures on the downward slope. As in earlier cases during this cemetery tour, one good practical reason is that grass on slopes protects from erosion; another may be that the shift in the community's stylistic tastes coincided with running out of space on the level hilltop. In any case, like Rock Springs Cemetery (which is only a few miles away), Union Hill shifted as it expanded down the hill, to a mixed modern look dominated by the coped-and-graveled Piedmont style. Yet it carefully preserved the bare-earth style for older burials along the ridge.

In northern Alabama's Lawrence County, two cemeteries present the old bare-earth style using white sand. Both are in southern Lawrence County, where the high country of the Tennessee Valley Divide is now part of William B. Bankhead National Forest. Water flows from the Divide north into the Tennessee River and south into the Gulf of Mexico. The population of this hill country, once considerable, is now much diminished. Some church buildings are no longer used for regular services, serving only for special events like Decoration Day, but the cemeteries are still tended.

Shiloh Cemetery sits virtually astride the Divide, next to Shiloh Church. A small pavilion between church and cemetery serves for dinner on the ground. In fall, when we visited, the white sand of the cemetery was softened by patches of brown dry leaves. Despite shade



and poor soil, grass grows between the road and the cemetery entrance, but in the cemetery the grass is replaced by white sand. The cemetery may have been mounded until recent years, but sand mounding dissipates quickly when hammered by frequent hard rains, and now the cemetery has a more level bare-earth appearance. The abundant decoration consists of both flowers and other objects. Two graveshelters, in separate locations but of similar design, adorn the cemetery's profile, and several plantings, including some boxwoods, augment the sense that Shiloh is well tended.

FIGURE 05 Rock Springs Missionary Baptist Church and Rock Springs Cemetery Cleburne County, Alabama. *(Photo by Karen Singer Jabbour)*

A cemetery may be considered a work of art, where piety, cultural values, aesthetics, and artistic discipline come together on a canvas writ large on the face of the countryside.

A few miles from Shiloh Cemetery stands Pine Torch Cemetery (Figure 6). The site houses an old log church, a newer and larger church, and various other structures. Neither church building is now actively used except for special events such as Decoration Day, which a sign informs us is held on the fourth Sunday in May. In some areas, Pine Torch shows recent remounding, and a large pile of white sand stands at the cemetery margin, ready to be tapped for cemetery renovation. The white-sand backdrop for the graves serves as an emblem of old ways in a cemetery still used by people to commune with family, community, and history.

It is noteworthy that three of these Alabama bare-earth cemeteries are conserved within a national forest: Spring Hill in Hale County and Shiloh and Pine Torch in Lawrence County. In all three cases the cemeteries are still visited and decorated, and all have recent burials.[7] Though the National Forest Service often provides information about cultural resources like cemeteries within national forests, staff members probably have no role in maintaining these cemeteries. It may be that as congregations dwindled and churches became

FIGURE 06 Pine Torch Cemetery, Lawrence County. *(Photo by Karen Singer Jabbour)*

inactive, there was a communal resolve to keep up the cemeteries but leave them in roughly the style of the time of transition.

Why do some communities hold on so tightly to the old tradition of bare-earth cemeteries? There may be some practical arguments in its favor. Getting a cemetery to a bare-earth state, like clearing a plot for a garden, is hard work, but keeping it that way may actually require no more effort than maintaining a grassy neutral ground within a cemetery. The history of grass management in cemeteries reveals how many unforeseen problems seem to have accompanied the adoption of a grass regime. Mowing a grassy yard is easy enough, but mowing a grassy field containing a vast assemblage of large and small artifacts resting close to each other is a demanding challenge! The goal of mowing grass efficiently tends to discourage and finally preclude personal styles of decoration, and it has led to a modern commercial cemetery style eliminating all grave markers that are not level with the earth. On the other hand, grass is beautiful; it can provide an attractive backdrop for flowers; and for a hilly, sloping cemetery it assists in preventing erosion.

Yet the practical assets and liabilities of the two styles may not have been the controlling reason for a community's choice. For many communities who chose grass, the change may have seemed either a welcome leap into modernity or a historical inevitability to which cemeteries must submit. For communities that resisted, maintaining bare-earth cemeteries seems to be rooted in religious piety, aesthetic preference, and devotion to tradition. Perhaps, for those who have conserved the bare-earth tradition, the striking contrast between the cemetery's bare earth and the surrounding green grass and woods conveys a sense of entering the cemetery's sacred space, which is clearly differentiated from the surrounding secular world. That has been its effect on us as visitors, and we believe that the community members who have shaped and tended the cemeteries share that feeling. ○

Documenting a Community

Prospect Quilting Heritage Days in Walker County

DENISE DUTTON BENSHOOF

The ladies of the community have been very busy making quilts for the M.E. church to finish the church buildings and classrooms.

MAUDE SMITH | "PROSPECT NEWS," *MOUNTAIN EAGLE*, OCTOBER 21, 1957

On August 3rd and 4th of 2012, volunteers and quilters came together at the Prospect Methodist Church (now known as the Prospect Independent Church) for Prospect Quilting Heritage Days, a quilt documentation for the Prospect community (Figure 1). The purpose was to document quilts made in the community and to archive the information acquired so that future researchers may explore community relationships, understand how the community's quilting has been impacted by the community's heritage, and learn about the materials and techniques used in quilting processes in Prospect.

Prospect, near Nauvoo in the northwest corner of Walker County, has a long quilting history. Maude Smith began recording Prospect's history through her rural correspondent column in the *Mountain Eagle*, the nearby Jasper newspaper. Her columns are source material for a historical timeline of Prospect. The rural correspondent columns, which she began writing in 1916 and continued until close to 1970, cover approximately sixty years of Prospect's social and agricultural history. Smith documented neighborhood gatherings, including quiltings, in local homes, the local school, and at local churches. The purpose of these quiltings was to develop community relationships and to sew quilts for both personal use and community fundraising.

Smith had two hanging quilting frames in her home, as did other quilters, to host community quilting and to keep up with her personal quilting.[8] In the late 1950s, the group of women who came together to quilt regularly in each other's homes decided that they wanted to quilt in one central location. They used their

quilting skills to raise money to complete the basement of the rebuilt Prospect Methodist Church so they could quilt in a common community space.[9] After this group stopped quilting in the early 1960s, their daughters began quilting again in the church in the 1980s.[10] Today, a small group of women who grew up in the area still come together to raise funds for Prospect Independent Church through their hand quilting.

I became interested in organizing a quilt documentation in Prospect while a student at Georgia State University working toward a post-graduate certification in heritage preservation. Prospect is an area I thought I knew well since my grandparents, William Jessie Dutton and Inez Smith Dutton Burt, were raised in Prospect. I visited my great-grandparents, Maude and Fred Smith, and their Prospect farm many times as a child for family reunions and holidays.

Over the years, and through my studies of the quilting group, I became aware of how many artifacts and local documents have been saved that illustrate the history of quilting in the area and could be part of a larger local preservation movement. Maude Smith's rural correspondent news articles create a timeline of events and names that could be linked together. Along with Smith's columns, there are church historical documents and residents' photographs of social and church events taken through the years. Janelle Baughns owns a small scrapbook with a short history of the church and its quilting group written by Maude Smith, which includes photographs taken at the quiltings in the 1950s. There is a collection of Polaroid photographs of quilts made during the 1990s owned by the local quilting group. Janice Warren Pendley is collecting photographs of the local school's clubs and classes. She also hosts an annual school reunion, which provides an opportunity to collect oral histories of the community. (The school closed in 1962.)

Yet time has been a detriment to capturing a full history. Many of the residents who grew up in the community during the 20th century have moved away, and women who participated in quilting in Prospect in the early years are elderly or have died. Quilts have been given away or discarded because they were worn through. Family photographs are being passed on to children and grandchildren who are not sure who is in them. The remnants of the stories are escaping before they have a chance to be recorded. It is important to record this history now and to encourage families to learn how to preserve it.

A quilt documentation involves photographing a quilt and writing down the dimensions and the fabrics used. A biography of the quilter and any available photographs, as well as the names of different owners, are added to the file. If possible, an interview with the quilter, or someone who knows the quilt's story well, is recorded. Then, the documentation is gathered together, catalogued, and given to a community history repository or an appropriate archive.

In documentation, every quilt is beautiful. The beauty is not in its aesthetics, but in the story the quilt tells. When were the materials made? From where did they come? What thread was used, what pattern was chosen, how was the pattern laid out? What name did the quilter give to the pattern? Are there names

FIGURE 01 Volunteers for the Prospect Quilting Heritage Days: Joanna Benshoof, Anna Rose Biddie, Janice Keeton, Mary Allison Haynie, Denise Dutton Benshoof, Doris Miller, Inez Burt, Janelle Smith Baughns, Sharon Owen, Janice Pendley, and Kathy Bozeman. Not pictured are Joyce Windham, Maretta Moore, Betty Gober, and Mary Ross. *(Photo courtesy of Denise Benshoof)*

to tell us who made it or who the quilter's contemporaries were? What can the quilt tell us about the quilter and her world? A researcher hunts for the facts and lays them out for the historian or folklorist to make sense of their historical and cultural context.

Since we could not keep the quilts the quilters brought to us, the information was digitized by scanning documents, journals, scrapbooks, and older photographs. Digital recorders were used for interviewing. Labels were sewn onto the quilts, identifying them as being documented at the Prospect Quilting Heritage Days documentation event.

The documentation will be available through the Archive of Alabama Folk Culture at the Alabama Department of Archives and History in Montgomery. Researchers will be able to study the quilts' patterns and stories, then interpret the quilting community within the context of its culture. If researchers would like to view an original artifact, they can ask what is available for study through museums and archives, or track down the artifact using the information from the files.

Acquiring this information required the help of many people. Quilt documentations are collaborations between volunteers and communities. When I first suggested a documentation of quilts, the quilters at the church appeared both intrigued and hesitant to share their work. I had already interviewed the quilters at the Prospect Methodist Church and documented the history of their quilting group for a Georgia State University "America's Folk Crafts" class project.[11] Through that research project, the quilters began to understand how sharing their quilt history could be a valuable tool for historical research about their community and the period of time in which they and their families have lived.

At one of the quiltings at the church, I met Kathy Bozeman, a local hand-quilting teacher, who became a mentor and partner. I also met Janice Warren Pendley, whose aunt, Nola Jones (1924-2009), had participated in Prospect community quilting as a child. Jones and her friend Frances Burt Myers (1920-2015) reorganized the Prospect

Quilters at the church in the 1980s. Both Bozeman and Pendley were extremely supportive, and together we prepared a daylong training session for the volunteers the week before the documentation event.

Assisting at the event as mentors were Mary E. Ross of Cumming, Georgia, who participated in the Georgia Quilt Project, a state documentation event; and Mary Allison Haynie, Executive Director of the Alabama Folklife Association.

The Prospect Quilters volunteered at the documentation and shared their life stories in recordings. Other volunteers included family members and quilters from Prospect and Birmingham, drawn to the idea of seeing the quilters' panoply of quilts from the twentieth century. Residents and former residents of Prospect and nearby Saragossa brought quilts they made and quilts they had been given.

Janice Pendley greeted quilters and quilt owners at the door, and helped with paperwork. Sharon Owen of Birmingham and I interviewed the participants. Kathy Bozeman and Doris Miller of Birmingham inspected the quilts for how they were made, then recorded the sewing, fabric, and pattern details. Joanna Benshoof and Anna Rose Biddie, my 16-year-old daughter and 18-year-old stepniece, hefted the quilts onto the photography stand and photographed them.

Betty Gober stitched labels onto the quilts, marking that they had been documented. Joyce Windham made participants comfortable, and got the paperwork and quilts ready to be documented. At one point, when there were no quilts to be documented, the volunteers sat around a big table, had lunch, and shared stories of haunted graveyards, snipe hunts, and memories of growing up in rural Alabama.

We documented almost thirty quilts over the two days. Since then, we have added thirty more by visiting quilters in the community and documenting the quilts in their homes. The collection at the Alabama Department of Archives and History now includes close to 350 photographs, nineteen biographies of local quilters, and a bound copy of "Tuesday Quilting," the research project I completed in 2010 on local quilting history and techniques.

Even though it was a rainy day, there was a jolly time at the Millard Atkins' home. Four quilts were nearly completed.

MAUDE SMITH | "PROSPECT NEWS," *MOUNTAIN EAGLE*, NOVEMBER 15, 1956

Prospect is a quiet place today with only a couple of churches and cemeteries, and the railroad tracks to mark its center, but early in the 20th century it was a thriving cotton-farming community of five stores, a post office, a school, a church, and a railroad stop.[12] Prospect is a relatively flat area of two square miles (approximately, since only the residents seem to understand the local community boundary lines) surrounded by old mining communities. Some of these included Jagger Lakes, Red Mill, Saragossa, Bunyon, and Slick Lizard.

The earliest white settlers migrated from South Carolina through Georgia and into the region. The 1830 census records the early family names of Keeton

and Cain in present-day Prospect.[13] Those family names are among the quilters who have participated in the Prospect Quilting Heritage Days project. The first Keeton and Cain settlers were listed in census records as being from Georgia and South Carolina, as were most of the later settlers. By 1920, census records show that most of the men in Prospect were born in South Carolina or Georgia, yet their wives were almost all second or third generation Scots-Irish Alabama women.[14]

It was interesting to find that many of the quilters in this documentation turned out to be cousins. The Herron family is probably the best example of how closely connected the quilters still are today. One family of Herrons from Georgia settled in Eldridge sometime during the 1840s, fourteen miles southwest of Prospect. Several of the quilters interviewed are descended from this same Herron family. Janelle Smith Baughns and Inez Smith Dutton Burt (1923-2017), sisters who had quilts documented, were taught quilting by their mother, Maude Watts Smith (1896-1977) and their grandmother, Laura Herron Watts Banks (1876-1959), who was born in Eldridge. Betty Jane Gober (1940-2019) was a Herron descendent, as is Olga Wakefield Wallace, whose mother, Julia Herron Wakefield (1885-1965), taught Wallace and her sister, Ruby Wakefield (1915-2012), how to quilt. Faye Kendrick, a quilter with the Prospect Quilters, is also a Herron descendent from Eldridge.

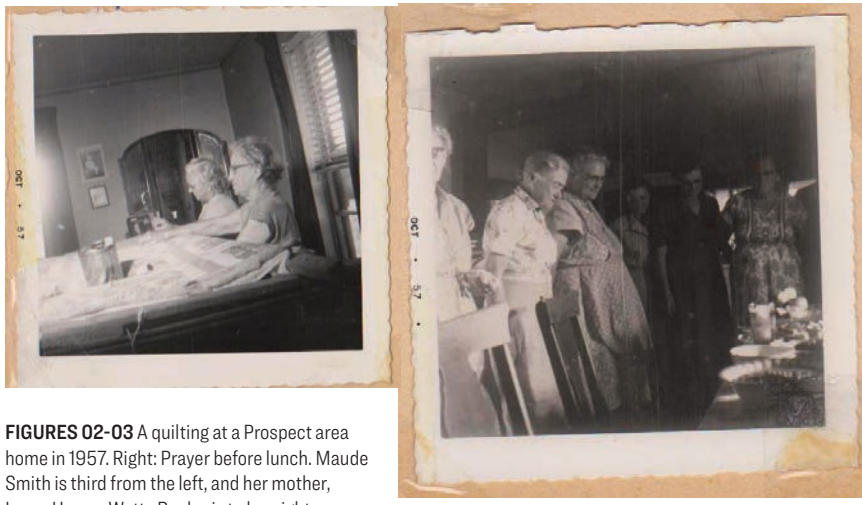
Family examples like this explain why, today in Walker County, hand quilting groups such as the Prospect Quilters still meet at several rural churches around the county and at the Jasper Senior Citizens' Center. The ancestors of the women who now quilt in Prospect carried their quilting techniques with them from the Carolinas, down through the southeastern United States to Alabama, and taught them to their daughters. Those daughters then taught them to their daughters. Lifelong friendships and the memories of a rural area where modern communication technologies are still scarce are treasured by the quilting groups.

The Methodist women met at the home of Mrs. F.L. Smith and quilted a quilt for the parsonage last Friday, all bringing their dinner and making a day of it.

MAUDE SMITH | "PROSPECT NEWS," *MOUNTAIN EAGLE*, NOVEMBER 7, 1940

Around 1900, the then Prospect Methodist Episcopal church was founded by Nancy Loucinda Sparks Smith, a Methodist who had moved to the area from Tennessee.[15] Prospect had a one-room schoolhouse, but the only church nearby was the Saragossa Baptist Church, a long walk from the Smith family farm, so Nancy Lou Smith helped to organize a Methodist Episcopal church in the community, next to the Prospect school.

In 1916, the farming community in Prospect organized a community improvement association. The idea was to develop a deliberate, supportive farming community model, in which farmers and their families would share information, techniques,



FIGURES 02-03 A quilting at a Prospect area home in 1957. Right: Prayer before lunch. Maude Smith is third from the left, and her mother, Laura Herron Watts Banks, is to her right. *(Photos courtesy of Janelle Smith Baughns)*

and news, both neighborly and economical. The newspaper reported that "several men ... showed a willingness to co-operate in the organization" and "the women were enthusiastic in the movement for a more progressive community."[16]

Building a strong community was essential to the farm families in Prospect. The February 17, 1917 issue of the *Progressive Farmer* and *Southern Farm Gazette* outlined how to build a progressive farming community. Maude Smith and her husband, F. L. Smith, kept this newspaper in their home for fifty years. It was found marked "Special, save this," when they sold their farm in the late 1960s.[17] The list of goals in the article, "Ten Tests of Progress for Your Neighborhood," included having community clubs for farm women and men and youth, as well as a strong community church and school, a library and community savings program, sports teams, agricultural fairs, and frequent meetings among the farming families so that news could be shared and support given.

