

Rock Castle Gorge Special History Study

Rocky Knob Recreation Area

Prepared by

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**For the National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Blue Ridge Parkway**

**Funded by a grant from the
Robert M. Utley Foundation**

December 31, 2018

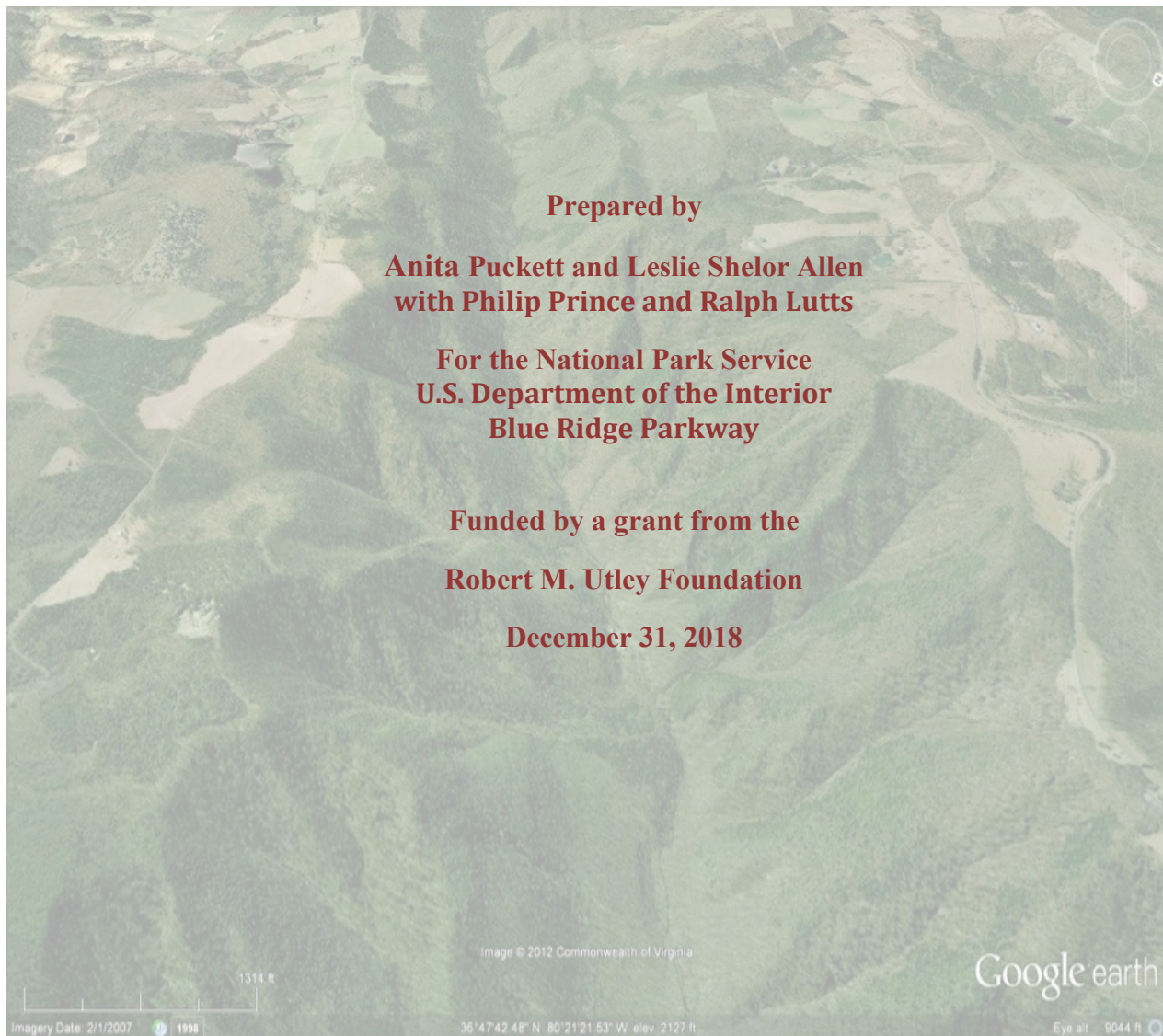


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1. Introduction

A. Purpose

This study describes the cultural history of Rock Castle Gorge (“the Gorge”) prior to acquisition of its properties by the Blue Ridge Parkway (“the Parkway”) in 1935-37. It also discusses the geology, ecology, and prehistory of the Gorge as they apply to the adaptations of the European settlers who lived there.

The study focuses on the settlement patterns, folkways and daily life, economic patterns, material culture, education, and religious resources of the approximately 17-30 homesteads in the Gorge from approximately 1820 to 1937 when most settlement ceased and the Parkway, under the aegis of the National Park Service (NPS), owned and controlled all of the area except for one property. Therefore, the entire European white settlement of the Parkway portion of the Gorge lasted, at best, 120 years. Given the longevity of many residents, this relatively short period spans only about three to four generations of residents before Parkway acquisition. The oral histories forming the basis for this study therefore capture not only the memories of former residents who gave the interviews, but also their childhood recollections of interactions with some of the first settlers or their children.

Also included in this study is a discussion of the Austin/Conner house, which was not purchased by the Parkway and which was occupied by descendants of original settlers until the mid 1950s. This house and surrounding acreage, which is still privately owned, is the site of the first permanent settlement in the Gorge and was a major contributor to Gorge cultural history. Its history is therefore critical to obtaining a holistic understanding of the Gorge contributions to United States regional history and to its unique place within the purview of the Blue Ridge Parkway itself.

The overarching purpose of this study, then, is to provide both an overview and a detailed description of life in the Gorge when it was a vibrant human community for the purpose of Parkway cultural and historic interpretation and preservation. It also suggests ways to develop visitor, local resident, and Parkway programming that will engage various publics in a manner that meets the National Park Service’s mission to revitalize communities, preserve local history, celebrate local heritage, and create close to home opportunities for kids and families to get outside, be active, and have fun.¹

The focus of the work is therefore to provide factual information with primary source documentation on various topics pertinent to its purpose from an historical ethnographic perspective. It differs from more narrative publications, such as Michael Ryan’s *Life in Rock Castle, Virginia In Their Own Words*² in its commitment to a multidisciplinary documentation

¹ National Park Service. *About Us: What We Do*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior. 2015. <<http://www.nps.gov/aboutus/index.htm>> (Accessed December 26, 2015).

² Ryan, Michael. *Life in Rock Castle, Virginia In Their Own Words: A Blue Ridge Mountain History*. Blacksburg, VA: Wordsprint, 2018. Research for this report was begun in 2011 and was totally independent of Mr. Ryan’s work, although he was contacted and asked to participate in it. He declined, citing his efforts to publish *Life in Rock Castle*. Ryan’s work also covers locations outside the Gorge on Rock Castle Creek more generally. With one exception (The Austin/Conner House materials), this

of the Gorge up to acquisition by the NPS. In so doing, it offers material that interpreters from various disciplinary orientations can contextualize in their own ways to construct interpretations that fit their approaches and interests.

B. Gorge Description

The Gorge is an approximately 2,700 acre³ section of the 4,000 acre Rocky Knob Recreation Area,⁴ which can be viewed at the Rock Castle Gorge Overlook at mile marker 168 (see Figure 1.1). It is a steep and narrow ravine created by Rock Castle Creek that has cut into the Blue Ridge Escarpment over the last 250 million years. It is extremely steep for the Blue Ridge, dropping approximately 1800 feet in elevation in about five miles, with most of the drop occurring within about 1.0 miles.⁵ Access is currently limited to foot travel only, although a locked gate gives access to a Park maintained dirt road from the bottom entrance to the Austin/Conner House. It exists to provide access to this privately-owned section, approximately two miles from the lower Gorge entrance.

The Gorge flora and fauna are consistent with surrounding Blue Ridge and Piedmont ecology, although the Gorge itself includes about five separate ecozones.⁶ Bedrock is metamorphic, and the name of the Gorge comes from the long, pointed, hexagonal shape of the clear quartz crystals of substantial size that were found there by Native Americans, early explorers, and first settlers. All, or nearly all, however, have been removed or destroyed so that no informant participating in this research could identify a location where unharvested crystals could still be found. Nevertheless, informants reported that the crystals in the Slate Mountain Presbyterian Church located on Route 726 (Rock Church Road) near the Gorge upper rim are from the Gorge, implanted in the church exterior stone façade in the late 1920s.

study focuses only on those properties located within the Rocky Knob Recreation Area of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

³ Exact acreage is difficult to determine because residents were imprecise in their recognition of Gorge boundaries during the historic period of this study, and the Gorge itself is not a formally delineated subsection of the Rocky Knob Recreation Area of which it is a part. This figure is therefore based on the acreage of properties acquired by the Blue Ridge Parkway 1935-1937 that were part of the drainage basin of Rock Castle Creek, as indicated on the Land Status Map 23, National Park Service, Division of Land Acquisition, 1975 map.

⁴ The Jaeger Company. *Rocky Knob Recreation Area, Blue Ridge Parkway: Cultural Landscape Report*. Atlanta, GA and Asheville, NC: National Park Service, Southeast Regional Office, Cultural Resources Division and the Blue Ridge Parkway. 2013, pp. 3-4.

⁵ Edwards, R. L. *Plant Diversity Survey of Rock Castle Gorge Backcountry Area, Blue Ridge Parkway, Virginia*. Blacksburg, VA: Final Report for #CA-5140-2-9003. 1996, p. 2.

⁶ Dale, Carlos Kenny. "Ecology and Wildlife Potentialities of the Rock Knob Area in Floyd and Patrick Counties, Virginia." Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Tech, M.S. Thesis, 1949.



Figure 1.1 Aerial View of Rock Castle Gorge
Prepared by Philip Prince. March 2012 from Google Earth

C. Settlement History Overview

The establishment of British sovereignty over Virginia in 1624 ensured that rights to land ownership and sale for Gorge property were vested with the Crown. As a result, early developers and investors in the areas surrounding the Gorge commonly received very large land grants involving thousands to hundreds of thousands of acres to settle or develop. No documentation exists, however, of specific Gorge land becoming privately and locally owned during this colonial period,⁷ Once the United States was formed, though, some late 18th century land deeds included parcels that could be identified as specifically within the Gorge.

Among the first of the documented, extant private grants incorporating Gorge land was one made to Henry (“Lighthouse Harry”) Lee circa 1783. His grant extended into the upper Gorge area adjacent to what is now Floyd and Carroll Counties. He most likely selected this site in large part because of the lead deposits in this section of Virginia.⁸ Lee never visited the Gorge or its surrounds, but soon sold the land to pay debts, raise cash, and financially assist his children. Other early landowners purchased land for its potential lumber or mineral resources or as an economic investment for future sale.⁹

Subsequently, European settlers began either renting or buying land in the Gorge area to establish 50 acre to several hundred acre homesteads. Dates of first settlement vary, but one household had definitely been established by 1835-39, although some family narratives from descendants of other Gorge families contradict this claim.

Social interactions and economic commerce among Gorge residents were bifurcated from the beginning primarily because of Gorge geography. Those at the upper end oriented themselves more towards the Blue Ridge Plateau and what is now Floyd County, while those at the lower end oriented themselves more towards contemporary Woolwine, Stuart, and other Virginia and North Carolina Piedmont population centers. The steep section of the Gorge separating the two locations is reported to have been a natural dividing line directing this division. Nevertheless, all Gorge residents knew each other well and carved many paths throughout the Gorge to the rim above to get to each other’s homesteads and to extra-Gorge people, stores, and places for social or religious gatherings. Furthermore, the main Gorge road, Rock Castle Road, which ran parallel to Rock Castle Creek was a significant transportation resource for locals to encounter non-locals and strangers, to permit residents to communicate with each somewhat often, and for the ebb and flow of commerce.

Ethnicities of first settlers varied; among them were Germans, Scotch-Irish, English, and French or Dutch. Popular culture claims that all were Scotch Irish are incorrect. The Gorge terrain was not conducive for residents to own slaves, and only one possible case of the use of

⁷ Nearby land was, however, recorded as privately owned. A deed of trust dated 1773 states that James McAlexander purchased 235 acres on a branch of Widgeon Creek, which flows near Woolwine. Given the imprecise wording of these documents at the time, and given the future location of McAlexander in the upper Gorge area and contemporary Floyd County, it is not inconceivable to think some portion of this land extended very close to the Gorge. McAlexander, James, Grantee, Land Office Patents No. 41, 1772-1773, Library of Virginia Archives, June 15, 1773, page 420 (Reel 40).

⁸ Lee, Henry, Grantee, Land Office Grants No. 36, 1796 – 1797, Library of Virginia Archives, October 21, 1796, p. 302; Davids, Richard C. *The Man Who Moved A Mountain*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press. 1970, p. 90 mentions local lead resources in the contemporary Carroll County area.

⁹ See chapter 3 on Early Settlement for further discussion.

slave labor in the Gorge has been documented. Those who owned slaves and might have used them in the Gorge lived outside or next to it, although they had land or relatives who lived there.¹⁰

As one of the County's main roads, Rock Castle Road provided steep but manageable access from Taylorsville (contemporary Stuart) to the area near current Mabry Mill on the Parkway. Consequently, despite the steep terrain, homesteads eventually emerged along the edges of this road as a natural outcome of its existence as a County-maintained route. A few houses also were built up higher on the hillsides away from the road border.

Trade with travelers or those seeking Gorge produce, crafts, or natural resources became somewhat developed, although the Floyd County Turnpike or Tuggle Gap Road, the forebear to contemporary State Route 8, that branched off from Rock Castle Road at the foot of the Gorge, was more used.¹¹ The presence of both roads however, was one reason that residents never became totally isolated or cut off from current events, politics, or other national issues and problems, or from transporting or receiving trade goods or equipment.

At its peak circa 1900, the Gorge population was about 200-300. Numbers are uncertain because seasonal laborers, county wards, renters, or visitors, were short or long term transients who nevertheless impacted the population count depending on when it was taken. Most renters or non-renting occupants were kin to landowners.

Material culture of the Gorge in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was consistent with that of the surrounding Blue Ridge communities. By the late 1800s, most, but not all, houses were of frame construction with shingle or tin roofing, replacing the earlier log constructions with board and ribpole roofs or split wood shingles. Of notable interest were both the chimneys and the gristmills of the Gorge. The chimneys of post Civil War homes were of outstanding stone construction, and many still stand in the Gorge. Three gristmills were built at various times and served to ground primarily corn and wheat for residents in and next to the Gorge. Some fixed sawmills also existed, as did several portable lumber mills that were imported after about 1920. Electricity was absent from the Gorge itself throughout its habitation period except at Sam Underwood's property in the upper Gorge where he introduced a Delco generator in the 1920s that provided limited electric power for household use.

The economy of the Gorge throughout its existence was based on subsistence agriculture augmented by sale of livestock, fruit, chestnuts, herbals, berries, maple syrup, or other subsistence farming products. Chestnuts were critical to raising hogs and for obtaining cash when sold as a desired human food item. They were crucial to the Gorge economy. Hunting and trapping augmented domestic animal husbandry, especially during the mid 1800s; small gardens provided greens and vegetables, in addition to berries and other plants that were gathered during the appropriate growing season. Hogs, chestnuts, and apples provided the most cash income, although control over stream trout fishing, trapping, gathering of ginseng and other herbals, and various other economic activities (egg selling or maple syrup making, for example) also provided cash or cash equivalent income. Most residents did most of their exchanges at the Edwards Store off what is now the Parkway near Mabry Mill or, if living near the bottom of the Gorge, at the DeHart Store just outside the Gorge perimeter.

¹⁰ The DeHart family living at the lower outer edge of the Gorge owned a few slaves who may have labored in the Gorge. Elijah Dehart, Patrick County Deed Book 9, p. 75.

¹¹ Austin, John. Oral History Interview. Jim Gale, interviewer. Asheville, NC: BRPLIB Code A, 1975, A14-15; Osborne, Mary Alice Atkins. "Writings of James Henry Dillon to the Floyd Press." Floyd, VA: *The Floyd Observer*. approx. 1951.

Once the chestnuts declined in the late 19 teens, the subsistence economy collapsed, and many male residents left for temporary or permanent work in West Virginia coalmines or in the Virginia or North Carolina furniture factories or textile mills. A basic economic shift occurred at that time as residents turned much more to a cash economy rather than a subsistence, land-based economy. This collapse, coupled with depletion of soil fertility and the Great Depression, meant that most residents were willing to sell their holdings to the Parkway and, if still living in the Gorge, moved outside of it. However, before they left, many Gorge residents extracted as much cash income from their land holdings as they could before turning over their lands to the Parkway. While extensive timber harvesting had begun in the mid 1920s, they engaged in something of a timber harvesting and clear-cutting frenzy when learning of these inevitable land sales in the 1930s, denuding much of the Gorge forest. Most has grown back, however, providing an environmental sanctuary for local species, some of which are unique.

Of the 11 or 12 households that were still living in the Gorge after Parkway acquisition,¹² most simply moved to nearby areas, staying close to their extended families and kin in the area and the Gorge itself. Many descendants, including study co-author Leslie Shelor Allen, still live within 30 miles of the Gorge and are closely tied to it through family traditions, narratives, and face to face or electronic communications that permit them to share their memories and keep the sense of the Gorge as their ancestral place alive. They constitute a potential resource for the Parkway to draw on in its efforts at Gorge interpretation and use.

The most striking geological feature having social and cultural significance was that of Bare (or Bear) Rocks, a collapsed metamorphic rock structure that functioned as a gathering place for picnics, socials, and other personal or community gatherings. Also of note are Tater Hill, the Baptismal Pool, and Raven Rock.

No schools existed in the Gorge per se, although one was built just outside the foot of the Gorge. It also served as a church house on Sundays. Another school at the top, very near the Floyd and Patrick County lines, served many upper Gorge students as well. Students living near the top sometimes attended a third school further away in Floyd County, and those near the bottom were bussed to a school in Woolwine in the 1930s. After the Civil War, one general store opened up just outside the mouth of the Gorge and another closer to current Rt. 8 was also frequented. Another on the Piedmont near the top of the Gorge opened up before the Civil War and continued to serve residents after it ended.

The chapters following elaborate on the points summarized above and provide documentation sources for them.

D. Significance

Rock Castle Gorge history offers a unique resource for the Blue Ridge Parkway's historic interpretation initiatives both in its sociocultural and socioeconomic distinctiveness from other Blue Ridge communities along the Virginia Parkway section and in its conformity to the value systems, economic resources, and customs of other Blue Ridge Escarpment communities in this area of southern Appalachia. No other Parkway resource exists in Virginia that can, in a single place, provide both the ecological richness of this region as well as a unique opportunity to interpret the cultural life of late 19th and early 20th century Blue Ridge communities. Its location in the Rocky Knob Recreation Area is also significant since this area hosts the

¹² See Table 5.1, p. 42 and surrounding discussion for a justification for the estimated figure of 12 occupied homesteads at the time of acquisition in 1936.

extremely popular Mabry Mill, a campground, and, just off the Parkway at the rim of the Gorge, Floyd Fest music festival in July of each year.

This study is intended to provide sufficient information to permit development of interpretive tools to display and communicate this cultural history in a manner accessible to all those interested in learning more about the Blue Ridge Parkway in all its complexities.

Finally, this study is also intended to be of use to the Parkway for the purpose of involving local residents and others interested in developing tourism and other place-based economic initiatives in partnership with the Parkway that stimulate the local economy.

This study was researched using both historical and historical anthropological ethnographic methods. Community meetings, emails, phone conversations, and two new oral histories from ex-Gorge residents who were still living in 2012-2015 augmented the rich documentary primary materials of the Blue Ridge Parkway archives. Primary among these academic and lay collaborations was the forging of a research partnership between Dr. Puckett and Ms. Leslie Shelor Allen, Meadows of Dan crafter and descendant of Gorge residents. The result has been a constantly emerging and never ending intellectual and affective engagement by authors of this study in the lives of those deceased and the memories of those progeny who are still alive. The stories of the phenomenal place now called “Rock Castle Gorge” are being retold as valued heirlooms by these descendants and have given a depth and scope to this study that would not have been possible otherwise.

E. Acknowledgements

Research for and production of this study was provided by the Robert M. Ultley Foundation as a flow-through grant to the primary researcher, Dr. Anita Puckett, from the Blue Ridge Parkway. She is deeply appreciative of the invaluable assistance provided by Ms. Leslie Shelor Allen, co-author, local historian, and descendant of Sam Underwood and others who lived in the Gorge and helped make it the fascinating place it is. In addition, Dr. Ralph Lutts of Meadows of Dan, Virginia, and Dr. Philip Prince, geologist in Blacksburg, Virginia, contributed substantive sections to this study. Chapter 2 recognizes Dr. Prince’s geological contribution, while Dr. Lutts is recognized in chapter 3 dealing with the ecology of the Gorge. Deep appreciation is extended to the Gorge descendants who gathered in August 2011, 2015, 2016 descendants’ reunions or events, and for attending an August 2017 presentation by Dr. Puckett at the Floyd Public Library to reminisce and discuss their family stories of Gorge life. Special thanks go to Danny Wood, Beverly Belcher Woody, Madison Hubbard, and Debra McAlexander for their sharing of family resources and their own personal family knowledge. In addition, the patience and continued support of Mr. Steven Kidd, Cultural Resource Specialist for the Blue Ridge Parkway, was much appreciated, as has been the support of Ms. Beth Byrd and then Mr. John McDade, Mr. Kidd’s replacement.

Questions or comments regarding this study should be communicated to the principal investigator, Dr. Anita Puckett, at apuckett@vt.edu or 540.231.9526 or Ms. Leslie Shelor Allen at angoralady@gmail.com.

2. Geology¹³

The lithography of Rock Castle Gorge conforms to that of the surrounding Blue Ridge Escarpment, which has been well mapped, and the geology well researched.¹⁴ Of interest to this study is how this geology contributed to residents' use of their natural environment and how it impacted their cultural adaptation to their immediate surroundings.

A. Geology and Topography

Rock Castle Gorge is a unique topographic feature occurring along the Blue Ridge Escarpment in southwest Virginia (see Figure 2.1). It manifests a distinct ecology created from the interaction of geologic processes, plant and animal habitats, and, during the historical period

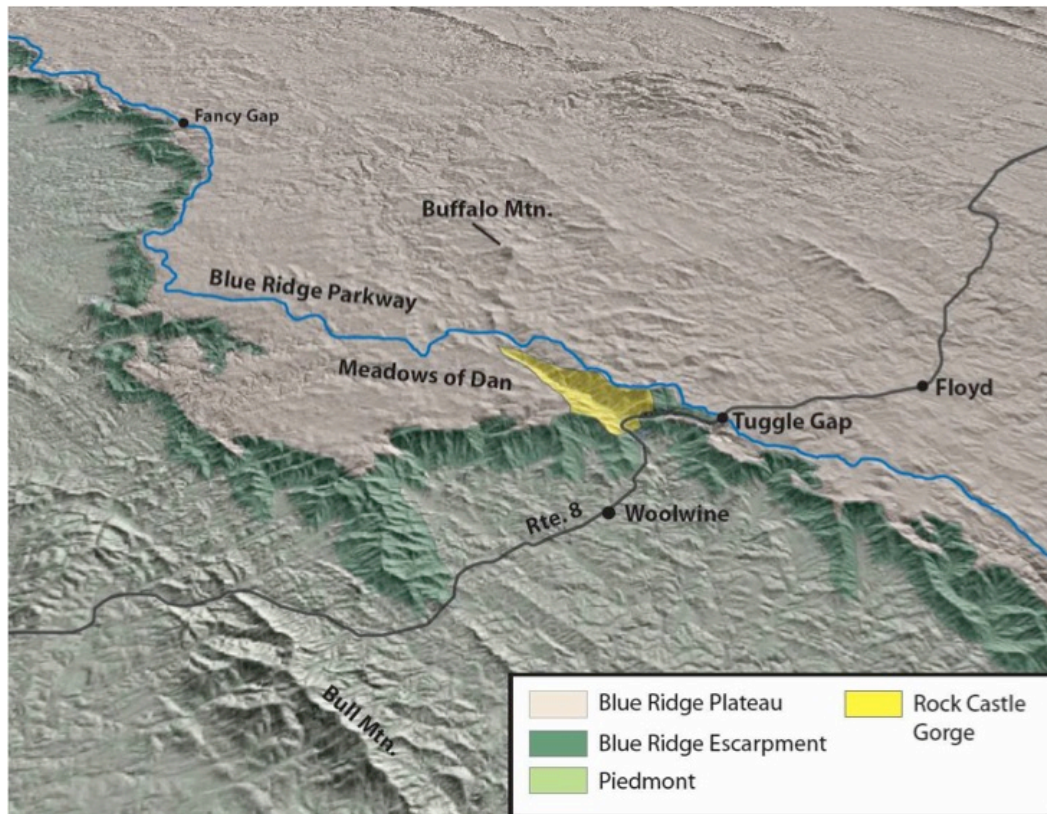


Figure 2.1. Rock Castle Gorge within Blue Ridge Escarpment (Prince 2012)

¹³ This chapter was prepared by both Anita Puckett and Philip Prince and is based on Prince, Philip, "Rock Castle Gorge, Patrick County, Virginia: A Case Study of the Role of Ancient Landscape Process in the Development of an Appalachian Community." Oral Presentation, Appalachian Studies Association Annual Conference 35, Indiana, PA: Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2012. All figures in this chapter are by Philip Prince.

¹⁴ Cobb, James C. "Blue Ridge Province." *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*. Rudy Abrahamson and Jean Haskell, eds. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2006, pp. 11-12. Hack, J. T. *Physiographic Divisions and Differential Uplift in the Piedmont and Blue Ridge*. U. S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 1265, 1982.

discussed in this study, Piedmont and Blue Ridge Appalachian cultural uses of these ecological resources.

The Gorge represents an embayment into the gently rolling Blue Ridge Plateau, which extends westward from the crest of the Blue Ridge Escarpment. As a v-shaped cut into the ridge, pre-historic and historic populations recognized its viability as a steep, but passible, transportation route from the Piedmont below to the Plateau above. It was therefore a means for facilitating commerce and cross-cultural contact, as well as way for European settlers to migrate west (see Figure 2.1).

While the elevation of the bottom of the Gorge is consistent with the neighboring Piedmont, its ambiance is one of a mountainous setting due to the great height and steepness of the Gorge walls. In about four miles, The Gorge elevation drops from about 3,572 feet above sea level at the top to about 1,700 feet above sea level at the bottom. Much of this change in altitude occurs within about one mile.¹⁵

The unusually elongated, v-shaped structure of the Gorge probably relates to its formation along a system of faults or fractures in the earth's crust. These fractures weaken the bedrock, making it capable of eroding easily and allowing gorge development to occur along the trend of the fractures. Rock Castle Creek developed as a secondary feature of these faults; its continuous flow of water hastened the erosion process.

Crystals form when superheated geologic waters cool in the pockets, allowing the crystals to precipitate in perfect form. After having formed in pockets within the fractured rock, the crystals have become exposed at the earth's surface after millions of years of erosion. Their occurrence in the Gorge is as unique as it appears to be; few places in the area can combine the presence of a fault/fracture system with appropriate topography to expose the crystals within bedrock or erode them into the soil or surface streams, certainly not with conditions that would form crystals of the size found in the Gorge.

B. The "Rock Castle" Name

This fault or fracture system that gives the Gorge its shape probably also contributed to its name. Well-formed quartz crystals populated the Gorge at time of European settlement and were the result of this fault system. They can only grow in open pockets and cavities in fractured rock (see Photo 2.1). Locals called them "rock castles."¹⁶ As one local teacher reported, "These quartz [crystals] resemble so many stone castles built on a hill, which was customary in England during the feudal system, so the early settlers called them rock castles; hence the name Rock Castle Creek."¹⁷

¹⁵ R. L. Edwards. *Plant Diversity*. p. 2.

¹⁶ The term "rock castle" is one that is widely used to refer to geologic structures of a obelisk or turret like structure. That those in the Gorge would be so named is not unusual, although the process for their mineralogical formation is. The term "rock castle" to refer to geological formations is quite common in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Ireland, as well as in the surrounding areas of Virginia. Its specific application to quartz formations, however, is more unusual, although the six-sided shape of the crystals with a pointed end suggest strong similarities to the turrets of British castles.

¹⁷ Osborne, Mary Alice Atkins. "Writings of James Henry Dillon to the Floyd Press." Floyd, VA: *The Floyd Observer*. approx. 1951. Also available at the Patrick County Historical Society. P. 2. Page numbers assigned by Anita Puckett.

One major location of the quartz crystals was apparently in a fault line on a side of a hill where sassafras trees grew. The “rock castles” were little, but large ones, reportedly as large as a bushel basket, also existed and were dug up by residents.¹⁸ None can be found, or easily found, today.



Photo 2.1

Quartz Crystal Similar to Ones Found in the Gorge.
MineralMiners.com. *Quartz: Mineral Information Page*.

The presence of these crystals would have also been a compelling reason for prehistoric Native American populations to travel to the Gorge. As noted in the Introduction, crystals have been used as architectural resources, appearing in the exterior walls of Slate Mountain Presbyterian Church at the northern rim of the Gorge (see Photos 2.2-2.4).

¹⁸ Dillon, Jim. Oral History Interview. Jim Gale, interviewer. Asheville, NC: BRPLIB Code J, 1975, p. J43. John Austin, however, noted that “Dillon’s garden” at the rim of the Gorge contained small ones Oral History Interview. Jim Gale, interviewer. Asheville, NC: BRPLIB Code A, 1975, p. A15. Furthermore, reports were that residents found clusters of crystals the size of bushel baskets and that they used one crystal 10 inches by 8 inches for a doorstep. These had a yellowish tinge. See also Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J29 and Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview. Anita Puckett and Leslie Shelor Allen, interviewers. Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Tech, July 2, 2011, p. 22. Moran said they were clear.



Photo 2.2

Rock Castle Gorge Quartz Crystals in Exterior Walls of Slate Mountain Presbyterian Church. Photo by Leslie Shelor, February 22, 2014.



Photo 2.3 Close Up of Rock Castle Quartz Crystal in Exterior Wall of Slate Mountain Presbyterian Church. Photo by Leslie Shelor, February 22, 2014.



Photo 2.4. Exterior Front Wall of Slate Mountain Presbyterian Church Showing Placement of Rock Castle Gorge Quartz Crystals among Other Stones. Photo by Leslie Shelor Allen, February 22, 2014.

C. Topographical Impacts on Gorge Integration with Surrounding Communities

In addition to the unique quartz crystals, the very topography of the Gorge stands out within the surrounding Appalachian setting. The steep walls of the narrow gorge stand in stark contrast to the gently rolling surface of the surrounding Blue Ridge Plateau at the top. This surrounding topography permits agriculture and human habitation outside of the Gorge to extend to the very crest of the Gorge walls. This sharp abutment of rolling landscape next to the Gorge rim allowed a juxtaposition of Plateau residents right next to Gorge inhabitants such that Gorge residents had neighbors living above them by well over 1,000 feet. As a result, Gorge residents

had to not only orient themselves visually to a vertical sense of community, but also auditorily to the sounds of human activity descending from above., In terms of relationship to the land, then, the Gorge topography encouraged two distinct types of community to develop in close proximity to one another: one adapted to the rugged and steep terrain inside the Gorge, the other to the flatter, more undulating land of the Plateau.

D. Stream Capture and Gorge Formation

Origins of the Gorge's topography go beyond the weakened rocks that produced its linear shape. The fundamental control over the Gorge's development is actually a process called stream capture, in which one set of streams erodes into another through rapid erosion, and, in the process, produces natural diversion of flora and fauna from one ecological zone to another. Stream capture is an unusual geologic process, but one that formed the uniquely rugged topography and flora of Rock Castle Gorge. In this case, the Piedmont Smith River system at the bottom of the Gorge, flowing at approximately 1,500 feet elevation, eroded into the margin of the Blue Ridge Plateau at the top. The Plateau, however, is drained by tributaries of the New River and flows at nearly 3,000 feet elevation (see Figure 2.2-2.3).



Figure 2.2. Smith River System. Local elevation ~ 1500 feet. Early topography flowing into Smith River system is illustrated in the first drawing. Then unstable cliffs break down, producing rockfalls and landslides. This rubble can still be found in the Gorge today. The second drawing depicts this process with its concomitant linkage to a New River stream.

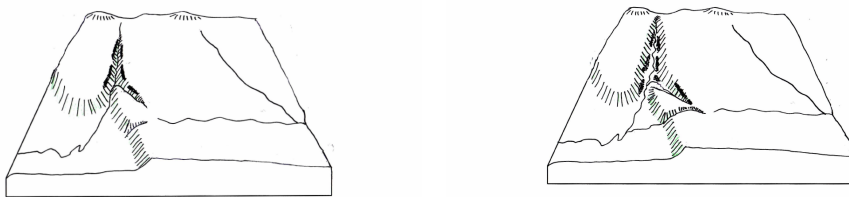


Figure 2.3. Captured New River Stream. The first drawing illustrates how the captured New River stream starts eroding a gorge to match the elevation of the rest of the Smith River system. The second drawing shows how, as erosion continues, a deep gorge lined with cliffs forms. Brook

trout and other flora and fauna typical of the captured New River stream now flows southeast into the Smith River system that drains into the Dan River, which, in turn, flows into the Roanoke River and eventually into Albemarle Sound. The New River, on the other hand, flows into the Ohio River and eventually into the Gulf of Mexico. The stream capture process exhibited by Gorge geology therefore represents a relatively unique breaking down of the Eastern United States Continental Divide.

By eroding into a higher elevation stream system, the Smith River therefore diverted what is now Rock Castle Creek off of the Blue Ridge Plateau and down the Blue Ridge Escarpment to the Piedmont below.

Aided by the weakened condition of the fractured rocks, the captured Rock Castle Creek began eroding very rapidly in a geologic sense to match the elevation of the Smith River over 1,600 feet below. As this rapid erosion progressed, a deep gorge lined with cliffs was carved into the margin of the Blue Ridge Plateau. The unstable cliffs collapsed over time, and breakdown of the cliffs produced landslides and rock falls whose debris accumulated in the bottom of the Gorge. Bare Rocks, the social gathering point for Gorge residents, was probably created by this process. Other debris can still be found in the Gorge today, although it is somewhat obscured by soil development and vegetation. This dynamic topographic history is responsible for the unique appearance, and particularly the unique ruggedness, that defined Rock Castle Gorge.

This focused erosion that formed the Gorge has exposed the local metamorphic bedrock at the surface in many locations. Older exposures have collapsed to form boulder deposits. This bedrock that underlies the Gorge is believed to be approximately 600 million years old and is part of the eastern Blue Ridge Geologic Province. The rock units in the Gorge are not unique or particularly different from others in the area, but they are likely to be better exposed because of the steep topography and erosional history (see Figure 2.4).

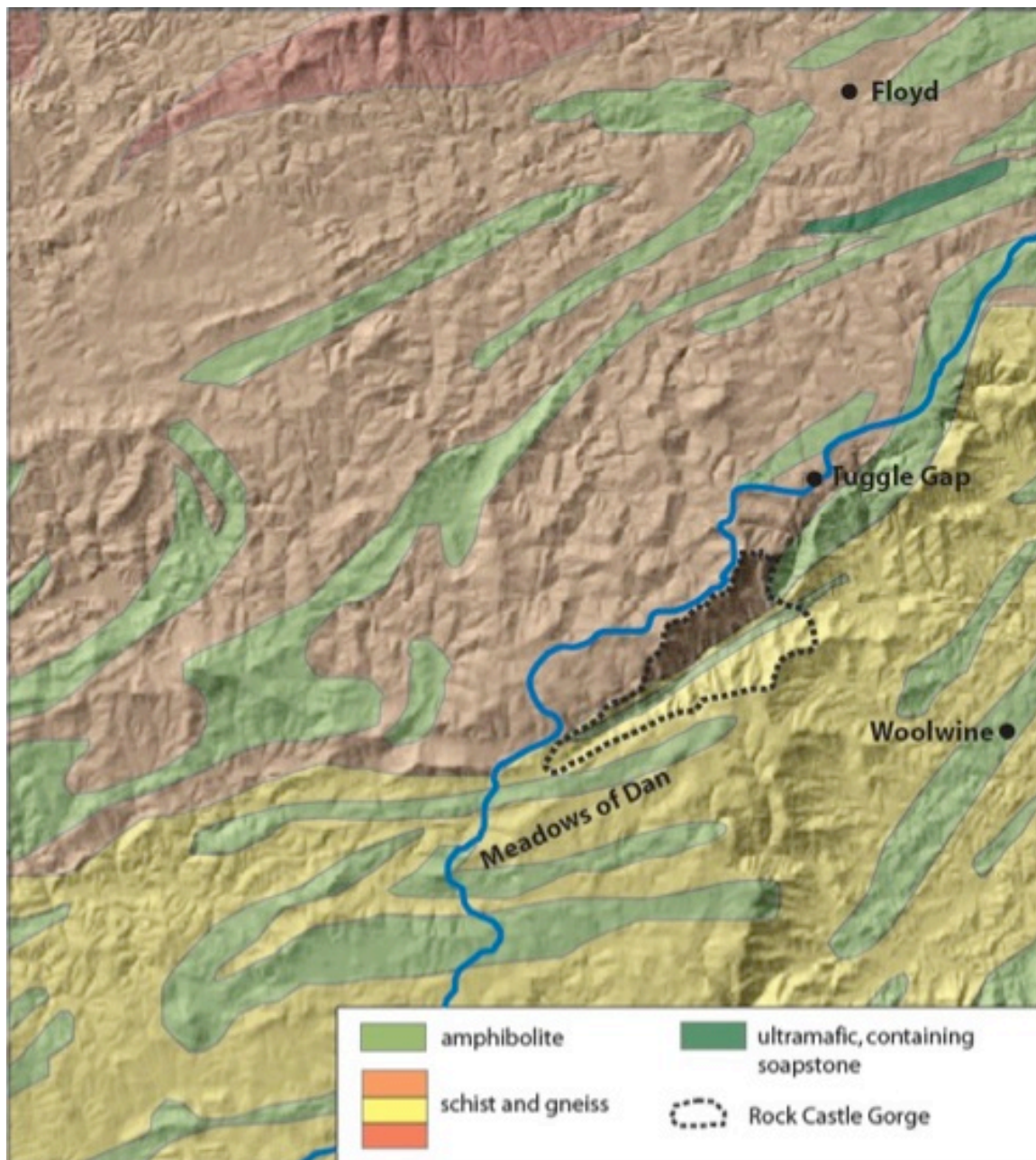


Figure 2.4

Surface Outcrops of Metamorphic Rock Constituting Gorge Lithography

The fault or fracture system that contributes to the shape of the Gorge is of unknown age or significance. It is almost certainly not an active fault, however, and should not be expected to produce earthquakes. It is most likely an ancient feature that last moved sometime during the formation of the Appalachian Mountains more than 250 million years ago.

One interesting aspect of Gorge geology is the occurrence of two different rock types within the Gorge: schist, or closely related gneiss, and amphibolite. While occurring within the same geologic formation, these rock types are composed of very different minerals and thus form different types of soil when weathered that, in turn, result in different potential agricultural uses (or, in this case, unavailability or limited availability for use). The exact extent of amphibolite within the Gorge is unclear, but one strip probably occurs along the southeast wall of the

Gorge, with a probable second strip occurring on the northwest wall (see Figure 2.4). Extensive geologic mapping could confirm this distribution, but clues in the topography offer some indication of where rock types occur. The elongated, linear hills indicated in Figure 2.1 typically form along narrow outcrops of amphibolite within the Blue Ridge Escarpment.

Further indication of bedrock occurrence could be indicated by the distribution of plant species in the Gorge. Throughout the Appalachians, many desirable herb species occur in locations with steep topography and exposure of amphibolite or similar rock, which is rich in calcium and magnesium. Ginseng is one such plant, and locations where it was known to thrive prior to over-harvesting often coincided with amphibolite occurrence. Tracing herb-gathering practices in the Gorge could offer a unique perspective on the influence of bedrock geology on aspects of not only Gorge cultural orientations, but the Appalachian region more generally.

Another unique consequence of the Gorge's geologic origins is the presence of brook trout in Rock Castle Creek. Rock Castle Creek presently represents recently added headwaters of the Smith River system, which drains to the Atlantic Ocean. Brook trout, the only type of trout (actually a type of char) that are native to Appalachian streams, occur in Rock Castle Creek as well as in some of the small, steep headwaters of other Smith River tributaries. They also occur in the headwaters of New River tributaries, which rise at the edge of the Blue Ridge Plateau and drain west to the New River.

Obviously, the trout cannot move across the drainage divide, so how did they come to live in the small, cold headwaters on both sides of it? The distribution of trout within only the headwaters of two different drainage basins separated by the Eastern Continental Divide is viewed as a "signature" of "stream capture" described above. The origin of the Gorge trout indicates that they came from a New River tributary as a result of this erosion process. In addition, trout are highly unlikely to have come from the Smith River system by swimming upstream against the strong current exhibited by Rock Castle Creek much of the year. The Smith River is too warm for trout and the headwaters too steep for them to move upstream.

The orientation of the Gorge also favors the maintenance of a strong trout population. The northeast-facing Gorge avoids prolonged direct sunlight, allowing Rock Castle Creek to remain cold even at lower elevation. This feature supports brook trout. The uniqueness of brook trout in the Creek resulted in residents using trout pools as an economic and subsistence resource, particularly in the late spring when visitors from the region traveled to the Gorge to fish for this highly desired delicacy.¹⁹ Once again, the unique topography of the Gorge exerts a direct control on important aspects of the ecosystem and, ultimately, the life of its former inhabitants.

¹⁹ Blue, Robert. *Little Boy Blue: The Childhood and Teenage Years of Robert L. Blue, Sr. in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia*. Self-published, 1999, p. 44.

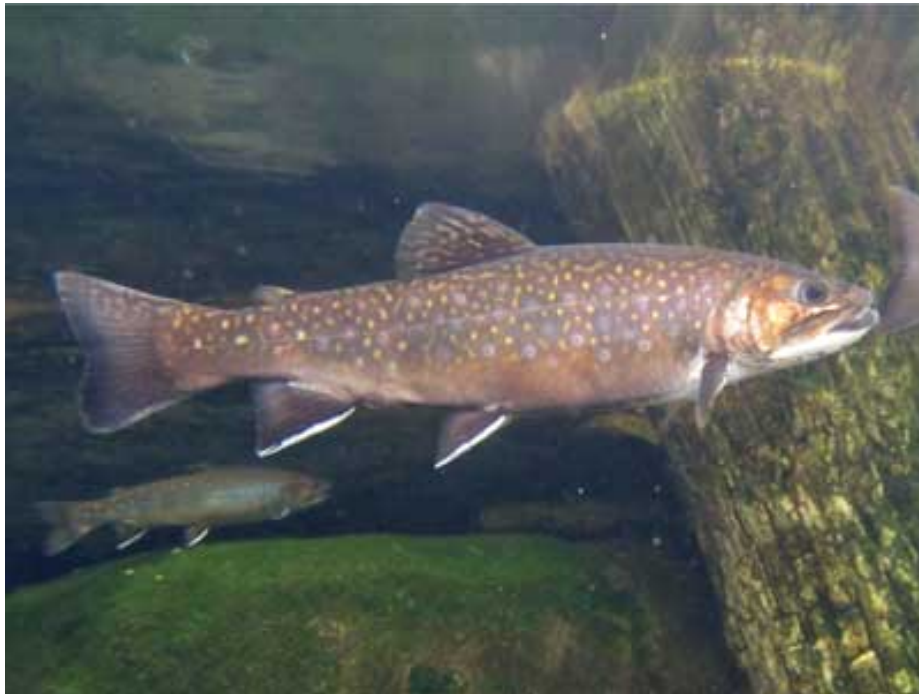


Photo 2.5
Brook Trout

Imgarcade.com-Online Image Arcade. *Gallery for >Brook Trout*

As a result of the Gorge micro-geologic provenience, European settlement assumed a specific configuration, shaped by the cultural orientations settlers brought with them, the political-economic and social forces impinging upon them, and the geologically based limitations the Gorge put upon them.

3. Ecology and Prehistory

This chapter describes the general topography, flora, and fauna of the Gorge, and its Native American prehistory as it pertains to European settlers' cultural history.

A. Ecology

More complete descriptions of Gorge flora, soils, and topography can be found in reports specifically on these features and through oral history discussions of the various plants of interest to residents.²⁰ Here, the focus is on the relationship of this ecology to human occupation of the Gorge.

The ecology of Rock Castle Gorge varies according to altitude and steepness of the slopes. The upper end is cooler, dryer, steeper, and narrower.

Some of the most precipitous slopes occur on the south face of the Gorge along New Brammer Spur and the north face near Grassy Knoll. Numerous small ridges run perpendicular to the two main ridges and these are separated by sometimes deep, narrow ravines. Numerous intermittent streams and seeps originate in these ravines at elevations of 2400' to 2800' and empty into Rock Castle Creek below.²¹

Rock Castle Creek originates near the Rocky Knob Cabins located at the top of the Gorge very near the Parkway at an elevation of about 2,980 feet. It runs through the Gorge for about 4.0 miles and levels off and widens somewhat at about 2.5 miles downstream near the Austin/Conner House (see Figure 2.1 and Map 5.1). Its main tributary is Little Rock Castle Creek, which runs more or less parallel to and along side of Route 8 as it descends from Tuggle Gap to the Piedmont below. It junctions with Rock Castle Creek near the bottom of the Gorge close to the CCC Camp Rd.²²

1) Soil

For Gorge residents, soil types were critical to the growth of the mesophytic forest that contained the very valuable chestnut trees, fruit orchards, and garden or field crops. The soils of the Gorge are of five types, and residents needed to know them all to succeed in their subsistence farming socioeconomy. They are the Peaks, Cowee, Tate, Greenlee, and Craigsville. The Peaks, Cowee, and Tate are derived from the metamorphic schist and gneiss

²⁰ E.g., Carlos Kenny Dale, *Ecology and Wildlife*; R. L. Edwards, "Plant Diversity Survey"; *Fiddlehead Forum* (1980) 7: 28-29. USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Services, *Soil Survey of the Blue Ridge Parkway: Carroll, Floyd, Franklin, Grayson, and Patrick Counties*, Report submitted to the National Park Service, Blue Ridge Parkway, 1995; and Wofford, B. E., *Guide to the Vascular Plants of the Blue Ridge*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989. For a report on residents' plant recognition and valuation, see Austin, John, Oral History Transcription for Rock Castle Gorge 1975-77 Code A, BRPLIB, 1975.

²¹ R. L. Edwards, *Plant Diversity Survey*, p. 2.

²² R. L. Edwards, *Plant Diversity Survey*, p. 2.

rocks in the Gorge, while Greenlee and Craigsville soils form from crystalline rocks,²³ such as those that produced the quartz crystals from which the Gorge got its name. The sides of the Gorge are composed primarily of the Peaks-Cowee Rock Outcrop Complex, which is excessively well drained and quite stony²⁴ and not good for growing crops. “Greenlee, and Craigsville loamy soil are found along Little Rock Castle Creek and at the bottom of the Gorge along Rock Castle Creek.” Both of these are very deep and well drained and suitable for growing crops and gardens. Greenlee also occurs on Gorge slopes from 15% to 55% of the time, while Craigsville soils develop 0% to 5% and are frequently flooded. Tate loam occurs at the southwestern end of the Gorge and is also deep and well drained.²⁵ Greenlee soils on Gorge slopes would have therefore provided residents with more land, albeit steep, for planting crops, while the Peaks or Cowee type²⁶ would have not.

2) *Plants and Trees*

At about 395 species, the number and diversity of plant species found in the Gorge are fewer than are found elsewhere along the Parkway (e.g., Peaks of Otter reports 661 taxa). This lower diversity is attributed to the lower diversity of habitats.²⁷ Among these species, however, were berries and herbals that were well known to Gorge residents for their medicinal properties (e.g., sassafras or witch-hazel) or potential sale value (e.g., black cohosh, raspberries, or ginseng).²⁸

A range of environmental conditions can be found in the Gorge. These influence what plants can be found in various parts of the Gorge. For example, the moist river bottom land supports a different assemblage of plants than do the much drier thin-soiled and rocky environment of its upper slopes of the gorge. Differences in elevation and, thus, temperature also have their impact. Redbud trees, for example, grow in the lower slopes of the Blue Ridge, but not at higher elevations. Spring wildflowers appears a few weeks later at the top than they do at the bottom.²⁹

As a result of the different soil types and effects of altitude changes, four broad forest types existed in the Gorge at the time of European settlement, each of which lent itself to specific

²³ R. L. Edwards, *Plant Diversity Survey*, p. 2. Dale uses a different classification system based on types of flora present, but with similar results. His system is Field, Shrub, Cove, Ridge, Orchard, and Pine plantation (Dale, *Ecology and Wildlife Potentialities*, pp. 25-66 and map insert.

²⁴ R. L. Edwards, *Plant Diversity Survey*, p. 2.

²⁵ R. L. Edwards, *Plant Diversity Survey*, p. 3.

²⁶ R. L. Edwards, *Plant Diversity Survey*, p. 3.

²⁷ R. L. Edwards, *Plant Diversity Survey*, p. 5.

²⁸ For a list of herbals and other plants in the Gorge, see Carlos Dale, *Ecology and Wildlife*, pp. 107-120. Dale, however, does not list ginseng as an herbal resource, but R. L. Edwards, *Plant Diversity Survey*, pp. 10-11 does, albeit in small quantities. Austin, John, Oral History Transcription, p. A7; Blue, Robert L. *Little Boy Blue*, p. 23; and Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 17, report the presence of ginseng, in the Gorge in the early 20th century, thus substantiating that ginseng was still growing in the Gorge in about 1924 or 1925. The minor presence of ginseng in the Edwards' 1995 report and a lack of it in Dale's 1949 thesis indicates that it was overharvested or killed off by residents' clear cutting of timber and is now in process of regrowth, assuming poachers do not harvest it. Moran noted that her grandfather made those who harvested it in his family replant the berries where they dug up the root. He also grew it near the house. Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 1, mentions the selling of raspberries.

²⁹ Lutts, Ralph. "Natural History of Rock Castle Gorge," manuscript prepared for this report, 2013, p. 1.

types of trees. Gorge residents then utilized them according to their availability through Virginia forest commons laws or by virtue of them growing on their own or a family member's property.

1. The type closest to the base of the Gorge and along the bases of slopes, i.e., within the Greenlee soil type for the most part and located within the more moist **Mesic hardwood forest** were

- Sugar maple
- Black walnut
- Tulip poplar
- Basswood

2. The **Sub-mesic Hardwood Forest** occupies the dryer spaces upslope from the Mesic hardwood forest and is therefore also growing primarily in Greenlee soils. It contains a more obvious shrub layer than the Mesic hardwood forest layer.

- Sweet Birch
- Shagbark Hickory
- American Chestnut (before the blight)³⁰
- White Ash
- Cucumber Magnolia
- White Oak
- Red Oak
- Great Laurel and rhododendron are quite common in this forest type.

3. The **Hardwood-Pine-Heath Association** is quite similar to the Sub-mesic hardwood forest, but the presence of pine distinguishes it from other types:

- Sweet Birch
- Shagbark Hickory
- American Chestnut (before the blight)
- White Ash
- Cucumber Magnolia
- White Oak
- Red Oak
- Great Laurel

4. The **Hemlock Forest** occurs on rocky ridges and slopes, that is, within the Peaks-Cowee-Rock Outcrop Complex. It is dominated by Carolina hemlock along with two species of rhododendron.³¹ It was not used for planting of any type, nor was it as good for hunting large game as the other forest types due to lack of suitable fodder and shelter.

³⁰ The chestnut trees began dying by the thousands around 1916. Conner, Wyatt. Oral History Interview, Jime Gale, interviewer. Asheville, NC: BRPLIB Code H, p. H9.

³¹ This classification of types of trees is derived from R. L. Edwards, *Plant Diversity Survey*, pp. 6-8.

Until intense clear-cutting occurred in the late 1920s and early 1930s (as discussed more fully in chapters 5 and 9), Gorge residents would have been living among hardwood trees with trunk diameters of six to eight feet or more and with heights of close to or over 100 feet. White ash, for example, grows to 80 feet and can have a trunk diameter of seven feet. The American chestnut, which was extremely plentiful in the Gorge, grew to about 100 feet and could have trunks that were nearly 10 feet in diameter.³²

How Gorge residents used their timber resources and for what purpose is discussed in chapters 6 and 9. This list derived from botanical research conducted in 1946-1947 and 1995-1996 is in accord with the list of timber resources, when provided, in Appraisal Reports produced during the Parkway land acquisition period of 1935-1937.³³ The consistency in the reports of this inventory of trees over time and their location indicates that the composition of Gorge timber resources has been stable since time of European occupation except for the loss of the American chestnut. The forest is therefore one resource that can contribute to a somewhat accurate visual and material interpretation of Gorge community life by Parkway personnel.

3) Wildlife

The mid 19th century wildlife of the Gorge was reported to be consistent with the surrounding Blue Ridge provenance, including large game such as bear, wolves, foxes, elk, and deer.³⁴ By the 1870s or 1880s, however, nearly all large game was absent,³⁵ either due to residents' hunting, killing by wild dogs, starvation due to loss of food sources from domesticated animals such as hogs or cattle and human cultivation of fields, or migration to other less domesticated locations.

Small game (e.g., rabbits, woodchuck [ground hog], opossum, raccoons, and squirrels), fish, amphibians, snakes, rodents, remained in various quantities. Eatable animals were hunted, but not to extinction.³⁶

B. Rock Castle Gorge Prehistory

The archaeological record for the southern Virginia Blue Ridge is scant and no systematic surveying by professional archaeologists of Native American prehistory has been done in Rock

³² Ostermiller, Stephen. White Ash. <<http://ostermiller.org/tree/whiteash.html>> (Accessed December 20, 2015). American Chestnut. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_chestnut> (Accessed December 20, 2015).

³³ Carlos Dale, *Ecology and Wildlife Potentialities of the Rocky Knob Area*, p. 5; R. L. Edwards, *Plant Diversity Survey*, title page. See References, BLPDLIB Tract Resources for list of these appraisal reports.

³⁴ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 4. Underwood, Willie B. *Isaac W. Underwood : His Life and Times*. Part Two. Victoria, VA: MS., March 12, 1988, pp. 43. He noted that his family moved to the Gorge circa 1840 or 1841 (p. 46), which was shortly after the presumptive first settler, Benjamin Belcher, moved into the Gorge.

³⁵ Dillon, Jim. Oral History Interview, Jim Gale, interviewer, pp. J1-J2. Mr. Dillon also describes an encounter with a bobcat, but it was not actually spotted. Handy, U. B., Oral History Interview, Jim Gale, interviewer. Asheville, NC: BRPLIB Code M, 1975, p. 10. See also Dale, *Ecology and Wildlife Potentialities*, pp. 67-71.

³⁶ Dale, *Ecology and Wildlife Potentialities*, pp. 67-71. Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, pp. 34-36.

Castle Gorge,³⁷ although much of Piedmont Patrick County has at least been surveyed.³⁸ Therefore the description offered here is suggestive rather than definitive.

That the Gorge habitat was part of the larger regional Paleolithic, Archaic, and Woodland Native American prehistoric cultures is undisputed.³⁹ Paleoindians were unlikely to have had permanent settlements in the Gorge because they were primarily nomadic. Given the topography of the Gorge and the paucity of Native American populations more generally, and despite the shift to more permanent villages,⁴⁰ it is unlikely that any major Archaic (8,000 – 1,200 B.C.) or Woodland (1,200 B.C. -1600 A.D.) permanent sites would have been present in the Gorge.

Subject to revision as more in depth archaeological information comes forward, the most likely scenario for Native American visitation to or occupation of the Gorge over time is

- 1) Visitation by Paleoindians during the Paleolithic Period for hunting, hides, food, and limited use for crossing from the upper plateaus to the Piedmont to the southeast;
- 2) Hunting camps or other transitory habitations such as seasonal camps and special use sites during the Archaic Period. Quartz crystal collection may have motivated these forays. Also, given the abundance of chestnuts in the Gorge, it is likely that nut collecting sites as well as hide and meat preparation sites existed in suitable locations such as rock shelters⁴¹;
- 3) Hunting camps and possible longer occupation by Woodland Indians;
- 4) Occupation or visitation by Siouan language speaking groups known to have been pushed into the area by the European Contact period of post 1550 (European Contact Period). This movement was due both to attacks and territorial expansion by Iroquoian groups from the north and by invasion by Europeans from the east. Diseases for which they had no resistance also led to abandonment of towns and villages to the northeast and, for those left, movement southward and southwestward. These groups probably included Tutelo, Monacan, Saponi, and possibly Occaneechi. Catawba may have also been present. Tutelo were likely to have been the dominant group.⁴² By the mid 1700s,

³⁷Kidd, Steven, Cultural Resources Specialist/Archaeologist, Blue Ridge Parkway. Personal Communication, Lower Rock Castle Gorge tour with Blue Ridge Parkway Personnel, July 25, 2011.

³⁸ Holland, G.C. *An Archaeological Survey of Southwest Virginia*. Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology No. 12. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1970.