Quiltings in the neighborhood were one way that farm wives could keep in touch and support each other (Figures 2 and 3). Spending most of a day around a quilting frame meant that the quilters learned each other's stories very well. As Inez Smith Dutton Burt said in an oral interview in 2010, the church and neighborhood quiltings were about both fundraising and fellowship:

All these women around here, Mrs. [Effie] Burt and Mrs. [Mary] Griffith, Miss Dolly Smith, and, just all the women around here, they'd go to different houses and quilt every week. And they would quilt at different houses ... at her house [her mother's, Maude Smith] or different one of the neighbors, you know. Instead of going to the church to quilt [like they do today], they'd go to each other's house quilting. They quilted and sold them, and if anybody wanted one for themself, (sic) well, they did that, too. Took scraps and cut blocks and sewed them together, and pieced them, mostly by hand. They've been a lot of different patterns of quilts gone through.[18]

The women's 4-H club is doing splendid work. Last year we made and sold a quilt that helped on the piano at the church; then we helped with the barbecue that was given at this place.

MAUDE SMITH | "PROSPECT NEWS," *MOUNTAIN EAGLE*, JANUARY 16, 1935

Today, the community's quilters meet at Prospect Independent Church (Figure 4). Although the congregation is small, heritage is a large part of the Prospect church. The congregation hosts Sunday night singings with other local churches and celebrates Decoration Day every third Sunday in May. Go inside the church on a Sunday morning and you'll hear a mix of "Are You Washed in the Blood?" sung by the congregation and individual members singing modern church anthems. As the congregation moves forward into its future, every Tuesday morning, and now Thursdays as well, six women come together in the church basement to quilt, a basement where their mothers and family friends quilted before them.

In the church basement, the quilt frame is a hanging frame. It has strips of wood for the sides with small nails and drilled holes down the length of the wood. The small nails are pushed through the quilt backing fabric to hold it tight during stitching, and the drilled holes are used to adjust the length of the frame. The wood strips are held together at the corners with a 16-penny nail. The whole frame is hung from the ceiling by chains like those used for swing sets, making it easy to adjust the height for sewing the quilt.

Inez Burt shared that when she was a child, the quilt linings were sewn onto the strips of wood, instead of being pushed onto the nails as they are today.[19] While frames were on sawhorses or other supports at some houses, the hanging frame was well-used in the community.[20] The earlier hanging quilts in quilters' homes had ropes and pulleys, instead of chains, to raise and lower the frames from the ceilings. Maude Smith and Frances Burt Myers both had two in their homes. Myers donated one of hers to restart the quilting at the church in the late 1980s.[21] The community quiltings in the neighborhoods, and in the church during Burt's mother's generation, had stopped in the early 1960s as the health of the earlier generation of women had declined.

Frances Burt Myers and Nola Jones, who together restarted the quilting at the church, were both daughters of the earlier generation. They followed the meeting patterns of their mothers: meeting once a week, arriving early, bringing lunch to share, and beginning lunch with prayer. Since Myers and Jones have died, friends they grew up with continue the work.

Their quilting techniques, though, have changed from those of their mothers, because the materials used by the quilters have changed. Hand-pieced quilts of their childhoods were filled with homegrown cotton or old blankets. Because of that, the hand-stitching followed particular designs of an L-shape or a shell-shape made of one-inch channels to keep the cotton batting or the blanket from moving around.

Today's quilting group meets to work for customers who bring tops to be quilted. Unless the quilt owner brings her own batting and backing when she

brings a quilt top, the group provides a polyester batting and a cotton sheet for the backing. Since the filling today is one large piece of polyester fiber, rather than thick cotton batting, the stitching is now more decorative, with outlines of the decorations on the quilt top and straight lines down the edges of the sashings and borders. After the quilt's completion, the owner pays the group for the quilting. This money is then donated to the church for its use.

The fellowship is still the same, though. As Inez Burt said in her interview, "We have a good get together and then everyone brings a covered dish for lunch. We eat a lot; we always eat too much, like everybody does. But, anyway, it's really enjoyable."

Our club thought, well, if there is no more on display than was at the [county] fair, it wouldn't be any trouble at all to walk off with first prize, and then some, but shux, if you could have seen the pretty quilts, fancy work of all kinds, canned goods, homemade toys, crochet table cloths and bedspreads, all kinds of things made from sacks and things too numerous to mention, just you come see for yourself next year.

MAUDE SMITH | "PROSPECT NEWS," *MOUNTAIN EAGLE*, OCTOBER 18, 1945, ON ATTENDING THE 4-H WOMEN'S CLUB ACHIEVEMENT DAY AT THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN JASPER

When I began interviewing quilters in Prospect, I started with the community quiltings at the church. I interviewed the quilters about the group history and took photographs and videos of them at work. A "real find" was two small albums of Polaroids of quilts stitched and sold during the mid-1990s. Digitized copies of the Polaroids are included in the documentation.

At the Prospect Quilting Heritage Days documentation event, I met individual quilters, some who had never participated in the community group. The

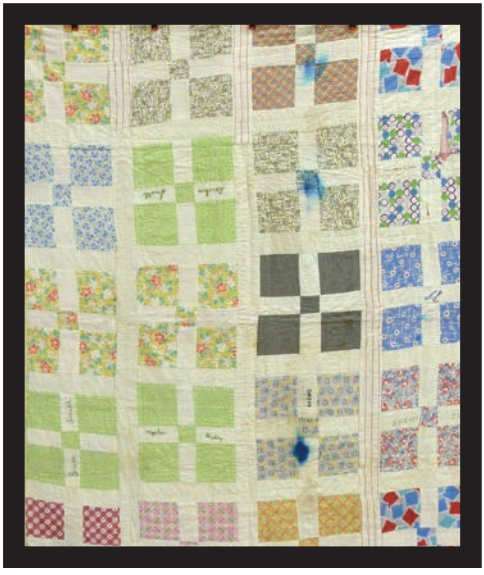
FIGURE 04 The Prospect Methodist Church Quilters in the Methodist church basement, August 19, 2002: Inez Smith Dutton Burt, Floy Street, Frances Burt Myers, Janelle Smith Baughns, Martha Dale Smith, Onnie B. Atkins, Nola Jones, and Helen Maddox. *(Photo courtesy of Janelle Smith Baughns)*

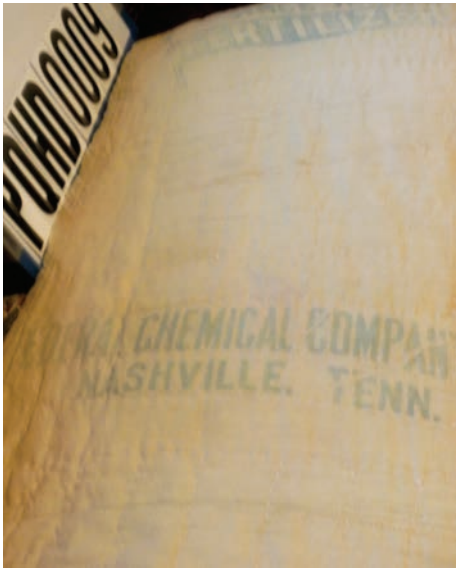
Prospect church quilters also brought their own quilts done at home to the documentation. It became a sharing of quilts and family news as volunteers and quilters admired each other's work. We also began to listen to the stories the quilts and quilters told.

Janelle Baughns shared what she believes is the first complete quilt she ever made, as a teenager in the 1940s (Figure 5). Each cell is made of nine pieces of feedsack cloth, which she called a nine-patch pattern. While the quilt is clearly stained with ink, the names of her family and friends embroidered on it are readable. The colors are pastel, with one striking black cell off the center. Worn places reveal that the batting was a pink plaid wool blanket. The thread used for the quilting, which is in an L-shape, is thick thread unraveled from flour sacks. This she called "ravelings."

On the back of the quilt is cloth from fertilizer sacks, with the company name still on them: Federal Chemical Company, Nashville, Tennessee (Figure 6). While I was recording the oral histories, I learned that locally these were called "guanner sacks," taken from the word guano. Baughn's quilt tells the story of a 1940s Prospect farming family. A teenaged daughter learned to quilt at home and used materials left over from goods purchased at the store. The signatures on the quilt

FIGURES 05-06
Feed and fertilizer sack quilt by Janelle Smith Baughns, ca. 1945. Right: Fertilizer sack backing on feedsack quilt made by Janelle Smith Baughns, ca. 1945. *(Photos by Joanna Benshoof)*





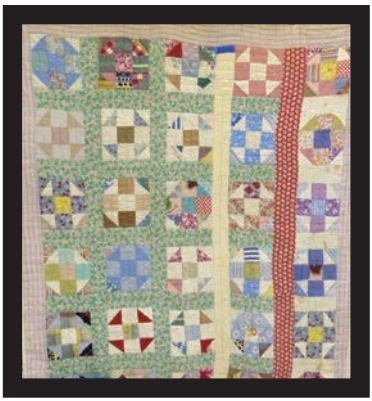
included the use of "Mother" and "Daddy," instead of her parents' given names. Her siblings' names on the quilt were of those still living at home or nearby. The quilt tells who some of her friends were as well. The fertilizer sacks and feed or flour sacks may help with studying rural merchandising during the 1940s in this part of Alabama, as well as farming techniques. The pink blanket inside provides even more information about the economic situation of the family and the goods that could be purchased in the area, perhaps several years prior. Asking questions about the fertilizer sack backing also gave us the opportunity to document words in the local dialect.

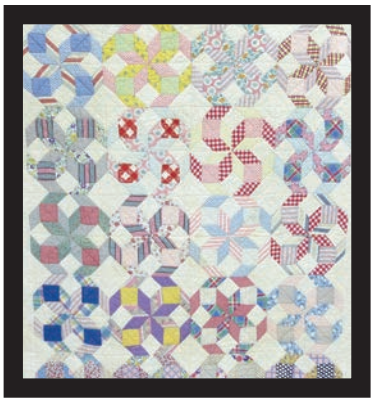
FIGURE 07 Jacob's Ladder quilt made by Julia Herron Wakefield with cotton scrap fabric, locallyl-grown cotton batting, and vegetable-dyed guano sacks for the backing, ca. 1940. (Photo by Denise Benshoof)

A quilt made by Julia Herron Wakefield (1885-1964) illustrates how residents of Prospect lived on limited incomes (Figure 7). Born in Eldridge, Wakefield moved around 1920 to the Saragossa Road (now Saragossa-Redmill Road), bordering Prospect, and near the mining community of Bunyon, which no longer exists. Wakefield's Jacob's Ladder quilt, possibly made during the 1930s, was made from scraps of clothing: shirts, blouses, and dresses her family had worn. The backing cloth is vegetable-dyed guano (fertilizer) sacks. Her daughter, Olga Wakefield Wallace, remembers the red and black fabric in the quilt being sent to her family by an aunt in Birmingham. Wallace wore a dress of this same fabric to a community event when the federal government brought materials and taught the farming families how to make mattresses.[22] While research has not yet located the date of this event, Maude Smith documented a government mattress giveaway in the community in her April 11, 1940, *Prospect News* article.

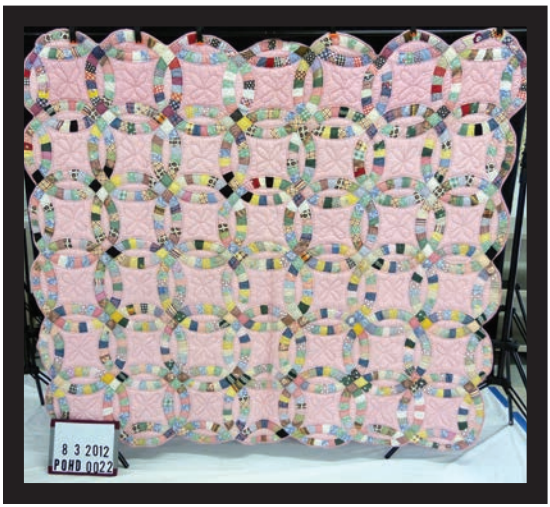
The scrap quilts in Figures 8 and 9 are believed by their owners to have been made in the 1940s, and highlight the puzzle-like patterns popular at the time. The quilt in Figure 8 was made by Inez Burt, who grew up and lived in the Prospect area for most of her life. Each square on the quilt is made of thirteen pieces, squares and triangles. The placement of the colors, like the quilt in Figure 9, creates an optical illusion so that several squares look like different patterns. It has a home-grown cotton batting and a whole cloth cotton backing. Burt said that the fabric used in her quilt was from "flour and sugar sacks" and called it a "shoo-fly" quilt.[23]

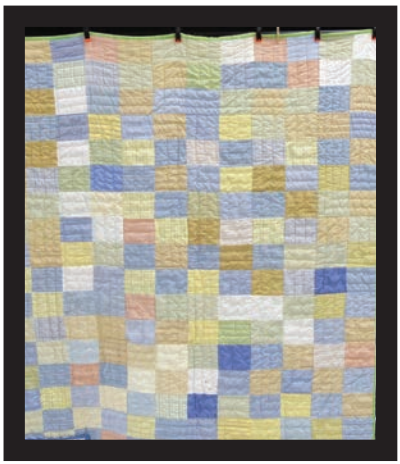
The quilt in Figure 9 was made by Nona Gray (1909-2000), a Prospect farm wife who generally quilted alone.[24] In this quilt she used identical





FIGURES 08-09
Left: Nine-block quilt made by Inez Smith Dutton Burt in the mid-1940s. Right: Star pattern quilt made by Nona Gray, ca. 1940. (Photos by Joanna Benshoof)





FIGURES 10-11 Left: Double-wedding ring quilt made by Francis Lathem Harris, ca. 1955. Right: Quilt made by Ruth Griffith Colburn with shirt fabric manufactured by the Arrow Shirt Factory of Carbon Hill, ca. 1962. *(Photos by Joanna Benshoof)*

geometric cells, or a collection of squares, to make the optical illusions. This quilt is also made with thick, homegrown cotton batting and a muslin backing, and is stitched with thread ravelings from flour sacks.

When we first began investigating quilts as they came into the documentation, we asked questions about the quilter and when the quilt might have been made. Understanding fabrics and how they were made, and which colors were available or popular at a particular time, can help to date a quilt. The quilt in Figure 10, a double-wedding ring quilt made by Frances Lathem Harris (1904-1996), is thought to have been made in the 1950s when pink was a popular color. The quilt in Figure 11, made by Ruth Griffith Colburn, is made from men's cotton shirting popular in the early 1960s. The owner reported that the fabric was discarded by the Carbon Hill Arrow Shirt Factory during that time, and the family retrieved it for quiltmaking.[25]

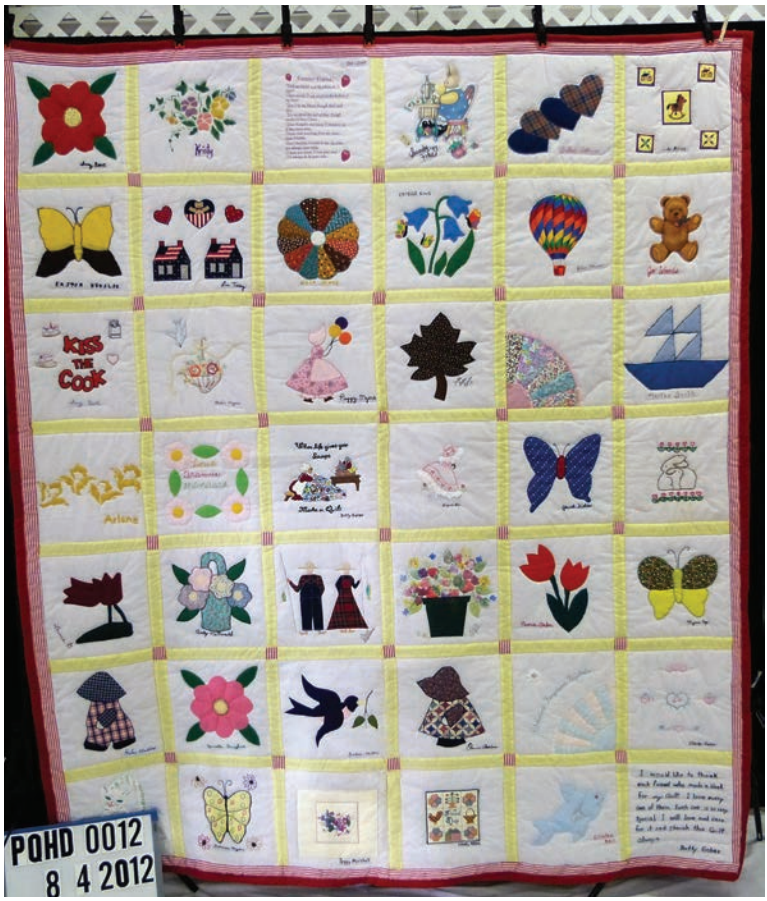


FIGURE 12 Friendship quilt made by Betty Herron Gober, and her friends and family, 1997. *(Photo by Joanna Benshoof)*

The quilts in Figures 12 and 13 were both made by Betty Jane Gober (1940-2019). She called the quilt in Figure 12 a "Friendship Sampler," and made it in 1997. Each square is a sampler square, a different design made by her friends and family members. The squares are made from different materials, craft supplies, and techniques that were available and popular in the mid-1990s. There is appliqué, stenciling, fabric paint, embroidery, and cross-stitching. Each quilter signed her square, and a date on one square allowed us to date the quilt. It is made of polyester fabrics.

Gober explained that honoring her family and celebrating friendship were very important to her. The quilt in Figure 13 is her original design made with bandanas and ties used by the men in her life. It was made in 2006, and the ties are appliquéd on with the zigzag stitch of a sewing machine. The fabrics are silks, polyesters, and cottons. Each square is labeled with the name of the owner of the tie or bandana, giving unique insight into the lives of the men in the Prospect community.