³⁹ Hellmann, Robert, "Archeological Investigations Conducted at Blue Ridge Parkway." National Park Service, Southeast Archeological Center, 2005; Patrick County Historical Society, *History of Patrick County, Virginia*. Stuart, VA: Patrick County Historical Society, 1999, pp. 13-18; Virginia Department of Historic Resources. *First People: The Early Indians of Virginia*. Richmond, VA: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, August 2001.

<http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/arch_NET/timeline/time_line.htm> (Accessed December 21, 2015).

⁴⁰ Patrick County Historical Society, *History*, p. 14, noted that, at the time of the Jamestown settlement in early 1600, no more that 17,000 Indians lived in all of what is now Virginia. Nevertheless, large Woodland communities of several hundred people in the New River and Roanoke River flood plains have been excavated. Pulice, Mike. *Archaeology in Blacksburg: Who Were the Earliest Inhabitants of the Area?* Blacksburg, VA: Blacksburg's Bicentennial.

<<http://spec.lib.vt.edu/bicent/mpulice/bburgarc.htm>> (Accessed December 22, 2015).

⁴¹ See G. C. Holland, *An Archaeological Survey*, for discussions of sites in the general area.

⁴² Quin, Richard. *Blue Ridge Parkway: HAER Report No. NC-42*. Historic American Engineering Record. Asheville, NC: National Park Service, Blue Ridge Parkway, 1997, p. 10.

however, and with the end of the French and Indian War in 1763, the Cherokee, whom the British had enlisted to fight the French with promises not kept, were spreading east and northeast to gain territory and extract vengeance on European settlers. Cherokee then moved into areas near or actually in the Gorge, however briefly, primarily as warriors.⁴³

- 5) From about 1774 until after the Revolutionary War, Shawnee, an Algonquian Native American group living primarily in southeastern Ohio at the time, resumed their Virginia raids, this time extending them into the Patrick County area, again to stop encroachment on their territories by European settlers. It is likely they would have traveled through Rock Castle Gorge to hide or take shelter during their forays, given its remote location at the time and relatively easy access to either the Piedmont below or plateau above. Enough settlers were in the area, however, to subdue them and claim the area as theirs, eradicating any but an occasional Native American visitor or traveler.⁴⁴

While unsubstantiated for all possible groups, the hardness, sharpness, and aesthetic appeal of the Gorge crystals would surely have been a draw for Native American hunters seeking projectile point materials or trade items. Archaeological evidence for the region indicates the use of quartz crystals for projectile points was high in the Late Archaic (3000-00 BC) period.⁴⁵ The Catawba, a Siouan group, may have been one. In addition, the Cherokee were known to assign high spiritual meaning to quartz crystals.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the abundance of ancient chestnut tree nuts that were such a resource for the European settlers must have also been appealing to the various Native American populations.

C. European Residents' Reports on Native Americans' Presence in the Gorge

European settlers' reports of Native American artifacts, sites, or encounters with ancestors in the Gorge are unsubstantiated, but provocative, warranting further investigation. They begin with a Benjamin Belcher legendary encounter with a Native American in 1835 when he was looking for a new, more secluded place to live. The Indian directed him to Rock Castle Gorge.⁴⁷ (For the text of the legend, see chapter 8, p. 120).

<<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/master/pnp/habshaer/nc/nc0400/nc0478/data/nc0478data.pdf>> (Accessed December 21, 2015); Johnson, Patricia. *The New River Early Settlement*. Blacksburg, VA: Walpa Pub. 1985, pp. 35-4;. Benthall, Joseph L. *Archeological Investigation of the Shannon Site: Montgomery County, Virginia*. Richmond, VA: The Virginia State Library, 1969. Dr. Sam Cook, Director, American Indian Studies Program, Virginia Tech. Personal communication via email to Ann Rogers. December 27, 2018.

⁴³ Patrick County Historical Society, *History*, pp. 18-24.

⁴⁴ Patrick County Historical Society, *History*, pp. 20-24.

⁴⁵ "Archaeological Survey of Webb Wetland Mitigation Site and Evaluation of Site 44C0015: Carroll County, Virginia. 2009." Pp. 11-13.

⁴⁶ Julia White. *Native Americans and Crystals*. 1996.

<<http://www.accessnewage.com/articles/stones/stones10.htm>> (Accessed December 29, 2018). Michael Ryan. *Life in Rock Castle, Virginia*, p, 19, cites Ed Sharpe, *The Cherokees Past and Present, An Authentic Guide to the Cherokee People*. Cherokee, NC: Cherokee Publications. 1970. Pp. 20-21 as well. That the Cherokee used quartz in a sacred manner is commonly known across various publics.

⁴⁷ Winston, Eliz. "Hike Back in Time in Rock Castle." *Martinsville Bulletin*. September 10, 2010. <<http://www.martinsvillebulleti.com/article.cfm?ID=25223>> (Accessed June 10, 2012). In addition, descendants told a similar story at a community meeting organized by Leslie Shelor Allen specifically

Other information includes the discovery of projectile points on multiple properties by residents or male descendants exploring the Gorge⁴⁸ and the presence of a peach tree orchard attributed to Native Americans on Gabriel DeHart's land in the bottom of the Gorge before he, one of the first settlers, bought it.⁴⁹ The assertion by some current residents living in the Gorge area that there were Native American petroglyphs in the caves under Bare Rocks or in another cave under Tater Hill are not supported.

The plant and animal complex of Rock Castle Gorge was rich in its quantity and variety, although it was not quite as diverse as other southwest Virginia Blue Ridge micro ecologies. While not fully substantiated through archaeological research, it must have been appealing to Native American peoples over the centuries, and was certainly so to the European settlers who created communities there in the mid 1800s.

for this Rock Castle Gorge Cultural History Project, Willis, VA: Burks Fork Church of the Brethren, August 6, 2011. This same story was also mentioned at the Blue Ridge Heritage program, Meadows of Dan, VA: Meadows of Dan Community Center, August 29, 2015.

⁴⁸ Robert Blue, *Little Blue Boy*, pp. 170 and 175; Danny Wood, personal communication, Blacksburg, VA, October 2012; descendants comments, Blue Ridge Heritage program, Meadows of Dan, VA: Meadows of Dan Community Center, August 29, 2015.

⁴⁹ Robert Blue. *Little Boy Blue*, p. 175. Discussion of descendants. Community meeting, Willis, VA: Burks Fork Church of the Brethren, August 6, 2011; Leslie Shelor Allen, personal communication, December 22, 2015.

4. Land Deeds and Early European Settlement

Eighteenth century British original land grants to male citizens in much, if not most, of the Virginia backcountry land, including Rock Castle Gorge, were often made with inaccurate or minimal surveying of tracts to be purchased.⁵⁰ Therefore property lines boundaries are difficult to reconstruct. Surveying was imprecise at best, often done in a hurry, and used reference points, such as trees and boulders, that have long since disappeared. In addition, deeds and original surveys have been lost in many cases. Furthermore, topographical identifiers, such as small stream or pond locations, were often different than in the contemporary period, and systems of naming and reference varied from the present.

For Rock Castle Gorge, early deed nomenclature relied extensively on existing stream names, trees, or nearby recognized population centers rather than geologic features such as gorge, ridge, or valley. The term “gorge,” in fact, was not applied to Rock Castle Gorge until after Parkway acquisition. Prior to this designation, the Gorge area was referred to as simply Rock Castle Creek⁵¹ or designated by the name of one of its tributaries (e.g., Little Creek and Little Rock Castle Creek). Recognized nearby population clusters were Rock Castle (now Woolwine⁵²), Tuggle’s Gap or Tuggle Gap,⁵³ and Mabry or Mayberry.⁵⁴ Some deeds mention geographical features such as Bull (spelled “Bool”) Mountain or Mayberry Gap. One 1803 deed notes, perhaps erroneously,⁵⁵ that Rock Castle Creek was called, or was also called, Peeping Creek prior to 1803.⁵⁶ Consequently, contemporary Gorge boundaries were not recognized in any extant 18th and early 19th century documents, making exact placement of early homestead boundaries and some homesteads difficult. The property boundary situation resolves itself somewhat once homesteads became more common in the late 1800s when

⁵⁰Hughes, Sarah. *Surveyors and Statesmen: Land Measuring in Colonial Virginia*. Richmond, VA: The Virginia Surveyors Foundation, Ltd. and the Virginia Association of Surveyors, Inc. 1979, pp. 1-7. See also Kegley, Mary. *Early Adventurers on the Western Waters*. Orange, VA: Green Pub. Vol I. 1980, pp. 5-6.

⁵¹ Belcher, Thomas. Oral History Interview. Jim Gale, interviewer. Asheville, NC: BRPLIB Code B, 1975, p. B22. Leslie Shelor Allen. Personal communication. July 2011. Exact date of re-naming is unknown, but one guess is when it was set aside as its own hiking destination.

⁵² Before “Woolwine,” “Rock Castle” was known as “Harbourburgh.” Its name was changed to “Rock Castle” in 1835 and to Woolwine in 1883. Patrick County Historical Society, *History*, p. 331. Flyer on Woolwine Post Office, Patrick County, Virginia. n.d.

⁵³ The name on official early 19th century and current federal government maps is “Tuggle Gap,” while the name of a current local restaurant is “Tuggles Gap.” The name “Tuggles Gap” was originally “Tuggle Gap” after the surname of the man who first lived in it. Then it was renamed when they put Rte. 8 through as “Tuggles Gap.” Finally, the National Park Service wanted it labeled by its original name and changed it back to “Tuggle Gap” on its records and maps. Compton, Ward. Oral History Interview. Jim Gale, interviewer. Asheville, NC: BRPLIB Code F, 1975, pp. F12-F13.

⁵⁴ Spelling variant is based on examination of Adams, Lela C. *Abstracts of Order Book “O” Patrick County, Virginia, June 1791-August 1800*. Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press. 1984; see also Ryan, Michael. *Ed and Lizzie: The Mabrys and Their Mill*. Castle on the Watch Publications, 2013, pp. 17-18.

⁵⁵ No other sources confirm this name change. Until a second source confirms “Peeping Creek” as an alternative name, it should be considered an anomaly and possible error.

⁵⁶ Patrick County Will Book for 1803 from James Turner to Frances Turner. The deed states, “. . . a Tract piece or parcel of land situate lying and being in the County of Patrick on the Waters of peeping creek, now Rock Castle . . .” On the other hand, Patrick County Historical Society, *History*, p. 324, noted that Rock Castle was used to designate this creek as early as 1750.

population density required more precise property boundaries. It is in this period that boundaries were more clearly defined in county recorded land deeds. Nevertheless, some inferences can be made as to what 18th century land grants included Gorge acreage, outlined as follows.

A. Early Land Grants

Early records of land transfers and ownership that include Gorge property were subject to the same political forces as was the surrounding areas including contemporary Carroll, Floyd, Montgomery, Patrick, and Henry Counties. Much of the land was first acquired by influential government officials or prestigious investors who often were granted land by the Virginia colonial government for development through surveying or through sale to settlers who farmed relatively small acreages. Few lived in the region and evidence suggests many never visited it as well.⁵⁷

After the establishment of the United States, land acquisition in the area of the Gorge was more regulated. Land owners of these very large tracts often used it as collateral to borrow against debts, to subsequently sell it according to the state of their finances, or to enhance the fiscal resources of close relatives through transfer of ownership to them. For example, much of the upper Gorge area was included in a 70,000 acre purchase in 1783 by Henry Lee, III, also known as “Lighthorse Harry” Lee.⁵⁸ Leading member of the Continental Convention, Revolutionary War colonel, 9th governor of Virginia, and father to Robert E. Lee, Henry apparently bought much of the land because of reputed mineral deposits, such as the then highly valuable, but limited, lead deposits in Buffalo Mountain, which is only about 10 miles from the top of the Gorge.⁵⁹ The parcel abutting or containing the upper Gorge was subsequently inherited by his second wife, Ann H. Carter Lee, who willed it to two of her sons and their wives: Robert E. Lee and Mary Lee, and Sidney Smith Lee and Anna Marie Lee. Another parcel was deeded to son Charles Carter Lee. All these parcels were purchased in August 1846 by Nathaniel Burwell of Roanoke County, a wealthy landowner who was related to Henry Lee by marriage to Lucy Carter of Shirley Plantation. This parcel and subsequent portions of it became locally owned when Nathaniel’s son, Charles William, sold it as part of his inheritance from his father.⁶⁰ A section of it was purchased by Gorge residents John T.

⁵⁷Wood, Dr. Amos D. *Floyd County: A History of Its People and Places*. Blacksburg, VA: Southern Printing Co., 1981, pp. 28-29.

⁵⁸ Wood, *Floyd County*, p. 29, noted a purchase of only 19,000 acres. The Jaeger Company. *Cultural Landscape Report*. p. 12, cites 25,000 acres. See, however, Library of Virginia land grant October 21, 1796, which stipulates the larger acreage. Henry Lee, Land Office Grants, Library of Virginia Archives, October 21, 1796. The survey map accompanying the deed description has not been located, but the deed describes the property as being on the waters of Big and Little Dan Rivers and South Mayo River waters. This description places the holdings near Meadows of Dan, Virginia, and surrounding locations, which would have included at least the upper Gorge area. Subsequent land transfers by his children, including Robert E. Lee, to early Gorge residents make clear that this was the case. References to some of this land being owned by a John Nicholous (Nicholas) have not been documented, although Patrick County Deed Book 12, p. 537 references that this parcel is the same “conveyed to the late General Henry Lee by John Nichalus and which deed is duly recorded in the land records of the General Court at Richmond, Virginia.” This deed indicates a 70,000 acre plot, while the Jaeger Co. (2013:12) list it as a 25,000 acre section. What is quite likely is that the total grant was for non-contiguous sections of smaller parcels.

⁵⁹ Richard C Davids. *The Man Who Moved a Mountain*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1970, p. 90.

⁶⁰ Wood, *Floyd County*, p.12.

Boyd (1881), then by John and Susanna McAlexander (1881) and eventually (1907) by Thomas and J. R. (his wife) Whorley.⁶¹ The Whorley house near the head of the Gorge trail next to the Rocky Knob Cabins sits on this parcel. As the only extant house within Gorge Parkway boundaries, interpreting its ownership and usage is therefore significant to Virginia settlement and Civil War history.

In addition, many of the upper Gorge owners selling their holdings to the Parkway in 1935-1937 could abstract their property ownership to the Henry Lee parcel under the Burwell name.

The late 1700s and early 1800s found much of the rest of the land in the Gorge, in close proximity to it, or both inside and outside of it was still in state government ownership or in unused Revolutionary War patents. Among these parcels were, for example, a 1787, 45 acre War patent that the Commonwealth sold to Adam Turner.⁶² While no evidence exists that Adam lived on his 45 acres, his son, John Turner did live in the area of Smith River and Rock Castle Creek at a location that probably would have been east of contemporary Woolwine, but perhaps somewhat closer to the Gorge. Adam Turner served as a Justice of the Peace for Patrick County (1812-1832), and his wife, Mary Pilson, was the niece of Declaration of Independence signer William Pilson who married Adam's sister, Esther.⁶³

Other possible early landowners were Joshua Reynolds (441 acres purchased 1800); Thomas Garrison (122 acres purchased 1784); Francis Turner and Robert Rowan parcel (1,223 acres purchased 1797) sold to Thomas P. Jordan (1797; acreage unknown); James McAlexander (237 acres purchased 1773); Henry Tuggle (various parcels purchased around 1788); Elyah (Elyjha, Elisha, or Elijah) Dehart (130 acres purchased 1803; other acreage probable but no deeds found); Notley P. Adams (various parcels; one was 100 acres, 1836).⁶⁴ Exact locations of these parcels cannot be determined, but some, such as the DeHart tract, did extend into the Gorge area. Nevertheless, actual permanent residency in the Gorge has not been documented before the 1820s or 1830s.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Worley, Thomas and J. R. Grantees, Patrick County Deed Book 36, p. 46.

⁶² Library of Virginia, Land Office Grants No. 10, 1787, page 628 (Reel 76).

⁶³ Genealogy.com. <<http://familytreemaker.genealogy.com/users/c/a/l/Michael-Lee-Caldwell-Whittier/GENE2-0002.html>> (Accessed Sept. 7, 2012)

⁶⁴ Joshua Reynolds, Land Office Grants No. 43, 1799-1800, Library of Virginia Archives, March 7, 1800, p. 471 (Reel 109); Thomas Garrison, Land Office Grants N, 1784-1785, Library of Virginia Archives, December 10, 1784, p. 503 (Reel 54); Francis Turner and Robert Rowan, Land Office Grants No. 37, 1796-1798, Library of Virginia Archives, August 7, 1797, p. 346 (Reel 103); Thomas P. Jordan, Patrick County Deed Book 1, Patrick County Courthouse, January 1, 1797, page 470; James McAlexander, Land Office Patents No. 41, 1772-1773, Library of Virginia Archives, June 15, 1773, page 420 (Reel 40); Henry Tuggle, Land Office Grants No. 23, 1790-1791, Library of Virginia Archives, July 25, 1791, page 730 (Reel 89); Elija DeHart, Patrick County Deed Book 2, Patrick County Courthouse, January 1, 1803, page 247; and Notley P. Adams, Land Office Grants No. 86, 1836, Library of Virginia Archives, August 31, 1836, page 337 (Reel 152).

⁶⁵ One descendent reports that William Belcher settled in the Gorge "around" 1820 (Moran, Verona Conner). "Benjamin and Reed Belcher," *Patrick County Heritage Book, Volume I, 1791-1999*. Patrick County Heritage Book Committee and Shirley Grose, eds. Summersville, WV: Walsworth Pub. 1999, pp. 114-115), but other family descendants indicate a date of about 1835 (Community meeting, Willis, VA: Burks Fork Church of the Brethren, August 6, 2011). Belcher visited the land in the 1820s and bought and sold acreage outside the Gorge beginning in 1819, but moved back and forth from Franklin County during this period, complicating an exact permanent residence date. He is listed in Franklin County in the 1830 U.S. Census, but is listed in Patrick County in the U.S. 1840 Census. Furthermore,

Three men, Benjamin Belcher, Jr. (1778/79-1884),⁶⁶ William Dillon,⁶⁷ and Elyjah (or Elishah) DeHart⁶⁸ all purchased large holdings that encompassed nearly all of the contemporary Gorge area and then settled there.⁶⁹ Belcher held land from what is now the Austin/Conner House area up to close to the top of the Gorge. Dillon owned land down stream from Belcher's for about a mile. DeHart owned land from the southern (lower) borders of Dillon's land over to near contemporary Woolwine.⁷⁰ Yet when they claimed ownership can be somewhat uncertain. Recording of land deeds was commonly after, sometimes long after, occupancy and development of a tract. Belcher's deeds, for example, do not appear in the Patrick County Deed Books until 1839. Consequently, disputes about who was actually "first" to live in the Gorge exist.⁷¹

B. Early Settlement and Ethnicity

The period from about 1820 to 1861 saw the Gorge develop into a more settled and populated area, setting the stage for the development of trans-gorge community life that emerged after the Civil War. Population was still sparse during this early period and included only a few families, four to perhaps eight.⁷² One was, as indicted above, that of Benjamin Belcher, Jr. Much of the remaining land not owned by Belcher, DeHart, or Dillon, was either privately owned by absentee owners or was still in Commonwealth of Virginia hands. The absentee owners sold

the 1839 recording date for 128 acres of Gorge land in the Patrick County Deed Book 10, p. 380, which was the first Benjamin Belcher deed of several listed, probably does not reflect an accurate occupancy date. Deed book entries were most often recorded significantly after the date of the actual land transfer or closing.

⁶⁶ Land deeds indicate that Belcher acquired his total holdings of about 210 acres in 1839 as patents from William and Mary Spencer (128 acres for \$300; see note 70 above), Abram Turner (25 acres), and another 68 acres from William Spencer (cost unknown). Patrick County Deed Book 10, p. 380. He also acquired 20 acres from \$20.00 from Nathaniel Fisher in 1861 Patrick County Deed Book 17, p.192.

⁶⁷In a series of land purchases over several years, William Dillon acquired several hundred acres. For example, in 1846 he purchased 82 acres from John Tuggle. Patrick County Deed Book 12, p. 566, and in 1856 he purchased 180 acres from Carrington J. and Elizabeth Dillon. Patrick County Deed Book 15, p. 349. He is listed as a resident of the area of Rock Castle Gorge in the 1840 U.S. Census as well.

⁶⁸ Land Grant to Elijah DeHart, 250 acres on the north waters of Rock Castle Creek. September 30, 1840. Richmond, VA: Library of Virginia, p. 115. He is listed as a resident of Patrick County in the 1840 U.S. Census, but surrounding names suggest he was not living in the Gorge itself at that time, but near it.

⁶⁹ Descendants living in Patrick County have prepared a map of the Belcher, DeHart, Dillon land boundaries, but it has not been substantiated against actual deeds and would need to be redone for the page limitations of this report. Therefore the authors of this report did not obtain permission to include it here.

⁷⁰ Patrick County Deed Book lacks entries for Elijah, but his brother Gabriel is listed as having bought a tract of land on the north fork of Rock Castle Creek in 1854. Patrick County Deed Book 15, p. 187.

⁷¹ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 175, for example, states that Henry Jack Dillon indicated settlement began in "last of the seventeen hundreds." No documentary evidence exists that European *settlement* occurred that early, although, as discussed above, land ownership by future settlers or their ancestors did occur. Furthermore, reports of other families dispute this early a settlement date.

⁷² This number is as best indicated by early census data (1840-1860) through identifying Benjamin Belcher and then inferring that names close to his were his neighbors against residences of extra Gorge residents as reported by their descendants and oral tradition.

Gorge land relatively frequently, indicating that they were using it as investment capital rather than for personal habitation or development.⁷³ Deed data indicate that a certain amount of population in-fill occurred in which residents living just outside the Gorge expanded their holdings by buying land that abutted their properties and was in the Gorge. In most cases, they did not move into the Gorge, however.

Ethnicity of these early settlers included German or French (e.g., Belcher⁷⁴), English (e.g., Underwood), Irish (Dillon), French Huguenot or Dutch (e.g., DeHart), and Scotch Irish (e.g., McAlexander).⁷⁵ Ethnicities of wives are similar to those of the men.⁷⁶ Claims of Cherokee heritage also appear.⁷⁷ No slaves appear in early Gorge settlement documents, but slave ownership by Elijah DeHart meant that slaves could have been used by him for labor in the Gorge.⁷⁸ The diversity in ethnic origins refutes claims that the early settlers were all Scotch Irish.⁷⁹

Yet to be firmly confirmed is a McAlexander family descendants' assertion that William McAlexander or his son John were the first residents in the Gorge. Deeds suggest the early McAlexander land holdings were just outside the mouth of the Gorge,⁸⁰ and evidence of actual

⁷³ For example, Benjamin Belcher, Jr. bought land from William and Mary Spencer, which, in turn, had been purchased from Barnabas Belisle who had obtained it from Shadrach Brammer. Some was part of the old Adam Turner 45 acre plot as well. Patrick County Deed Book 10, p. 380. See also the discussion of ownership of the DeHart mill below (pp. 69-73).

⁷⁴ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 2, asserts that Belcher had an English background by noting that family stories indicated that Benjamin Belcher spoke with a distinct English accent, but family reports are that the "Belcher" surname was originally German or possibly French (Leslie Shelor Allen, Personal Communication December 24, 2015). Blue's assertion is somewhat suspect, however, because Benjamin Belcher, Jr. was born in Franklin County, Virginia, in 1778 or 1779, as was his father (mother's birthplace unknown) (*Benjamin Belcher Sr.* <<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~genbel/main/benjamin.html>> [Accessed December 24, 2015]). It is unlikely that Benjamin would have retained much of an English accent when born in Virginia and raised by parents who were also born in the colonies.

⁷⁵ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac Underwood*, p. 41 states that the Underwoods were of English descent. Leslie Shelor Allen, Personal Communication, December 20, 2015, stated that family assumptions that the Belchers were German descent was being questioned as being perhaps French. "Dillon" is Irish. *Dillon*, Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dillon_%28surname%29> (Accessed December 24, 2015), while "DeHart" or "DeHeart" is a modified German name with a typical French prefix, indicating a possible Flanders origin. Kirkman, Eunice B. *DeHart History*. Rootsweb. <<http://homepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~aml/deharthxekirkman.html>> Accessed December 24, 2015.

⁷⁶ Discussions of women's backgrounds are rare in public documents and have to be gleaned from their natal surnames and genealogy. Gorge marriages tended to be with those who lived in the Gorge or nearby in Patrick or Floyd Counties. Since these families' ethnicities are often known and documented in family records, it is possible to determine the ancestry of wives in most cases.

⁷⁷ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, p. iv.

⁷⁸ Patrick County Deed Book 9, pp. 75 and 307 note either purchase or transfer of slaves by or to Elijah DeHart.

⁷⁹ Sensbach, Jon. "Rock Castle: Prosperous Farm Hamlet Now Deserted." *Martinsville Bulletin*. October 10, 1982. p. 12-A.

⁸⁰ William McAlexander, Sr. died on Rock Castle Creek on March 8, 1822. *William McAlexander, Sr.* Geni.com, 2015. <<http://www.geni.com/people/William-McAlexander-Sr/6000000025805761872>> (Accessed December 23, 2015). That he died on Rock Castle Creek does not mean he died in the Gorge,

residency in the Gorge per se is suggestive, but inconclusive. If it could be proven, then, based on family oral reports, a McAlexander claim to first residency would be approximately 25 years before Belcher, circa 1811.⁸¹

Subsequent land purchases up to 1860 resulted in settlement either from absentee owners renting to homesteaders or from settlers' purchases from the Commonwealth. Those that have been documented are⁸²

1. William Dillon, who purchased 72 acres in 1847 for \$150.00 on Rock Castle Creek headwaters from the John Tuggle estate. Lands were just outside of the Gorge. He added on in 1856 another 170 acres for \$475.00 near Gabriel DeHart's property that was at the bottom of the Gorge and just outside it. In 1858, he bought 25 more acres for \$125.00 on the south side of Rock Castle Creek from Gabriel and Martha DeHart. That he bought a relatively small number of acres over an 11 year period indicates he, a family member, or a renter was possibly/probably living in the Gorge and needed or wanted more acreage for agricultural purposes. Some of this property transferred eventually to Nancy (Liney) E. Dillon (Nancy Lee)⁸³ who was the largest landowner in the Gorge at the time of Parkway acquisition.⁸⁴
2. Samuel Underwood and family (whose wife was Rebecca. One son named Isaac wrote an extensive memoir on Gorge life) moved into the upper Gorge area in 1840 or 41. They first rented from landowner Pleasant Nolin (sometimes spelled "Knowling").⁸⁵ The Gorge became their permanent home for themselves and their descendants.
3. Zephaniah T. DeHart purchased from Charles DeHeart, son of Elijah DeHeart (deceased) 250 acres for \$125 in 1850. Land was on the north waters of Rock Castle Creek near where the Floyd Turnpike Road and the Tuggle Gap road split, which was at the base of the Gorge close to where the DeHart mill was later built. Someone was living on this parcel, probably a DeHart, because the deed says, "With all woods, way, waters, fences, orchards, houses, and emoluments thereunto." This phrasing indicating settlement and occupancy was not commonly included in other land deeds. That it was present in this one indicates that it actually referred to real property built on this site.⁸⁶
4. Other possible occupants of some houses as renters or landless family members are likely, but not documented.

but perhaps closer to Woolwine, since Woolwine was named Rock Castle at the time and is located on Rock Castle Creek.

⁸¹ Oral history conversations. First Rock Castle Descendants' Reunion. Meadows of Dan, VA: Slate Mountain Evangelical Presbyterian Church. September 23, 2017. Ms. Beverly Woody, organizer.

⁸² This list is based on deeds recorded in the Patrick County Courthouse Office of Records. It may not be complete.

⁸³ Nancy Emeline Dillon and then Nancy Emeline Lee was nicknamed "Liney" because of her middle name. Spelling of "Liney" varied. One occurring in the Wood family is "Lina." Leslie Shelor Allen, personal communication via email, December 28, 2018. Loss of the first unstressed syllable so the word has only two syllables and then ending with an unstressed long "e" sound is consistent with Appalachian English phonology.

⁸⁴ William Dillon. Patrick County Deed Book 16, p. 374, December 8, 1858; William Dillon, Patrick County Deed Book 21, May 27, 1878, p. 184.

⁸⁵ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, pp. iii and 43.

⁸⁶ Jephaniah T. DeHart, Patrick County Deed Book 13, January 5, 1850, p. 612.

C. Early Cultural Life

The early cultural life in the Gorge circa 1830-1861 is interesting for two reasons. First, it exhibited what might be called “typical” rural life in the Blue Ridge area of Virginia in a manner that revealed creativity and skillful adaptation to a very difficult terrain. Second many residents also exhibited strong entrepreneurial motivations to sell goods for actual money rather than just for trade as was dominant in the subsistence farming economy of this region. They therefore were developing a marginal but nevertheless capitalistic-oriented cash economy in an ecology that strongly resisted it. This business orientation in a rugged and semi-wilderness setting is attributable to the economic ideologies of these first settlers. In moving in from places such as Martinsville and Franklin County, Virginia, in the 1830s and 40s, they settled in the Gorge late in the European settlement history of the southern Appalachian regions of the United States.⁸⁷ This meant that their economic ideologies were consistent with those in the more urban piedmont areas of Virginia where industrialism had emerged as the dominant economic system. This intersection of the demanding and somewhat unique geography and ecology of Rock Castle Gorge with a strongly independent and self-reliant population encouraged emergence of a specialized cultural adaptation that set residents somewhat apart from their neighbors who had settled the region earlier and were more attuned to the trade and barter system of the subsistence agricultural system they relied on.

First settlers encountered an old growth forest with its ecology and fauna (see chapters 2 and 3). Hogs⁸⁸ came with them and were branded by notching their ears in distinctive ways and then turned into the woods to forage for food or, in the winter months were penned up, if not slaughtered in November or early December.⁸⁹ Some became feral, acquiring the designation “razor-backed hogs” or “wild.”⁹⁰ They also competed with existing wildlife so that, along with hunting, they reduced the large wild game supplies significantly by the post Civil War period. Neighbors would drive the unpinned hogs off their land if they ranged too close to houses. Fall roundups were arduous, but resulted in most domesticated hogs being captured. Many were slaughtered for food, others were transported to North Carolina markets for cash sale, and some were kept alive for breeding and the next year’s supply.

These early settlers had no close neighbors, so day-to-day survival was placed heavily upon the household to provide for its daily needs. The resources for most for doing so were few, although reciprocity for labor and services among Gorge residents was extensive, if not time

⁸⁷ Stone, Lyman. “A Brief Population History of Central Appalachia.” 2016. <https://medium.com/migration-issues/a-brief-population-history-of-central-appalachia-b65a58bc6e6c> (Accessed December 20, 2018).

⁸⁸ Domesticated breeds included, but were not limited to Hampshires and Berkshires. These came in later in settlement history, after 1865. Dillon, Jim, Oral History Interview. No name given for interviewer. Asheville, NC: BRPLIB Code J. 1975, p. 6. Some former residents referred to razor backs as domesticated hogs; others used the term to refer wild pigs in their oral history interviews.

⁸⁹ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J6.

⁹⁰ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, p. 50. John Austin, Oral History, p. A22. Wade, Era. Oral History Interview. Jim Gale, interviewer. Asheville, NC: BRPLIB Code N 1975, p. 8. Hancock, Reg. Oral History Interview. Jim Gale, Interviewer. Asheville, NC: BRPLIB Code O, 1975, p. P2. Regarding the branding of hogs, see Lutts, Ralph H. “Like Manna from God: The American Chestnut Trade in Southwestern Virginia.” *Environmental History* 9(3) (July, 2004), p. 511.

consuming when transportation demands were included. In his memoir, Isaac Underwood, who moved to the upper Gorge in 1840 or 41 as a six-year-old child, recounts the following:

It was eight miles to the nearest mill and about the same to a church and there were two schoolhouses within hearing of our neighborhood. One was, fortunately, in about five miles of where we lived. . . And as to dwelling houses, they were very rude and primitive. There were but a few of them that had shingled roofs. . . And there were but few stone chimneys. There were but three [with stone chimneys] that were within our range of visits.⁹¹

Houses were of logs, as were churches, barns, and sheds.⁹²

Physical work was arduous and constant, and was characterized by the use of few tools that were usually handmade. These tools, such as adzes and handsaws, were often primitive and used in multiple tasks so that they needed regular maintenance.⁹³ Some male residents were, of course, noteworthy for their carpentry or other tool-based skills, while some women had local reputations for their quilting, sewing, or cooking.⁹⁴ The steep slopes of the Gorge also meant that physical work required that they engage in intense exercise nearly every day as they hunted, worked their crops, or nurtured and harvested fruit trees. The result was that most residents were in extremely good physical health. In addition, many residents, especially the men, took only two meals per day,⁹⁵ so caloric intake was not and could not be excessive. This also contributed to their fitness and life expectancy.⁹⁶

Men engaged in hunting to augment meat supplies and were quite good at it, as captured by the following family narrative:

My great grandfather, Johnny Brammer was a great hunter. He used a flint lock musket which he loaded with buck-shot. On one occasion while hunting he discovered two turkey gobblers engaged in combat. As Robinson Crusoe would say, he took aim and “let fly”, bringing down both turkeys with one shot. He stood in his tracks and reloaded his musket. As he was getting ready to retrieve his game a black bear appeared. He promptly shot the bear. The bear escaped down the mountain side. After reloading he followed the bear trail for a quarter of a mile and found it dead.⁹⁷

Residents planted gardens that included corn, various types of beans, and other produce (e.g., cabbage, potatoes, and various greens), along with flax, wheat, barley, and possibly tobacco in

⁹¹ Of these three, only one, Benjamin Belcher’s, was actually located in the Gorge. Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, p. 44.

⁹² “Rock Castle Gorge/Squire Dillon.” Oral History Notes. No author, no date. Asheville, NC: BRPLIB Code P, p. P2; Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, p. 51; Conner, Wyatt. Oral History Interview. Jim Gale, Interviewer. Asheville, NC: BRPLIB Code H. 1975, p. H6.

⁹³ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, p. 51.

⁹⁴ Among them were Benjamin and Reed Belcher. Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 22-24. See also Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, “Writings,” p. 3.

⁹⁵ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, pp. 47-48.

⁹⁶ For example, Benjamin Belcher, Sr. lived from 1779 to 1884 according to his tombstone located in the Gorge, and his wife, Sarah (Sally) lived from 1790 to about 1893. His son (George) Reed Belcher, lived from 1844 to 1931. “Belcher Genealogy. *WikiTree* <<https://www.wikitree.com/genealogy/BELCHER>> (Accessed December 20, 2018).

⁹⁷ Another narrative relates how Jackson Dillon drove smoke into what he thought was a raccoon den to drive them out. He then crushed three animals to death only to find out he had killed bobcats instead of raccoons. Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, “Writings,” p. 4.

various amounts according to family labor and resources.⁹⁸ Flax, an indicator of a Scotch-Irish ancestry or borrowing from them, was made into linen or woven with wool into linsey-woolsey. Several families may have raised sheep; regardless, wool was available through other non-Gorge residents for processing into cloth by carding, spinning, dyeing, and weaving, crocheting, or knitting.⁹⁹ The growing of fruit, particularly apples, in orchards began during this period.¹⁰⁰ The production and consumption of brandy or whiskey by men, in the Gorge depended on using some of the apples from these orchards (and, for whiskey, corn they had raised). During this early period, however, it was produced in relatively small quantities primarily for non-commercial use.¹⁰¹

All clothing, bedding, food, lighting, soap, grinding of grain, medical treatment, tanning of hides, making of shoes and other leather items, most utensils, traps, and objects or artifacts related to childbirth and childrearing were constructed or performed at home or obtained through barter or labor exchanges with neighbors. Salt, cotton, and coffee, among a few other items, were hauled in from Lynchburg, Richmond, Danville, and elsewhere in Virginia to trade stores several miles distant from the Gorge.¹⁰² Barter and/or cash were used to purchase metal worked items, household items, and food such as coffee, salt, and sugar.¹⁰³ One source indicates that, even in the 20th century, blacksmithing was primarily, but not entirely, done elsewhere, thus indicating that it did not exist in the Gorge during the pre Civil War period except in small homestead forges, if then.¹⁰⁴

Rock Castle Road through the Gorge was a dirt path, as was the precursor to current Route 8. Foot transportation appeared to have dominated, although evidence exists that most had oxen and some had mules or horses.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ Based on the accounts available, diversity in garden produce was less in this period than after the Civil War. Underwood discusses hunting, gathering, dairy products, butchering of hogs, and brandy making, but does not mention any human food crops but corn and beans. Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, p. 51 and 59. See also Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 3. Given that one geographic feature was named "Tater Hill," or "potato hill" because it looked like a garden potato mound, knowledge of and therefore probable growing of potatoes also occurred. As a clarification, however, Underwood's account discusses events and places located near his upper Gorge home. His memoir therefore includes homesteads outside the Gorge itself, so items such as tobacco and sheep may not have been grown or raised in the Gorge during this period. One post Civil War oral history, however, mentions sheering in the autumn. Howell, Ruby. Oral History Interview, Leslie Shelor Allen, interviewer. Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Tech, Patrick County Project. 1980, p.1. Dillon as reported by Osborne, noted as well that people grew flax and wool (p. 3), thus suggesting Gorge residents at least had ready access to these products.

⁹⁹ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, pp. 44-60.

¹⁰⁰ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 3-4. Willie. B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, p. 49.

¹⁰² Willie. B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, p. 51. Large sacks of salt sold for \$4-\$5/bag, while domestic cotton went for 25-50 ¢/yard. Coffee sold for 10 or 12 ¢/lb.

¹⁰³ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," pp. 47-51.

¹⁰⁴ Wade, Era. Oral History Interview. Asheville, NC: BRPLIB Code N. 1975, p. N10.

¹⁰⁵ Dillon had mules (Conner, Wyatt, Oral History Interview. Jim Gale, Interviewer. Asheville, NC: BRPLIB. 1975, p. H2); Most, however, used oxen (Ellis Connor, Oral History Interview. Jim Gale, interviewer. Asheville, NC: BRPLIB Code G, 1975, p. G13; Jim Dillon, Oral History, J31). That some had horses is supported by a report that residents hid their horses from a raid by Confederate cavalry, deserters, or recently decommissioned Confederate soldiers during or just after the end of the Civil War

Gold was found along one branch, the largest nugget reported as being the size of a man's thumb, but no commercial mining operations existed or proposed until after the Civil War.¹⁰⁶

What is notable is that residents were keen on obtaining cash or cash equivalences via barter of any amount, no matter how small. Belcher sold corn (50¢/bushel) and hogs (3 ¢/lb), while others sold raspberries.¹⁰⁷ Selling of chestnuts is not reported for this period probably due to lack of transportation to ship large quantities of the nuts to national or regional markets.¹⁰⁸

Local stores accepted bartered goods for cash equivalents in most cases. Cash for real estate and property taxes could also be paid by trading goods for cash at local stores, so the drive to possess currency was for other reasons than for buying and selling trade goods, with land purchase being among them. Belcher, for example, had several hundred dollars stashed at his house that he never or rarely spent, but kept in safekeeping as a reserve.¹⁰⁹

Benjamin Belcher was apparently the most economically successful. Noted for his "miserliness," he sold hogs in regional Virginia and North Carolina markets, sold corn for 50¢/bushel, and began the apple orchards that provided he and his heirs a stable income through sale of fresh and dried apples to regional markets and the local DeHart distillery, once it came into existence in the 1880s.¹¹⁰ Unlike the log houses in the area with ribpole roofs, his was shingled and had a stone chimney, which was also rare during this early period.¹¹¹

Social life revolved around collective work tasks, church services (when weather or time allowed residents to travel several miles to attend services), visits at neighbors' homes, trips to stores and mills by men, school for children, and the few court, legal, or commercial business trips men engaged in from time to time. Participation in these communal work tasks, such as barn building, log rolling, and harvesting, was expected, and male workers might come from as far away as 15 miles away; non-attendance needed to be accounted for or community concern would result in search parties or other activities to locate their whereabouts.¹¹² Talk included, but certainly was not limited to, discussions of politics, news, latest fashions (for women), how to better accomplish tasks (e.g., recipes, ways of hunting and where, hog killing and meat

(John Austin, Oral History, p. A24; Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 46; Jim Dillon, Oral History, p. J37). (Also, see chapter 5.)

¹⁰⁶Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 169 reports that his great grandfather, who would have been Reed Belcher, his grandfather, George William Mack Conner, and grandmother, Annie Conner, discussed the deposits and where they were with him, but that he could never find any gold of any size. Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, Anita Puckett and Leslie Shelor Allen, interviewers. Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Tech. May 27, 2014, p. 20, suggested that reports of gold were greatly exaggerated

¹⁰⁷ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, pp. 44 and 50-51. Belcher later sold hogs in Piedmont Virginia and North Carolina markets, but when he began this business is unclear. Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," Mr. Dillon, whose oral remembrances Osborne relates, p. 1, noted that raspberries were worth 30¢/lb. and that his father paid for his farm of 110 acres and built a framed house from his proceeds from raspberries. "... P.L. Howard, a merchant in Floyd bought them and paid half cash." However, the mention of building a *frame* house suggests that this activity occurred after the Civil War (see chapter 6).

¹⁰⁸ Ralph H. Lutts, "Like Manna," p. 502.

¹⁰⁹ Willie B. Underwood, *Writings*, p. 44.

¹¹⁰ Sullivan, Jack. *Those Pre-Pro Whiskey Men" the DeHarts of Virginia: Moonshine in the Sunshine*. 2011. < <http://pre-prowhiskeymen.blogspot.com/2011/11/deharts-of-virginia-moonshine-in.html> > (Accessed December 24, 2015).

¹¹¹ Willie B. Underwood, *Writings*, p. 44.

¹¹² Willie B. Underwood, *Writings*, pp. 49-50.

preservation, childcare, medicinal remedies, and how to make dyes for yarn).¹¹³ Road travel, relatively sparse as it must have been,¹¹⁴ also contributed to reducing isolation. Wagons did come through, however, as did horseback riders going west, east, or back and forth in local or regional travel.¹¹⁵ As a result, social separation of families from county or larger county or regional life was present, but intermittent, (particularly for women) during this early period. As was typical throughout the region, women rarely traveled far from home and then primarily for family-related activities such as church, community gatherings, or to accompany family males to a town, settlement, or non-local homestead.

Creative outlets for children were manifested in terms of chestnut and walnut whistles, running and jumping games,¹¹⁶ practical jokes and teasing,¹¹⁷ and other invented or imagined play-like activities. Work was all consuming, leaving little time for “play” as a separate activity. Among adults, music, church and ballad singing,¹¹⁸ reciting traditional family and community narratives and jokes or humorous tales,¹¹⁹ formed the basis for verbal lore (See chapter 8). Among women, cooking, quilt-making, weaving, knitting, crocheting, and sewing dominated their non-childrearing activities.¹²⁰ Given the regional distribution of clever or innovative designs on functional items such as fences, flower gardens, door hinges, and other standard items, it can also be assumed that residents found creative expression in subtle but distinctive ways in their designs of functional items.¹²¹

¹¹³ Willie B. Underwood, *Writings*, pp. 44-60.

¹¹⁴ No data on road travel were kept, but the population of Patrick County in 1850 was 9,609. Conner, Maynard Calvin and William K. King. *An Economic and Social Survey of Patrick County*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, Extension Division. 1937, p. 39. Floyd County had 6,458 *Floyd County, Virginia*. “Floyd County, Virginia – Demographics.” *Wikipedia*, 2015. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Floyd_County,_Virginia_-_Demographics> (Accessed December 24, 2015) Given the conditions of local roads, the homestead focus of most residents, and the secondary or tertiary road status of the Gorge road, only a small percentage of this population would have traveled through the Gorge on any basis, regular or sporadic during this time period.

¹¹⁵ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 22.

¹¹⁶ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac Underwood*, p. 46.

¹¹⁷ Descendants’ recollections from community meeting. Willis, VA: Burks Fork Church of the Brethren, August 6, 2011.

¹¹⁸ Ballad singing was ubiquitous in the region, and interviewer Jim Gale noted that John Austin, who lived in the 20th century, knew “the ballads that were the heritage of the area.” John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A1. Therefore, it is quite likely that ballads were performed during this period.

¹¹⁹ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 19-22 and 250.

¹²⁰ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, pp. 44-60; Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, “Writings,” p. 3. That women were making quilts in the 1850s suggests further research on the material cultural traditions they brought with them to the Gorge. Creative quilt-making is commonly considered to have started later in the 19th century when store-bought cloth or decorative seed bags were available in greater quantities and when sewing machines became available. Horton, Laurel. “Quilts.” *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell, eds. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, pp. 822-823.

¹²¹ See, for example, Martin, Charles E., “Appalachia’s Art of the Useful,” *Natural History* (1987) 96(7), pp. 51-59.

Church attendance was sporadic due to distance to them, but certainly sought after. The churches readily available to them were Primitive Baptist or Missionary Baptist.¹²² Attending church, by necessity, if not desire, was therefore an all day affair.

Literacy levels varied as indicated by marks instead of signatures on land deeds.¹²³ Elementary schools, which were probably subscription schools since public schools were not created until after 1870, existed in the area outside the Gorge,¹²⁴ but it doesn't mean that Gorge children were able to attend regularly or for many years in a row. Work, distance, and weather all served as barriers to attendance.¹²⁵ Consequently, literacy was minimal to absent for many,¹²⁶ resulting in many residents relying on literacy "brokers," that is, trusted neighbors or kin who were literate, to conduct business for them.¹²⁷

Early residents were noteworthy for their moral character and honesty. Locks, guard dogs, or other forms of security were not needed. Unlike the 20th century situation described for Buffalo Mountain communities,¹²⁸ high levels of alcoholism have not been reported, although drinking among men was common, and women drank alcohol rarely.¹²⁹

Life in general was difficult, strenuous, and often dangerous; life in the Gorge was especially demanding with steep terrain, little sunlight in most places, and ambient temperatures that were depressed compared to outside the Gorge. Work was unending, so, when opportunities to engage in relaxation and "play" occurred, they were approached with the same hardscrabble intensity as everyday life demanded. By modern standards, the common act of teasing sometimes bordered on the malicious or painful.¹³⁰ Yet, given the ever-present dangers of just living, it was well within the range of acceptable. Over the years, Gorge life continued to revolve around physical work, but the depressed economic conditions after the Civil War, the cash demands of a nation becoming heavily industrialized as a result of it, as well as an expansion in the number of homesteads primarily due to residents' children's inheritance, which then necessarily reduced the amount of family-owned acreage, meant that Gorge residents had to adapt and change to meet new cultural and socioeconomic demands.

¹²² Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, pp. 44-46; Richard C. Davids, *The Man Who*. See also Patrick County Historical Society, *History*, p. 177, which noted that most Patrick County residents affirmed a Primitive Baptist faith.

¹²³ U. S. Censuses (1830, 1840, 1850, and 1860) during this period (1840-1865) did not record data on literacy.

¹²⁴ Patrick County Historical Society, *History*, pp. 194-195.

¹²⁵ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, pp. 51 and 60-61.

¹²⁶ Evidence for this assertion comes from the use of marks instead of signatures on legal documents and from census records. For example, an 1841 marriage certificate for C. J. Dillon and Elizabeth McAlexander, daughter of William McAlexander in which C. J. Dillon signed with his mark. [source is a photocopy from a descendant's family archive in Puckett's possession]. See also Patrick County Historical Society, *History*, p. 177.

¹²⁷ Allen, Leslie Shelor Allen. Personal Communication, July 2013 and personal communication based on family narratives regarding her Gorge ancestors, September 8, 2012. This practice was and is very common throughout the southern Appalachian region.

¹²⁸ Davids, Richard. *The Man Who*.

¹²⁹ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, p. 49; Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 11.

¹³⁰ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, p. 47.

5. Development of Gorge Community Life

A. The Civil War and Its Impact on the Gorge

The Civil War marked a major transition period for Gorge residents. As primarily non-slave owners¹³¹ whose political relationship to the rest of the county was somewhat subdued, many Gorge residents, few as there were, found their sons conscripted into a war few had interest in.¹³² At least one Rock Castle Gorge male resident fought for both the North and the South, and others fought for the North. One highly significant effort at Confederate recruitment involving Benjamin Belcher has become a Gorge folk legend. Involving torture to extract the location of Belcher's son, the various versions of this poignant story are more fully discussed in chapter 8 on Gorge folklore. An entry in Captain Rufus J. Woolwine's diary supports the factual accuracy of this raid, however, in stating in an 1863 entry, "August 1st Went to hunt the Belchers."¹³³

The Gorge itself and its immediate surroundings were directly impacted by War activities. Throughout this section of the Blue Ridge, deserters from both the North and South hid out alone in small (8' x 10' or less) cabins on the mountainsides. Whether any were actually in the Gorge is disputed, but probably at least one, if not several hideaways, existed, while there were probably about 40 or 50 in the general area.¹³⁴ Also, one woman may have supported a runaway hiding in Gorge caves.¹³⁵ One former resident, John Austin, reports that one cave hideout was possibly near his former property. In addition, shortly after the War ended, soldiers came through the Gorge and robbed residents of all their food supplies and livestock, except for their horses, which residents hid.¹³⁶ Therefore the subsistence resources of Gorge residents were severely depleted by 1866. In addition, U.S. money was very difficult to obtain in general, not withstanding the loss of surplus hogs, fruit, corn, and other products to sell.

Furthermore, the toll on individuals and families was sometimes tragic. Isaac Underwood noted that his tour of duty for three plus years was the one of the "hardest trials of all [his] life." He became ill with typhoid fever, pneumonia, smallpox, and scraffolus that left him permanently disabled. He switched sides to the North at one point, saying that

¹³¹ Elijah DeHart owned property both within and outside of the Gorge. He also owned slaves and therefore may have had them employed in Gorge activities. DeHart, Elijah, Patrick County Deed Book 9 (1835), p. 75 and DeHart, Elijah, Patrick County Deed Book 9 (1836), p. 307 record purchases of slaves by him.

¹³² Leslie Shelor Allen. Personal communication, July 2011. Melly Dillon noted that six DeHart men served. Dillon, Melly, Oral History interview. Jim Gale, interviewer. Asheville, NC: BRPLIB Code K, 1975, p. K1, while Jim Dillon reported that two of his grandmothers' brothers were killed, four others returned safely. Those who returned received a pension. Jim Dillon, Oral History, pp. J37-38.

¹³³ Woolwine, Rufus J. *The Civil War Diary of Rufus J. Woolwine*. Richmond, VA: Virginia Historical Society. 1963, Vol. 71(4), p. 431. The date of the entry is August 1, 1863.

¹³⁴ John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A 24.

¹³⁵ Discussion, Community meeting, August 6, 2011. However, Era Wade noted that none hid out in the Gorge. Era Wade, Oral History Interview. p. N13.

¹³⁶ John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A24; Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 46; Jim Dillon, Oral History, p. J37).

I was no war man anyway, and it was slaves that the issue was about, and I had none of them to fight for, and I thought it was wrong for me to fight for other people's property unless they paid me for it.

Furthermore, his wife's health was destroyed in trying to keep the family and homestead together, such that she was "nothing but a living wreck."¹³⁷ (For the folklore surrounding these events, please consult chapter 8.)

As with most of the South, Patrick County also suffered intense economic stress after the Civil War. Money was nearly non-existent and markets for Gorge products, such as apples and hogs, even if they had them, were shut down or buying very little.¹³⁸ At the same time, Gorge residents were somewhat exempt from the intensity of the collapse because of their self-sufficient orientation and locally-oriented farm economy. Because of the raids mentioned above, they may not have had many hogs, dairy cattle, chickens, or much garden produce to draw upon for food and other supplies, but they did have the small game and wild flora, including the abundant chestnut trees, of the Gorge and its surrounds to harvest, in addition to well-established bartering and reciprocity kinship-based networks to draw on to distribute what subsistence resources did exist.

However, the need for cash money increased for a variety of reasons, most of which were related to the expansion of industrialism and factory products in the post bellum era. These costs included rising taxes to rebuild the local economy and infrastructure, expansion of market goods (e.g., costs related to developing railroad transportation that permitted transport of chestnuts or Gorge apples to more distant markets),¹³⁹ and the development of machine-driven equipment and tools, such as sewing machines and sawmills, that addressed Gorge residents' emerging needs.¹⁴⁰ Consequently Gorge households had to be more resourceful economically as they became more integrated into a commodity-based economy. These needs, in addition to the loss of subsistence resources through robbery by marauding ex-soldiers, and the increased population mentioned above, changed the cultural dynamics of Gorge households significantly. Manifestations of these changes can be seen through a discussion of

- Creation of Gorge community life due to expansion of households and reduction in land holdings
- Development and Uses of Landmarks
- Expansion of Type and Quantities of Physical structures
- Growth in Gorge-specific businesses and industries
- Redevelopment of a local market-based economy (see chapter 6)
- Establishment of schools and churches in or near the Gorge (see chapter 7)

The time period for the full development of these changes is approximately 1870 to 1935. Focus in the following sections of this chapter is on what ex-residents reported as being representative of their daily life circa 1910-1930 with recollections to the late 19th century. The

¹³⁷ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, Pp. 63-64.

¹³⁸ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, Pp. 64-65. Patrick County Historical Society, *History*, p. 171.

¹³⁹ Patrick County Historical Society, *History*, p. 176.

¹⁴⁰ "Rock Castle Gorge/Squire Dillon," p. P2.

economic collapse in the 1920s after the loss of the chestnut trees is discussed in chapter 6. Here the focus is on the every day life of residents and those geographical formations and material structures in which much of it occurred.