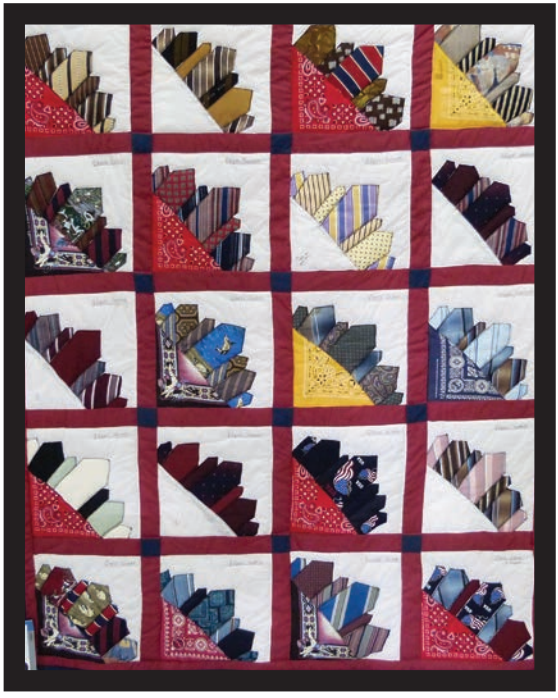
While the Prospect Quilters still meet at the church and hand-quilt, their quilting and the community's quilting have been impacted by Kathy Bozeman

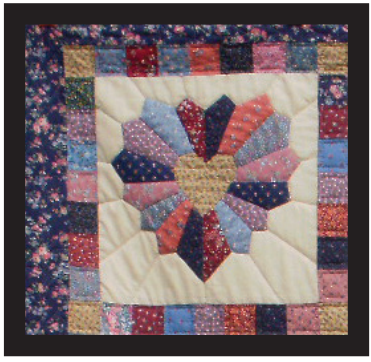
and her nearby quilt shop (now closed). Bozeman's quilts are a mix of both old and new quilting styles and techniques. In her quilting shop, Bozeman taught traditional hand quilting and long arm machine quilting to local adults and youth. She also sold fabrics and supplies, including pre-printed quilt tops.

Bozeman moved to Saragossa, adjacent to Prospect, in 1991. Although she was born in nearby Sipsey and learned quilting from her family there, she has also taken quilting classes in Savannah, Georgia, and meets regularly with professional quilters in other communities.[26]

The pieced quilt (Figure 14), made by Bozeman in 1994, is made from a pattern with all-cotton quilting fabrics and manufactured cotton batting. Called "Dresden Hearts," it shows her traditional side. The Bottle quilt (Figure 15), made from a pattern in 2007, is colorful and more contemporary than the Dresden Hearts. It is also made with all cotton materials and a patterned backing. It would be interesting to study and evaluate how Bozeman's students and the supplies offered through her shop have changed quilting in Prospect.

Prospect's quilt history over the past 100 years has followed community traditions and popular trends. Supplies have included fabric bought for making into clothing and cloth made for quilting. We documented quilts made out of labeled and dyed fertilizer sacks, feed and flour sacks, thread from sacks, sheeting, and cloth found at the community dump. Batting has consisted of cotton grown in the local fields, old blankets and old quilts, cotton batting purchased at craft stores,





FIGURES 13-14 Left: Tie and bandanna quilt made by Betty Herron Gober, 2006. Right: Detail from a pieced quilt titled "Dresden Hearts" by Kathy Bozeman, 1994. *(Photos by Joanna Benshoof)*

FIGURE 15 Bottle quilt by Kathy Bozeman, 2007. (*Photo by Denise Benshoof*)

and polyester on a commercial roll kept in the church basement. Quilts have been pieced in traditional patterns. Then using traditional patterns, quilters experimented with optical illusions and new pattern twists. Community signatures were embroidered, images of high-heeled shoes painted with glittery fabric paints, tops decorated with favorite football team appliqués, and squares made from bandanas and men's ties. For the Prospect quilters, quilts are celebrations of their community care and family traditions as well as expressions of their creativity in the arts and craft possibilities of the century in which they have lived.

Documentations do not always answer the questions researchers may have. I know this is true for me in Prospect. I continue to find more information about the community's quilt history as I study the community's heritage. More information about the quilters in Prospect and their quilts will give researchers greater possibilities to create a fuller picture of the people who worked and lived in Prospect over the past century, and perhaps earlier, if earlier quilts can be found. The Prospect Quilting Heritage Days project is a beginning to understanding a community that is unique in its people and, yet, is also a comparable example of other 20th century rural Alabama communities. More importantly, through the collaboration of residents and documentation volunteers, we're creating new conversations about how to preserve this community's heritage. ○

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I would like to thank Prospect Independent Church of Nauvoo for the use of their facilities, and the Prospect Quilters who meet there for their support and participation in documenting their history and quilting services.

THANK YOU, also, to the volunteers and participants who shared their time, memories, and expertise.

The Daily Mountain Eagle newspaper in Jasper, Alabama, graciously allowed the use of quotes from their pages, and reported on the event as well.

VOLUNTEERS

Janelle Smith Baughns, Jasper, Alabama
Denise Benshoof, Snellville, Georgia
Jo Benshoof, Snellville, Georgia
William B. Benshoof, Snellville, Georgia
Anna Rose Biddie, Carbon Hill, Alabama
Kathy Bozeman, Nauvoo, Alabama
Inez Smith Dutton Burt, Nauvoo, Alabama
Roy L. Dutton, Nauvoo, Alabama
Betty Jane Gober, Nauvoo, Alabama
Janice Keeton, Nauvoo, Alabama
Faye Kendrick, Jasper, Alabama
Doris Miller, Alabaster, Alabama
Maretta Moore, Nauvoo, Alabama
Sharon Owen, Hoover, Alabama
Janice L. Pendley, Carbon Hill, Alabama
Mary Ross, Canton, Georgia
Joyce Windham, Nauvoo, Alabama

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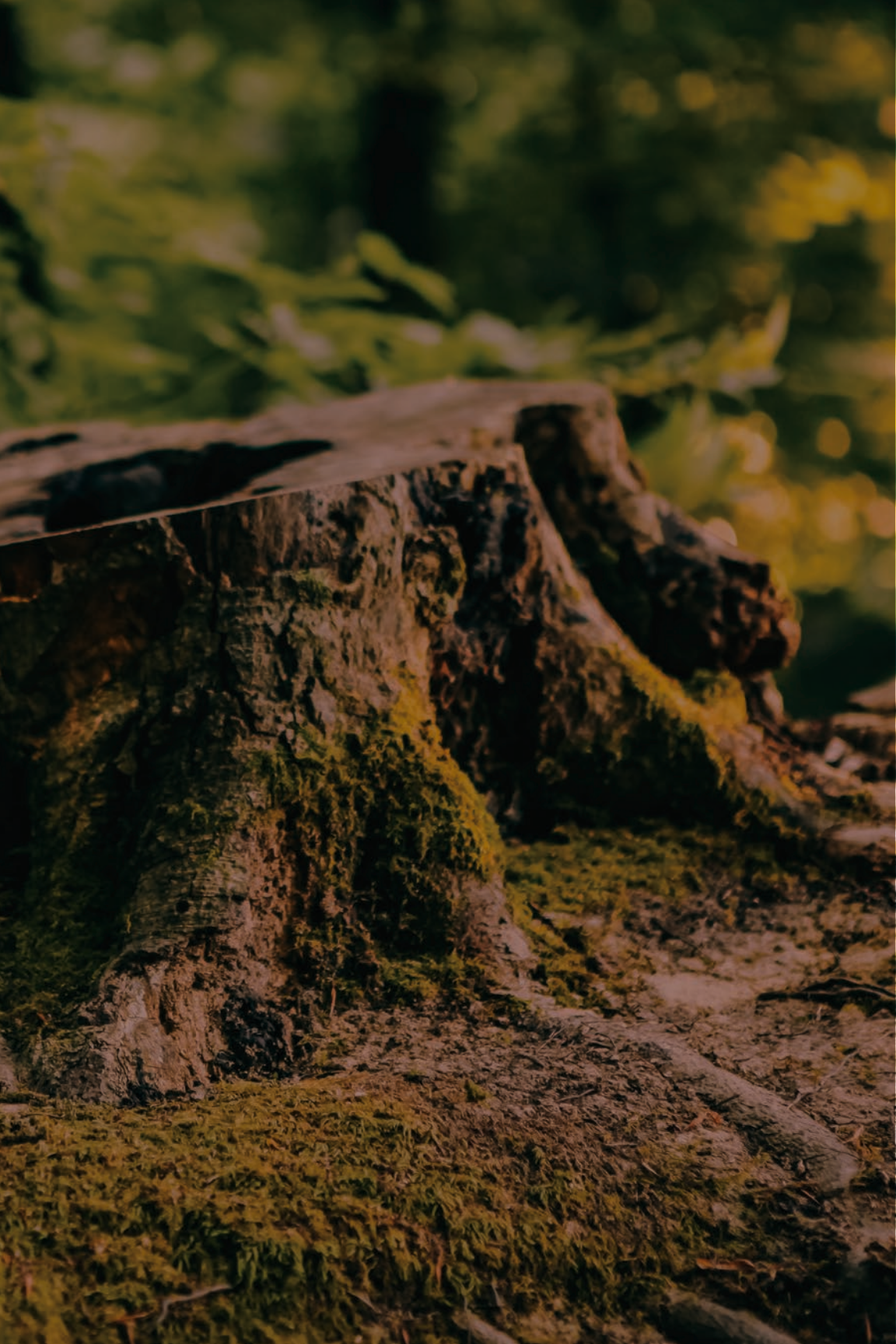
Janelle Smith Baughns
Kathy Bozeman
Inez Smith Dutton Burt
Ruth Colburn
Laura Novella Farris
Betty Jane Gober
Nona Gray
Robin M. Green
Beverly Guthrie
Connie Harbin
Lena Harbin
Frances Harris
Opal Hayes
Kathy McCormack
Audie Myers
Martha Nix
Maude Watts Smith
Frances Stewart
Julia Wakefield
Ruby Wakefield
Olga Wakefield Wallace



Tie a String and Bury It

A Review of Folklife Scholarship on Wart Healing Traditions

JENNIFER JOY JAMESON

No. 2579: To cure warts, wash them with water out of an old horse's head.

THE **FRANK C. BROWN** COLLECTION OF NORTH CAROLINA FOLKLORE

Introduction

The first time I came across the tradition of curing warts and similar ailments through folk remedies was in Nashville, Tennessee, during the summer of 2010. I was with my good friend Sarah Carter, a high school English teacher originally from Norfolk, Virginia, when she told me that she and her mother each had a set of warts healed by the late Ira Baccus, a local specialist in traditional wart cures in the community of Possum Flat in Northwest Alabama, where her extended family resides.

Sarah reported that the warts took some time to heal, but they did heal. She explained the elaborate process by which Mr. Baccus prepared the skin ailments for healing, and the telling of her story made me recognize the significance of this tradition as a living, breathing method of folk healing that holds considerable weight in certain regions, and among certain cultural communities.

When I later learned of a research and documentation grant available from the Alabama Folklife Association (AFA), Sarah and I decided to apply together to research and document wart healing as it is and has been practiced in the Northwest region of Alabama, particularly in Winfield and Marion County. Sarah has strong family ties in the community, and I also have some lingering heritage in the area, as my late maternal grandmother, Evelyn Burleson Montgomery, was born and raised in a farming family of fifteen in Haleyville, in neighboring Winston County.

Upon successful receipt of the AFA's Joyce H. Cauthen Fellowship, Sarah and I made plans to interview individuals in the region who have engaged in, or have some knowledge of, the local practice of healing warts by traditional means. We wanted to begin this fieldwork with an understanding of wart healing prac-

PHOTO FROM iSTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

tices in the Southeast in general, in order to place what we would learn from our interviews in a broader context and potentially to differentiate Northwest Alabama wart healing traditions from those in other areas. By examining the themes, motifs, and approaches found in the literature, we could gain insight on how to frame interview questions and how to recognize region- or culture-specific variations on wart healing.

To this end, I conducted an extensive review of scholarly literature on the subject of wart cures in the United States. Most of the works that I discovered focused on wart curing techniques in the United States, with the exception of one historical source from England. Surprisingly, I found only one published source on wart cures and relevant healing rituals in the state of Alabama: Ray B. Browne's 1958 collection, *Popular Beliefs and Practices from Alabama*. Browne's work includes a four-page list of wart cures collected from around the state. However, in an article surveying the "History and Evolution of Folklife Scholarship in Alabama," folklorist Henry Willett notes that although Browne conducted extended field trips throughout Alabama, the text "received some criticism for its lack of cultural context and was correctly thought to be unrepresentative of the entire state in that half of Browne's informants were from Lamar County."[27]

Upon consulting with Joey Brackner, Director of the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture at the Alabama State Council on the Arts; Mary Allison Haynie, Executive Director of the AFA; and Joyce Cauthen, former Executive Director of the AFA, each reported that they were unaware of any available documentation or written material on wart healing completed by Alabama folklorists. I'm pleased that our research and documentation project amends this relative lack of material available to the public on contemporary wart cures in Alabama.

Theory

Sir James George Frazer's theory on sympathetic magic is central to the literature's discourse on wart cures. Dr. Erika Brady defines *sympathetic magic* in simple terms as "the belief that one can influence something (an item or an outcome) based on its relationship with, or resemblance to, another thing. Frazer also calls this 'magical correspondence.'"[28] This "magical thinking" can then be broken into two types. The first, and most relevant to this research, is the concept of contagious magic, or the law of *contagion*. Wayland Hand, in the Popular Beliefs and Superstitions volume of the *Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore*, explains this concept. "By this principle of contagion it is held that things once conjoined remain forever sympathetically attached, even though dissevered."[29] In simpler terms, something which has been a part of or in contact with something else can continue to affect it. The second type of magical thinking, homeopathic/imitative magic, or the principle of *similarity*, occurs when something that resembles something else is used to affect it, such as the use and effects of hoodoo/voodoo dolls on the person they are modeled after.

Two common categories of belief practices can also be distinguished. In beliefs that are *magico-religious*, the effect is understood to be a supernatural

response or intervention. This is seen in the use of amulets, holy medals, and spells and prayers, including the repetition of conjuring words. In *natural* beliefs, the effect lies in the item or ritual used. Examples include herbal medicine, dowsing or "waterwitching," or planting by the signs.[30] An example of a wart cure that falls under this category is Frank C. Brown No. 2527: "Keep an application of milkweed juice on the wart and it will go away in several days." Another is No. 2533: "The milky juice of the Osage orange is used as a wart cure."[31] These cures are considered *natural* due to the use of botanical elements and fruits, which are natural in composition.

In his article, "Moving Beyond Stereotypes" in *Herbal and Magical Medicine*, Richard Blaustein draws upon the structuralist approach laid out by Claude Lévi-Strauss on the ways traditional healers make sense out of "chaos" for their patients:

By locating and identifying sources of distress within a culturally and socially meaningful context, the healer imposes order, definition, and structure upon disintegrative experiences, connecting the patient with integrative resources that make distress psychologically manageable, promoting physical as well as emotional healing ...Warts seem to be especially susceptible to the power of suggestion, and it has long been observed that a wide variety of curative rituals will cause them to disappear.[32]

While Blaustein's Lévi-Straussian interpretation is cause for ponder, it may not apply to every situation so cleanly. However, his attention to the role of the healer, and the cultural context by which traditional healers usually operate proves to be an important aspect in holistically documenting such a culture-specific tradition, often deeply rooted in local history and versions of belief.

Wart Healing in the Literature

Defined in medical terms in *Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia*, a wart is:

A small, benign, circumscribed tumor of the outer layer of the skin. Warts are flat or elevated from the surrounding skin and are firm. Caused by the human papilloma virus, they vary in size and may be accompanied by pain, particularly if they occur on the feet (plantar warts). Treatment involves the use of local medication. If the wart recurs, it may be treated by freezing with dry ice, X ray, burning with an electric needle, or surgical removal.

However, the traditional cures used throughout communities, then collected, documented, and represented in scholarship, present a very different perspective on treating these skin ailments. Curing practices held and practiced by a community not only serve an immediate function of (hopefully) ridding the virus, they may also perform, affirm, or engage a regional and/or spiritual identity. Warts have endured a long and rich history of folk remedies at home and in the popular vernacular, as

exhibited in Mark Twain's description of Huckleberry Finn's effort to rid a wart by burying a cat in the crossroads at midnight in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

In the edited volume *Herbal and Magical Medicine,* Robert Sammons writes a treatise on magico-religious healing and the potential relationship between folk cures (such as burns and warts) and hypnotism—"a theory that provides a bridge between folk medicine and current scientific medical knowledge."[33] Sammons provides an excellent review of the course of growth and immunology of warts from a medical perspective. Then, with an orientation to the ways hypnotism works and functions, he notes, "hypnotism can allow the body to do things it is not normally able to do." He concludes that two forms of folk healing, removing warts and the related ritual of "talking the fire out of burns," possess "both form and function of hypnosis."[34] Karen Baldwin also writes in *Herbal and Magical Medicine* on the tradition of "talking off" warts, particularly by "three rapid repetitions of Ezekiel 16:6."[35]

In his article, "American Indian Foods as Medicine" in *American Folk Medicine: A Symposium,* Virgil J. Vogel writes that "Alabama Indians pounded up kernels of corn, mixed the meal with water, and poured the mixture through a sieve, over the head of a patient with 'slow fever.' They also rubbed the body with it. The Catawba used corn grains as sympathetic magic objects in eliminating warts."[36] An article by Elizabeth Brandon, in the same collection of essays, concerns folk medicine in French Louisiana. The article briefly reviews the use of traditional or "supernatural" cures for warts within the region and culture—most of them fairly archetypal in their use of wart curing motifs (rubbing warts with "willow leaves, potatoes, meats, or peas," then burying them; transference of warts by tying a string around the wart, then discarding it for someone else to pick up).[37]

Folk belief and folk medicine scholar Wayland Hand has, perhaps, provided the largest amount of analytical and theoretical work based on collections of wart cures. This wealth of scholarship comes mostly from his work compiling an Archive of American Popular Beliefs and Superstitions during his tenure as a professor at UCLA from 1937 to 1974, where he worked to establish the Department of Folklore and Mythology. The Archive, containing over 2 million items, is now housed in the special collections at Utah State University.