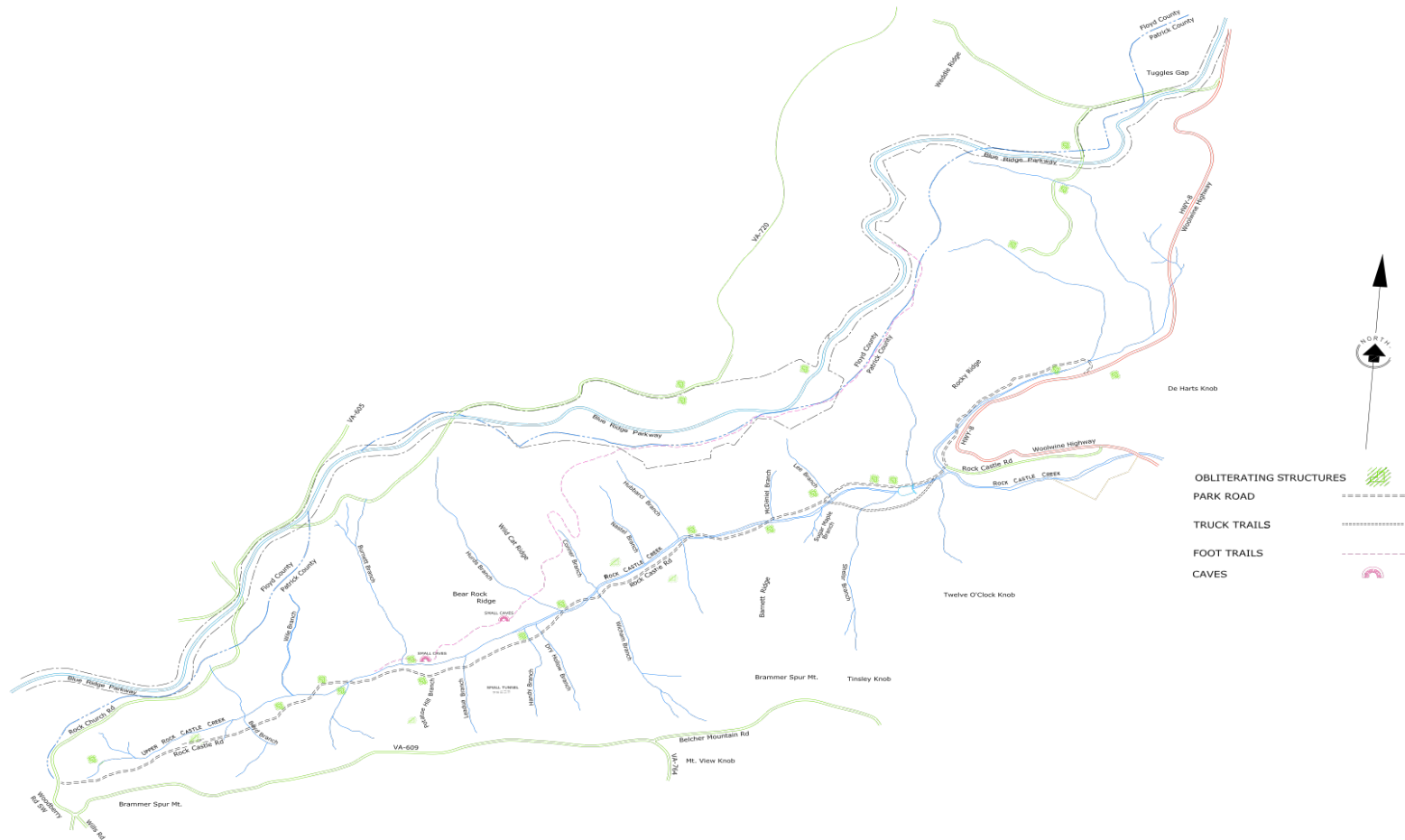
B. Creation of Gorge Community Life after 1870

Among the significant changes in the Gorge land itself are that significantly more people lived in it. First was that the number of homesteads increased after the Civil War as early residents' children or younger kin became married adults who needed land to farm to support their families. Consequently, many original holdings were divided among these younger family members who wished to remain in or move back into the Gorge, creating more numerous but smaller real estate parcels. Second, members of this same group purchased unclaimed parcels left over from the earlier period that were still in state or national ownership. Third, property owned by early settlers or their descendants was sold off to non-kin or more distant kin for badly needed money. And fourth, residents rented or loaned out properties or rooms to kin in return for labor or other compensation, or to seasonal workers in the orchards and sawmills as part of their pay, or, in one case, as a rental to a local teacher.¹⁴¹

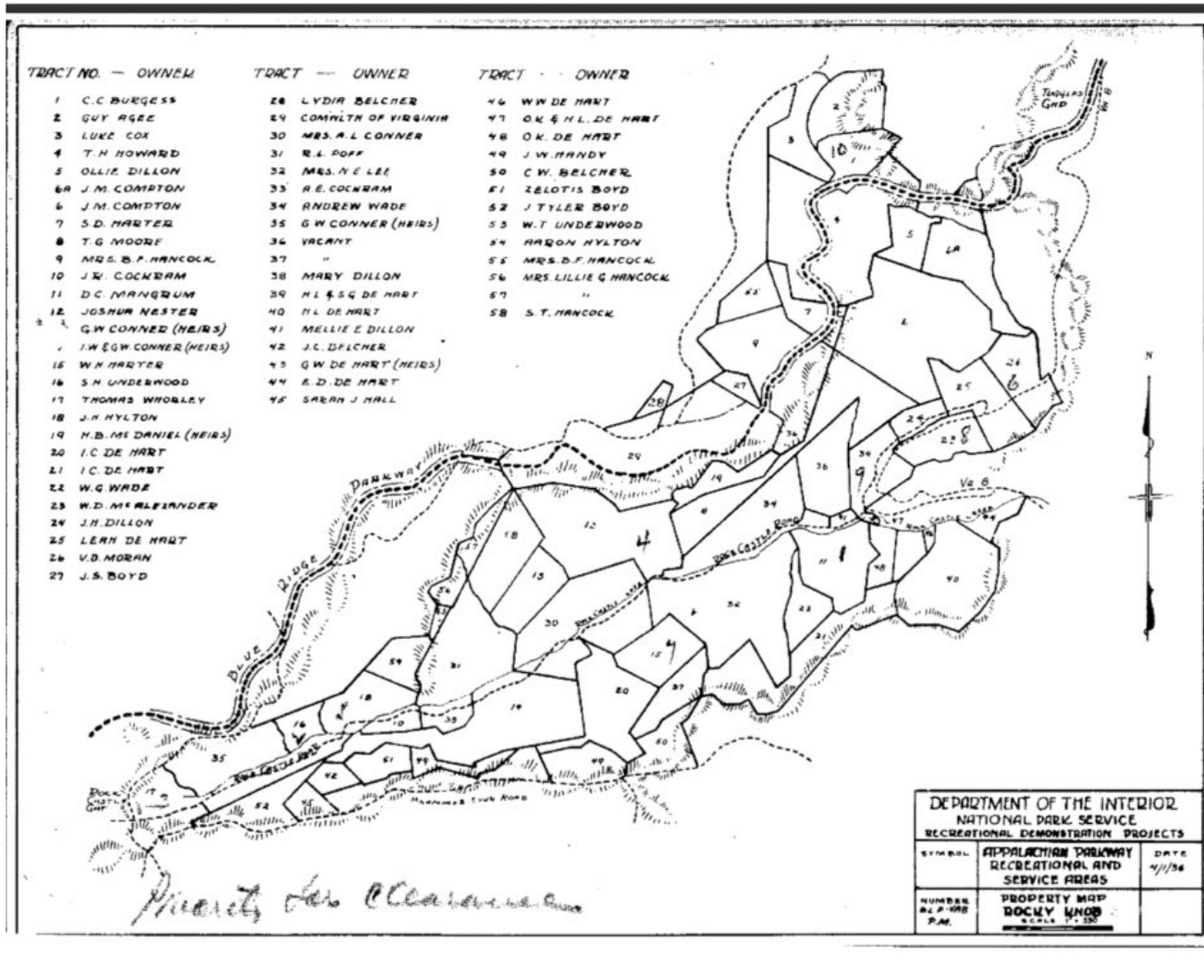
However, as time went by and the chestnut, whose nuts was the main money source for most residents, died off, owners moved out, renting their homes to outsiders or just leaving them abandoned. By the time of Blue Ridge Parkway acquisition in 1935-1937, only 12 Gorge houses had occupants, some of whom were renters (see Map 5.1 and 5.2 and Table 5.1). Their transitory occupancy may account for the count of 12 houses that appears in NPS and Parkway reports.¹⁴² Many more of the unoccupied homes extant at the time were in various levels of decay (see Table 5.1).

¹⁴¹ U.S. 1920 census indicates Henry James Dillon was a teacher living with his wife in the Gorge; Jim Dillion, Oral History Interview, p. J34; Robert Blue, *Little Blue Boy* describes his and his family's intermittent occupancy of the Shabby House, a poorly maintained shack, among other homes.

¹⁴² The 1930 U.S census indicates a number of renters living in the Gorge at the time. They were Luther Conner and his family; Stowell Hylton among other renters in the J. W. Handy house; Daniel Conner and his family; a Moran family, and a Dillon family member who was renting. This number does not include those living in the Austin/Conner House since this property remained in private hands. For the number 12, see, for example, Rock Castle Gorge/Squire Dillon. Oral History Notes, p. P1; See also The Jaeger Company, *Cultural Landscape Report*, p. 14.



Map 5.1. Location of Houses by Owner Circa 1925 (National Park Service 2015).



Map 5.2. Tract Owners and Parkway Tract Numbers. Property Map, Rocky Knob.

Table 5.1 List of Tracts with Structures as of 1935 at Time of Blue Ridge Parkway Acquisition¹⁴³

Original Tract # at Time of Acquisition	Landowner; * Indicates Landowner Living on Property	Structures Reported in 1935; “No Improvements” Indicates No Built Structures Present¹⁴⁴
6 & 6a	J.M. Compton (James Monroe & Laura DeHart Compton)	Six acres cleared for cultivation. One dwelling is a frame house, 16' x 36' and 18' x 22' that has a single and composite roof. It had two stories with five rooms and was in fair condition. A second frame house was 16' x 32', had a shingled roof, was 1.5 stories, and was in poor condition. In addition, there was a frame two story barn 32' x 26' with a composite roof. The barn was in fair condition, but the roof and foundation were in poor condition. There was also a springhouse, a cellar, a meat house, and a frame corn house. These out buildings were in fair to poor condition. There was an orchard, a spring, and poor fences. All structures were cheaply built.
8	T. G. Moore (T. G. and Gladys Moore)	No improvements.
10	J. R. Cockram (James R and Leah Cockram)	One frame dwelling that was one story with two rooms. It was 14' x 26' and in fair condition. There was also a granary that was 8' x 10'. Both structures were cheaply built. Poor fences. An orchard and a spring. Six acres cleared for cultivation.
11	D. C. Mangrum*	Property contained three dwellings, several outbuildings, an orchard, and a mill.

¹⁴³ The Austin/Conner House, which was the largest and most economically successful homestead in the Gorge, is not included in this table because it was never acquired by the Parkway, so no appraisal report exists for this property.

¹⁴⁴ Information provided in the Structures Reported column was obtained from Appraisal Reports from 1935-36. National Park Service, Appalachian National Parkway VA-R-5. Reports varied in their level of detail, however, so some information is more general for a given tract than for others. Source information for Appraisal Reports listed in Tracts Documents section of References.

	(Dolphus Calvin and Pearl G. DeHart Mangrum)	The mill contained a wheel, wooden flume, machinery, and feed cutter.
12	Joshua Nester* (Joshua and Martha Brammer Nester)	Property contained a six room house that was 24' x 27'. There was also a pole and frame barn that was 27' x 27'. In addition, the tract contained a frame spring and wash house, 12' x 16,' a cellar house of stone, 8' x 10', and a frame storage house, 12' x 30'. All were in fair condition. The tract had an apple orchard with about 600 trees that were 25 to 30 years old. There was a spring and fences.
13	G. W. Conner (Heirs) (Heirs of George W. Conner)	Contained a fence and spring.
14	I. W. and G. W. Conner (Heirs) (Heirs of George W. Conner)	No improvements.
15	W. H. Hatcher (W. H. & Annie M. Hatcher)	No improvements.
16	S. H Underwood* (Samuel H. and Martha Belcher Underwood)	Two dwellings; one was two story, frame, 16' x 50' with six rooms and a metal roof. It was 20 years old and in fair condition. The second was one and one half stories, frame, 18' x 24', four rooms, with a shingle roof. It was in poor condition. There were also two barns, 10' x 15', frame, shingle roof and one 24' x 16', frame, composite roof in fair condition. The tract also had a frame granary in poor condition and a power mill that was 12' x 16'. It lacked its generator at time of appraisal and was in fair condition. Orchard and springs. Fifteen to 20 acres were being used for farming. It was assessed as having improvements above average for the community.
17	Thomas Whorley*	One frame dwelling 16' x 32' and 16' x 14'. Three rooms, one story. It had a shingle roof, but was in poor condition. The tract also contained a packhouse

	(Thomas and Rosa B. Whorley)	lined with sawdust, a corn crib, a sheep shed, a cow shed, and a spring house. All was of cheap construction. Also present were rail fences, a spring, and orchards.
18	J. H. Hylton (Jeremiah H. Hylton)	About one half of the 46 acres was cleared for pasture or cultivation. There was a small, cheaply constructed dwelling, some outbuildings in poor condition, and an old orchard.
19	N. B. McDaniel (Heirs) (Heirs of Henry B. McDaniel)	Had a house, an orchard, and a spring on the premises.
20	I. C. DeHart (Isaac C. and Alice Thompson DeHart)	No improvements (appraisal same for Tract 21).
21	I. C. DeHart (Isaac C. and Alice Thompson DeHart)	No improvements (appraisal same for Tract 20).
22	W. G. Wade (William G. and Earie A. Wade)	Three acres cleared for cultivation. A new, roughly constructed two room house with no floors had recently been built.
23	W. D. McAlexander	The dwellings were listed only as being in poor shape. There was an orchard.
24	J. H. Dillon	Spring and orchard.
25	Leah DeHart	Two acres in orchard; 2 acres in grazing land.
26	V. D. Moran (V. D. and Hester Moran)	Thirteen acres in cultivated land, two of which were in an orchard. Dwelling that was five rooms, one and one half stories, and measured 16' x 16' and 16' x 36'.
30	Mrs. A. L. Conner (Annie L. Belcher Conner)	A frame house that was 16' x 30' with two rooms. Composite roof. Storage building, shed, and other buildings. Spring Eight acres of poor grazing and orchard land. Orchard contained 18 good apple trees and 20 young trees.

31	R. L. Poff (Robert L. and Mary P. Poff)	An old, abandoned log building stood on the property and it had an overgrown orchard.
32	Mrs. N. E. Lee* (Nancy E. Dillon Lee)	One frame dwelling that was 14' x 28'; 16' x 40' and in fair condition. It contained six rooms. A second log and frame dwelling was 16' x 18', had three rooms, and was in poor condition. ¹⁴⁵ The barns were in poor condition; the 16' x 20' frame granary was also in poor condition. The property had fences and an orchard with 75 trees. It was about 30 years old. Springs; 50 acres were in cultivable or pasture land; 15 acres were ranked as good, while 17 acres of cultivable land were ranked as fair. Eighteen acres of pasture were ranked as fair.
33	A. E. Cockram (A. E. and Dora Cockram)	The one room house was not completed. It had an orchard and poor rail fences. Spring. Four acres were cleared for cultivation.
34	Andrew Wade (Andrew and Octavia Wade)	Three and one half acres had been cleared for cultivation; only one suitable for cultivation. No improvements.
35	G. W. Conner (Heirs of George W. Conner)	Fences. Fifty-one acres was in cultivated land, 25 as open pasture. Six acres were rated "good." All in good to fair condition.
36	Vacant (A, C1, D); owned by Commonwealth of Virginia	No improvements.
37	Vacant (D); owned by Commonwealth of Virginia	No improvements.
38	Mary Dillon (Mary and Henry)	A house that was 24' x 16' and 16' x 20'. Orchard. Eleven acres in fair or poor crop land.

¹⁴⁵ The larger house was known to be two stories; the smaller one was the "Shabby House." (See individual house discussion below beginning on page 54.)

	J. Dillon)	
39	H. L. and S. G. DeHart	Orchard. Two acres in poor crop land.
40	H. L. DeHart (Heirs of Henry Lee DeHart, Jr.)	Dwellings and barns in very poor condition. Spring. Eight acres in crop and grazing land; grazing land partly cleared.
41	Mellie E. Dillon (Mellie and A. G. Dillon)	Two acres were cleared for cultivation, including an apple orchard. The trees are two to four years old and properly primed and planted. No other improvements.
43	G. W. DeHart (heirs) (Heirs of Green W. DeHart)	No improvements, but spring served home outside Parkway acquisition area.
44	E. D. DeHart (E. Daniel and Brooksie DeHart and Millie DeHart)	Two acres in grazing land with gravel pit; spring.
45	Sarah J. Hall (Sarah J. Hall)	No improvements.
46	W. W. DeHart (W. W. and Eliza A. DeHart)	No improvements.
47	O. K. DeHart (O. K. DeHart, Henry L. DeHart, and Lillian DeHart)	All 3.5 acres in open land. Old DeHart mill site with mill equipment (42" mill stones, 18" turbine wheel, and other equipment).
48	O. K. DeHart	Two structures in poor condition, at least one of them was a dwelling. Two acres in crop or pasture land; spring.
49 and 49a	J. W. Handy*	Frame tenant house 18' x 20' in poor condition. Log corn house. Fencing in poor

	(John William and Rozina Virginia Conner Handy)	condition. Grazing and pasture land on 35.75 acres. Spring.
51	Zalotis Boyd (Zelotes and Lillie Pendleton Boyd)	Twenty-seven acres in grazing and pasture. Spring. No improvements.
52	J. Tyler Boyd (John Tyler Boyd)	Thirty-three acres in open pasture or grazing land, some of it cultivated. Twenty-two acres timbered, with 20 acres merchantable. Fencing. Spring.
53	W. T. Underwood* (William Tilden and Mary Harter Underwood)	Three acres in grazing or open pasture. No improvements.
54	Aaron Hylton (Aaron Hylton)	A log 8' x 12' barn with a log top and fencing in poor condition. Six acres in grazing or open pasture.
56	Mrs. Lillie G. Hancock (Lillie G. Burgess and Simon T. Hancock)	Appraisal found under tract 57 file. Four acres in fair crop land; 5 acres in grazing or open pasture. No improvements.
57	Mrs. Lillie G. Hancock (Lillie G. Burgess and Simon T. Hancock)	Orchard, but the 10 apple trees were in poor condition. Ten acres in open pasture or grazing land. Appraisal indicates no improvements, but other documents indicate occupancy. Such occupancy probably refers to one of the other Lillie G. Hancock tracts.
58	S. T. Hancock (Lillie G. Burgess and Simon T. Hancock)	Twelve acres in open pasture or grazing land. Walnut and apple orchard. Spring. No improvements.

In addition to the main dirt road, residents also used or created several foot paths up and across both sides of the Gorge such that the slopes were crisscrossed with both animal and human trails.¹⁴⁶ These facilitated ingress and egress from the Gorge to and from rim households and establishments. As a result, residents often did not need to use the main road. With these foot paths, the sides and hollows of the Gorge itself became humanly occupied either by additional houses or by the movement of people as pedestrians.

Some sounds could carry as far as two miles, perhaps further, so everyday life in the Gorge by 1910 contained the frequent noises of human activity and talk created by residents in the Gorge and at the rims.¹⁴⁷ These sounds traveled not only horizontally, but vertically so that an enveloping sense of community through human communication was both vertical and horizontal.

Nevertheless, geographical and social isolation from surrounding plateau above or piedmont terrain at the bottom was significant enough that communal life developed just within the Gorge itself, such that bonding among kin and families, and most families were, indeed, related, was very strong.¹⁴⁸ Land itself was, in most cases, treated as a commons. Therefore most male and many female residents felt safe in traveling up and down the Gorge and its paths often to pick up mail and newspapers at boxes at the bottom near Rt. 8.¹⁴⁹ They also traveled to trade at Edward's store (top of Gorge Rim), DeHart's store (just outside the bottom of the Gorge),¹⁵⁰ or Shelor's store (near Route 8).¹⁵¹ They may have also visited or shared labor with kin or neighbors, or, occasionally, go to church at the school house at the bottom of the Gorge or at one of the churches on the plateau above the Gorge.¹⁵² By 1938, those residents who were left could attend occasional movies at the CCC Camp at the bottom of the Gorge.¹⁵³ If they had time away from home chores, children attended either the public school at the bottom, after it was created, or, if living near the top of the Gorge, walked up the Gorge to the top where they picked up a bus or were taken by horse and buggy to a Floyd County school on the Boyd property ("Stamping Birches" or "Stomping Birches" school)¹⁵⁴ or elsewhere. By the 1930s, children living near the

¹⁴⁶ See Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B38 and Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 140 and following for discussions of hunting on the mountains.

¹⁴⁷ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 243.

¹⁴⁸ Leslie Shelor Allen, personal communications on multiple occasions. Community meeting, Willis, VA: Burks Fork Church of the Brethren, August 6, 2011.

¹⁴⁹ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 95. Madison Hubbard Oral History Interview, p. 9 reported that mail was placed at the foot of the Gorge near contemporary Rt. 8, and people walked to it to pick up their mail. Melly Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. K4, noted that mail was picked up about once a week. A similar situation probably occurred at the top of the Gorge, although an exact location has not been identified.

¹⁵⁰ See chapter 6 for description of these stores.

¹⁵¹ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 23. Other oral histories do not mention this store, so it must have been opened in the mid 1930s or after Parkway acquisition. Mrs. Moran lived in the Gorge for a few years after acquisition into the later 1930s.

¹⁵² See chapter 7 for a more detailed discussion of these churches and residents' religious participation.

¹⁵³ Hall and FRIENDS of the Blue Ridge Parkway, Inc. 2007. *Images of America: Building the Blue Ridge Parkway*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, pp. 24-25 indicates that the camp was just being built in 1938. There couldn't have been a facility for viewing movies before then. Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ Howell, Ruby. Oral History Interview, Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Tech, Patrick County Project, 1980, p. 8.

bottom were picked up by a bus or truck at the foot of the Gorge and transported to a county school in Woolwine.¹⁵⁵ Further details concerning these structures and their history follow in chapter 7.

As in pre-Civil War life, communal activities revolved around co-participation in work tasks more than in sharing leisure time activities: men would work in outside activities or hunt in groups and women would cook, sew, or share food preservation activities together. Family gatherings for meals often led to after main meal conversations where family history and lore, personal insights, biographical information, and values were transmitted. No reports were made regarding reading for entertainment, although bible reading was certainly done. Weekend gatherings for dancing and music were looked forward to,¹⁵⁶ while gathering to listen to the radio as a Saturday night activity once Cal Magnum acquired one in the early 1930s.¹⁵⁷

Weddings and funerals were often performed at the homes; some funerals were performed at local cemeteries. Rarely, funerals were performed in churches.¹⁵⁸

With the increase in population also came more intense naming of nearly every physical feature in the Gorge and the infusion of historical accounts into them. While a complete inventory of geographical names is no longer possible, following is a description of the major natural landmarks and any outstanding features or attributes associated with them.

C. Natural Landmarks

Gorge residents differentiated local geographical features primarily by some distinctive feature or shape. Again, naming of them using terms other than family surnames helped to create a common sense of community rather than a patchwork of kin-oriented enclaves.

1. *Bare Rocks*

Bare rocks, sometimes spelled “bear rocks,”¹⁵⁹ is a geological feature created by the faulting and subsequent fast erosion of Gorge walls.¹⁶⁰ Some residents indicated that, when bears lived in the area, they used the caves for their dens, hence the spelling of the name as “Bear Rocks.” Their black shape, large size, and general “stacked up” configuration created pockets that residents called “caves.” An old legend is that these caves contain Native American petroglyphs,¹⁶¹ and

¹⁵⁵ Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 5.

¹⁵⁶ Ellis Conner, Oral History Interview. Jim Gale, interviewer. Asheville, NC: BLPLIB Code G, 1975, p. G10. See chapter 8 for a fuller discussion of the distinct music and dance styles that emerged in the Gorge.

¹⁵⁷ Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 10.

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B22.

¹⁵⁹ Because residents named most geographical or geological features after some physical quality rather than some event, such as a “bear” being seen on the rocks, I chose to spell the name “Bare Rocks.” Nevertheless, some interviewees reported their relatives or ancestors as having seen bears actually live there, hence, Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, spells it “Bear Rocks.”

¹⁶⁰ See chapter 2.

¹⁶¹ John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A11, noted that a Mr. Swanson in Woolwine knew where the petroglyphs were and could show them to others, but no report that he did so has been found. No other oral history or oral report substantiates finding petroglyphs in the caves. Leslie Shelor Allen, personal communication, December 24, 2015, noted that her grandmother saw Latin writing in the caves.

residents say that the caves that might contain them have had their walls collapse or debris fall over openings so even intense scrutiny of the formation has yielded nothing.¹⁶² One resident reported that she and her girl friends (all kin) saw initials and names using the Roman alphabet etched into the walls of a cave when they were children, but no petroglyphs,¹⁶³ indicating that the etchings were made by Europeans, probably young Gorge residents.



Photo 5.1 Bare Rocks. Photo by National Park Service, July 2011.

¹⁶² John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A11.

¹⁶³ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, followup conversation after the oral history interview, July 2, 2011.



Photo 5.2. Bare Rocks Caves. Photo by National Park Service, July 2011.

Bare Rocks was a social gathering place where residents could picnic, lounge on the rocks, explore the caves, and socialize. Easter celebrations, reunions, and other commemorative events were commonly held there;¹⁶⁴ young people could rendezvous there; and teen-age and slightly younger children would have trysts or climb around there.¹⁶⁵ Bare Rocks therefore functioned as a community “center” where family and kinship relations were subsumed under a sense of a common geographical place with shared meanings and interests that were expressed when community gatherings occurred.

2. *Tater Hill*

Tater Hill was a name assigned to a geographical feature that residents described as being shaped like a big potato hill, especially since it had an old and very tall Chestnut tree growing alone at its top, evocative of a potato stalk growing in a potato hill.¹⁶⁶ All residents grew at least one type

¹⁶⁴ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, pp. J18-J19. Austin noted that there were large numbers of people who gathered there. Thomas Belcher stated that as many as 50-70 people would assemble on Easter and that the cave was about 50 yards long. Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B17. See also Melly Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. K15.

¹⁶⁵ U. B. Handy, Oral History Interview, p. M10-M11. Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B17.

¹⁶⁶ John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A12; Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B17; Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J16. However, comments from descendants at a gathering to present

of potato in their gardens, and the shortened form, “tater” is and was in common usage as referring to potatoes,¹⁶⁷ so labeling this distinctive geographical feature by a garden vegetable was not only logical, but a way to create a sense of community by *not* using a kin term or other word that would assign privileged status to a person, his or her family, or a specific lineage. Tater Hill also had at least one cave.¹⁶⁸

3. *Baptismal Font*

This portion of Rock Castle Creek was set aside for baptizing Gorge residents. Deep and clear, it served the purpose well. Apparently, someone, name unknown, still maintains it.¹⁶⁹



Photo 5.3. Baptismal Pool. The dam creating a deeper pool is not visible, but is periodically rebuilt by unknown users. Photo by Leslie Shelor Allen, September 2013.

4. *Lethia Spring*

Lethia Spring (pronounced “lee’ thee” or “lay’ thee”; sometimes spelled “Lethey Spring”) is located at the headwaters of Rock Castle Creek at the edge of what used to be Lethia (“Lethey”

this project’s findings suggested that this may not be a baptismal pool, but a pool for gathering fish for easier catching. Floyd, VA: Floyd Public Library. Aug. 19, 2017. However, comments from interviewees in the 1970s cited here were firm in their assertion that it is a baptismal pool. It is quite possible that it served both functions, however.

¹⁶⁷ The word “tater” conforms fully with the phonology of Appalachian English. Words ending in an “ow” sound in an unstressed syllable in Standard American English become “er,” and words having three syllables when the first one is not stressed drop the first syllable. See Wolfram, Walt and Donna Christian. *Appalachian Speech*. Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics. 1976.

¹⁶⁸ Reg Hancock, Oral History Interview, p. L4; Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J17.

¹⁶⁹ Ralph Lutts, personal communication, August 2011.

Boyd's property.¹⁷⁰ It became a landmark because of its beauty and its location near the rim of the Gorge. Residents knew how close they were coming to the top.



Photo 5.4. Lethia Spring. Photo by Leslie Shelor, September 2011.

5. *High Bank*

High bank is a section of the Gorge where the road narrows, a feature that created a sense of apprehension or fear in night travelers. Allegedly, two or three intoxicated travelers fell off the

¹⁷⁰ Unstressed short “a” syllables at the end of a word become long “e” in Appalachian English. See Wolfram and Christian, *Appalachian Speech*. 1976.

road in this section and died. Because of the extreme slope of the banks, residents named this place “High Banks.”¹⁷¹

6. *Dry Holler*

Dry Holler was a narrow hollow through which Dry Creek, a small branch of Rock Castle Creek, ran (see Map 5.1). It rarely had water flowing through it except after a hard rain. It was a common landmark for delineating where fishing at the lower end of the Gorge would end when going up the Gorge.¹⁷²

D. Physical Structures

Physical structures in the Gorge were primarily associated with homesteads. While churches, stores, and schools were built near to or just outside the edge of the Gorge itself, within its borders were houses, barns, outbuildings, and cemeteries,¹⁷³ plus grist mills and saw mills, and dams to create ponds for the mills. Structures related to commercial industries are discussed in section E. of this chapter. In this section, private homesteads and their buildings are discussed.

Buildings associated with homesteads included:

- Houses
- Barns
- Apple boxes
- Chicken coops and hog pens
- Sheds and spring houses
- Other miscellaneous buildings and structures

1. *Houses*

In the post bellum period, many houses in Rock Castle Gorge were built as sturdy, permanent homes. Exceptions included the so-called “Shabby House” (see Map 5.1). Others were frame or weather boarded log houses of modest dimensions, but containing multiple rooms.

Room usage was different than expected currently. Former resident and daughter of Sam Underwood noted

¹⁷¹ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, pp. J41-J42.

¹⁷² Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J24. He stated that it was a local “landmark,” hence its inclusion here.

¹⁷³ Cemeteries are not discussed in this report in order to minimize identification of their location. Vandalism has already occurred and a report that discussed their location, size, and graves would encourage further damage. However, two significant cemeteries exist in the Gorge, one for the Belcher family and its descendants, and one for the Dillon family.

And in all the old farm homes that I remember, the parents slept in the kitchen which as I said was a large room, and was u-usually used as a everyday living room. All the activities went on in the large kitchen.¹⁷⁴

Of note is the quality of the chimneys of many of the houses, many of which are still extant.



Photo 5.5. Extant Chimney Showing Sturdy Building Style. National Park Service Photo, 2011.

Many are attributed to John McAlexander (1835-1909), who was a master stone mason.¹⁷⁵ Chimneys were of local metamorphic rock held together by a sand, lime, clay, and ashes mixture

¹⁷⁴ Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, p. 3. For confirmation of this multifunctional use of the living room as a common practice, see Shiffert, Paggy Ann. *The Living Room Bed: Birthing, Healing, and Dying in Traditional Appalachia*. Waynesboro, VA: McClung Publishers.

¹⁷⁵ Community meeting, Willis, VA: Burks Fork Church of the Brethren, August 6, 2011.

that hardened as solid as cement.¹⁷⁶ Chimneys of such study and well-built construction appeared in most Gorge homes, creating a distinctive folk architectural style.