Magical Medicine, a collection of essays by Wayland Hand, includes the article, "Folk Curing: The Magical Component," in which Hand considers the role of sacred and secular magic and magical ritual in the healing process. In particular, he takes up the concept of the crossroads—a common motif in popular repertoires of wart cures. He writes:

The crossroads, or merely a fork in the road, have always been considered among the most magical of places. Here it is that spirits and supernatural creatures of all kinds congregate, here it is that the future is divined, and the sick healed… The notion is that diseases spread by spirits and other evil creatures can be left at the crossroads by the victim for his erstwhile tormenters to contract or he may leave the disease there for some other unwary person to pick up.[38]

"Superstition is not the preserve of the unlettered only, but is a state of mind or a way of looking at things that may befall even the most sophisticated members of society."

In regard to place and setting, Hand notes that the curing of the sick (by traditional means) typically occurs in open air.[39] In another article, Hand writes about the medical transference of disease and the concept of an intermediate agent of disposal, or what he calls a *Zwischenträger*, in contrast to the more direct transference encountered in cases of *contagious magic*. He provides a few apt examples: "In Pennsylvania warts were believed to be 'catching,' and it was thus prudent to avoid shaking hands with a person who had them. A not so clear example of person-to-person contact is seen in a Kentucky belief that if you kiss your wart and then kiss someone, your wart will come off."[40] He moves on to discuss the commonality of transference of warts through pins, providing examples in various regions:

In Nebraska, the pin is stuck in the wart, and then wrapped in a corn shuck, which is put in the road and transferred to the person who steps on the shuck. In another fine example of contagious magic (Kansas, before the turn of the century), the wart is picked, and the blood collected in brown paper which is thrown into the road without looking where it falls, and destined to pass to the person finding the bundle. The pin itself, by way of variation, is not transferred.[41]

These examples recall one of the official curative techniques offered in the encyclopedic entry of the (Western) medical definition and treatment of the wart virus. One typical wart treatment is "burning with an electric needle." It is interesting to note the potential relationship between, and mutual influence of, more institutional treatments and treatments deeply rooted in folk traditions.

An important reference work in the available scholarship on wart cures is the substantial *Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore*, with volumes on *Popular Beliefs and Superstitions* edited by Wayland Hand in 1961. This collection compiles the work of folklorist Dr. Frank C. Brown, from 1912 to 1943, in collaboration with members of the North Carolina Folklore Society. In Hand's introduction, he notes that traditional wisdom and superstitions pertaining to belief are held by all members of society. He writes, "Superstition is not the preserve of the unlettered only, but is a state of mind or a way of looking at things that may befall even the most sophisticated members of society."[42]

Hand then explores some of the theoretical scholarship that may be applied

to these folk beliefs and superstitions, including the discourse on witchcraft and magic, highlighting Frazer's concepts of contagious magic and imitative magic in particular.[43] Hand also notes that the flurry of collection of superstition and popular belief most likely went hand in hand, or was inspired by, the more robust business of folk song collecting.[44]

The list of wart cures found in the Frank C. Brown Collection represents the most exhaustive compilation of traditional wisdom and curative practices that I discovered in my research. Collected mostly in North Carolina, but including items from other states, the list comprises about forty pages of the reference work. An item number accompanies each entry, with contextual information including the name(s) of the individual the item was collected from, his/her location(s), a few variations of the cure (if available) and references to related items, including their numbers, from other published collections.

The remedies listed in the Frank. C. Brown Collection range from details on how one contracts a wart (No. 2409: "If raindrops fall off the eaves of a house onto the hands, they will cause warts"), to directions on how to have the warts healed—from more ritualistic cures (No. 2450: "By putting a dead cat in a tree stump one can remove warts") to more natural cures (No. 2522: "Dandelion juice will cure warts"). While most of the remedies are short and succinct, Hand saw value in including remedies that were collected in a full narrative text, such as the following cure story collected in 1961, from a man named Thomasen:

No. 2653. One of the boys on the farm has a wart on his hand which he wished to be taken off, so he went to Uncle Dolph's hut and told him he wanted him to take the wart off his hand. The old Negro looked at it and then went into the house and brought out a small bottle of yellowish substance, a needle, and took from his pocket a match. He then took the boy's hand and put some of this yellow medicine on the wart and let it stay until he counted ten; then he wiped it off. Next he took the needle and buried the needle and told the boy that the wart would be off within seven days, but I left before the seven days were up so never knew whether it went off or not.[45]

Finally, the list contains traditional wisdom about who is able to cure warts (No. 2693: "Any person who has never seen his father can conjure warts" and No. 2688: "Many people believe that there are people who can remove warts simply by looking at them"). This reference work is diverse in its presentation and holds particular relevance in its contextual approach to each item.

In *The Foxfire Book*, a volume of folk customs and practices collected from old-timers by high school English students in the community of Rabun Gap, Georgia during the late 1960s and through the 1970s, wart cures are listed under a section on "Home Remedies" that lays out a set of traditional cures. The introduction to the list notes that in the face of being quite a distance from medical facilities, the Appalachian people of Rabun Gap "were forced to make do with what they had on had ... Some of the remedies undoubtedly worked; some of them probably were useless."[46]

Unfortunately, aside from a few ethnographic photos with informants named in the captions, there is no contextual information about how the participating students compiled the list, nor which informant contributed which remedy. The list of cures for warts includes approximately sixteen one- or two-sentence directional processes, such as "Wet your finger and make a cross on the wart," which reflects the importance of religious belief in the ritual process. Another remedy also demonstrates the key role of faith, but in a less overtly Christian sense: "Put a small piece of bacon or salt pork on the wart. Wrap it up and sleep with it that way. In the morning the wart will be gone if you have faith."[47]

Other cures highlight the passing on of infection, akin to Frazer's law of contagion. Several of the remedies take on this principle: "Rub the warts with a rock and put it in a box. Whoever opens the box will get the warts" or "Put some blood from the wart on it and throw it into the road. When someone picks it up, the wart will go away."[48]

Motifs

Most of the lists of collected wart cures, as well as ethnographic accounts of traditional wart healing, reveal traditional motifs in the ritual processes of curing warts. In order to understand the historical and contemporary use of wart cures, in America and elsewhere, it is helpful to closely examine some of the more common themes, elements, and motifs in the practice of curing warts by traditional means. The motifs below are those I found the most useful information about, or encountered most often in the texts, and although the list is not exhaustive, each motif or theme carries a well-documented tradition and history.

► Generational and Gendered Aspects | The Seventh Son

In many folk cures for warts (and similar ailments), the healing is done by the seventh son, or the seventh son of a seventh son, in a family.[49] Wayland Hand, in *Magical Medicine*, expounds on the seventh son motif:

The unusual curing power attributed to seventh sons, or to seventh sons of seventh sons is well known in European folk medical tradition ... Liebrecht has called attention to the magical qualities of the number seven in the context of healing, and Seemann has made application to magical persons and creatures ... Henderson, writing in the 1860s, reported that this tradition was so strong that 'when seven sons were born in succession parents considered themselves bound, if possible, to bring up the seventh as a doctor.' In the Ozark country, for example, a seventh son of a seventh son is thought to be a physician in spite of himself, endowed with healing powers which cannot be denied. Even if such a man does not study or practice medicine, he is very often called 'Doc' or 'Doctor' by common consent.[50]

In James Hardy's 1878 article for the English journal *The Folk-Lore Record*, entitled "Wart and Wen Cures," he briefly presents a more ancient precedent for this tradition: "In ancient Wales patients were advised to wash the warts

A seventh son of a seventh son is thought to be a physician in spite of himself, endowed with healing powers which cannot be denied. Even if such a man does not study or practice medicine, he is very often called 'Doc' or 'Doctor' by common consent.

with the water from a font in which the seventh son of the same man and wife is baptized."[51] There were, however, variations and exceptions to the gender criteria. Hardy continues: "Seventh daughters in an unbroken chain of female children were also thought of in many countries as endowed with the fist of healing, and it is not surprising that there should also be variations to include seventh daughters of a seventh daughter, as well as the inevitable seventh daughter of a seventh son."[52] Other generational variations have also been documented. According to Anthony Cavender's 2003 work, *Folk Medicine in Southern Appalachia,* some cures require the act of rubbing the wart with a dishrag stolen from one's mother or grandmother.[53]

► Dishrag or Washcloth

Another common motif is the act of rubbing the wart with a dishrag or washcloth (the act of rubbing the wart is also a traditional motif). A list of wart cures in the journal *Hoosier Folklore,* presented by Violetta Halpert, include those collected from Herbert Halpert's students in eight freshman composition classes at Indiana University from 1940-41. She writes first and foremost about the rag/cloth theme:

By far the most popular folk remedy for warts is rubbing them with a washcloth (variously a dishrag, a washcloth, or a dishtowel). Many versions of this cure specify that the cloth must be old, wet, or dirty. The usual procedure for removing warts with a dishcloth consists of three operations: procuring the cloth, rubbing the warts with it (or having someone else rub them), and disposing of the cloth. In one version, the wart must be picked until it bleeds before it is rubbed. In every case, regardless of the precise details of execution, the method of treatment is believed to bring about the disappearance of the warts only when the cloth has rotted [or is properly disposed of].[54]

Halpert goes on to explain variations in belief about the "proper way to procure and dispose of the cloth." In some cases it must be stolen, as mentioned above, and it must be disposed of either by burying it, or simply throwing it away—

sometimes behind your shoulder, onto a roof, or into the crossroads. One informant reasoned the cloths be disposed of so that "no one find it," which is interesting in light of the fact that so many cures involve an element of transmitting the wart to another living being. For example, Frank C. Brown No. 2595: "To cure warts, steal a dirty dishrag and bury it under the doorsteps so that a rooster can't dig it up."[55] Cavender states, "The underlying assumption of this remedy is that the essence of the warts is transferred to the dishrag, and as the dishrag decomposes, so will the warts."[56]

It should be noted that the simple act of burying an item for the success of a cure is a highly common motif. Halpert notes, "Secrecy in disposing of the curative object is often necessary."[57] In a personal account of a wart cure that I collected from a young woman named Jordan, from Albemarle, North Carolina, she mentioned her healer whispering something secret and inaudible while rubbing Jordan's warts.

► Tying of String or Knots

The act of tying a string around a wart, or making knots, are also common motifs, interpreted in various ways across the collected cures, such as this cure from Oregon: "To get rid of a wart, tie a horsehair around it and leave it on for nine days." Hand offers an orientation to this motif in *Magical Medicine*:

Another means of communicating disease to second parties, perhaps best known in connection with charming away warts, is the transfer of the disease to twine, string, yarn, ribbon, and other materials of animal and plant fibre, by means of knots. A typical example, current in Texas, will suffice: "To cure warts, make as many knots in a thread as you have warts; then throw the string away. Whoever picks up the thread will get the warts instead of you."[58]

This theme is central to the cure(s) practiced in the Possum Flat community in Alabama. The healer, usually an elder in the community, performs the curative ritual on the patient which includes counting the patient's warts, tying knots in a string, cutting the string, and throwing it on the ground. The patient is then instructed to bury the string, not revealing its location to anyone else.

Halpert offers this context: "The string is usually treated like the dishcloth—buried or hidden, and the cure is effected when the string rots ... The color of the string is sometimes important; black and red are mentioned in this collection."[59] In relation to another motif, of moonlight, or of staring into the moon to cure a wart, she continues: "A belief from Dillsboro [Indiana] is that the string should be tied when full moonlight is shining on the wart." She also writes that the "mumbling of magical words as the string is tied is essential."[60] In 1878, James Hardy also wrote about the tying of knots in these cures:

The Romans had a god named Nodinus, who presided over the knots of the stalks of corn; hence they may have been accounted sacred. With regard to warts, however,

nodosities of any sort may be employed. "Make as many knots in a hair as there are warts, throw it away, a cure follows" (Northumberland). Do the same with a piece of twine; "Touch each wart with the corresponding knot, and bury the twin in a moist place, saying at the same time, "There is none to redeem it but thee" (Manchester)."[61]

An account of the wart cure experience by my research partner, Sarah Carter, also includes the motif of tying knots:

I was with my Mother, and my cousin, Kelsey, of Winfield, Alabama. We each had warts to be healed. Mr. Ira Baccus counted the warts, approximately thirty in total, which ran along the side of my leg. He tied a knot in a string for every wart I had, then he cut the string in half, and threw it on the ground. After that, he would no longer touch the string. He asked me (and my mom and cousin) to take the string and bury it in a secret place, and to not tell anyone where it's buried. To my recollection, he did not even touch the warts, but said something under his breath while tying the knots.[62]

► Sayings, Prayers, and Conjures

Many folk cures are supplemented or made possible by traditional sayings, prayers, or magical words and conjures. Cures that contain this motif can usually be classified as magico-religious in their employment of the supernatural belief in the verbalizing of these spiritual, ritual words. As mentioned previously, some individuals are known to be able to "talk off" warts, particularly by "three rapid repetitions of Ezekiel 16:6."[63] This biblical verse, which was also present in the curing of hemorrhages in a collection of folk cures from Kentucky, compiled by Sadie Price, reads: "And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee, Live!"[64] Sarah Carter notes that her kin in Virginia have used the verse in curing not only warts, but also blood poisoning.

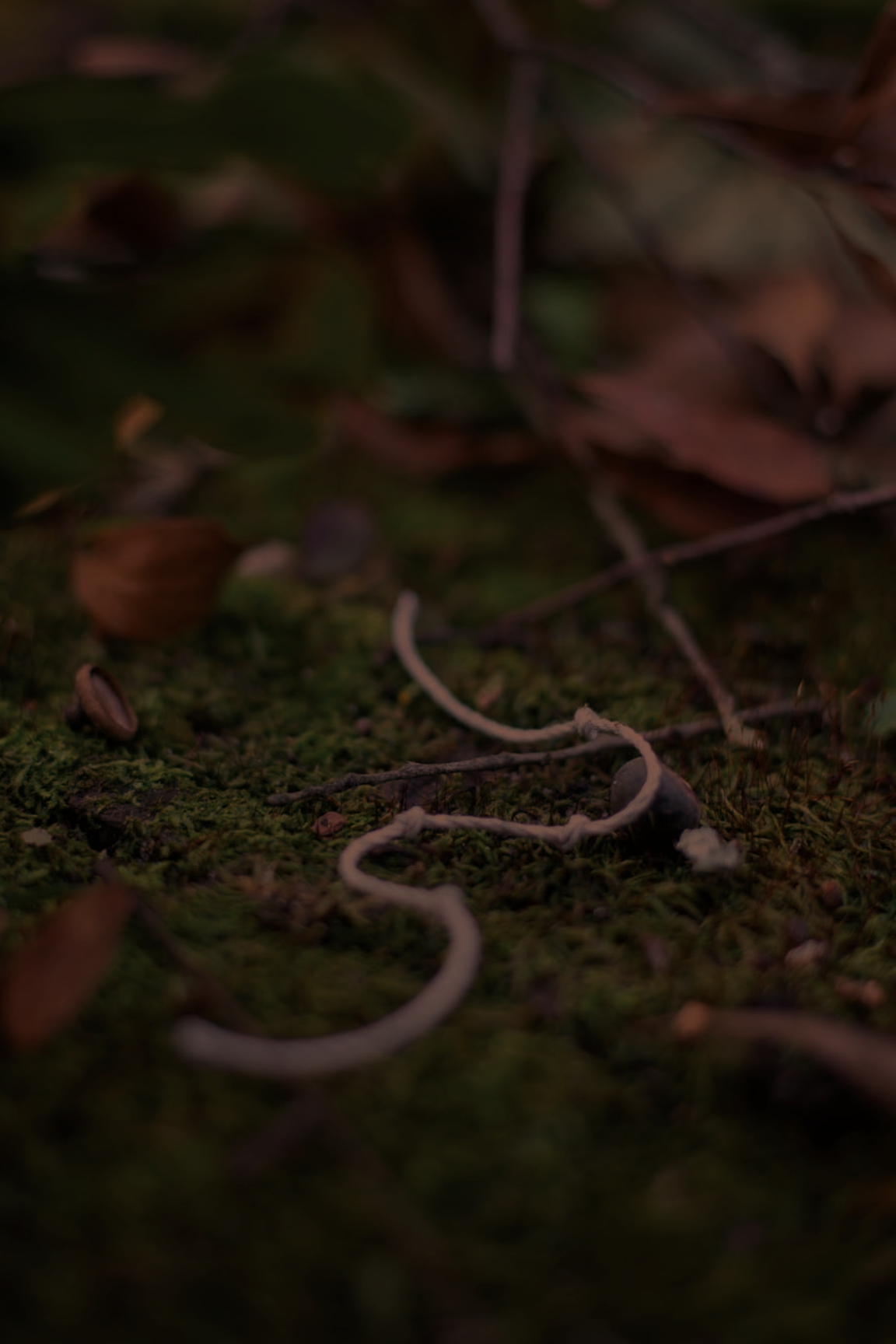
Other cures have a more magical approach, such as this cure from Kentucky: "Spit on the wart, and rub it several times upward with the finger while one chants a hocus-pocus rhyme."[65] Cavender also offers an example: "Other magical remedies were ... rubbing the warts while looking at a new moon and saying 'You grow and you go' ... Should these or any of the other wart remedies fail, one sought a 'wart doctor' who had the ability to conjure warts off by rubbing them with a hand and murmuring 'You grow and you go' or some other secret charm."[66] No. 2701 from the Frank C. Brown Collection, collected from Julian P. Boyd of Maryland, suggests "Some people can talk warts away by reciting poetry."[67] This recalls anthropologist Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah's ideas that ritual or magical practice represents a symbolic communication that functions more like poetry than science or physics.[68]

Conclusion

Reviewing the available literature on wart cures was an important exercise in preparing to conduct fieldwork on the wart healing traditions of families in

Possum Flat, Winfield, and Winston County, Alabama. Though much of the research is dated, the older collections of wart cures were a critical resource in understanding the cultural motifs and themes which are, to some extent, universal (at least in the United States). However, even among the wider traditions of curing a wart by the aid of moonlight, or conjure words, or prayer, or by the (sacred) skill of a seventh son, variations do reveal regional and ethnic priorities, values, aesthetics, identities, and ways of living, as well as cultural and spiritual worldviews.

New documentation, rooted in current ethnographic theory and methodology, will prove to be a valuable resource for those interested in Alabama folk medicine and folk belief, and those interested specifically in traditional wart curing techniques. A more holistic approach to documenting the tradition should allow for those interested in the contemporary practice to go deeper than simply knowing the curative techniques by short, one-sentence directives. In documenting not only the variations on curing techniques that have been kept and passed on in a community, but also the legacies and lives of those who choose to engage in the tradition, researchers may be better able to know the community, and if they are a part of it, better able to know themselves. ○



Tradition, Faith, Mystery, Service

Wart Healing and Folk Cures in Northwest Alabama

SARAH CARTER

"Clevis Stivener, the blind broom maker, took ninety-nine warts off Great Aunt Mildred's knee." This was the one sentence story that started it all. I learned the details through years of asking questions over steaming plates of collards or when after dinner talk turned to strange things just before bedtime. If I asked Mom directly about Clevis, she'd just say, "I can't really remember. Wait 'til we go to Alabama and we'll ask Hot Dog."

My uncle, Duane Hughes of Winfield, Alabama, sure doesn't look like he'd be called Hot Dog. He earned the nickname at the tender age of three, when the pitiful appearance of an old, red hot dog he peeled made him cry. At 6'2 now, with an auburn mustache, to me he looks more like a cowboy from the Louis L'Amour novels he loves.

I did ask my uncle about Clevis when we arrived in Winfield one of many summers we visited, and he told me that Clevis Stivener spent his whole life in the Possum Flat area of Alabama (near Hamilton), an area marked by low, clay-rich hills and dense pines. This geography became so ingrained in Clevis that, at his wife's insistence, he continued driving after becoming blind. Clevis also continued making brooms after losing his sight. As a child, Uncle Hot was so fascinated by this feat that often he padded barefoot through the dew-covered grass to Clevis's workshop, long after dusk had faded into night. He followed the metallic snap of the straw-cutting blade and by the time he made it to the shop doorway, Clevis had identified the sound of his steps. "Hot? Is that you?" he would call out from the shop into the darkening night.

Clevis lore is just one of the many subjects of my family's narratives when they get to telling stories, but it forever implanted wart healers in my mind. So, when a trip to the dermatologist failed to remove a cluster of warts from my knee when I was in high school, it wasn't surprising that my mother suggested we find a wart healer. I didn't know how firmly I believed in this practice when we arrived in Winfield for summer vacation, but with the possibility of a hot summer looming wearing pants, I was ready to try anything.

PHOTO BY VALERIE DOWNES

Of course, Clevis died long before I was born, so we had to ask Uncle Hot if he knew any living wart healers. He did—Ira Baccus, a long-time deacon at the Winfield Free Will Baptist Church. My mother called Ira (pronounced Iree) and he agreed to meet with us. Yes, *us*. My mom and cousin each had a wart a piece. We all drove together to Ira's well-kept ranch home on a street of well-kept ranch homes. The lawn was cut close and there were little ceramic animals in the flower bed.

We were a sight filing up the closely edged sidewalk. My mother led the way, looking neat and summery in khaki pants and a floral blouse. My cousin had her makeup done just right, as usual. My outfit was somewhere between punk rock and lazy goth, that is to say, all black. I was still dying my hair with black, box color and felt it necessary to convey a punk rock aesthetic *at all times*—even, apparently, in the home of an *elderly, Southern, folk medicine* practitioner.

Mrs. Baccus, a grey-haired woman in her early eighties, met us at the door as warmly as if we were coming for dinner. She directed us to her living room and motioned for us to sit on her plastic covered sofa. The room was filled with pristine 1960s furniture and family photographs. Sun flooded in from the large, picture window as she told us the names of her grandchildren, pointing to each one's photograph as she spoke. She received us so warmly I felt like we were coming to eat supper; instead, we had arrived to have unsightly skin blemishes removed by a mysterious power.

As I shifted my weight on the sofa, my legs stuck to the thick, plastic cover. Would Ira be so friendly? What he would look like? The only images of healers I had seen were the photographs of medicine men in my history textbooks.

Ira came into the living room with labored steps. He was dressed like a classic, TV grandpa in his khaki slacks and red plaid shirt, buttoned all the way to the top even though it was the middle of summer. His movement and mannerisms were slow, but his eyes were dark and focused. Mrs. Baccus, not Ira, told us he was ready to start. He said nothing as he began to count the cluster of warts on the outside of my right knee.

When he finished, he said something under his breath and began tying knots in a string he pulled from his pocket. He cut the knotted string in half, threw it on the ground, and told me to pick it up. "Bury your string in a damp spot," he said. "As the string rots, your warts will go away. Don't think about them anymore. Don't talk about them anymore. Just go on with your business."

I stood there holding my totally normal, off-white string while my mom and cousin had their warts treated. It was the kind of string you'd put up for runner beans. *How could something so ordinary have any power to heal?*

After we buried our strings in a place I will not tell you to this very day, we went back to our normal family vacation. My cousin and I went to the snow cone shack (next to the Wal-Mart and across from the fireworks stand), which was manned by local hunk, Marvin Leathers. We drove around in my cousin's yellow, 1970s Volkswagen Beetle listening to Hank Williams Jr. and *talked* about Marvin Leathers. We went to the pool, ate vending machine snacks, and forgot about our warts. Back at home a few weeks later, when I looked down at my leg, my warts were gone.

After that summer, I truly did what Ira Baccus told me. I stopped talking about my warts. I stopped looking at them. I forgot about them for about ten years. In that time, I got a teaching degree, moved to Nashville, and started my adult life.

Then, one chilly Nashville night, while hanging in our favorite burger joint, I remembered Ira when my friend Jennifer Joy Jameson, in Western Kentucky University's Folklore Studies Program at the time, started talking about research fellowships. She knew I had family in Alabama and suggested we reach out to the Alabama Folklife Association. I was still new to the idea that yard art and making cane backed chairs were something you could study academically, and I had no idea what else might be included.

"What about wart healing?" I asked. "In high school, I had a wart healer take some warts off for me."

"Wait, you had warts healed, personally?" asked Jenn, who was not unfamiliar with folk healing but who grew up in California with different practices.

I told Jenn an abbreviated version of the story and we agreed to apply for the AFA's Joyce H. Cauthen Fellowship. We were thrilled when we received the grant, but truthfully, I wasn't sure exactly what we had gotten. At that time, I hadn't ever typed a transcript or done a formal interview. I was teaching research and writing to high schoolers, but Jenn, whose family has roots in Haleyville, knew the folklore procedures.

In the meantime, we read everything we could find. In her article, "Tie a String and Bury It: A Review of Folklife Scholarship on Wart Healing Traditions," Jenn references literature as varied as Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to Wayland Hand's work for the Archive of American Popular Beliefs and Superstitions at UCLA. The work she references covers everything from simple, practical advice such as, "No. 2522: 'Dandelion juice will cure warts,'" in Frank C. Brown's *Collection of North Carolina Folklore* to complicated, academic concepts like the idea of sympathetic magic.

We learned of European folk practices that prescribed burying items to which something undesirable has been transferred. Touching a dirty dish towel to the wart and then burying it (one object acting as a scapegoat for another) was just one of the many variants. And although there were similarities, there was not one specific cure that matched up with the practice I had seen. Obviously, this healing tradition had a European connection, but Jenn and I weren't able to pin it down in a single source.

Much of Jenn's research found short descriptions of wart healing methods in larger collections of folkways. These methods had a few commonalities such as the use of material items and the practice of verbalization. Yet this research did not include oral history from local practitioners, which was the aim of our project. We wanted to provide regionally focused accounts of wart healers in Marion County, Alabama, to contribute to a more robust understanding of how wart healing is still practiced today.

This piece is a compilation of our ethnographic fieldwork, audio interviews, field notes, and personal observations in the summer of 2012 in Marion County, Alabama. I have been told wart healing occurs in other parts of Alabama, but

because practitioners' abilities are passed on by word of mouth, Winfield and its surrounding areas are the only place I have been privy to this information (because my family is a part of this community).

The oral interviews explain each healer's process of learning and practicing the tradition and can be found in the Archive of Alabama Folk Culture. Although each interview touches on a different aspect of what makes this ability unique, they have four common themes: tradition, faith, mystery, and service. Each of the healers had a different style and rules which governed the success or failure of the wart healing process. However, these methods also had commonalities:

- Each healer wanted the gift. S/he saw a family member performing the wart healing ritual and expressed interest in how it was done.
- Each practitioner learned from a family member who explained a secret component (except for one informant who described his secret component as more of a secret thought).
- Each healer (except one) insists upon the belief of the patient and will ask the patient, "Do you believe this will work?" before the process is administered.
- Each person believes in the process despite not understanding it.
- None of the informants publicizes his/her ability or will take compensation. Knowledge of this practice spreads by word of mouth (from patient to patient).
- After the ritual, each healer informs the patient not to think about the wart or talk about it anymore.
- Each person has successfully healed at least one individual.

Ten years after my own healing experience, armed with our research, Jenn's expertise, and recording equipment borrowed from the AFA, we set off for Winfield. We would be staying with Uncle Hot Dog and Aunt Lynn which meant we would eat well. Sure enough, we got in at just about dark and Aunt Lynn had left peas and cornbread on the stove with sweet potatoes. My aunt and uncle are integral members of the Winfield community. They raised their children there, are active in their local church, and volunteer with the Lion's Club and Salvation Army.

If we had just traveled to town and started asking for wart healers, it's doubtful we would have had anything to write about. My aunt and uncle both asked around town, calling distant acquaintances to explain our unusual project, risking their reputations and trusting that we would conduct our work respectfully and well. Along with their food, my family shared their insider status so that we could do this work. Full of gratitude (and with full bellies), we turned in early so we'd be ready to meet our first healer.

Gina Bryant | Tradition

The next morning, fueled by Uncle Hot's homemade biscuits (he's a White Lily man), Jenn and I set off to interview Gina Bryant. We passed the pool where my cousins and I used to swim during my family's summertime visits and I noticed it had been filled in. Instead of the crowded, bright blue waters I remembered,

the lot was empty, the pool's shape disappearing under loads of dirt. The snack machines and beach chairs were only a memory. This is true of many places I remembered in Winfield. Locally owned grocery stores and clothing shops are slowly being replaced by Wal-Mart and other national chains.

Still, in addition to the folk healing tradition we came to study, Winfield's residents maintain traditions that make their home unique. Celebrations like the annual Mule Day Parade (which includes a car show and Civil War reenactment) and the Jerry Brown Festival (named for a local potter) are two of the many ways Marion County residents celebrate their history (Figure 1).

When we arrived at the Winfield Community Center, there was no one at the front desk. We wandered around the center, asking a few of the many senior citizens throughout the building if they had seen Gina Bryant, our first informant. She was in a classroom folding T-shirts with an elderly friend. She ushered us into a quiet room nearby that smelled like a wood-paneled church fellowship hall. The multipurpose room was neat and undecorated, except for two huge wooden panels with the Twelve Steps emblazoned on them. Gina was a petite woman in her early forties with shoulder-length brown hair. Dressed for work in khaki shorts, a yellow T-shirt, and gold hoop earrings, Gina looked stylishly utilitarian. After one false start with our recording equipment, we started to listen.

FIGURE 01 Mules at the Mule Day parade in Winfield, Alabama, 1988. *(Photo by Maggie Holtzberg. Alabama Department of Archives and History, Q86644)*

Though the room was plain, Gina's story was not. Gina learned to heal from her grandmother, Illa Fowler Pierce. Her grandmother learned from an elderly African American woman who would walk past Mrs. Pierce's house in Fayette County, Alabama. Because it was the 1930s, Gina's grandmother had to sneak out to visit with this woman as African Americans and whites did not freely mix socially at this time. Eventually, through their friendship, the woman taught Pierce her process for wart healing. Gina explains:

You take a cotton string and you tie a knot. You count the warts. But Granny's is a little different [than some of the other methods we discussed in

PHOTO OF GINA BRYANT BY JENNIFER JOY JAMESON

the interview]. As you tied the knot, you rubbed that knot over the wart. And that knot touched that wart, and then as you moved to the second wart, you would tie the second knot, and that knot would rub that wart … when the person left, eventually, you would bury the string. But you didn't show anyone where, and Granny always put a rock over it. I'm not sure why … after she buried it. I'm not sure if it was so she could remember where she buried it.

Gina's grandmother taught her about other folk remedies used in the region as well. For example, if a child were to get the chicken pox, a Black woman from the community would be asked to come, pick the best chicken from the hen house, hang it above the bed and slit its throat over the affected child, letting the blood drip on the child. Another remedy Gina recalled was for oral candidiasis, also known as thrush. If you could find a man who was the "seventh son of a seventh son who had not seen his father," you were to take the child to the man and ask him to blow in the child's mouth. Gina's own niece had thrush as a child and as the condition persisted, was referred to a local healer. At first, the child's parents were hesitant to take her because the healer was an older man and his hygiene habits were not as good as they once were. Nonetheless, Gina's brother took the baby, and within a few days she was healed and able to take a bottle.

Most healers, including Gina, say a secret phrase or include a spiritual element in their healing process. When asked if there was a spiritual element to her wart healing ritual, Gina repeated her process: "Rub, tie, bury, and I do mine [the secret part] in between. But it's almost like when you say a silent prayer or something. It's just something you think about." We asked Gina, a retired nurse, why this healing is so effective. "I see it as faith," she said. "I can't see any scientific reason they should go away as a nurse, and as an intelligent human being. But it just works."

"To me, one of the biggest parts of nursing, any kind of healing, is spiritual. I think your attitude has a lot to do with anything when your body heals. I think that the Good Lord has everything to do with whether or not you heal, and this is just faith-based, so I think it's all intertwined."

GINA BRYANT

Gina has healed about a dozen people. She feels this number is low because wart healing isn't something people talk about very much these days. She's particularly amused when children come to be healed because they don't know what to expect. Because Gina's method requires being entirely alone with the patient, children are often the most anxious or hesitant. No parent has ever asked about her exact process, but she feels sure they ask their children in the car after they leave.

Gina's most recent healing experience was with a co-worker she helped a few weeks before our interview. The woman was about to leave for a doctor's appointment to have a wart frozen off when Gina volunteered to take care of it. Her co-worker said, "Sure! Might as well save that co-pay," and the two women stepped into a room at the recreation center. Gina performed her wart healing process but is unsure if the woman's wart has disappeared yet.

Overall, Gina's role as a healer is the same role she played when she worked as a nurse and the same role she currently fills at the senior center. She sees a need, and she meets it—there is no glamour involved, no fanfare. Gina anticipates a need and offers her help. Although the method isn't entirely logical to her, Gina trusts it because it works. She plans to pass her method down to her daughter soon, just as her grandmother passed it to her, and an elderly woman passed it to her grandmother. To Gina, this practice is about faith and tradition: "It's just a Southern thing. Of course, this is the Bible Belt, and you know, we're so spiritual anyway, but it's just all in your faith. And that's a Southern tradition. There's faith wrapped all around it."

Harold Spann | Faith

Twelve-year-old Harold Spann didn't notice his warts were gone until he went fishing. As he washed the muddy Alabama red clay off his hands in the creek, he realized the hand that had previously been covered with bumpy warts was smooth again. Two weeks earlier, at the behest of his mother, Harold showed his hand to his uncle who was a known wart healer. His uncle, Jim Spann, rubbed the warts and said something under his breath. Then he said, "You've gotta believe. Do you believe?" At

"Me, I have beliefs. Here as a person, we may have some power—we don't have all power. To me, God has all the power. And he may work through us—through you and I, someone else— whatever we do. It's not our doing. It's just his power may come through us ... Don't let this person think that I'm the one that's doing this. I think there's a higher power to it. You don't think a whole lot about it, just somebody asks you something, and you feel in your mind and your heart that you may really help this person. Somethin' guides you to do this, and that's what I do."

HAROLD SPANN

the time, Harold wasn't sure if he believed or not. But when he washed his hands that day at the creek, he became a believer.

When we spoke to Harold, he was in his seventies. A former correctional officer, Harold carried himself with easy authority as he showed us around his flower garden, full of wild lilies and ingenious squirrel traps. After the tour, he spoke to us from his easy chair in the living room. Harold learned to heal from his uncle Jim Spann, whom he described as unusual. Jim told Harold that he could probably take off warts if he wanted to because he believed. When Harold asked how, all Jim would say was, "First, I touch 'em. You gotta touch 'em. The person needs to believe you. If they don't believe you—if they think you're just kidding them, they may not come off." If Harold was skeptical about having his own warts healed, he was very skeptical about believing that he himself was a healer.

Young Harold had the opportunity to test his healing ability soon after this conversation. His mom volunteered him to take a wart off for a family friend's child. Harold did what his uncle had done to him—rubbed the warts, said something under his breath and told the child not to think about it. A couple of weeks later, he learned the child had been healed.

Some wart healers feel that the tradition and the process itself hold a great deal of mystery. For the Spanns, it is pure faith—the healer's faith in his/her ability to heal and the patient's faith to be healed. Belief is the central theme of Harold's view of the healing process. Because of this emphasis on faith, he feels children are the easiest patients. "The easiest people to deal with in this was the younger generation," said Harold. "The older ones—some of the older fellers say, 'Aw, well, that's hokey pokey,' they'd call it."

The younger children who came to Harold for healing were usually accompanied by a female family member. Harold thinks this has to do with the transparency and faith required in the process: "Usually it's a grandmother or a mother—very few fathers that will come around with a kid. They always send Mama with that or Grandmama will bring the kid, you know. I think it might be an ego-situation with the male

PHOTO OF HAROLD SPANN BY JENNIFER JOY JAMESON

population. It could be. You know, they think, 'Aw, I'm not gonna fall for that.' Whereas the mothers and grandmothers will try anything for the child. That's where it comes from."