Notable houses in terms of style, architecture, size, or because they are extant are

a) Whorley House. The Thomas (Tom) Whorley house (see Map 5.1) is located inside the Rocky Knob Cabin site off contemporary Rock Church Road accessible from the Parkway (Mile Posts 174). The previous owners, John and Susanna McAlexander, are reported to have built the house after they bought the land in 1881,¹⁷⁷ so a construction date in the early 1880s is both consistent in terms of the building style and with stone mason John McAlexander's tenure in the area. John lived in and may have built this house. He was a direct descendant of the first McAlexander settlers (see chapter 3).¹⁷⁸

In extreme disrepair but extant, it still captures one basic early house style of the area: modified saddlebag style cabin design of one story, three rooms, two doors, a chimney at each end of the house rather than in the middle. Shingles form the roof and windows contain glass. Both in size (16' x 32')¹⁷⁹ and in its durable and complex construction, the house indicates that its original builder was a person of higher economic status.



Photo 5.6 View of the Whorley (McAlexander) House 2012. Photo by Anita Puckett

¹⁷⁶ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J10.

¹⁷⁷ Leslie Shelor Allen, personal communication, August 2013.

¹⁷⁸ Debra McAlexander, John McAlexander descendent, personal communication, Blacksburg, VA, June 2011.

¹⁷⁹ See Table 5.1.



Photo 5.7. End View of the Whorley House Showing One of the Chimneys. Photo by Anita Puckett, August 2012

Of note is the construction of the two chimneys, which were most likely built by John Alexander. Finely honed local sandstone and slate were used to construct these extremely efficient, and functional chimneys.¹⁸⁰

The Thomas Whorley family, who acquired the house in 1907¹⁸¹ and were the last occupants of the house before Parkway acquisition, were reported to be “wild.” The hole over one of the doors was due to a son, John, shooting at his father with a shotgun.¹⁸²

b) The Sam Underwood House. One of the largest and most prosperous homes in the Gorge was that of Sam Underwood (see Map 5.1). The house had two chimneys and was built with eight rooms. It was a frame house that was 16’ x 50’ and had wooden floors with a tin roof on both sections. Given that a front porch was very common, the house probably also had a porch. It was 20 years old and in fair condition at the time of appraisal for Parkway acquisition.¹⁸³ Notable for this house was that Mr. Underwood had installed a Delco 32 volt generator that used water power via a small water wheel to recharge. Insulators that held the wire to the house were of zinc with a porcelain center. As a result, the house had electric lights in every room and an electric refrigerator by 1930.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Debra McAlexander, John McAlexander descendent, personal communication, Blacksburg, VA, June 2011.

¹⁸¹ Worley, Thams and J. R., Patrick County Deed Book 36, p. 46.

¹⁸² Reg Hancock, Oral History Interview, p. L15.

¹⁸³ See Table 5.1; Leslie Shelor Allen, email communication, December 25, 2015. Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J5.

¹⁸⁴ John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A2; Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B4; Phipps Bourne, Oral History Interview, Jim Gale, interviewer. Asheville, NC: BRPLIB Code C, p. C2.

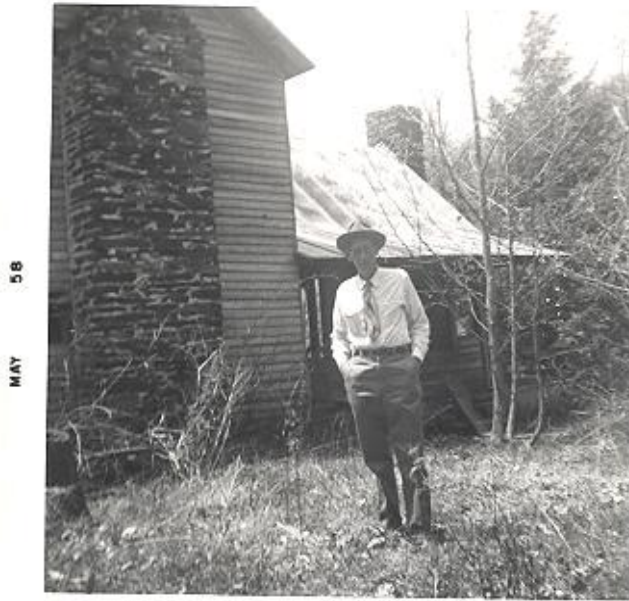


Photo 5.8 Photo of William Cruise Howell in Front of Sam Underwood's House. Date unknown. Photo courtesy of Leslie Shelor Allen.

c) The Austin/Conner House. Also known as the “Big White House” or just the “White House” or the “Conner House,” the Austin/Conner House (see Map 5.1) is the only house still standing in the actual Gorge (the Whorley House is at the upper edge). Built by landowner Mack Conner in 1916, it was at least the second house on this location. An earlier, smaller log-based house existed about 75’ down closer to the creek¹⁸⁵ at the current site of the barn.¹⁸⁶ This log structure was Benjamin Belcher’s house that was temporarily vacated after his death in 1884. Logs from this house were eventually used to build the barn, which is still standing. The “White House” was a two and a half story house with eight rooms, two front porches one over the other.¹⁸⁷ It was not wired for electricity.

¹⁸⁵ John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A26.

¹⁸⁶ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B12; Leslie Shelor Allen, personal communication, October 2013.

¹⁸⁷ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 21.



Photo 5.9. The “White” or “Mac” Conner House. Now Known as the Austin/Conner House. Photo provided by Leslie Shelor Allen, 2012.

George W. (Mac or Mack) Conner obtained the property through marriage to Anna. L. Belcher, Reed Belcher’s daughter. Reed, son of Benjamin Belcher, inherited the property in 1888¹⁸⁸ after the death of his father, Benjamin, in 1884. Co-heirs were his sisters, Martha Akers and Elizabeth Wood, who then sold her share to her brother. Martha sold her share to Mac Conner in 1896.¹⁸⁹ Reed Belcher lived on the rim of the Gorge, and Martha Akers lived elsewhere as well. The property was unoccupied for a few years, but George “Mac” Conner was living on it by 1910.¹⁹⁰ At some point, Reed Belcher moved from the rim to live with his daughter and Mac Conner until the big house was built in 1916. Then Reed Belcher moved in with another daughter, dying shortly thereafter. The deed of trust was conveyed to Conner in 1925 by Reed Belcher.¹⁹¹ John W. Austin, Jr. bought the property in 1954 from the Mac Conner heirs,¹⁹² hence the home’s renaming to “the Austin/Conner House” or just “the Austin House.”

It was built by Walter Green Weaver of Woolwine who was also the carpenter for the house.¹⁹³ Dover Dalton and Mack Conner’s brother, Dan Conner, are also mentioned as builders.¹⁹⁴ They probably assisted Weaver, however. It took about three months to build.¹⁹⁵ All of the timber for

¹⁸⁸ Benjamin Belcher Will. Patrick County Will Book 7,1878, p. 666.

¹⁸⁹ Conner, George W. Patrick County Deed Book 28, p. 377.

¹⁹⁰ U.S. Census has him living next to Reed Belcher in 1900, but in the Gorge by 1910.

¹⁹¹ Conner, George W. Patrick County Deed Book 58, p. 93.

¹⁹² Justin, John W. and Frances L. Austin, Patrick County Deed Book 105, p. 424.

¹⁹³ John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A26.

¹⁹⁴ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B12; Daniel Conner, personal note, March 8, 1998, provided by Beverly Woody, August 2011.

¹⁹⁵ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B12.

the house was rough cut on the property and then hauled to Woolwine where it was processed into the different types of finished wood needed for the house. It is frame and “storm sheeted” with oak. Weather boarding was of poplar allegedly all from one tree. The floors are of white ash, but the porches are of locust. The inside walls were paneled with wormy chestnut, wormy because the chestnut blight had taken most of the Gorge chestnut trees by 1916. The two chimneys were built by a relative of a Dillon family from Woolwine who received \$7.00 for constructing each chimney.¹⁹⁶

The house and surrounding property were not purchased by the Parkway during the land acquisition phase and still resides in private hands. Owners, their families, and guests occasionally host gatherings there. This house was arguably the “finest,” meaning largest and most opulent, of the houses in the Gorge at the time of Parkway acquisition.

The house and its immediate surrounds were part of Benjamin Belcher’s original land purchases recorded in 1839 (see chapter 3) and was the actual location or near the location of Belcher’s original house at or close to the extant barn. The privately-owned acreage surrounding the house is 57.36 acres.¹⁹⁷

d) Mrs. Nancy E. Lee House. The Nancy (Liney) Lee house (see Map 5.1) was a large two-story house of six rooms, four downstairs and two upstairs.¹⁹⁸ Well built with a tin roof and gutters, glass windows, and horizontal clapboarding with white paint, it stood out as a house for people of means, as was the case for Mr. and Mrs. Lee (see chapter 6). Some felt it was the nicest house in the Gorge.¹⁹⁹



Photo 5.10. Nancy (Liney) E. Lee House 1953. Photo courtesy of BRPLIB.

Mrs. Lee inherited the house from her father-in-law, William Dillon, after her first husband, Abraham Green Dillon died in 1890. William Dillon was one of the three original settlers in the Gorge and owned over 400 acres, so this house occupies the same location or nearly the same

¹⁹⁶ John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A27.

¹⁹⁷ Land Status Map 23, National Park Service, Division of Land Acquisition, 1975 (Mapped by Denver Service Center); Reg Hancock, Oral History Interview, p. L3; John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A27 both report various acreages of 32 acres, 55 acres, or 72 acres.

¹⁹⁸ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B12.

¹⁹⁹ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B12.

location as his first house. Originally the house was one large room and a loft. The large room was later sealed off to make a kitchen, probably about the same time they added four more rooms to construct the two story house seen in Photo 5.10. This expansion occurred about 1910.²⁰⁰

e) Shabby House. The Shabby House (see Map 5.1) was noteworthy for its poor condition, its name, and its frequent reference to it in memoirs and oral histories.²⁰¹ A log cabin of three rooms (two downstairs and one upstairs) with a small porch,²⁰² the Shabby House was a rental or temporary home to non-land owners.²⁰³ It was located on William (Willie) Dillon's original plot (acquired in 1847) that eventually became Nancy (Liney) E. Lee's property.²⁰⁴



Photo 5.11. Shabby House 1953. Photo courtesy of the BRPLIB.

f) Joshua Nester House. The Joshua Nester house (see Map 5.1) was noteworthy for its architectural style (see Photo 5.12). With two stories and a double front porch with one over the other, it stood out as a house of distinction in the Gorge.

²⁰⁰ Wood, Danny. Email communication to Leslie Shelor Allen, August 9, 2011.

²⁰¹ E.g., Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue* and Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview. See also Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J34.

²⁰² Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 4.

²⁰³ Melly Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. K9. No information on it ever being a permanent home was found.

²⁰⁴ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 9.

Joshua Nester was born in Laurel Fork, Carroll County, Virginia in 1867 and lived in various places outside the Gorge until his marriage to Martha L. Brammer in 1913. She was his second wife, her natal family lived nearby just outside the Gorge on the rim, and Nancy (Liney) E. Lee was her cousin.²⁰⁵ Nester bought the property in 1922 from A.N. and S.L. Hylton, who obtained it in foreclosure from John W. Boyd in 1898. The Hiltons never lived on the property nor was there a conveyance recorded documenting their foreclosure purchase.²⁰⁶ A construction date for this house is unknown, but the style is similar to the Nancy E. Lee house (see Photo 5.10), so it is possible that Nester built a new house for his new bride, hence the year's difference between purchase date and marriage date. Given Nancy E. Lee's kin relationship to Martha, the proximity of her house to Nester's, and her financial stability, she may have influenced their settlement in the Gorge and the actual construction of the house. Nester and his wife occupied the house until Parkway acquisition in 1935.²⁰⁷ They then moved just outside the Gorge close to Martha's natal relatives.

John Boyd is reported to have had a house above the Nester House on the mountainside.²⁰⁸

Photo 5.12. The Joshua Nester House 1953. Photo courtesy of the BLPLIB



g) Cal Mangrum House. The Mangrum House (see Map 5.1) was noteworthy for its gingerbread porch decoration, its location near the Civil Conservation Corps camp, and because Mangrum built a grist mill near the house. Mangrum purchased the land on which the house was built in 1928, which was quite late in European Gorge settlement. This meant that this house was new to the Gorge area.²⁰⁹ Its conformity to a 1920s house style in its porch and fencing reflects this later construction date. Two other smaller dwellings were located on the property, one of which was in "poor" condition at time of sale to the Parkway.²¹⁰

²⁰⁵ Place of residence, marriage, and kinship information derived from U.S. censuses 1880, 1890 and 1900.

²⁰⁶ Tract No. 12 RK Nester, Joshua Sec. 1-S.pdf. BRPLIB, pp. 3-5 and 10. Patrick County Deed Book 39, p. 304 (1922) records the conveyance from Hylton; the Boyd conveyance is recorded in Patrick County Deed Book 30, p. 45 (1883).

²⁰⁷ Tract No. 12 RK Nester, Joshua Sec. 1-S.pdf. Offer to Sell Lands to the United States, August 31, 1935. Asheville, NC: BRPLIB, pp. 29-30. The 1940 census has them living outside the Gorge.

²⁰⁸ Melly Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. K10.

²⁰⁹ D. C. Mangrum. Patrick County Deed Book 57, p. 60.

²¹⁰ Tract 11 Appraisal Report, Land Program Division, National Park Service., August 23, 1935. Tract No 11 RK Mangrum, D. C.Sec. 1-s.pdf, Asheville, NC: BRLDLIB, pp. 33-36; See Table 5.1 also.



Photo 5.13. Cal Mangrum House Front and Side Views, 1953. Front Façade had been added only four years before Parkway acquisition. Photos courtesy of the BRPLIB.

The frame house was one and one half stories and six rooms. with approximate dimensions of 26' x 28'. Two rooms were not “ceiled off.”²¹¹ It had a picket fence, a front porch that ran the length of the house, and a “composite” roof with gutters.

The owner, Dolphus Calvin (Cal) Mangrum, was a widowed farmer from Floyd County. Cal purchased the land from Georgie M. DeHart, who was the mother of his current wife (Pearl Mangrum) at the time. Nancy (Liney) E. Lee, their neighbor, was Pearl’s great aunt by marriage and sister-in-law to Georgie’s mother, Martha Dillon. The Mangrum property was part of the original William Dillon parcel then owned by Nancy E. Lee, and, by one report, was the same location as Abram Dillon’s house. The Mangrums were married in 1920 in Floyd County²¹² and probably lived in Floyd until the land was purchased and the new house built in the Gorge.²¹³



2) Barns, Apple Houses, Sheds, Fences, and Other Out Buildings

Outbuildings were built to be functional with no indication of any extra decoration or enhancement, as was to be expected, given the ecology, rugged geography, and subsistence economy of the residents.

a) Barns. Not all houses had barns; some had sheds for their cows or other animals or for storage. When barns existed, they were relatively small, containing areas for storing hay and other feed and stalls for the few animals each household had. These were, depending on the household, one or two milk cows, one to four horses, mules, or oxen. Oxen became rare in the 20th century. Reported barn sizes ranged from 12' x 24' to 30' x 30', but slightly larger ones

²¹¹Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B8, lists the dimensions as 14' x 28'.

²¹² Floyd County Marriage Register Book 4, 1920, page 86.

²¹³ Leslie Shelor Allen. Email communication September 9, 2013.

existed.²¹⁴ The Austin/Connor barn, for example, is 50' x 50'.²¹⁵ The existing barn at the Austin/Conner House (see Map 5.1) is a crib barn style,²¹⁶ which is widely found in the area, and is probably typical of other barns existing in the Gorge in the 1920s-30s. Given that lumber was usually obtained locally and sawed locally, most were probably built with the rough hewn planks available from timber growing in the Gorge. In the case of the Austin/Conner House barn, however, descendants report that logs from the original Benjamin Belcher cabin, located on this site, were used to build it, at least in part, thus recycling building materials from the first or one of the first architectural structures in the Gorge. The barn was built around 1931, when Reed Belcher, who lived in the cabin until his final years, died.²¹⁷



Photo 5.14. Barn at Austin/Conner House. Photo by Leslie Shelor Allen, September 2013.

²¹⁴ See Table 5.1. The largest barn known was the barn at the Austin/Conner House. It still stands.

²¹⁵ Measurements by Leslie Shelor Allen, September 10, 2013.

²¹⁶ Glassie, Henry. *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press. 1968, pp. 90-91.

²¹⁷ Leslie Shelor Allen, personal communication, September 2013.



Photo 5.15. Inside of Barn at Austin/Conner House Showing Old, Unhewn Logs Probably from the Belcher Cabin.
Photo by Leslie Shelor Allen, September 2013.

b) Apple Houses. A somewhat common Gorge structure, particularly for those homesteads containing apple orchards, were so-called “apple houses” used to store apples until they could be sold. For large orchards, such as was at the Austin/Conner property, these houses were quite

large.²¹⁸ Kilns to dry apples were also made from stone. See chapter 7 for a description of this process.

c) Chicken Coops and Hog Pens. Except possibly for very few renters, households raised chickens and hogs. Chickens were often kept in homemade coops, but some households let them range freely within a penned area. Hogs were branded and commonly roamed the mountains during warm months, rather than being penned. This use of the surrounding forest as an agricultural “commons” changed radically when the chestnut blight affected Gorge trees in the late 19 teens. Collected in the late fall, hogs were either butchered or kept in pens during winter.²¹⁹ After the chestnut blight, however, wild forage was much scarcer, so fewer were raised and they were kept primarily in pens where owners fed them.²²⁰

d) Granaries and Corn Cribs. Corn was a ubiquitous crop and was stored in cribs or barns if unground and whole, and, if ground into meal, in barns, sheds, or, if sold as a commodity, in larger structures that could be called granaries. Other stored grains were rye, oats, buckwheat, and wheat.²²¹

e) Fences. Except for chicken fencing, fences were erected to keep animals out of some designated space, such as a garden or front yard, not to keep them inside a corral or pen. This practice was in keeping with Virginia’s legal definition of “the commons” in which domestic and wild animals were free to range across property boundaries without penalty.²²² Fences were generally of split rail type, specifically of stake and rider construction (see the fence in the foreground of Photo 5.12), when they existed at all,²²³ although the exterior fence in Photo 5.13 is an exception since it is a vertical pole fence. The prevalence of wood in the Gorge provided a rich and abundant resource to build them. A favorite wood was locust because of its durability.²²⁴ Chicken fences were made out of vertically staked sticks lashed together to keep chickens

²¹⁸ Era Wade, Oral History Interview, p. N12 and John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A29. He noted that the apple house was about half the size of the barn. Thomas Belcher, however, noted that the Conners took their large supply of apples to Stuart, Virginia, for cold storage instead. Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B1. Leslie Shelor Allen, personal communication, December 24, 2015, noted that Parkway interpreter Michael Ryan identifies the rock foundation remains of an old building at the Austin/Conner homestead as the Conner apple house.

²¹⁹ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 11. Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, pp. J6-J7. See previous discussion, p. 32, as well.

²²⁰ Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 14.

²²¹ U. B. Handy, Oral History Interview, p. M7; Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 13. See Table 5.1 as well.

²²² Ralph Lutts, “Like Manna,” pp. 509-512. Virginia did not require landowners to fence their animals in until the late 20th century. Patrick County, in which the Gorge is located, did not pass an ordinance until 1977. Lutts, “Like Manna,” p. 516.

²²³ Given that hogs and cattle often roamed freely in the Gorge area, fencing of one’s entire property was not done. Fencing near one’s house, however, was common. Jim Dillon also reported that fences enclosed the cornfields. Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J 12. Several houses had fences closer to the house for various functional or aesthetic reasons (see photos in this chapter and Table 5.1 listings). Fences throughout the area existed to keep animals out of gardens and fields, and to protect chickens from predators, rather than to pen in domestic animals.

²²⁴ Ward Compton, Oral History Interview, p. F3. Photo of Gorge split rail fence. Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 3 of first photo insert.

from running loose. A limited amount of barbed wire fencing was also present.²²⁵ The front of the Nester house was enclosed in decorative picket fencing, however (see Photo 5.13).



Photo 5.16. Extant Fence Post in Gorge. Photo by Leslie Shelor Allen, September 2013.

f) Other Outbuildings. Wells were not dug in the Gorge. The metamorphic geology (see chapter 2) made the drilling of deep wells extremely difficult even after steam and gasoline powered tools were invented, and impossible early on. In addition, underground water reservoirs are thin and fractured. Meanwhile, fast running streams and springs were plentiful. Residents therefore used spring or creek water and most, but not all, built springhouses through which water ran.²²⁶ Others had smaller spring boxes.²²⁷ These were used to keep milk, butter, and other perishables cool. The springhouse at the Austin/Conner House contains a small tank that could have functioned as a cistern from which water could have been pumped to the house. The installation date of this tank is not known. The Sam Underwood house had running water into it. Other homes “piped” water from a spring or their springhouse to their dwelling using wood troughs or other materials.²²⁸ The Hancock home (see Map 5.1) used a hydraulic ram to pump water upstream to the log house’s springhouse. Water power ran a pump that continuously pushed water uphill.²²⁹

²²⁵ John Austin, Oral History Interview, pp. A9-A10.

²²⁶ Ward Compton, Oral History Interview, p. F17; Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, page preceding 1, contains a photo of the Austin/Conner house spring house.

²²⁷ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 15; See also Table 5.1.

²²⁸ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, pp. B3-4; Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, pp. J33-34.

²²⁹ Reg Hancock, Oral History Interview, pp. I9-I10.

Root or potato cellars or sheds, pack houses, and other specialty buildings or sheds were built according to need and economic resources. Some were of a wood/stone composition. The Nester, Underwood, and Austin/Conner Houses had separate root cellars,²³⁰ although other properties may have as well.



Photo 5.17. Remains of the Root Cellar at the Sam Underwood House (see Map 5.1). Photo by Leslie Shelor Allen, September 2013.²³¹

Outdoor privies of the usual wood type were used. No reports exist on whether they were constructed over a small water source or if a latrine was dug, but the shallowness of soil and the hardness of the underlying metamorphic rock suggests many households would have located them over branches or creeks so waste would have run off in the stream. The extant Austin/Conner house, however, has a latrine-type.

g) Missing Outbuildings. Notable was that only one smokehouse was documented for Gorge households on the Jack Dillon property, although one “meat house” existed at the Thomas Whorley house in which meat was stored in straw.²³² Pork was processed by butchering after the first heavy freeze, usually in early November. Some lard was left on much of the meat to absorb salt. Meat was then treated with salt for preservation purposes and then stored in various places

²³⁰ John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A28.

²³¹ For a photograph of a comparable root cellar that has been restored, see Hall and FRIENDS, *Images*, pp. 108-109.

²³² See Table 5.1. Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 15: It was small, about 8’ x 10’ or 10’ x 10’.

of convenience for each household. These included sheds, barns, spring houses, attics, or cellars. Shoats were sometimes killed during the winter if salted pork rotted or ran out. No hog butchering buildings were reported.²³³ Beef, for those who ate it,²³⁴ was usually provided by slaughtering a dairy cow that was no longer producing milk. Its meat would then be distributed among various households according to need.²³⁵ How the existing small game (rabbits, squirrel, raccoon, and opossum) was stored, once it was killed, is also absent, but cold winters would have permitted them to be frozen and kept in barns or spring houses during this season if immediate need were not great. Generally, however, small game was eaten immediately or within a day of slaughter in the warmer parts of the year.²³⁶ Large game was hunted out in the Gorge perhaps by as early as 1870,²³⁷ so information on the processing and storage of bear, deer, or elk is understandably absent.

E. Gorge Businesses and Industries

Several businesses and home industries arose in the Gorge, reflecting the development of commercial technologies in the country as a whole. Discussed here are the equipment and machinery supporting them. Their economic contributions are discussed in chapter 6. They were

- a. Grist mills
- b. Threshing machines
- c. Saw mills
- d. Blacksmith shop
- e. Mines
- f. Distilleries
- g. Electric generators and Telephones

1. Grist Mills

Grist mills to grind corn and other grain for baking, cooking, and feeding chickens or, occasionally, livestock, were critical to maintaining residents' livelihood in the Gorge. Late in Gorge community history, wheat flour, but not cornmeal, was purchased or exchanged at local general stores by residents.²³⁸ This, however, was probably after the DeHart Mill ceased

²³³ Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p.16. Leslie Shelor Allen personal communication, September 2014. See also Table 5.1.

²³⁴ Beef was often avoided in much of southern Appalachia, and the paucity of reports of cattle raising in the Gorge indicates that this custom was observed here as well.

²³⁵ Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 7. However, Austin noted that people raised beef cattle, which they let run wild in the woods. Whether these cattle were sold or eaten is unclear. John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A22.

²³⁶ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J6.

²³⁷ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, pp. J1-J2; Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B23; Wyatt Conner, Oral History Interview, p. H7.

²³⁸ Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 6.

operation since it was reported to have had a bolter,²³⁹ which was a sifting device that separated the coarser parts of the wheat from the bran to make fine grained flour.

Three commercial gristmills existed in the Gorge in the post Civil War period at different times: the DeHart Mill, the Hylton Mill, and the Mangrum Mill.²⁴⁰ Millstones for these three mills came from Brush Mountain in Montgomery County, Virginia, and, at least for DeHart mill, were hauled into the Gorge by oxen.²⁴¹

Early mills were tub mills, but all three mills in the Gorge at the time of Parkway acquisition were “overshot” or “turbine” mills (the two terms are used interchangeably by former residents), meaning a “race,” or extended trough, was constructed from a pond to the wheel to funnel water over it (see Photo 5.19 below). Mabry Mill on the Blue Ridge Parkway (mile post 176.1) exhibits a turbine-type system. No creek or branch in the Gorge provided a predictable water supply with a large enough flow rate to support a direct water supply to drive the mill wheel, so races from holding ponds were constructed to provide a reliable system. Therefore, no water wheels were placed directly in Rock Castle Creek or its tributaries.²⁴²

Given this basic structure, each of the wheels exhibited its own unique features and history.

a) DeHart Mill

Preceding the DeHart mill was the George Washington mill²⁴³, which was a “tub wheel” gristmill that used local sandstone for millstones.²⁴⁴ This earlier mill was built after 1822 when Washington acquired the land.²⁴⁵ He was not able to make a financial go of his venture, so the

²³⁹ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J14.

²⁴⁰ Thomas Belcher’s claim of a fourth is incorrect. The Nolin (pronounced “Nay-n”) mill he mentions in his oral history (Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B33) was located outside of Rock Castle Gorge. Wyatt Conner, Oral History Interview, pp. H4-H5; Leslie Shelor Allen, personal communication, July 2014.

²⁴¹ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J13. See also Hockensmith, Charles D., Fred E. Coy, Jr., and Jimmie L. Price. *Millstone Manufacture in Virginia: Interviews with the Last Two Brush Mountain Millstone Makers*. Newton, NC: Society for the Preservation of Old Mills, 1999.

²⁴² John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A3.

²⁴³ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, “Writings,” p. 1. James Henry Dillon mentions in this collection that a “George Washington” owned this mill. This person was not the famous George Washington, first US president.

²⁴⁴ Tub mills use horizontal wheels set in a tub, while the overshot mills that replaced them used vertical wheels with water flowing across the wheel above (overshot) the top of the wheel or below it (undershot). See Ball, Donald. “Notes on the Use of Tubmills in Southern Appalachia.” *Material Culture* (2008) 40(2), pp. 1-20 for a full discussion.

²⁴⁵ Patrick Deed Book 6, p. 179 noted that William and Lucy Brammer of Patrick County, Virginia, sold 125 acres to George Washington, also of Patrick County on October 20, 1822. The lands involved included the mill site. In 1823, Washington made out a deed of trust with John Tuggle as the trustee (who functioned as a loan co-signer) when he borrowed money from Catherine Hefflinger of Meadows of Dan, Patrick County, whose family owned and operated a gristmill between Meadows of Dan and Mayberry (Maybry). Then followed a series of complicated land deals because Washington apparently could not pay Hefflinger back the money, or all of the money, she had lent him. Hefflinger acquired the land from Tuggle as trustee for \$160.00, as recorded on March 26, 1836 (Patrick County Deed Book 9, p.221), but then Catherine sold it to John Brammer of Patrick County for \$150. The two transfers are recorded only

land on which the mill stood changed hands often from 1843 to 1856 when Gabriel DeHart finally obtained ownership.²⁴⁶ Whether the mill continued working during these 13 years is unknown, but, given the increasing value of the land transfers, it is likely that someone continued to oversee its operation since no other land improvements were present. That so many land transfers occurred in a relatively short period for the times, and since these transfers were, by and large, by non-kin, an assumption is that the mill was in operation and earning some form of capital through barter or cash.