Harold cited many reasons for the decrease in the number of people coming to traditional wart healers for help: modern medicine, age, and Wal-Mart's instant wart removers. More than those, Harold sees faith lessening with age. He spoke on taking a wart off an adult:

I'd ask them, I'd say, 'Do you believe that this will come off?' 'Well, I'm not sure,' they'd say. Then, I'd say, 'Really, you've got to believe it's gonna happen to you.' Most of the times, you know, the ones that would tell you out, that there's just folklore or something like that. I'd say, 'Well, just try it and believe it for a while and see what happens.' And some of them would come back ... [after they had seen it work] later on, some of the fellers I worked with would tell me, some of them would have their kids come to my house [to be healed]. I'd tell 'em I could remove a wart, or they'd find out by me doing for someone else, and their kid would pass the word around. It spreads on you if you're going to do something like this.

Most wart healers believe their power will be lost once they tell someone their process. For Harold and Jim Spann, all one needs is a desire to do it. When asked if he will pass on his gift, Harold replied, "I don't think you pass it on. I think that it comes to you through your own consciousness—through your own being. I think it comes to you that way. I don't feel that my uncle passed it on to me. I just feel that I seen the procedure, and then wanted to know if I knew how to do it."

According to Harold, the amount of faith one needs to be healed is small: "Just try it and believe it for a while and see what happens." His gift was imparted from his uncle in a practical way, and he expresses his faith in the process in a practical way: "I cannot explain the situation. What the procedure is. All I did was, I rubbed it [the wart]. And I felt this was going to remove the wart. And I tell them, you need to feel the same thing. I believe that your wart is going to be disappearing."

Mary Dean McDonald | Mystery

Mary Dean McDonald healed her first wart patient when she was in the seventh grade. There was a little boy, whom she described as underprivileged, who had a big wart on his nose. People made fun of the boy, and Mary Dean decided she wanted to help. Her mother, a wart healer herself, had recently passed on her wart healing secret. So, without the boy's knowing, Mary Dean did her healing practice. Within a few weeks, she noticed his wart was gone.

Mary Dean (who chose to use an alias) told us this story at the McDonald's on Highway 43 in Winfield. She had just come from Wednesday night church, and she thought meeting in a public place would be best. The only person in Mrs. McDonald's family who knows about her gift is her husband, and she said he doesn't believe in that kind of stuff.

Mary Dean was our only reluctant informant. Because of her religious beliefs, she associates this gift with witchcraft. According to her, "We are not supposed to have those kinds of powers. You know, to tell the future or some kind of thing that's like the apostles were given [like healing]. We're not supposed to have those kinds of powers." Yet, she said she doesn't regret learning the skill from her mother.

The only information Mary Dean felt comfortable telling us about her healing method was that there is something you say, and you do it the same way each time. She said, "Because it's such a voodoo thing, I just kind of stayed away from it." She went on to explain that she didn't mean French Louisiana-type voodoo, but was referring more to the process being taboo. In fact, each of our informants used the term "voodoo" at some point in the interview, implying this similar meaning.

Though Mary Dean didn't want to speak in depth about her ability to heal warts, she freely shared about other skills she had. She also believes she can predict the sex of a baby. By holding a string with a light weight on the end (a needle or a wedding ring) over the inside of a pregnant woman's wrist, she observes the direction the string sways. If the string swings in a circle, the baby will be a girl. If the string moves front to back or side to side, the baby will be a boy. Mary Dean told us a story about when she tried this method for a woman and the string stood still. She lied and told the woman a gender anyway, feeling certain the baby would not live. The woman lost her baby some time later. Directly after this story, Mary Dean offered to determine the sexes of babies Jenn and I might have in the future, but in light of the tragic outcome of the story we had just heard, we quickly declined.

All in all, Mary Dean seemed very conflicted about this tradition. She felt glad her mother taught her and happy to have secretly helped individuals from afar.

"Because it's such a voodoo thing, I just kind of stayed away from it."

MARY DEAN MCDONALD

She did say she would like to pass the tradition down to her son one day and feels he has the openness to understand it.

All the healers with whom we spoke were part of an evangelical, Christian denomination, but Mary Dean was the only one who felt the practice might be related to un-Christian powers. Despite this conflict, Mary Dean wanted to speak to us in tribute to her mother and the good her mother did through healing.

Catherine Box | Service

The day we went to interview Catherine Box was one of the hottest days of the summer. The cows we passed on the drive suffered in the heat, swinging their tails in the shade of trees for some relief. When we arrived, Cat's son saw us knocking on the door and offered to go get her. She was in the barn and had been shucking corn all day with her family, undaunted by the punishing heat.

Despite the temperature, we sat on the porch. Cat's grandson, Thackery, age five, demonstrated how he could jump off the porch and told us about his girlfriend and the way to pick up frogs. He lives next door. In fact, almost all of Cat's family lives near her house, which serves as the family's social center. During the interview, her son, who was working behind the house with his dad, Rev. C.W. Box, came up to the porch to say hello. Her teenage grandson stopped by in his pick-up truck to drop something off. And Cat's daughter, Rita, a nurse, came by to participate in the second half of the interview.

Cat was a short, strong woman in her seventies. She had the healthy, brown look of someone who has worked outside for a large part of her life, and her wrinkles appear when she shyly smiles. She was unfazed by the heat as we sat on her porch, and when she told us her story, she looked out into the yard and across the road at the grazing cows.

Cat and her husband, Southern Baptist preacher Rev. C.W. Box, have lived in Alabama their whole lives. Cat grew up watching her parents use folk cures and remedies. For example, her mother tied strings around Cat and her siblings' necks to keep the measles from "falling on them." Cat's mother also knew how to use the plants and herbs native to Northwest Alabama. She always boiled redwood oak bark tea for Cat's bad tooth. She would boil the bark, tell Cat to hold it in her mouth, and then instruct her to spit it out once she felt the infection was drawn out. Cat's father practiced divining and "witched for water" when people

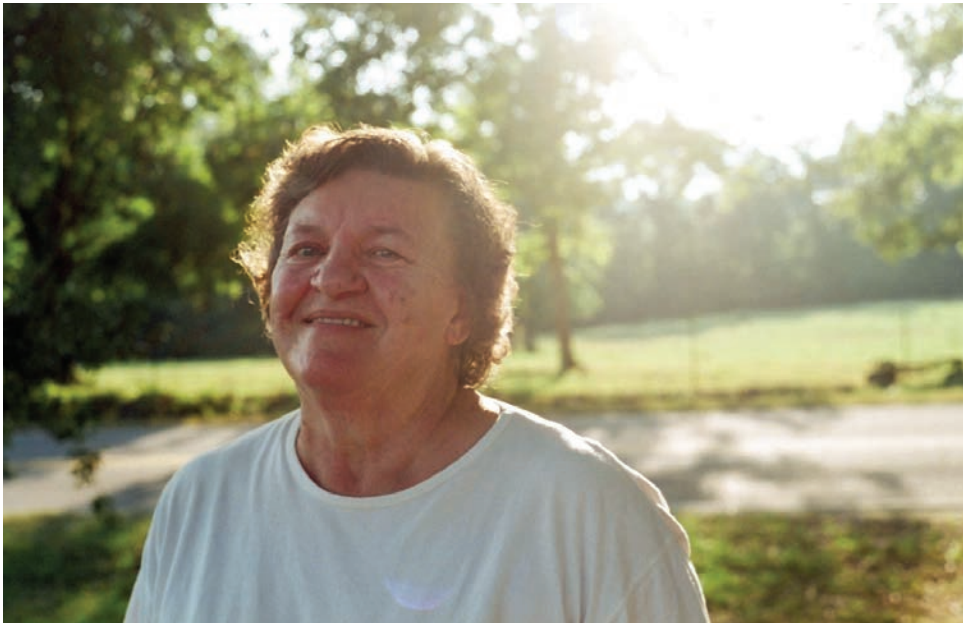


PHOTO OF CATHERINE BOX BY JENNIFER JOY JAMESON

needed to dig a well. She doesn't feel these things have any spiritual connection but are useful practices, nonetheless.

Cat plants by the signs to ensure a good harvest. Understanding this process can be complicated to people who haven't grown up with it, but those who practice it usually buy calendars like the Farmer's Almanac to see which sign falls on which day. This information is taken from a chart with a picture of a man's body on it. Each section of the man is assigned seasons according to moon cycles. There are certain times within each season which are bad for planting. For example, Cat says, "Don't plant in the blooming season, when the moon is in the bowels. For potatoes, you have to dig them on a certain moon, and if you don't, every one of them will rot. If you have questions about planting by the signs, you should just find a calendar, maybe in an almanac or a Ramon's calendar, and follow the signs. The best time to plant beans is when the signs are in the arms." Also, she advises not planting when the signs are in the head or in the heart. Planting in the wrong sign can cause your plants to only bloom green leaves instead of producing vegetables.

Cat strongly feels her healing is a service. Many years ago, a mother brought her daughter, who was covered with warts, to Cat to be healed. Cat patiently performed her wart healing ritual in sections until the girl's skin was healthy again. Motivated by compassion, and compelled by her daughter Rita's volunteering her to heal other people, Cat feels it's important to keep the practice going. "I wouldn't want it to die down because there's so many kids in this area—that, oh, they look pitiful where they'll have 'em burned off and things, and leave scars ... I think I've got a gift to give ... and it helps people. I've seen people go to doctors and things and I think that's terrible to me, and then they come right back."

"I preach the gospel and Mama does voodoo."

REV. C.W. BOX | CATHERINE BOX'S HUSBAND

Before Jenn and I started our interviews, my cousin Kelsey asked us to see if any of the informants would be willing to take a wart off for her. She wondered if it would even be possible because she was pregnant at the time. Since my cousins grew up with Cat's granddaughter, Randa, I felt comfortable asking Cat if she would heal Kelsey. Cat agreed, noting that the pregnancy wouldn't affect the healing. She also asked that we turn off our audio recorder while she was working.

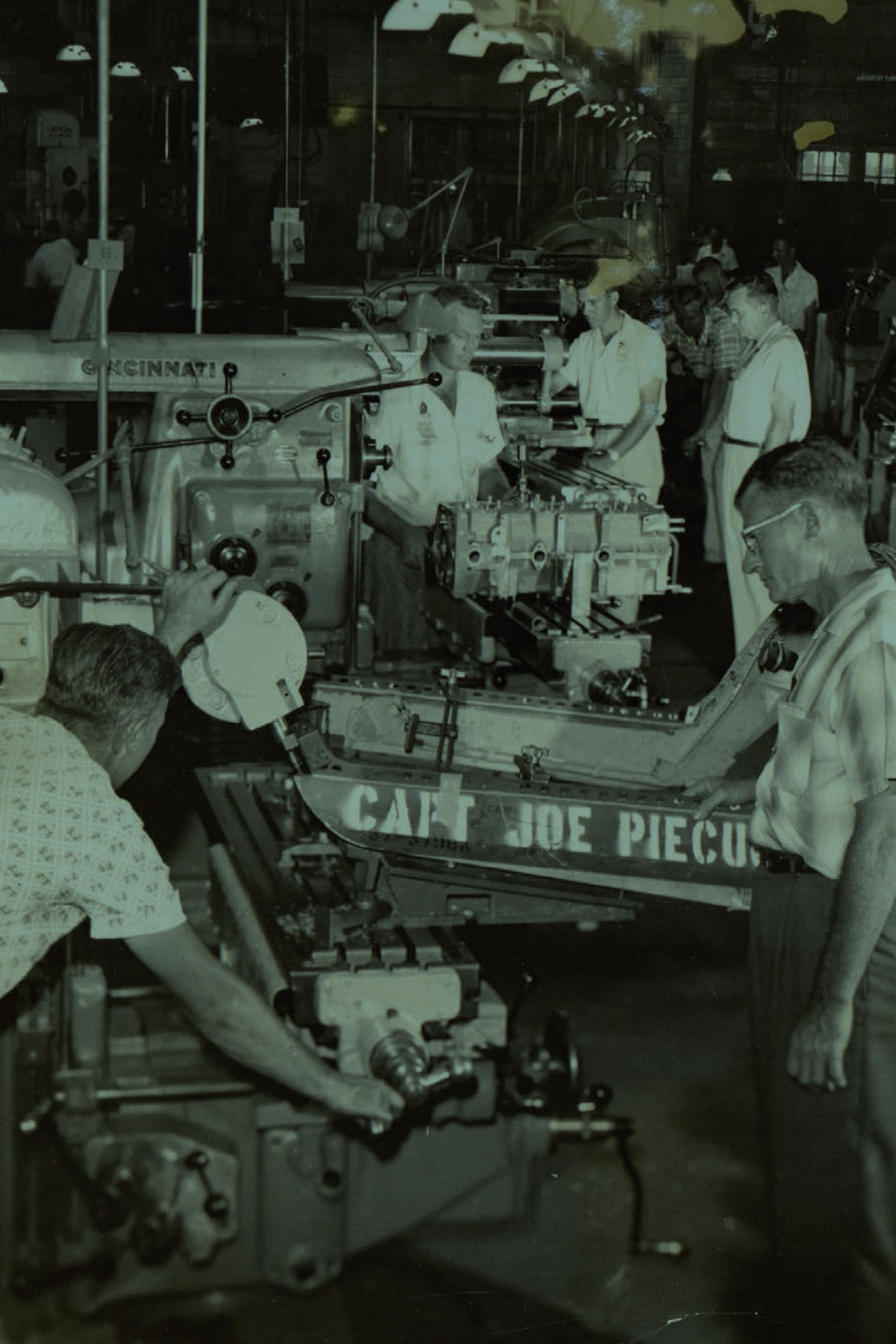
When Kelsey arrived still in her dental hygienist scrubs, Jenn, Rita and I just kept talking about Cat's career as a healer. Cat instructed Kelsey to have a seat and she started to cure her wart. She drew a series of invisible circles around the wart with her finger and tied knots in a string. After about three minutes of tying knots, Cat and Kelsey walked around the side of the house. Kelsey told us later that she and Cat buried the string together, which was different from her experience of burying the string by herself when Ira Baccus took off her last wart.

According to Rita, Cat has healed hundreds of people. Cat is happy to serve the members of her community with her gift. Being able to prevent the scarring and expense required by modern wart healing methods makes her especially grateful. Her home is a center for her family and her gift is a place of connection for the community.

Conclusion

My mom went to the dermatologist for an issue unrelated to warts soon after Ira Baccus healed our warts in 2000. The dermatologist asked her if my warts were gone, and she said, "Yes, we went to see a wart healer." He said, "Where is he? Do you have his phone number?" The dermatologist's aunt had been a wart healer, and he remembered watching her perform her wart healing ritual, which involved a penny. He went on to talk about how a wart is a virus and will eventually go away on its own, but he also lauded the power of positive thinking, which is how he categorizes the wart healing tradition.

Marion County wart healers have faith in their processes and community members have faith in these healers. This faith keeps the tradition alive, and though no one really understands the mysterious processes, practitioners use their gifts to serve the community. This practice also still exists because it works. None of our healers could explain it, nor could a professional dermatologist. Wart healing traditions have stood the test of time and served generations of people throughout the South. They will continue to do so as long as there are healers willing to use their gifts to serve and patients who still believe. ○


CINCINNATI

"A Good Steady, Stable Job"

A Culture of Community at Brookley Air Force Base

SUSAN THOMAS

Brookley Air Force Base, initially constructed in 1941 as a supply depot and aircraft modification facility for the Army Air Corps, occupied over 2,000 acres of land adjacent to Mobile Bay and provided 11% of jobs in the Mobile area until its closure in 1969 (Figure 1).[1] During World War II and again during the Cold War years, Brookley's civilian employment at times topped 16,000. With a payroll of over $95 million, the facility was a dominant player in Mobile's economic, civic, and cultural life.[2]

The initial announcement of Brookley's impending closure was made by the Department of Defense in November 1964, just as Mobile was beginning to emerge from a two-year economic recession. The closure would eventually result in the loss of 12,000 civilian jobs, with roughly half of those affected leaving the Mobile area to find employment. This loss would constitute the "largest employment impact that any community would suffer from defense realignment between 1961-1974," according to one government analysis.[3]

Between 1964 and the official closure date of June 30, 1969, many of Brookley's civilian personnel were offered transfers to other military facilities across the country. Many were reassigned to Air Force bases in Sacramento; San Antonio; Warner Robins, GA; and Pensacola, FL. Others found employment locally, while some opted to retire. Many of the Brookley facilities were deeded over to the city of Mobile, with the University of South Alabama eventually acquiring some of the acreage.

Now known as the Mobile Aeroplex at Brookley, the facility currently houses approximately 70 companies that represent a wide range of industries. In 2012, international aircraft manufacturer Airbus chose to locate its first North American final assembly line for producing airframe components at Brookley; the Airbus complex would eventually add 12,000 direct and indirect jobs to the Mobile economy (Figure 2). In August 2020, the Mobile Airport Authority announced plans to build a $160 million eight-gate terminal for commercial air flights at Brookley.

A Brookley employee directory and guide published around 1960[4] refers to the base as a "city within a city," and this designation is reiterated in an article

printed in the base's newspaper, *The Spotlight*, in May 1966.[5] To explore this concept of the workplace as a cultural community, twenty-one individuals who were former employees of Brookley were interviewed under the auspices of the Alabama Folklife Association between April 2012 and May 2013.[6] They were asked to share their experiences related to working at Brookley, including describing their jobs, camaraderie with fellow workers, morale-building activities at the base, their emotional response to the base's closure, and any attempts to stay in touch with colleagues after Brookley closed.

Other topics addressed in the interviews included the role of women, minorities, and persons with disabilities in the workplace at Brookley; participation in the annual United Fund campaign; how Brookley was viewed by the larger Mobile community; and how working at Brookley compared to working at other job sites.

The twenty-one individuals interviewed ranged in age from 65 to 96, were almost equally divided by sex, and represented a variety of occupations within the Brookley workforce. All but one worked at Brookley until the base began phasing out jobs in the mid-1960s. Of the twenty individuals who were faced with losing their jobs, nine transferred to other bases out-of-state while twelve obtained other employment locally. Those moving out-of-state eventually moved back to Mobile upon retirement.

FIGURES 01-02
Original Brookley airplane repair hangers viewed from the shoreline of Mobile Bay, 2014. Below: Recently completed administration building for the Airbus aircraft assembly facility currently under construction at the Mobile Aeroplex at Brookley. *(Photos by Susan Thomas)*

Many of the individuals interviewed began work at Brookley at a young age, often right out of high school. In most cases they had heard about Brookley through relatives or friends who already worked there. Many stated that Brookley was considered a good place to work in the Mobile area. Edwina Mullins, who started at Brookley in 1942 at age twenty-one as a clerical worker, said, "People came from all over the state and from all over the United States to work there. Brookley gave them good jobs and good pay, and they only had to work eight hours a day, and that was something new ... it was just a good place to work."[7] Virginia Dewrell, who also began employment at Brookley in 1942, moved from her home in Escambia County, Alabama, at age nineteen to work on the base, even though she had to share a bedroom with three other young women boarding with a local family. "Housing was hard to find," she explained. "The shipyard was booming and Brookley was booming; the war had started."[8] (Figure 3).

Another interviewee, Jean Smith Ingram, also started at Brookley at age nineteen. "Nineteen years old, green as grass, scared to death!" she

FIGURE 03 Airacobras being serviced on line at Brookley Field, Mobile, Alabama, circa 1940s. *(Alabama Department of Archives and History, Q69052)*

FIGURE 04
Machinists in the Engine Repair area of Brookley, ca. 1953. *(Photo courtesy of Cecil Wiggins)*

stated. "Brookley was my first experience into the real world—people were kind; I made a lot of mistakes but ... I gained confidence and was able to go on and retire with 40 years of service."[9]

George Rohm started work at Brookley in 1951, admitting he lied about his age and had not even finished high school when he began employment.[10] Frank Reese, a student in Civil Engineering at Vanderbilt University, traveled to Mobile during Spring Break to apply for a job at Brookley; he started in 1957 shortly after graduating. Frank remembered that people in general thought Brookley was a good place to work. "They thought you should work there or for the paper company."[11] Vera Edwards initially worked for a local jewelry store after graduating from high school, but stated, "I recognized Brookley as being a real good opportunity so when I applied, I took the first thing that was available."[12]

In general, the interviewees indicated they felt lucky to have obtained jobs at Brookley, as the base was considered a good place to work, with fewer layoffs and better benefits than jobs in the private sector. Blanding Drinkard, who started work at Brookley in 1955, explained, "You were lucky [to get a job at Brookley]—it really was the epitome of places to work in the area."[13] (Figure 4).

Almost all of the interviewees, when asked to recall what they liked best about their jobs at Brookley, indicated their most positive memo-

"People came from all over the state and from all over the United States to work there. Brookley gave them good jobs and good pay, and they only had to work eight hours a day, and that was something new ... it was just a good place to work."

EDWINA MULLINS

ries were of relationships among co-workers. "It seemed everybody got along. The people were cordial; we had good supervisors," Frank Reese stated. Chelton Wilson, a machine shop foreman, said his co-workers were "great people."[14] Virginia Dewrell described supervising 35 women in the Civilian Personnel Office: "We got along great; we were just one big happy family ... We were together five days a week, through everything a family goes through ... We went through marriages and divorces and babies," and even one suicide, which, she said, "was hard on all of us." (Figure 5).

Several individuals mentioned that informal mentoring took place between older staff and newer employees. Linda Bracewell, who started work at Brookley as a temporary worker immediately after high school in 1965 stated about her older co-workers, "They were very pleasant to me ... they helped me and encouraged me." She indicated that they were patient in teaching her how to perform her job duties.[15] Jean Smith Ingram recalled the division supervisor of her area when she started work at age nineteen: "She called us in, and she would say, 'Now this is the way you do this' ... And to this day I still use those things that [she] taught us."

Donna Rohm, wife of George Rohm, recalled that George and his co-workers were always playing pranks on each other "in fun." Neither she nor George could recall any specific pranks, but Donna described them as "just pure little silly pranks like kids do" and stated they were not serious enough to get George and his

FIGURE 05 Interdenominational Chapel at the Brookley Air Force Base, Mobile, Alabama, 1956. *(Troy University Library)*

FIGURE 06 Cecil Wiggins (center) with two Brookley co-workers vacationing together at Gulf Shores, 1945. *(Photo courtesy of Cecil Wiggins)*

co-workers "in trouble." She said, "There was camaraderie" in the workplace. Another interviewee, Wallace Chunn, recalled his co-workers in the Ground Electronics Engineering Installation Agency (GEEIA)—a subcomponent of Brookley—were continually playing jokes on each other. "They did me a dirty trick," he stated. His co-workers prepared fake travel orders for him, complete with a stamp "made from a Coca-Cola bottle," he explained. He did not realize the "orders" were fake until his co-workers burst out laughing when Wallace went to complain to his supervisor. Wallace indicated he took the trick "in fun."[16]

On-the-job camaraderie extended after hours as many of the interviewees indicated they socialized with co-workers away from the job (Figure 6). Several mentioned going on fishing and camping trips with other Brookley families, participating on golf or bowling teams, or getting together with other couples for a dinner out or a game of cards. Willis Wian, a machinist in the electrical machine shop, recalled attending square dances on base at the Civilian's Club on Wednesday nights.[17] George Rohm played in a country band after work hours along with another Brookley employee.

"We got along great; we were just one big happy family ... We were together five days a week, through everything a family goes through ... We went through marriages and divorces and babies, and even one suicide, which was hard on all of us."

VIRGINIA DEWRELL

Several interviewees mentioned occasions when co-workers were quick to help each other out. Chelton Wilson stated that several of the men from his machine shop helped him build a house during their weekends off from work. "Anytime you needed some help on something there was somebody who had that skill so they could help you," he stated. Donna Rohm recalled that in her husband George's work area, people were always taking up collections for co-workers in need. Blanding Drinkard remembered going to area stores where his employees had over-extended their credit and trying to convince the owners to give them more time to pay off their debts.

Supervisors at Brookley seemed to tolerate and even encourage some social activities in the workplace. Linda Bracewell recalled regularly eating lunch with her supervisor and the two of them working crossword puzzles together. Vera Edwards remembered attending secretary lunches quarterly and Elizabeth Hall, who as an administrative assistant supervised sixteen workers, recalled having office parties when people retired or celebrated birthdays.[18] LaVerne Foster, who worked as a clerk in the Supply Division, also recalled retirements celebrated with a "division-wide shindig."[19]

Virginia Dewrell, supervisor of Civilian Personnel Records, stated, "We always found a reason to have a luncheon! And several times a year we'd go out at night together." Cecil Wiggins, an administrative assistant in the Comptroller's office, recalled her office had several parties at night when "everybody dressed up." Many of these events were held at Bayley's, a popular seafood restaurant located south of Mobile, and were often going-away parties for staff who were leaving.[20]

Several interviewees recalled elaborate luncheons around Christmas. Jean Smith Ingram stated, "The holiday parties were legendary!" She described Christmas parties occurring during work hours in which staff would eat all day. Willis Wian recalled, "The day before Christmas was nothing but party and eat!" He stated that supervisors would provide the food. At Thanksgiving each worker in his shop was given a turkey. Donna Rohm remembered that her husband George would cook a turkey every year for the staff Christmas dinner and that she would prepare banana pudding. George also recalled that staff would eat "most of the day" at these events.

According to the interviewees, Brookley sponsored several base-wide social events and activities. Vera Edwards stated, "The base in general had a lot of

what you might call morale boosters; we'd call them community events now." These activities included the annual Miss Brookley contest, a yearly Employees Day featuring hot dogs and hamburgers for all workers and their families, and dances at Ft. Whiting Armory, located on the Brookley campus. Ila Herring Antoine, who served as secretary to several base commanders, recalled a formal Thanksgiving ball held yearly at Ft. Whiting. "It was a big occasion," she stated, featuring a live band and dancing.[21] Cecil Wiggins also recalled the balls and stated that everyone "dressed up" for the occasion. "There was always something going on," she said.

According to Fred Edwards, a cryptology specialist, Brookley employees were urged to participate in civic activities.[22] Nowhere was this more evident than with the annual United Fund campaigns.[23] Jean Smith Ingram recalled that the base commander would talk to groups of employees assembled outside on the grounds about the campaign. He would "impress upon us how important it was for us to be a part of that and to give, and of course we did," she stated. Vera Edwards remembered the campaigns being "really big" and that employees were encouraged to make their contributions through payroll deductions. She indicated she did not mind giving. "We just felt it was something we all should do," she said.

Blanding Drinkard was the campaign coordinator for his work area and he reported that his staff usually had 100% participation. Blanding explained how he got his staff to give: "I'd say, 'Look what the community is doing for you—You've got a job that makes it where you can afford to give at least a little bit' ... And these were not the big money makers." Wallace Chunn recalled that his area had good participation in the campaigns and that they were often mentioned in the base newspaper, *The Spotlight.* Chelton Wilson recalled that in the machine shops workers sold coffee for a nickel a cup all year long and that the money was used to cover the "fair share" pledge of each employee in the area. "Therefore, we weren't harassed—didn't anyone say anything about our business," he explained.

Some interviewees, however, felt the United Fund campaign put too much pressure on employees to give, to the point that they did feel harassed. Arlene Kinnison, who worked in the electrical repair shop, said of the yearly pledge: "Oh, gosh ... when they asked for that, I just gave it to them, because I've seen them transfer people way down there somewhere in reclamation where they sorted nuts and bolts ... There were a few who would fight it 'til the end but it didn't get them nothing ... I didn't go through that."[24] Arlene's husband, Albert Kinnison, who worked in several different areas of Brookley, also recalled workers being almost coerced to give. He stated he had a co-worker who was sent "from one level of supervision on up" when he refused to make a pledge, with each level of supervisor strongly suggesting that he give. The man eventually ended up in the general's office but still refused to contribute, saying he couldn't afford to do so. Albert recalled that the general did not force him to give.[25]

Ishmael Hall, who worked in Engine Repair, stated, "Our bosses would force us to pay it ... They'd tell you how much you had to give ... If you didn't give it, they'd take you up to talk to the colonel." However, Ishmael recalled that if a person really could

not afford to give, the supervisors would let him "slide."[26] Fred Edwards believed some employees felt pressured into giving but he did not recall anyone experiencing negative repercussions over refusing to give. Frank Reese stated some supervisors "really bore down on folks to get their fair share," but others were satisfied if their workers gave a little. Frank recalled some years that employees who gave their fair share were entered into a contest to win an automobile. Jean Smith Ingram saw the campaign as having a uniting effect on employees: "We were a group—an individual group— representing Brookley" in the area-wide campaign.

During World War II nearly half of Brookley's workforce was female, although this proportion dropped considerably after the war when veterans returned and replaced women in the workforce.[27] Women interviewees overall reported little discrimination on the job. Vera Edwards stated that Brookley was a good place for a woman to work. "I was given opportunities that I could not have had in the private sector at that time," she stated. Arlene Kinnison, who worked in a repair shop with mostly male co-workers, recalled, "I liked to work with men. I liked the men better than the women ... We just got along so good and I never had a man to say anything out of the way to me ... I made a lot of good friends." Jean Smith Ingram remembered the group of male engineers with whom she worked on her first job at Brookley at age nineteen as being "very kind." She stated, "I can remember all those guys coming into the office and it was just a real laid-back, relaxed atmosphere."

Ila Antoine, on the other hand, experienced discrimination firsthand when she applied for a supervisory position in the Procurement area. She stated the Director of Personnel "just came out and told me that there was no place for me in Procurement [because] people didn't like doing negotiations with a woman ... It was more of a man's job." She did, however, advance to become secretary to the base commander.

Several female interviewees stated that Brookley was good about holding jobs for women out on maternity leave. LaVerne Foster remembered taking a total of twelve weeks off for her leave and that her supervisor saved her job for her even though a higher-up boss wanted to eliminate it. Virginia Dewrell reported that in her area she once had five women out on maternity leave at one time. Women were allowed to work as long as they liked before delivery and usually had no problem being re-hired when they were ready to return, she said.

Brookley was considered at the forefront of actively recruiting workers with disabilities during World War II. An article in the *Birmingham News* in 1944 stated that the base had become "the nation's proving ground for vocational rehabilitation," opening "the door of economic independence" for persons with disabilities.[28] Several of the interviewees recalled persons with disabilities performing a variety of jobs. Wallace Chunn recalled working with two polio survivors as well as a blind mechanic who "had to feel almost everything he did, but he managed to do whatever it was." Fred Edwards also recalled working alongside polio survivors who were "crippled to some degree," and a supervisor who was "a little crippled but he was not handicapped." Ishmael Hall remembered working with a blind man and his wife, and with several people who used crutches. He stated he felt Brookley helped "a lot of people like that."

Cecil Wiggins remembered there were "some blind people in Maintenance where they counted screws," and Edwina Mullins remembered blind workers who did "jobs they could do with their hands."

Several interviewees stated that Brookley supervisors were good about making accommodations for workers with medical conditions. Blanding Drinkard recalled convincing his superiors not to fire a man with diabetes who often fell asleep on the job due to his medical condition. Brookley, he stated, "went overboard for most people's needs." Jean Smith Ingram recalled supervisors working with an employee who had a drinking problem. "This was of course before they had programs for that kind of stuff," she said. "They were willing to work with him and try to help him." Elizabeth Hall recalled supervisors holding a job open for a girl who had been hit by a train, and Donna Rohm remembered employees being allowed to return to their jobs following heart attacks. "They didn't get rid of people when they started getting older," she said.

Wallace Chunn openly shared in the interview that while working at Brookley he experienced some psychiatric problems and had to take time off and see a therapist on a regular basis. He stated his supervisors were very understanding and worked with him in adjusting his schedule and job duties. He did not experience any stigma from his supervisors or co-workers regarding his illness.

Not only was Brookley more liberal than private sector employers in hiring persons with disabilities, but the base was somewhat more progressive in hiring minorities.[29] Blanding Drinkard recalled that his crew of workers in the Buildings and Grounds division was a mix of Black and white employees. He stated this was somewhat unusual for the time. "You wouldn't have had that outside," he said. Most of the other interviewees, however, did not recall working closely with any African Americans. Virginia Dewrell stated that there were no minorities in her office but that "there were some all over the base but I don't think there were any problems; you never heard of any." Fred Edwards only recalled one Black worker in the GEEIA area when he was there, and that individual was in the military. Jean Smith Ingram remembered a few Black workers in the warehouse area and some Black clerical workers in GEEIA. Arlene Kinnison recalled one "Negro inspector" and one Black woman in the Radio department. Several of the interviewees did not recall having any minority co-workers.

All but two of the twenty-one individuals interviewed were working at Brookley on November 19, 1964, when the Department of Defense announced the impending closure of the base. Most, but not all, were shocked by the announcement; a few stated they had heard rumors of a possible closing and were therefore not totally surprised. Dr. Peter Bertucci, a local pediatrician who worked part-time as a physician on-call at Brookley, recalled a mood of "devastation" after the announcement was made. "A lot of people just couldn't believe it. And they didn't know what they would do about their jobs ... It didn't work out well for a lot of people," he stated.[30]

Virginia Dewrell recalled when the announcement was made, "it was a sad day ... We knew they were going to make some announcements [about base closings] but nobody had any idea that Brookley would be one of them ... It was

a shock to everybody." She recalled people were upset and many were crying. Blanding Drinkard remembered how he felt on hearing the news: "I was crushed ... We really felt like ... something would come up that would make them change their minds." LaVerne Foster remembered, "A lot of people were very unhappy—very sad," and Vera Edwards recalled the announcement day as "a black day." Ishmael Hall remembered after the announcement that "a lot of women cried ... well, everybody thought the world was coming to an end. You figured you'd lose your job—what were you going to do?"

Over the following five years the base was gradually phased out, with employees transferring to other bases, obtaining other employment, or retiring. Most areas continued to function with a reduced workforce. Blanding Drinkard recalled the last few years on his job with his Buildings and Grounds crew: "Everybody did whatever had to be done, no matter who you were ... We got down to the bone ... I wasn't the last one to walk off the ship but I was there 'til it was very dismal ... 'dismal' is a kind word ... A little anger would get in—people were upset and stressed."

Virginia Dewrell's Office of Civilian Personnel Records was one of the last to close. Virginia herself had the distinction of being the last civilian worker to leave Brookley in 1969. Her office was responsible for all the transfers of staff to other bases, including making moving arrangements, filing paperwork, and taking care of all details of the relocations. She stated during the final four years of the closure her office typically worked ten-hour days, seven days a week. "Those last four years were a nightmare," she recalled.

Linda Bracewell was a temporary worker hired on after the closure was announced. During her sixteen months of employment in Central Procurement Accounting, there was a prevailing "sense of gloom and doom" in the office, she said. "It was so sad because many [of her co-workers] were faced with that dilemma—were they going to transfer or were they going to retire ... they were all so sad."

Several of the interviewees faced problems selling their homes when they transferred to other bases. LaVerne Foster stated, "We couldn't sell our house when we left ... We had started buying one ... and there wasn't any point in putting it on the market ... we ended up just walking away from it ... A lot of people had to do that." Frank Reese recalled, "People just moved off and left their houses—left keys in the mailbox." Frank had just built a house when he had to transfer. "The only offer I had was somebody who wanted me to take their boat and give them $5,000!" he said.

Most of the interviewees felt that the closing of Brookley had a drastic effect on Mobile. "Most everyone we knew worked at Brookley ... that was the reason it was so heartbreaking when it closed ... Mobile was in mourning when we lost Brookley," Donna Rohm stated. Peter Bertucci, however, felt the effect of the closing was not "as bad as the media expected ... We weathered [the closing] well—it was not as bad as everybody thought it would be." Jean Smith Ingram disagreed: "Brookley was a big part of the Mobile community. When it closed down ... people say it didn't affect Mobile, but it did!"