When the sandstone grinding stones at this mill were replaced by Gabriel DeHart, one was used as a door step.²⁴⁷ Gabriel DeHart's mill was located "practically on the same site" as the Washington mill and was probably built around 1860, as reports of it being in existence during the Civil War exist.²⁴⁸ In addition, DeHart apparently had an English "miller" on site in 1860, suggesting he had brought in a professional mill operator to design and build his mill.²⁴⁹

three days apart, so this resale was quick and probably pre-arranged. Brammer, then entered into a contract with William Ayers and Thomas DeHart, (parties of the second part) who acquired the 125 acres from William Spencer (party of the third part) for \$178.23 payable in 12 months plus \$1.00 more paid by DeHart and Ayers along with three horses, five head of cattle, 20 hogs, 20 barrels of corn, seven oat stacks, one bureau, one cupboard, and two tables. Thomas DeHart then used his portion of the land, other holdings plus his slaves, to borrow money in 1843 and again in 1844, loans that he paid off. (Patrick County Deed Book 11, p. 28). He leased the land to William Ayers in 1845. Elijah DeHart, Thomas' father, died around 1846. Ayers obtained possession of the land in about 1850 according to the probate records of Elijah DeHart's estate, although no conveyance of the land is recorded. Ayers then sold 110 acres of the land to David Washington for \$109.66 and "other considerations" in 1848 (Patrick County Deed Book 13, p. 90). In 1856, David and Anna Washington conveyed three land tracts to Gabriel DeHart, one of which was the tract on which the mill was located (Patrick County Deed Book 15, p. 430).

²⁴⁶ Patrick County Deed Book 15, p. 430.

²⁴⁷ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 1.

²⁴⁸ Danny Wood, email communication, August 21, 2011. Mr. Woods cites an oral communication from Parkway ranger, Michael Ryan, with respect to Ryan having documentary support that the DeHart mill was in existence during the Civil War.

²⁴⁹ U.S. 1860 census lists Richard Faraday as a miller who was born in England. His listing is right next to that of Gabriel DeHart's, indicating they were living next to each other. Farraday is not listed in either the 1850 or 1870 census, however.

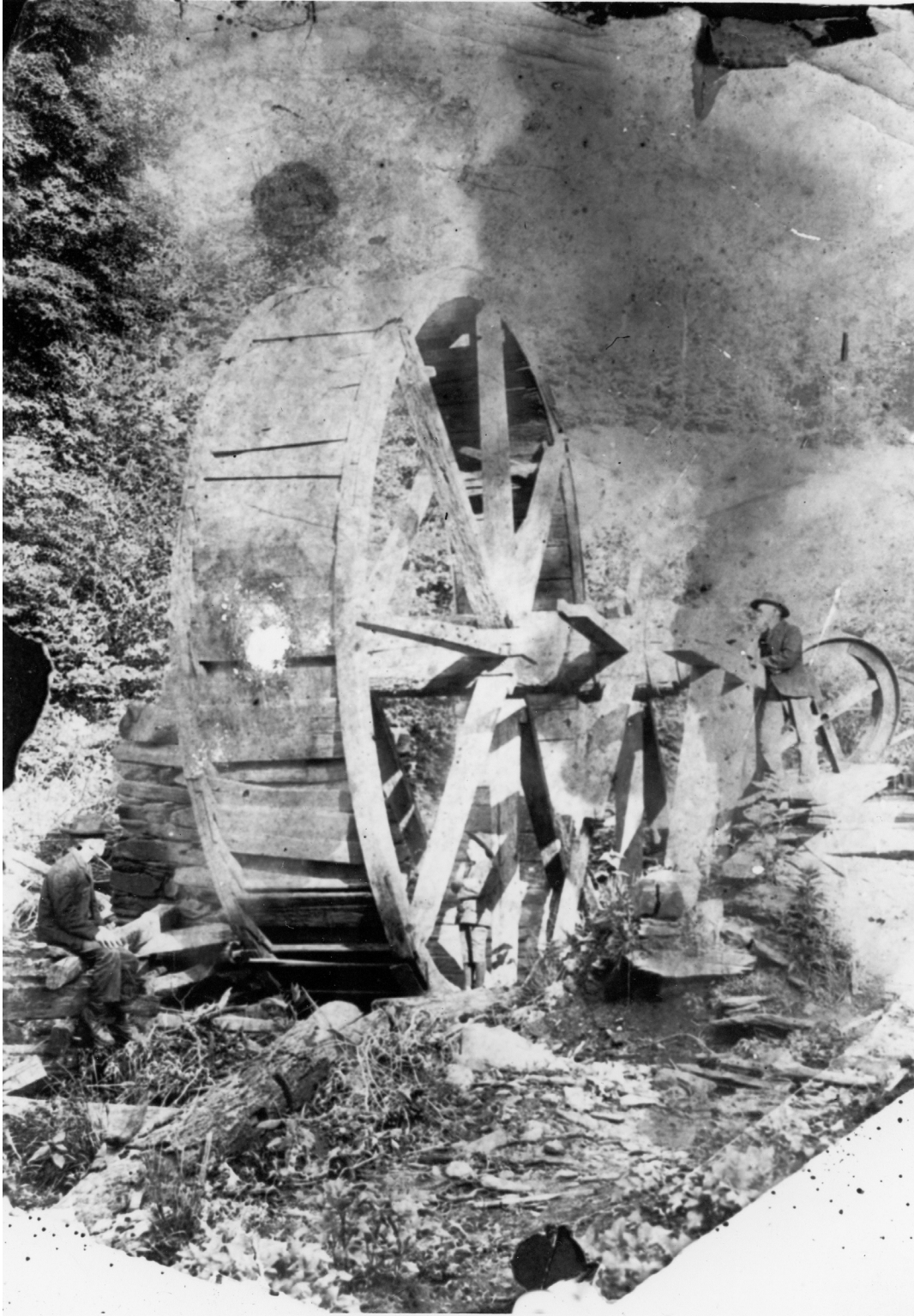


Photo 5.18. Photo of DeHart Mill Wheel Circa 1920. This photo may have been taken during construction of this later iteration of the mill (Danny Wood, email communication October 4, 2011) or, given its condition, just after the flood damaged it beyond repair. Photo courtesy of Danny Wood and Leslie Shelor Allen.

The stones for this newer mill were also of the limestone/chert conglomerate type produced at Brush Mountain, Montgomery County, Virginia. Stones were around 36” or larger in diameter. Wooden cogs affixed to the stones were factory made.²⁵⁰ and were the largest of the sets at the three commercial mills in the Gorge.²⁵¹ In a trip that took “some time,” Gabriel DeHart took three yoke of oxen to Brush Mountain to obtain the millstones and then return.²⁵² They may have been moved to the Mabry Mill site after Parkway acquisition.²⁵³ The structures at the mill consisted of a mill house, a race, a fish ladder,²⁵⁴ the wheel, and a penstock.²⁵⁵ Over time, a mill pond and thresher²⁵⁶ were added, as was a sawmill. The mill pond provided enough water power to power turbine-type wheel, replacing the earlier overshot wheel and bolting chest.²⁵⁷ It ground wheat, barley, rye, and corn.²⁵⁸

The mill wheel was about 20-25 feet high and held a lot of water. The penstock channeled water from the pond to the mill and generated a lot of power by restricting water flow. It was constructed out of 6” x 6” lumber.²⁵⁹

Material for building the mill house had to have been local since nearly all lumber was locally produced. Local timber was plentiful and the milling of it possible on site. Size of the mill house is unknown, but, as suggested by the size of the wheel in Photo 5.17, it was probably quite large.

²⁵⁰ John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A2. Wyatt Conner, Oral History Interview, p. H56, indicates 36,” but Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J14, noted four or five feet. Jim Price, local Montgomery County, Virginia, historian on the Brush Mountain millstones and their makers, reports that stones did not generally exceed 36” in diameter. The time involved in crafting a large millstone of over 42” would have been years (Price, Jim, personal communication, June 2013).

²⁵¹ Melly Dillon noted that the Mangrum mill was small. Melly Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. K18; as noted in Photo 5.19 below, the Hylton mill was also quite small.

²⁵² Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J13; Danny Wood, email communication, August 2011.

²⁵³ Melly Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. K4, indicates they thought they were moved by the Parkway, with one indicating they were moved to Mabry Mill. Two sets of stones lie outside this exhibition mill; the smaller set was from Rock Castle (Jim Price, personal communication); if the larger set was also from the Gorge, then they had to have been from the DeHart mill site. They are 42” in diameter. See also Ryan, Michael, *Ed and Lizzie: The Mabrys and Their Mill*. Castle on the Watch Publications. 2013, pp. 105-106.

²⁵⁴ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 97, for description of the fish trough.

²⁵⁵ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J44.

²⁵⁶ The thresher was reported to have been a “chaff-piler.” “The machine was propelled by four horses. It did not separate the chaff from the grain, so the grain was cleaned by a’ fanmill,’ which was operated by hand. Later, the horses were discarded and threshing grain was done by steam power, oxen being used to haul the equipment.” Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, “Writings,” p. 1.

²⁵⁷ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B16. Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, Floyd, “Writings,” p. 1. A bolting chest was a large sifting device designed to remove dampness in the meal from the grinding process so that it can be bagged dry and much finer than it would be otherwise.

²⁵⁸ Melly Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. K4. She stated that the ground corn was “hominy,” but it was ground corn rather than actual hominy that is a different corn product. “Hominy” may have been a local usage for ground corn, however.

²⁵⁹ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J44.

Payment was by a portion of the grain,²⁶⁰ as set by state law: 1/8 of the ground total or one gallon per bushel.²⁶¹

The Gabriel DeHart mill was dormant for a period after his death,²⁶² but his son Stephen, who owned the land, perhaps started it up again or ran it intermittently. Certainly his son Oscar Kirk DeHart did. By 1910, Kirk was overseeing the mill, while his father and two of his uncles were running a general store approximately .3 mile downstream. The mill, however, was washed out by a flood in the mid to late 1920s and was not rebuilt.²⁶³ Instead, Cal Mangrum, who had only recently bought land and built a house in the Gorge, built a smaller but more modern mill slightly upstream.

The mill was used as a voting precinct location and as a political gathering place from about 1880 to 1931. Approximately 290 residents voted in 1880, but the number decreased to about 160 by 1931.²⁶⁴

b) The Hylton/Hilton Mill

Located about 1.5 miles from Rock Castle Creek's source, the Jeremiah (Jerry)²⁶⁵ Henry Hylton mill (see Map 5.1) was built after the DeHart mill shut down after Gabriel DeHart died in 1870.²⁶⁶ It was built on or near the abandoned site of the much earlier Weddle Mill, which was the first mill erected on Rock Castle Creek. It was also a wood turbine-driven mill.²⁶⁷ The Hylton mill was a smaller mill than the DeHart Mill. It contained a small pond²⁶⁸, two mill races, a small mill house about 10' x 12' or 6' x 8' to 10',²⁶⁹ and an overshot wheel about 20' in diameter. Millstones also came from the Brush Mountain quarries in Montgomery County.²⁷⁰ The millstones were about 15" in diameter.²⁷¹ It milled only corn.²⁷² Therefore Hylton did not bolt.²⁷³ Two streams were used to construct his races, and he had to dam up one of them to

²⁶⁰ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B6.

²⁶¹ Michael Ryan, *Ed and Lizzie*, p. 50.

²⁶² Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J15.

²⁶³ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 13; Danny Wood, email communication, August 10 and 21, 2011. Community meeting, Willis, VA: Burks Fork Church of the Brethren, August 6, 2011.

²⁶⁴ *Stuart Enterprise*, November 11, 1892, p. 3 and November 5, 1931, p. 1.

²⁶⁵ Personal Communication, Leslie Shelor Allen. Referred to as the Hylton Mill, the owner's full name was Jeremiah Henry Hylton, referred to locally as "Jerry" Hylton.

²⁶⁶ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J15.

²⁶⁷ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 1.

²⁶⁸ Robert Blue, *Little Blue Boy*, p. 116. ; John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A8, on the other hand, stated that there was no pond. Austin, however, came to the Gorge much later, in the 1950s, when he obtained the Conner house (see Map 5.1). Therefore he observed the mill after it had been abandoned because of Parkway acquisition.

²⁶⁹ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B6; John Austin, Oral History Interview, p.A8; Ellis Conner, Oral History Interview, p. G8.

²⁷⁰ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J13.

²⁷¹ John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A8.

²⁷² Ellis Conner, Oral History Interview, G3.

²⁷³ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, J14.

obtain enough water power.²⁷⁴ Hylton ground the meal and then brought it to his house where he sifted it through a sifter to get the husk out.²⁷⁵

Hylton ran the mill until the 1930s when his mill broke down. He then moved to Stuart prior to sale to the National Park Service.²⁷⁶

Photo 5.19. Photo of What Is Believed to be the Hylton/Hilton Mill Circa 1936. The photo matches oral history descriptions of the Hylton Mill as does the background topography. Photo courtesy of BRPLIB.



Hylton installed a carriage and saw in the mill to saw small amounts of lumber. He made shingles for his house from this mill.²⁷⁷ A probable date for installation of this saw is early 1920s.

c) Mangrum Mill

The Calvin (“Cal”) Mangrum mill was built in the late 1920s to early 1930s after the DeHart mill was washed away by a flood.²⁷⁸ It replaced an earlier mill constructed by Abe Dillon near or on the same site.²⁷⁹ A more modern water-driven mill for the times, it had a crusher and was an overshot mill run by water. No mill house is reported, but Mangrum built a race, the remains of which are still extant. He ground buckwheat, oats, or corn, but not wheat.²⁸⁰ With the crusher, he could crush corn in its ears and make chop for cattle. The crusher was a metal hopper with bits set into it.²⁸¹ Corn was put in the hopper on top, the bits crushed the corn and corn cob, and the cob was ejected through a spout. The millstones, again from Brush Mountain quarries, were small, about 38”, and were removed by Thomas Belcher and others to Mabry Mill where they

²⁷⁴ Ellis Conner, Oral History Interview, p. G8; Robert Blue, *Little Blue Boy*, p. 116.

²⁷⁵ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B6.

²⁷⁶ Danny Wood, email communication, August 22, 2011. He obtained his information from a map of the Hylton property, location unknown. Supporting his claim is that the U.S. census for 1930 has Hylton and his family living on his Gorge land, while the land appraisal by the Parkway for acquisition in 1935 did not indicate that a mill or any of its equipment were on the premises.

²⁷⁷ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 116.

²⁷⁸ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 95.

²⁷⁹ Melly Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. K18.

²⁸⁰ Era Wade, Oral History Interview, p. N11.

²⁸¹ No information is available on the composition of these bits, but they had to have been made of very durable metal or stone.



currently lie outside the mill. Ira Wade worked at this mill briefly.²⁸² This mill ceased operation after Park Service acquisition in the late 1930s.

Photo 5.20. Mangrum Mill. Although not identified as such in the original photo caption, the photo matches oral history descriptions of the Mangrum Mill as does the background topography. Photo courtesy of BLPLIB.

2. *Threshing Machines*

One permanent, commercial, water-driven threshing machine is known to have existed in the Gorge. It was located at the DeHart mill and was probably built under Kirk DeHart's management in the early 1900s.

Earlier threshers were oxen, horse, or mule driven and were owned by men who would travel through the general area, leasing out their horses and equipment for some form of barter in return. These early threshing machines were "chaff piler," driven by four horses.²⁸³ Chaff was separated from grain by a fan mill operated by hand. A "separator" type machine replaced the "chaff pilers." It was propelled by eight horses and was capable of separating chaff from the grain.

For these types of mobile threshers, steam engines later replaced horses.²⁸⁴ Homer Harris and Georgie Boardman were reported to have brought steam-driven system to the Gorge for a few

²⁸² Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, pp. B 10 and B22. Era Wade, Oral History Interview, p. N11.

²⁸³ U. B. Handy, Oral History Interview, p. M5 discussed the actual process; Wyatt Conner, Oral History Interview, p. H9 discussed early mule-driven threshing operation.

²⁸⁴ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 4.

years just before Parkway acquisition.²⁸⁵ Boardman fueled his engine with local discarded fence rails.²⁸⁶

Little wheat was grown in the Gorge, but barley, rye, oats, and buckwheat were, and threshers were needed to separate the grain from the chaff for these crops.²⁸⁷

3. *Sawmills*

Sawmills came to the Gorge in the 1880s. Their arrival permitted the earlier log homes to be replaced by frame houses.²⁸⁸ Sawmills were prolific in the Gorge after the chestnut tree blight destroyed the major cash crop and animal feed source in the Gorge. Residents turned to commercial logging of their extensive forests in order to obtain necessary cash and get as much money out of their holdings as they could before they relinquished their land to the Parkway (see chapter 9 for a fuller discussion). Consequently the number and types of mills changed significantly. Sawmills must therefore be discussed in terms of their distribution and composition before and after the death of chestnuts (pre and post 1920).

a) Post 1880 and Pre 1920 sawmills

With one exception, early sawmills were water powered, requiring a pond to generate enough water to power them, and were up-and-down mills, meaning a saw blade moved vertically up and down to cut a log passing horizontally through the blade. The process was not unlike two men using a crosscut saw except that the saw was vertical instead of horizontal. This process was quite slow, so producing enough board feet to construct a structure of any size was either very time consuming or prohibitive.²⁸⁹ Therefore producing wood planks to build frame houses was slow and rather crude by this method.

Chief pre-1920, stationary producers were the DeHart Mill, which first used an up and down saw,²⁹⁰ a nearby Dillon sawmill, and the Underwood sawmill near the top of the Gorge. Smaller mills were reported for this period at least at the Abe Dillon house (the future Mangrum homestead).²⁹¹

²⁸⁵ U. B. Handy, Oral History Interview, M6.

²⁸⁶ U. B. Handy, Oral History Interview, M12.

²⁸⁷ U. B. Handy, Oral History Interview, M7 and M12.

²⁸⁸ Rock Castle Gorge/Squire Dillon Oral Report, p. P2.

²⁸⁹ Holcombe, Dick. "Re-creating Up-and-Down Sawmill History." Topeka, KS: Gas Engine Magazine, 2015. < <http://www.gasenginemagazine.com/equipment/up-and-down.aspx> > (Accessed December 24, 2015).

²⁹⁰ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B13; Melly Dillon, Oral History Interview. p. K1 also reported a sawmill at the DeHart Mill, but did not indicate what type. She also noted that Abe Dillon had a "little" sawmill as well, p. K18.

²⁹¹ Wyatt Conner, Oral History Interview, p. H6, describes an up-and-down sawmill that produced enough boards to construct one person's house. This was probably Abe Dillon's sawmill.

The Nancy/Claude Lee circular sawmill was installed in the 1920s, and was supervised by her son, Claude. The Lees used horses to haul logs from the surrounding woods to the mill.²⁹² During this period, the Abe Dillon up and down mill was removed and replaced by the Mangrum grist mill.²⁹³

A possible semi-mobile mill²⁹⁴ was the Compton sawmill, which was steam powered. Ward Compton's father leased it for three years from John Epperly who purchased the equipment, including the mill itself.²⁹⁵ It was built about 1903 and clear cut to the foot of Rocky Knob to the Wyatt Connor home (see Map 5.1). The types of wood milled were poplar (often called "cucumber"), oak, chestnut, and a bit of locust for fencing. Once cut, the timber was hauled to the mill by horses or oxen. Two Compton brothers and their father worked the mill, along with a partner, Levi Epperly, and, from time to time, temporary laborers. They continued to log chestnut after it died off. They used wood to produce the steam to run their engine that, in turn, powered a circular saw. It took about 30 seconds to cut one plank. They logged the timber, sawed it, kiln dried it, machine smoothed it, hauled to the purchaser, and then sold it for \$10,12, or 15 dollars per 1,000 board feet. By about 1925 the steam boiler was replaced by a gasoline engine. They first sold the lumber both in Patrick and Floyd Counties to those who wanted to build a house or some other structure, but they later hauled the lumber to Bassett in Henry County and sold it to the Bassett Furniture Company.²⁹⁶

Wood produced by these mills was rough hewn, requiring more milling to make the boards useful for refined or specialized uses, as described above for the building of the Austin/Conner House (see pp. 59-60).

b) Post 1920 Sawmills

Later sawmills were either stationary or mobile. Due to the vast timber reserves, extensive commercial logging using mobile and gasoline driven saws occurred. It was funded by non-local companies. These operations subcontracted with more local operators to produce up to 10,000 log feet per day at the Stickley sawmill operation, with most others producing 4,000 or 5,000 log feet. Up to eight or nine sawmills operated in the Gorge.²⁹⁷ The Stickley mill was located on the Austin/Conner property near the barn. It began with a new crick engine and it took four teams of horses to move it into the Gorge.²⁹⁸ The semi-stationary Frank Griffey (Griffith) mill had a

²⁹² Thomas Belcher Oral History Interview, p. B10.

²⁹³ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J40.

²⁹⁴ The source, Ward Compton, describes the mill as if it were stationary, but the use of steam to power it that was produced through the burning of wood suggests it could be moved, with effort, if necessary. It was leased from John Epperly. Ward Compton, Oral History Interview, p. F4-F6. On the other hand, the water-driven sawmills were dependent upon creek flow and could not be moved.

²⁹⁵ Ward Compton, Oral History Interview, p. F6.

²⁹⁶ Ward Compton Oral History Interview, p. F3-F5.

²⁹⁷ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B24; Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J30.

²⁹⁸ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J28. Among those working the rig for a short period were Larryman Sawyer, Fred Dillon, Jim Dillon, and Clyde Clark.

number of shanties to house the men operating it. Trucks were used to haul the hewn lumber from the Gorge.²⁹⁹

A good sawmill business was expected to mill approximately one million feet/year. A successful mill would be expected to have a crew of 14 to 16 men, and it ran eight to 10 hours day. Lumber had to be carried out; paved roads or railroads were not present. Boards were usually about eight feet long. They were air dried for about 60 to 90 days and then hauled out to surrounding communities such as Bassett, Martinsville, Stuart, or Pulaski. Supplies for sawmilling came from R. P. Johnsons store in Wytheville, Virginia.³⁰⁰

1) Mobile Sawmills

Among the operators of mobile sawmills were Tommy Moles, Raz Poff (Dry Holler), Boyd Brammer and Murton Dillon, Mr. Stickley,³⁰¹ and Frank Griffith³⁰² All produced rough hewn timber. Raz Poff used the fence rails on people's properties to fire his sawmill, but people replaced them quickly using chestnut.³⁰³

The Frank Griffith operation was a circular saw system that was the precursor to the current Griffith mill operations near Charity, Patrick County, Virginia.³⁰⁴ The Frank Stickley saw had a log turner that turned the logs automatically.³⁰⁵ This feature sped up the sawing process considerably, contributing significantly to the quantity of logs sawed during a given day.

2) Stationary Sawmills

Most of the pre-1920 mills continued past 1920. The stationery mill at the Conner (now Austin) house became a steam-powered mill.³⁰⁶

Dead chestnuts were systematically removed after Parkway acquisition in 1938, although an occasional decaying trunk can still be found. Citizens were allowed to cut them for timber and haul them out. However, actual sawmills were not established.³⁰⁷

4. *Blacksmith Shop*

Jeremiah Hylton constructed a small blacksmith shop approximately one half mile down stream from his mill on the other side of the creek from his mill.³⁰⁸ This shop would have been created post 1920.

²⁹⁹ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J42-J43.

³⁰⁰ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B25-B26. This source provides a detailed description of the sawmill process as well.

³⁰¹ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B24.

³⁰² Era Wade, Oral History Interview, p. N4.

³⁰³ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J22-J23.

³⁰⁴ Era Wade, Oral History Interview, p. N4.

³⁰⁵ Thomas Belcher 1975, B24.

³⁰⁶ John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A29.

³⁰⁷ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview , p. J8. Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 13.

Cal Mangrum also performed blacksmithy work at his mill.³⁰⁹ Otherwise, metal forging needs were met by blacksmiths outside the Gorge or by less skilled efforts at home that met basic needs.

5. Mining

A brief gold mine operated in the Gorge in the late 1800s. That gold actually existed in the Gorge was widely believed. Benjamin Belcher reported that two men found nuggets, one as large as a man's thumb, and then some small nuggets. For only a brief period, a Western mining company built a dam up one of the creeks, moved in motors and high-pressure pumps, and washed out the dirt on the large boulders at the head of the hollow. Finding very little ore, they left, citing that they could not mine enough gold to pay expenses.³¹⁰

A second mining operation occurred across from the Austin/Conner House towards the top of the mountain.³¹¹ No reason for the mining has been identified.

6. Distilleries

With the extensive fruit orchards in the Gorge, the cultural tradition of making one's own liquor, and the knowhow of how to do it was certainly present. Most male Gorge residents therefore made small amounts of apple or other fruit brandy until Prohibition prohibited production.³¹² Six small, legal distilleries once operated in the Gorge.³¹³ Ingredients, grown or produced locally, generally consisted of primarily corn, with some rye, hops, and yeast.³¹⁴ Materials for producing the liquor varied, but included copper tubing and iron or stainless steel vats.³¹⁵ Many added fruit for flavoring. This type of liquor was then called "[fruit name] brandy." Recipes and production styles varied according to distiller's preferences, but, in general, final proof was 90-100.³¹⁶

Residents, particularly the Mack Conner family (for a period), sold their subprime apples to the DeHart Distillery in Woolwine for brandy production.³¹⁷ The Conner family occupants of the Austin/Conner House made apple jack (fermented apple cider) from some of their apples.³¹⁸

³⁰⁸ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, B 39.

³⁰⁹ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J41.

³¹⁰ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 169.

³¹¹ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 170.

³¹² Reg Hancock, Oral History Interview, p.L11; U. B. Handy, Oral History Interview, p. M1.

³¹³ Rock Castle Gorge/Squire Dillon, Oral History Report, p. P3. Also, Danny Wood, email communication to Leslie Shelor Allen, August 2011. Mr. Wood reported that Clyde Lee, husband to Nancy Lee, stated this number to his daughter who told her nephew, Mr. Wood.

³¹⁴ U. B. Handy, Oral History Interview, p. M15-16. Handy also reports that one resident, Joe DeHart had a steam whistle he blew, but whether to announce a new batch or just for the sake of blowing off steam is unknown.

³¹⁵ U. B. Handy, Oral History Interview, p. M15.

³¹⁶ U. B. Handy, Oral History Interview, p. M1.

³¹⁷ Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 12.

³¹⁸ John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A29.

One local man was arrested and convicted for bootlegging in the 1920s, after Prohibition began. The folklore surrounding this event and the bootlegging events surrounding the abandoned, deteriorated automobile currently in the Gorge are covered in chapter 8.

7. Electric Generators, Batteries and Telephones

Electricity in homes was absent from the Gorge except for the Sam Underwood house (see Table 5.1 and description of the house, p. 57-58). He installed a 32 volt Delco battery-generated home electrical system in the early 1930s.³¹⁹ Electricity was generated from a water powered wheel similar to the overshot grist mills in the area, including the presence of a race and pond to funnel the water stream from a creek running from the top of the Gorge. Each of the eight rooms in the house had a light. He also had a refrigerator.³²⁰

At least Cal Mangrum owned a battery-powered radio (see pp. 49 and 100). The Austin/Conner house had a crank telephone by the 1930s. No other house in the Gorge had one.³²¹

³¹⁹ JohnAustin Oral History Interview, p. A2.

³²⁰ Thomas Belcher Oral History Interview, pp. B4-5 indicates only four rooms, but John Austin Oral History Interview, p. A2 indicates eight. Eight is also reported by Leslie Shelor Allen, a direct descendant of Sam Underwood's.

³²¹ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 83; Ellis Conner, Oral History Interview, p. G11.

6. Socioeconomic Life

The socioeconomic life of the Gorge after the Civil War assumed its own distinct configuration, albeit one derivative of the more general rural patterns established along the adjoining edges of and actually in the southwestern Virginia Blue Ridge. These included the Plateau to the north, northwest, and northeast of it in Patrick, Floyd, and Carroll Counties, and the Piedmont to the south and southeast in Patrick and Henry Counties.³²² The post Civil War economic stress and national pressure to industrialize resulted in greater entrepreneurship as those left with any economic resources looked for ways to increase their assets through acquisition of money, land, or other capital-producing resources, and as the regional and national economy demanded a substantial increase in wage-based labor necessary to support industrial capitalism. Emerging from these changes was socioeconomic stratification among Gorge residents based on the production of capital assets surpluses, but not necessarily in terms of how much money a family or person had. The necessary *monetary* wealth disparities necessary to construct such a hierarchy did not exist prior to Parkway acquisition and Gorge depopulation. Instead, collateral, such as timber, equipment, other store bought items, or access to human or animal labor to obtain what were now necessary material commodities did.