The individuals interviewed varied in how well they kept in touch with their Brookley co-workers following the closing. Albert Kinnison said that in Sacra-

mento, where he transferred, there was a "Former Brookley Club" but he never went to any of the meetings. Some of the interviewees only kept in touch with colleagues who lived in their neighborhood or attended their church. Others took an active part in organizing reunions or regular lunch meetings for their co-workers. Edwina Mullins and Virginia Dewrell were both instrumental in planning activities for their respective groups; both have kept scrapbooks full of photographs from past get-togethers (Figure 7). Wallace Chunn has regularly attended GEEIA lunches, as has Jean Smith Ingram. Ishmael Hall attended yearly reunions of the Instrument Repair Shop until a few years ago when he moved to an assisted living facility. Cecil Wiggins planned a few reunions for the Comptroller's group in the past, but now, she stated, most of her colleagues have died.

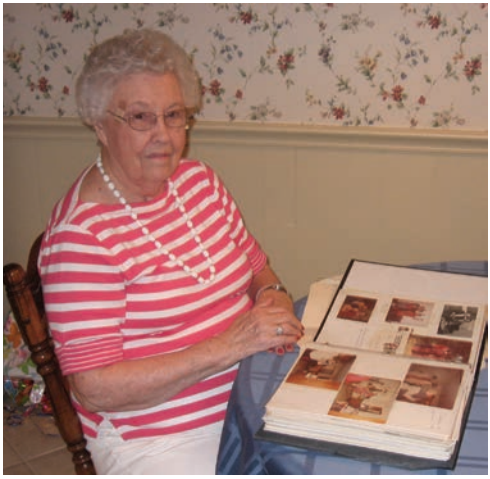


FIGURE 07 Virginia Dewrell with one of several scrapbooks she has compiled through the years on Brookley-related reunions and activities. *(Photo by Susan Thomas)*

When asked how working at Brookley compared to working at the jobs they took after the closure, almost all interviewees indicated they preferred working at Brookley. Ishmael Hall, who transferred to Pensacola Naval Air Station, felt his supervisors there had no respect for Brookley employees. "It was altogether different ... They wouldn't let you talk about [Brookley] ... I think the people over there thought we were going over there to take their jobs," he said. Albert Kinnison, who transferred to McClellan Air Force Base in Sacramento, stated, "I liked Brookley better ... I think they closed the wrong base! I don't think they were as efficient as Brookley," he explained. Chelton Wilson had a variety of jobs after leaving Brookley but he remembers his job at Brookley as "the most challenging." Donna Rohm stated that her husband George did not enjoy his job in the private sector at Teledyne Continental Motors as well as the one he had at Brookley: "It was different ... the bosses were different ... They were more scared of the bosses at Teledyne than they were at Brookley." Edwina Mullins, who transferred to another federal job with the General Services Administration, stated, "Well, no comparison ... Brookley was my favorite."

In summarizing their work at Brookley, the interviewees shared few negative experiences. Those who were supervisors mentioned how difficult it was to fire employees, especially if they had families. Several mentioned that there were always some difficult people around—LaVerne Foster said there were "one or two grouches or grumps" in the workplace, but generally, "it was a nice atmosphere." Albert Kinnison

The workplace at Brookley represented a rich cultural setting of a "city within a city," a place where people not only worked, but developed relationships, learned lifelong skills, and gave back to their community.

felt it was hard to get promotions at Brookley unless somebody assisted you. "You could wind up in a dead end and never get a chance to show what you [could] do ... You had to have some help," he stated. Interviewees indicated that despite occasional problems on the job, they still felt Brookley was a favorable place to work. Chelton Wilson summed up their collective feelings: "All in all, the people that I had working for me and worked with me were good people. I enjoyed it thoroughly."

Almost all of the interviewees indicated that had Brookley not closed, they would have chosen to continue working there until they retired. Many mentioned the job security that Brookley afforded. Wallace Chunn stated that his job at Brookley "was secure; that was probably the main thing about it; we had security" (Figure 8). Linda Bracewell also said about her job, "It was a good secure job that you didn't have to worry about." Peter Bertucci summed up most of the interviewees' feelings: "It was a good place ... if you worked at Brookley you had a good steady, stable job and people were happy with it ... Everybody loved it."

The results of these interviews serve to preserve a collective memory of a viable segment of Mobile labor culture and tradition. The workplace at Brookley represented a rich cultural setting of a "city within a city," a place where people not only worked, but developed relationships, learned lifelong skills, and gave back to their community. Memories of the interviewees portray Brookley as a forward-thinking workplace that treated employees fairly and had a strong impact on the larger Mobile community. As expressed by Ishmael Hall, Brookley was "a good place to work—in fact, it was one of the best jobs I ever had." ○

FIGURE 08 Wallace Chunn modeling his World War II-era army uniform and medals. *(Photo by Susan Thomas)*

ENDNOTES

1 Minutes of a meeting of the Petersburg Ladies Memorial Association, June 12, 1867 (President's Report, Blandford Cemetery); the staff of Blandford Church kindly arranged for us to peruse these documents. Blandford's link to the origin of Memorial Day is discussed in Alan Jabbour and Karen Singer Jabbour, Decoration Day in the Mountains: Traditions of Cemetery Decoration in the Southern Appalachians (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 118-22. On Petersburg and the post-Civil War Ladies' Memorial Associations, see Caroline E. Janney, Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

2 Fred Kniffen, "Necrogeography in the United States," Geographical Review 57, no. 3 (July 1967): 426-27.

3 Terry G. Jordan, Texas Graveyards: A Cultural Legacy (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 14-19; Terry G. Jordan, Texas: A Geography (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), 130; Terry G. Jordan-Bychkov, The Upland South: The Making of an American Folk Region and Landscape (Santa Fe and Harrisonburg: Center for American Places/University of Virginia Press, 2003), 76; Donald G. Jeane, "The Traditional Upland South Cemetery," Landscape 18, no. 2 (1969): 39-41; D. Gregory Jeane, "The Upland South Cemetery: An American Type," Journal of Popular Culture 11 (Spring 1978): 895-903; Brian D. Joyner, African Reflections on the American Landscape (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Cultural Resources, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2003). In Jabbour and Jabbour, Decoration Day, 24-25 and passim, we discuss and share many photographs of bare-earth and other grassless cemeteries in western North Carolina (Jackson, Swain, and Transylvania Counties).

4 On mounding, see Jordan, Texas Graveyards, 16-18; Jordan, Texas: A Geography, 130-31; Jeane, "Traditional Upland South Cemetery," 39, 41; Jeane, "American Type," 899, 901; Crissman, Death and Dying, 116, 153; Jabbour and Jabbour, Decoration Day, 25-32 and passim (indexed).

5 On the truncated triangular prism style of mounding, the African American cemetery cited is Basket Creek Cemetery in Douglas Co., GA (April 12, 2010, IMG-3032–IMG-3072). A published example of the style in a white cemetery in Appalachian North Carolina is in Jabbour and Jabbour, Decoration Day, Plate 13, made by Verna Kirkland, Brendle Hill Cemetery, Swain Co., NC. This photograph also shows rake tracery.

6 On Decoration Day as a cemetery ritual in Southern folk tradition, see Jabbour and Jabbour, Decoration Day, passim (indexed); Jordan, Texas Graveyards, 25-28. Crissman, Death and Dying, 152-55, discusses "Memorial Day in Central Appalachia"; the information is helpful, but conclusions are problematic.

7 Remington, Cemetery Locations, describes all three as in active use ("Springhill," Hale #63, 243; "Shiloh," Lawrence #226, 314; "Pine Torch," Lawrence #225, 313). We did not note the most recent burial dates, but all three have recent burials.

8 Inez Burt, interview recorded by Denise Benshoof, October 24, 2010.

9 This information is contained in a scrapbook Maude Smith made in the late 1950s.

10 Frances Burt Myers, recorded interview, October 24, 2010.

11 Benshoof, Denise. "Tuesday Quilting," Prospect Methodist Church, Walker County, Alabama, 2010. Bound copy available at the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

12 "Prospect News," in The Mountain Eagle newspaper (Jasper, Alabama), December 20, 1916.

13 Bill and Sue Tubbs, ed., 1830 Census of Walker County, Alabama (Jasper, Alabama: self-published, 1997).

14 Steven L. Akins, "Walker County's Celtic Heritage" in The Heritage of Walker County, pp. 7-8.

15 This information is contained in a scrapbook Maude Smith made in the late 1950s.

16 "Educational: Prospect Community Organized," The Mountain Eagle, May 17, 1916.

17 I was given the copy of this gazette, previously owned by Frederick and Maude Smith, when I was a child as the farm's goods were dispersed among the Smiths' heirs.
18 Inez Burt, recorded interview, October 24, 2010.
19 Inez Burt, recorded interview, October 24, 2010.
20 As shown in Figure 2.
21 Frances Burt Myers, recorded interview, October 24, 2010.
22 Wallace, Olga Wakefield interview notes, October 13, 2012.
23 Inez Burt, recorded interview, August 4, 2012.
24 Novie Farris, recorded interview, August 4, 2012.
25 Kathy McCormack, interview notes, August 8, 2012.
26 Kathy Bozeman, recorded interview, August 19, 2012.
27 Willett 1989: 15-16
28 Brady 2012
29 Hand 1964: xxvi
30 Brady 2012
31 Hand 1964: 327-8
32 Blaustein 1992: 36
33 Sammons 1992: 54
34 Sammons 1992: 55
35 Baldwin 1992: 189
36 Vogel 1973: 130
37 Brandon 1973: 220-21
38 Hand 1980: 2
39 Hand 1980: 4
40 Hand 1980: 19
41 Hand 1980: 20
42 Hand 1961: x
43 Hand 1961: xxvi-i
44 Hand 1961: xxxix
45 Hand 1961: 344
46 Wigginton 1972: 230
47 Wigginton 1972: 246
48 Wigginton 1972: 246
49 Interestingly, Sarah Carter and I were told that in the Baccus Family in the community of Possum Flat, Alabama, the skill has been passed down among middle children.
50 Hand 1980: 45
51 Hardy 1878: 223
52 Hardy 1878: 46
53 Cavender 2003: 106
54 Halpert 1949: 38
55 Hand 1964: 336
56 Cavender 2003: 106
57 Halpert 1949: 38
58 Hand 1980: 22
59 Halpert 1949: 41
60 Halpert 1949: 41
61 Hardy 1878: 221
62 Carter 2012
63 Baldwin 1992: 189
64 Price 1901: 32
65 Price 1901: 32
66 Cavender 2003: 106
67 Hand 1964
68 Brady 2012

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► *Brookley Air Force Base Directory and Guide* (Mobile, Alabama: Brookley Air Force Base, date unknown), 6. Although this publication is not dated, it can be assumed based on references to local stores, churches, etc., that it was most likely published in the early 1960s, before the base closure was announced.

► "Brookley: A City within a City," *Brookley Spotlight*, May 20, 1966.

► Funding for the oral history project was awarded through the Joyce H. Cauthen Fellowship Fund, administered by the Alabama Folklife Association (AFA). Recordings from the project will be catalogued at the Alabama State Archives in Montgomery.

► Edwina Mullins, interview with the author, June 13, 2012. All subsequent quotations in this article by Edwina Mullins are from this interview.

► Virginia Dewrell, interview with the author, July 26, 2012. All subsequent quotations in this article by Virginia Dewrell are from this interview.

► Jean Smith Ingram, interview with the author, July 22, 2012. All subsequent quotations in this article by Jean Smith Ingram are from this interview.

► George Rohm, interview with the author, May 30, 2013. All subsequent quotations in this article by George Rohm and/or his wife, Donna Rohm, are from this interview.

► Frank Reese, interview with the author, April 18, 2013. All subsequent quotations in this article by Frank Reese are from this interview.

► Vera Edwards, interview with the author, March 13, 2013. All subsequent quotations in this article by Vera Edwards are from this interview.

► Blanding Drinkard, interview with the author, May 15, 2013. All subsequent quotations in this article by Blanding Drinkard are from this interview.

► Chelton Wilson, interview with the author, August 2, 2012. All subsequent quotations in this article by Chelton Wilson are from this interview.

► Linda Bracewell, interview with the author, October 16, 2012. All subsequent quotations in this article by Linda Bracewell are from this interview.

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► Cecil Wiggins, interview with the author, April 28, 2012. All subsequent quotations in this article by Cecil Wiggins are from this interview.

► Ila Herring Antoine, interview with the author, August 9, 2012. All subsequent quotations in this article by Ila Antoine are from this interview.

► Fred Edwards, interview with the author, March 13, 2013. All subsequent quotations in this article by Fred Edwards are from this interview.

► According to an article in the last edition of the *Brookley Spotlight* (June 27, 1969), the idea for a combined annual city-wide giving campaign for local charities was introduced by the then-base commander of Brookley, Maj. Gen. Fred Dent in 1953. During the next fifteen years Brookley employees consistently gave very generously to the campaign, with their per capita gifts among the highest in the nation.

► Arlene Kinnison, interview with the author, August 2, 2012. All subsequent quotations in this article by Arlene Kinnison are from this interview.

► Albert Kinnison, interview with the author, August 2, 2012. All subsequent quotations in this article by Albert Kinnison are from this interview.

► Ishmael Hall, interview with the author, June 20, 2013. All subsequent quotations in this article by Ishmael Hall are from this interview.

► Allen Cronenberg, "Mobile and World War II, 1940-1945," in *Mobile: The New History of Alabama's First City*, ed. Michael V.R. Thomason, 223 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001).

► Ibid. See also Patricia G. Harrison, "Riveters, Volunteers and WACS: Women in Mobile during World War II," in *Down the Years: Articles on Mobile's History*, ed. Michael Thomason, 283 (Mobile: Gulf South Historical Review, 2001), which refers to a group of "physically handicapped women, some deaf mutes and some totally blind" who were hired at Brookley during the War.

► For a detailed discussion of race relations in Mobile in general during the years of World War II, and in defense contract industries in particular, see Cronenberg, 223-226.

► Peter Bertucci, interview with the author, October 19, 2012. All subsequent quotations in this article by Peter Bertucci are from this interview.

Contributor Biographies

Denise Dutton Benshoof is an independent historical and cultural researcher who was born and raised in north central Alabama. Ancestors in her father's family have been in Walker County since the 1830s. She has a master's degree in organizational management from Cumberland University in Lebanon, Tennessee and a post-graduate certification in heritage preservation from Georgia State University. She received a Joyce H. Cauthen Fellowship in 2012 and added the Prospect Quilt Heritage Days documentation to the Archive of Alabama Folk Culture. In 2013, Benshoof attended the AFA's Alabama Community Scholars Institute held in Cullman, Alabama. Although she resides near Atlanta, Georgia, she frequently returns home to continue her research project.

Sarah Carter is a freelance writer, educator, and folklorist, who currently works at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. She holds a BA in English from Old Dominion University and an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of the South. As an English teacher, she worked for Friendship Christian School for seven years, served as a Teaching Fellow for Liberty Collegiate Academy, and taught at Norview High School in Virginia for almost three years. Carter attended the AFA's 2019 Alabama Community Scholars Institute held in Fort Payne, Alabama.

Alan Jabbour, PhD (1942-2017) A scholar and musician, Dr. Alan Jabbour spent a life dedicated to folklore. After graduating magna cum laude from the University of Miami, he completed an MA and PhD at Duke University. A classical violinist since childhood, he went into the field as a graduate student and began documenting old-time fiddlers. As a result, Alan became an apprentice and went on to be a lifelong recording artist, performer, and preservationist of the genre. One of his early informants and mentors was Henry Reed. In 1969, Alan became the head of the Archive of Folk Song (now the American Folklife Center) at the Library of Congress. After a short term with the National Endowment for the Arts, he returned to the Library of Congress as the founding director of the American Folklife Center, a position he held for 23 years. He edited several recorded productions, including a CD of his own fiddling, and established the Henry Reed Fund for Folk Artists. In 2003 Alan received the Benjamin A. Botkin Prize from the American Folklore Society for outstanding achievement in public folklore.

After retiring, Alan and his wife, **Karen Singer Jabbour**, completed cultural resource surveys in the Great Smoky National Park for an environmental impact statement. After finishing, they continued to research the Upland South's tradition

of decorating graveyards that culminated in the book, *Decoration Day in the Mountains: Traditions of Cemetery Decoration in the Southern Appalachians* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010). A photographer, collector, and author, Karen had joined Alan in the field for many years. Her images of grave sites and cemeteries, carefully positioned to capture the surrounding landscape, are a significant contribution to the book and to the collections now preserved as part of the Archive of Alabama Folk Culture.

Jennifer Joy Jameson is a public folklorist and the Programs Manager and Media Director at the Alliance for California Traditional Arts, a position she accepted in 2017 after serving for a several years as the Folk and Traditional Arts Director for the Mississippi Arts Commission. She holds an MA in folk studies from Western Kentucky University and a BA in folklore and ethnomusicology from Indiana University. She has managed the digital publication *Mississippi Folklife* and served as the Communications and New Media Coordinator for Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments (SPACES Archives). Jennifer has held positions with the Smithsonian's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Traditional Arts Indiana, the Kentucky Folklife Program, the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, and Tennessee's historic Highlander Center for Research and Education.

Susan Thomas is an independent writer, researcher, archivist, and social worker living in Mobile, Alabama. She holds an MA in Communication from the University of South Alabama and serves as an archivist for Springhill Avenue Temple, the oldest Jewish congregation in the state. Her professional interests include oral history, foodways, Southern culture, and historic preservation. Her past projects with the Alabama Folklife Association have included conducting oral histories on Croatian stave-maker descendants in Clarke County and the John Henry legend in the area around Leeds.

The AFA is grateful to fellowship recipient **Dr. Ethan P. Sharp**, Assistant Professor of Folklore at the University of Kentucky, for his contributions. Dr. Sharpe's documentation of Latino communities in Cullman and Albertville, Alabama provided a collection of images, videos, and oral histories recorded in Spanish that make a significant contribution to the Archive of Alabama Folk Culture.

The Alabama Folklife Association

The AFA was founded in 1980 to document, preserve, present, and promote the multicultural folkways of Alabama through research, education, and programming.

To share folklife broadly statewide, the AFA supports a variety of work including community and school programming; hands-on workshops; the Alabama Community Scholars Institute; exhibits; interviews and oral histories; the Archive of Alabama Folk Culture; performances, festivals, and events; and publication of *Tributaries*.

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