This distinction in terms is necessary because so much of the local external and internal Gorge economic activity was still based on cashless exchanges through barter or various forms of reciprocity. While some actual cash (rather than checks, bonds, bank drafts, or other non-cash forms of monetary exchange) was needed, in fact critical, to purchase necessary or desired items from time to time, many, if not most, exchanges remained as trades, barter, or in labor,³²³ regardless of the surplus assets residents had. This arrangement still held true at least until approximately 1920. Around this time, the chestnut blight destroyed the major natural asset, the chestnut nuts, that everyone had access to and could sell or use as cash credit at local stores.³²⁴ In addition, if homestead labor demand exceeded the resources of the family living on it, people simply swapped labor across the various parcels, creating labor pools that could be counted on for assistance. Residents also helped the ill, disabled, or orphaned by planting crops or by donating other labor.³²⁵ Such exchanges were based in the fact that most people were kin to each other as well, thus intensifying labor reciprocity through blood and marriage ties. Consequently, socioeconomic stratification was demonstrated by whether a landowner possessed so many surplus resources, whether they were in human, animal, monetary, land, or wage-labor sectors,

³²² See Ralph Lutts, "Like Manna from God"; Whisnant, Anne Mitchell, *Super-Scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006; and Patrick County Historical Society, *History of Patrick County*.

³²³ Ralph Lutts, "Like Manna from God," Note 22, p. 520, notes that a general store in Vesta, Patrick County, Virginia, which is about 14 miles from the Gorge, bartered eggs, live chickens, cows, hogs, rabbits, sheep, butter, corn, wheat, rye, oats, millet, beans, hams, bacon, beef, fresh apples, dried apples, chestnuts, chinquapins, yarn, hides, onions, potatoes, a hay stack, fodder, strawberries, honey, firewood, ginseng, lumber, sacks, boxes, a buggy, a watch, 5 days roofing, mowing, buggy repairs, and general "work" for other goods. References to bartering for necessary items at the two general stores most used by Gorge residents suggests that barter of similar items was also accepted at these establishments as well. Ward Compton, Oral History Interview, p. F12.

³²⁴ Wyatt Conner, Oral History Interview, p. H9, reported that the chestnuts began dying around 1916.

³²⁵ Ward Compton, Oral History Interview, p. F12; M. Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 8.

that they could be assured of socioeconomic stability or enhancement over time. A highly ranked person or family in socioeconomic terms, then, had both a good name for coming through on deals and obligations with others who were often kin. This stability was then displayed by such things as nice houses, clothes, and mechanical devices such as trucks or automobiles, as well as plenty of food and other indicators of plenty. In contrast, they did not acquire status by investing in stock, bonds, or other forms of financial investment.

Furthermore, race as an economic ranking determinant was not a local issue as no African Americans lived in the Gorge or worked in the orchards. If any worked as temporary laborers in the sawmills, it was not reported in the oral histories or indicated in census data.

In addition, social and socioeconomic sanctions were strong for those who deviated significantly from cultural norms in place. Anyone who exhibited values or behaviors outside of the range of the cultural norms held by Gorge residents was likely to be omitted from the reciprocity labor exchanges, or encouraged to move away. In addition, the strong kinship ties among most added an additional layer of sociocultural conformity through familial peer pressure and the need to have a good family “name.” As a result, displays of wealth were muted and channeled into acceptable areas of daily life such as building larger, but still modest houses, good barns rather than sheds, installing electric generators for home use, and increasing orchards or livestock resources. Therefore, usual definitions of “economic class” could not emerge.³²⁶

The following discussion, then, describes first the subsistence-based foundational socioeconomic system operative in the Gorge post Civil War to about 1920 when the chestnuts no longer contributed to the local economy, then the post 1920 economic collapse, and, finally, the cash-generating or trade producing activities that moved residents towards a less land-based economy and more towards a cash-dependent, class-based, wage labor socioeconomic stratification system in the Gorge.

A. Before the Chestnut Blight (about 1870-1920)

The population of Rock Castle Gorge circa 1870-1920 could be divided into those families that owned land and those families or individuals who did not. Several houses routinely housed laborers, temporary visitors such as teachers or ministers, or kin, such as newly weds, who were in need of temporary or semi-permanent housing.³²⁷ These residents may or may not have participated in the local subsistence economy by assisting land owners with their farming activities. Paying of cash for rent was extremely rare, so it could be expected that renters would contribute to landlord’s assets through reciprocity. This included donating labor, garden produce, or crop “shares.” Those who owned land invariably farmed for household subsistence, even if they owned one of the gristmills or sawmills.

³²⁶ Leslie Shelor Allen, personal communication; see also Charles E. Martin, “Appalachia’s Art,” for a related discussion.

³²⁷ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B.11, for example, noted that Nancy Lee regularly put up laborers working at her sawmill in the second floor of her house. See also Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue* for a discussion of how his natal family resided in the Gorge on a temporary basis. Also, see discussion of the Shabby House, p. 61.

The basic subsistence farming pattern, meaning farming that was primarily for household use only,³²⁸ was that of a highly diverse vegetable garden, chickens for eggs and meat, two or more dairy cows for milk and butter, hogs, hunting for small game, fishing for native trout, growing of small to medium amounts of corn and other grains, harvesting of forest produce and products (berries, greens, honey, maple sap for syrup, herbals, vines for line, timber for buildings and firewood, and bark for teas or furniture laths), and fruit trees (mostly apple varieties, but also black cherries, pear, and peach).³²⁹ Meat and produce were not sold, although they might be given away.³³⁰

Subsistence activities can be classified into:

- crops and bees
- gardens
- wild plants, nuts, and syrups
- domesticated animals
- hunting and fishing
- fruit trees and orchards
- meals and diet
- household activities

1. Crops and Bees

The major crop grown was corn, although it was used minimally for animal feed during this time period since hogs and cows were fed primarily by roaming the surrounding forest. Some corn was used for this purpose, however, because all the mills made chop, which is a type of animal feed.³³¹ Notable was that most, even the relatively well-off Conner family, planted some or all of their corn using hoes rather than plows. Much of the ground was too steep and rocky to plow, so residents used hoes to plant individual stalks one by one in soil surrounding trees or tree

³²⁸ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 13, for example, noted that they sold nothing they planted. It was all used for the family.

³²⁹ Madison Hubbard OH 2014:8. Danny Wood, through email communication to Leslie Shelor Allen, August 2011, reports that the 1870 census has Stephen DeHart owning 420 acres worth \$600 and \$100 in machinery. This machinery value must have included the gristmill. His livestock consisted of two horses, six milk cows, two oxen, six other cattle, eight sheep, and 30 swine. Produce consisted of 14 bushels of wheat, 28 bushels of rye, 200 bushels of corn, and 12 lbs. of wool. His orchard produce was valued at \$50. He had one ton of hay and one bushel of flax seed.

Likewise, in 1870 James Dillon owned 175 improved acres and 225 acres of woodland for a total of \$350 farm value. He had \$5 worth of tools. Other assets include one house, three milk cows, two oxen, five other cattle, 11 sheep, and 30 swine for a total livestock value of \$200. He also had 100 bushels of rye, 400 bushels of corn, 250 bushels of oats, two subshells of beans, 20 lbs. of wool, 35 bushels of Irish potatoes, 30 bushels of sweet potatoes, 100 lbs. of butter, and 25 gallons of molasses.

Melly Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. K10, noted the John Boyd property had pear trees. Melly Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. K3, and K10, noted that the Nancy Lee property near the Shabby House and the Austin/Conner property had cherry trees; see also John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A26. Ward Compton, Oral History Interview, p. F16, mentions preserving cherries.

³³⁰ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 15.

³³¹ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J13.

stumps.³³² This was a very time consuming and somewhat hazardous activity. A few plowable plots existed, especially towards the rim or bottom of the Gorge, but these were relatively small. Residents generally grew about four acres.³³³ Given the steep slopes, yields were therefore often low, causing the use of other wild crops for animal feed (see pp. 31 and 66) and restricting the use of corn, but not corn shucks and stalks, to primarily, but not entirely, human consumption. Some, such as the Lee homestead (formerly William Dillon's property), however, had enough pasture land to grow hay, which was stored in a barn for horses, cows, and cattle.³³⁴ The Mac Conner household had enough "flat" land to raise seven to 10 acres of corn,³³⁵ which provided enough surplus to feed stock and sell it.

Depending on what year the corn was grown and the condition of the Gorge mills, it was ground at either one of the Gorge³³⁶ gristmills, at one of the mills outside the Gorge at the top, such as the John (Pobb) Boyd Mill,³³⁷ or the Nolan Mill.³³⁸ No evidence exists that seed corn was purchased, so, in keeping with other crops and produce, some was probably kept back from one harvest to another for planting.

Other crops grown in small to modest quantities were buckwheat, barley, rye, wheat,³³⁹ oats, and flax.³⁴⁰ Similar amounts were paid for milling as were for corn. Rye bread was a desired luxury.³⁴¹ Mack Conner kept beehives so the bees would pollinate his apple trees.³⁴² Others may have as well, but most gathered wild honey.³⁴³ Sorghum was raised early on to produce molasses, but it was purchased at local stores by the 1930s.³⁴⁴

³³² Wyatt Conner, Oral History Interview, p. H8; U. B. Handy, Oral History Interview, pp. M4-M5.

³³³ U. B. Handy, Oral History Interview, p. M7.

³³⁴ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, pp. J35-36.

³³⁵ Wyatt Conner, Oral History Interview, p. H8.

³³⁶ J. Dillon OH 1975,

³³⁷ Webb, Franklin F. and Ricky L. Cox. *The Water-Powered Mills of Floyd County, Virginia: Illustrated Histories, 1770-2010*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2012, pp. 279-280. Leslie Shelor Allen, personal communication, March 2014.

³³⁸ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B32.

³³⁹ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 13 says wheat was grown, but she may be referring to buckwheat. "Wheat" and "buckwheat" may have been used interchangeably to refer to the same grain.

³⁴⁰ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 3.

³⁴¹ Melly Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. K4.

³⁴² Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 16; Robert Blue, *Little Blue Boy*, p. 59.

³⁴³ Leslie Shelor Allen, email communication, 24 January 2013.

³⁴⁴ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 12 reports that no one grew sorghum, but U.B. Handy describes typical molasses making activities, including the production of candy, in her interview (U. B. Handy, Oral History Interview, p. M7), and James Dillon (footnote no. 314) was reported to have had 25 gallons of molasses in his inventory of goods. The difference in reports is likely due to the shift from a land-based subsistence economy to a more cash based one by the time Mrs. Moran was growing up in the Gorge. Mrs. Handy was in her 80s in 1975, while Mrs. Conner was in her late 40s at that same time.

Soil conservation was not practiced. When depleted, the plot was abandoned and a new one cleared.³⁴⁵

Mac Conner cultivated a ginseng patch next to his house, but also collected it wild in the woods (see below).

2. Gardens

Gardens were also relatively small (an acre or perhaps slightly larger) because of the lack of flat land and good soil in which to grow produce. Tilling was done by hand or by use of animal-driven plows, depending on size. All land owners and many temporary residents had gardens in which they grew cabbage, potatoes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, various varieties of beans, perhaps cantaloupe and watermelons, lettuce, and onions, cushaw squash, mustard greens, and occasionally turnips.³⁴⁶ Garden produce was canned to preserve it. Even chicken was canned.³⁴⁷ Gardens had to be fenced to keep animals out. Produce was also preserved by drying. Climbing beans were planted next to the corn so the bean stalks grew up the corn stalks.³⁴⁸ Earlier in this post bellum period, destructive blights, insects, and pests affecting garden crops were unknown or very rare.³⁴⁹

3. Wild Plants, Nuts, and Syrups

Wild plants gathered for subsistence included huckleberries, white and red strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, watercress, poke,³⁵⁰ dandelion, wild lettuce, bamboo briar sprouts, and dry land cress.³⁵¹ Wild plants, such as ginseng, galax, and cohosh, were also collected and used for medicinal purposes, or, in the case of ginseng, for sale.³⁵² Gathering was primarily women's and children's work, but ginseng harvesting of a small number of plants was a male-only task done in the fall.³⁵³

A "sugar-camp" existed on the southern slope near the bottom of the Gorge where a stand of sugar maples were tapped to make maple sugar.³⁵⁴

Chestnuts were a major staple for much of the year. Black walnuts and hickory nuts were also gathered.

³⁴⁵ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 3.

³⁴⁶ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, pp. 13 and 28.

³⁴⁷ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, 19; Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 8.

³⁴⁸ Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, p. 22; Era Wade, Oral History Interview, p. N5.

³⁴⁹ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 3.

³⁵⁰ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 28; Blue 1999, p. 68.

³⁵¹ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 68.

³⁵² Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, 17-18.

³⁵³ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 17.

³⁵⁴ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 12; M. Hubbard OH 2014:6.

4. Domesticated Animals

Domesticated animals were primarily chickens, hogs, and dairy cows. Chickens were kept for laying, setting, and eating. Razorback hogs dominated, but Pole and China breeds were introduced in the 20th century.³⁵⁵ Under the Virginia commons law, hogs could legally run wild in the woods where they fed on chestnuts, acorns, and other mast (see also pp. 31 and 66). Razorbacks survived well in this environment when more domesticated breeds would not.³⁵⁶ For those owners who let their hogs run wild, they collected them in the late fall (November or December near Thanksgiving) by driving them into pens where ownership could be sorted out and the hogs either returned to their rightful owners or butchered and then returned the meat to the owner. Some hogs went feral, and they and their unbranded offspring were hunted as if wild game. Penned hogs were also butchered at this time as well.³⁵⁷

Sheep may have been present in some households,³⁵⁸ although the eating of mutton was not documented. If they were present, they were kept for their wool. Every homestead had dairy cows for milk, usually two; the Conner household, and probably others who had the need and the resources to feed them, had several to accommodate periods when a single cow's milk production was low.³⁵⁹

Every home kept horses, mules, or oxen.³⁶⁰ Oxen were the dominant, if not the only, work animal in the Gorge during 19th century settlement, but the easier to manage and faster horse or mule gradually supplemented them by the turn of the 20th century when the unpaved roads were slightly better.³⁶¹ Eventually, by the mid 1920s, trucks and automobiles also were in use.

As in the ante bellum period, the raising of beef cattle was rare, in part because of the scarcity of grazing land, but also because of an aversion, common in southern Appalachia, to eating beef.³⁶² The Lee homestead (see Map 5.1), however, kept a few cattle for personal consumption and for sale.³⁶³

5. Hunting and Fishing

Hunting was necessary, especially in the winter, and wild game contributed significantly to residents' diet. Only small game remained in the post Civil War period, but it was plentiful.³⁶⁴

³⁵⁵ Ward Compton Oral History Interview, p. F10.

³⁵⁶ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 14.

³⁵⁷ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 11. Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, pp. J6-J7. Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 14. See previous discussion, pp. 31 and 66.

³⁵⁸ Note that oral histories covering the 20th century do not report the raising of sheep. This was probably a 19th century activity when women spun and wove more, making cloth at home rather than buying it at a store.

³⁵⁹ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 15; Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 8.

³⁶⁰ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J28.

³⁶¹ Ellis Conner, Oral History Interview, p. G13; Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J32.

³⁶² Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 15

³⁶³ Melly Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. K13.

³⁶⁴ James H. Dillon's report that bear were present (Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 4) was not substantiated by the later oral histories obtained from those growing up in the Gorge much later. His

Squirrel and turkey were the main animals hunted. Squirrels, turkey, grouse, and quail were shot, sometimes by Civil War era musketry,³⁶⁵ but rabbits were trapped. Rabbit trapping was very time consuming and labor intensive,³⁶⁶ so it was done less often. Opossum, for those who ate them, were most likely trapped as well, while groundhog would have been trapped or shot. Hunting was done alone in or in very small groups.³⁶⁷ Raccoon hunting was reported, but it is not known if they were eaten.³⁶⁸ Families owned only two or three dogs.³⁶⁹ As to be expected, hunting was a male activity.

Fishing of the plentiful brook trout in Rock Castle Creek, especially in the pools close to Bare Rocks, was a highly desired activity by local male residents and by men in the area who came in the spring for the pleasure of catching and eating them. Grasshoppers were one type of bait.³⁷⁰ The trout could get to about 12", but were usually smaller, and were a significant contribution to residents' diet in the spring and early summer when they were abundant and when the creek was higher.³⁷¹ At the same time, the influx of non-residents to fish provided residents with opportunities to socialize with men outside the immediate area and to engage in political and economic networking.³⁷²

6. Fruit Trees and Orchards

When properly managed so that light, soil, and water needs were addressed, the growing of fruit trees was especially suited to the Gorge ecology. All landowners grew fruit trees, even if only a few. Great care was required for successful production because of the Gorge micro-ecology that created unique sunlight, breeze, soil, and water patterns. Sunlight, even when the skies were clear, was often limited to a few hours a day. Most trees were planted on slopes, saving what flatter land there was for crops. Also, given the undulating nature of the slopes, planting so adequate sunlight was obtained was crucial, in addition to knowing how to accommodate winds and use existing pockets of soil or develop new ones on these slopes. While fruit tree blights or insects were rare in the early 20th century, they did exist, and proper pruning and spraying was extremely important.³⁷³ Soil was thin and erosion a very likely possibility if one did not know

comment was likely based on a story told to him about his great grandfather, who would have been in the Gorge in the early to mid 1800s, not in the post Civil War period of this chapter. Large game was present then. Bear was reintroduced, however, after Gorge acquisition by the Parkway through the escape of caged bears brought in by government to the CCC camp. Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 104; Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 20.

³⁶⁵ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 3. Jim Dillon describes loading of his grandfather's muzzle loader. One shot severed a wild turkey's beard that was then saved and passed down through the generations. Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J3).

³⁶⁶ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, pp. 11-12.

³⁶⁷ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J1-J3.

³⁶⁸ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J20.

³⁶⁹ U. B. Handy, Oral History Interview, p. M10.

³⁷⁰ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J18.

³⁷¹ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 44. Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J45.

³⁷² Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 28, noted that Ed and Ruby Bassett of Bassett Furniture brought in a trailer they parked at the Austin/Conner House. Ed and her father would then fish every day in Rock Castle Creek.

³⁷³ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 58.

how to manage or curtail it. Knowing where to plant and how to grow trees was therefore an art as well as a skill. Consequently, fruit orchard production in the Gorge required special agricultural knowledge that was unique to this specific environment.

The most common fruit grown was apple, but black cherry, peach, and pear were also present.³⁷⁴ Fresh and dried fruit was a staple of everyone's diet and central to the production of brandy. Fruit harvesting was also a major source of income for the Austin/Conner farm, while others also sold or traded small surpluses to outside commercial fruit dealers. Also important for home and commercial use was that different types of apples varied in their ripening times so that a supply of fresh apples was available for most of the year. Consequently, many residents were extremely skilled in their intricate knowledge of different apple varieties' growth qualities and harvesting requirements within the unique growing environment of the Gorge. The result of their application of this experiential skill and knowledge was that residents had or could have access to both fresh and dried apples year round, and producers had the potential or actual ability to sell apples or distill their own brandy for most of the year as well.

Table 6.1 details the varieties of apples grown, their properties and uses, ripening times, and other relevant comments about them. Stillhouse (whiskey) apples included, Leather Coats, Parmers, Rusty Coats, Guffeys Horse Apples, among others.³⁷⁵ These were preferred in distilling brandy. Noteworthy is the scope of the varieties (19) and the variation in their ripening periods, periods of storage, and uses.

³⁷⁴ See Table 5.1; Era Wade, Oral History Interview, p. N12.

³⁷⁵ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 3. Since Guffey's Horse did not produce an eatable fruit, it is unlikely the this reference is correct, at least as written in the article. Also, Dillon refers to a Brimstone Apple, but no variety named "brimstone" could be located. He might have been referring to a type of brandy named "brimstone."

Table 6.1
Varieties of Apples Grown in Rock Castle Gorge

Variety	Heirloom* (H) or Nursery (N)	Harvesting Time	Uses	Comments
Albemarle pippins (also referred to as Jerusalem pippins)	H	October	cider and cooking	Albemarle Pippin was discovered in New York in 1759. It may have come from England about 1666. It was grown by George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. It is difficult to grow. Its flavor improves with storage. ³⁷⁶
Arkansas Black	H	Late October to November	eating raw and cooking	A mid 19th century apple with a dark red skin. The skin gets darker in storage. Blooms mid-season. Originated from an Arkansas Winesap seedling in 1870 ³⁷⁷
Baldwin	H	October	eating and cooking	A firm, moderately coarse juicy apple, agreeably subacid, sweet. Very popular with growers because it shipped well and would last until March or April in common storage and until May in cold storage. Grown in Conner orchard. ³⁷⁸
Black Ben Davis/Striped Ben Davis	H	Summer; stayed on trees until November or	distillery	Two names are subvarieties. Called the best commercial apple in the Virginias and across

³⁷⁶ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J25; “Turkey Knob, Albemarle Pippin Apples—10lb Box.” 2014.

<<http://turkeyknobapples.com/index.php/products/albemarle-pippin-apples-10lb.html>> (Accessed January 2014).

³⁷⁷ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, pp. 163-166; “Orange Pippin.” 2015. <<http://www.orangepippin.com/apples/arkansas-black>> (Accessed December 29, 2015).

³⁷⁸ Reg Hancock, Oral History Interview, p. L11; Beach, Spencer Ambrose. *Apples of New York, Volume I*. Albany, NY: J. B. Lyon Company, Albany, 1905, p. 56-60. <<http://archive.org/details/applesofnewyork01beacrich>> (Accessed June 2014).

		December.		the middle of the country. It was considered a low quality apple as far as taste, apparently, but the trees grow fast and the fruit is thick skinned and travels well. Blossoms late in the spring, which is important in the Gorge where late spring frosts are common. Not very crisp. Called a process apple rather than a table apple. No longer a popular apple. A few grown in Conner orchard. ³⁷⁹
Black twigs	H	October	eating	A Tennessee variety developed around 1830. Ripens in October and has to be stored to reach the peak flavor. Disease and pest resistant. Considered a dessert apple. Also referred to as Winesap. Grown in Conner orchard. ³⁸⁰
Brimstone				No information; may be a mislabeling.
Champions	N	July-August	eating	A new variety originating in Texas in 1923, so a late-comer to the Gorge. Grown in Conner orchard. ³⁸¹
Commerce		October; good to eat the next May.		Reported in two sources as Conner orchard apple, but not listed as a variety in available print or electronic sources. ³⁸²

³⁷⁹ Reg Hancock, Oral History Interview, p. L11; Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, B1; Verona Conner Moran. Oral History Interview, p. 18; Spencer Ambrose Beach, *Apples*, vol. 1, p. 76-77. <<https://archive.org/details/applesofnewyork01beacrich>> (Accessed December 24, 2018); Big Horse Creek Farm. "Arkansas-Black. 2012. <http://bighorsecreekfarm.com/arkansas-black/> (Accessed December 29, 2015).

³⁸⁰ Reg Hancock, Oral History Interview, p. L11; Thomas. Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B1; Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, pp. 163-166; Albermarle CiderWorks, "Vintage Virginia Apples: Black Twig." N.d. <<https://www.albemarleciderworks.com/orchard/apple/black-twig>> (Accessed December 29, 2015).

³⁸¹ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B1; Big Horse Creek Farm. "Summer Champion." 2013. <<http://bighorsecreekfarm.com/summer-champion>> (Accessed December 29, 2015).

³⁸² Reg Hancock, Oral History Interview, p. L11; Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, pp. 163-164.

Golden Delicious	N	October-November	eating; applesauce and apple butter	Discovered in 1891 on a West Virginia farm; possibly a variant of a Grimes Golden. Blooms late. Grown in Conner orchard. ³⁸³
Grimes Golden	H	November	eating; cooking; cider	The Grimes Golden was popular apple in the wider Gorge area for a long time. Not a good keeper so would need to be used during harvest or shortly after. An old apple that originated in West Virginia. Grown in Conner orchard. ³⁸⁴
Guffeys Horse Apples	indigenous to Plains; introduced to American east		used for its wood for tool handles, fence posts, and other tough, durable wood uses	Local term for Osage Orange (Hedge Apple), a small tree that bears a knotted fruit. The wood was highly prized and people used it as part of hedges in some places. Used in Gorge area as a natural dye. It's not native to the area and is no longer common but some trees can still be seen occasionally in the greater area. ³⁸⁵
Limbertain	H	October	eating; cooking; cider	Limbertain is any one of a number of varieties that store well, ship well and keep a long time in storage. At least one variety was considered a good cider apple because of the robust flavor. Different varieties ripen at different times but mostly in October. Summer Limbertain originated in Greensboro, North Carolina, and became

³⁸³ Reg Hancock, Oral History Interview, p. L11.

³⁸⁴ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 18; Spencer Beach, *Apples*, vol. 1, p. 153-155.

<<https://archive.org/details/applesofnewyork01beacrich>> (Accessed December 29, 2015); Leslie Shelor Allen, email communication 20 January 2014;

³⁸⁵ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 3; Encyclopedia Britannica Online, "Osage Orange." 2015.

<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/433707/Osage-orange>> (Accessed December 29, 2015); Leslie Shelor Allen, email communication, 20 January 2014.

				known about 1855. Grown in Conner orchard. ³⁸⁶
Maiden Blush	H	September-November	cooking; commercial	This apple originated in Burlington, New Jersey in 1817 and first named by Samuel Allinson. It was a pretty apple used for cooking that was kept poorly and only lasted in storage until mid-December. If harvested properly, it sold at a good price. It had to be picked several times through the season to avoid loss from windfalls. It had nice white flesh and thin skin with a sharp, tangy flavor well suited for cooking. When the fruit is fully ripe, the sharp, tart flavor mellows a bit and makes a very tasty fresh eating apple. It also makes an excellent drying apple as the flesh remains very white when fully dried. Fruit medium to large with smooth, pale waxen yellow skin with a crimson blush. Grown in Handy's orchard. ³⁸⁷
Newtown Pippen	H	October-mid November	eating	Called "green Pippen" by Gorge residents, this apple is originated from a seedling, not a grafted tree. It is a hard green apple that comes off the tree very tart but mellows in storage and becomes sweet. This apple was very popular all along the east coast after it

³⁸⁶Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B1; Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, pp. 163-166. SFGATE. "Varieties of Limbertwig Apples." N.d. <<http://homeguides.sfgate.com/varieties-limbertwig-apples-24466.html>> (Accessed December 29, 2015); Century Farm Orchards. "Limbertwig." N.d. <<http://www.centuryfarmorchards.com/descripts/lt.html>> (Accessed December 29, 2015); Big Horse Creek Farm. "Summer Limbertwig" 2013. <<http://bighorsecreekfarm.com/summer-limbertwig/>> (Accessed December 29, 2015).

³⁸⁷ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 218; Spencer, Ambrose Beach, *Apples of New York, Volume 2*. Albany, NY: J. B. Lyon Company. 1905, pp. 139-141. <<https://archive.org/details/applesofnewyork02beacrich>> (Accessed December 29, 2015); Big Horse Creek Farm, "Maiden's Blush," 2013, <<http://bighorsecreekfarm.com/maidens-blush/>> (Accessed December 29, 2015).

				was discovered in the early 1800's in New York. Keeps well and was used from February into May. Harvests in early October to mid-November. The eastern slope of the Blue Ridge was known as "Pippinland" for the good flavor of the apples. Grown in Conner orchard. ³⁸⁸
Parmer	H	July-August	cooking, whiskey/brandy	Also known as Yellow Flat, Parmer apples were apple of Virginia origin arising sometime in the 18th century, but never very well known or widely distributed. It is quite an attractive yellow apple popular for making a thick, dark yellow applesauce. It was also very popular for making apple brandy. It was said that if a grower had several Parmer trees in his yard, the neighbors knew he was most certainly making illegal brandy. Fruit is small to medium, conical-shaped, with deep yellow skin and irregular patches of russet all over. The dark yellow flesh is fine-grained, crisp, and sub-acid in flavor. ³⁸⁹
Red Delicious	N	mid-August – late October	eating	Red delicious was a variety developed in 1880 in Iowa as a replacement for the Ben Davis. Apparently it has always gotten by on its looks and is a purely eating out of hand

³⁸⁸Reg Hancock, Oral History Interview, p. L11; Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 18; Era Wade, Oral History Interview, p. N13; Big Horse Creek Farm. "Newtown Pippin." 2013. <<http://bighorsecreekfarm.com/newtown-pippin/>> (Accessed December 29, 2015); David Karp. "It's Crunch Time for the Venerable Pippin." New York: New York Times. November 5, 2003. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/05/dining/it-s-crunch-time-for-the-venerable-pippin.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>> (Accessed December 29, 2015).

³⁸⁹Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 3; Big Horse Creek Farm. "Parmer." 2013. <<http://bighorsecreekfarm.com/parmer/>> (Accessed December 29, 2015).

				apple that was originally very sweet. Stores well because of its thick skin. Grown in Conner orchard. ³⁹⁰
Rusty Coats (Leathercoats)	H	September-early October	eating	An old, well-known variety popular in the South. The true origins are difficult to trace as any old Southern apple with heavy russet on the outer skin was typically called “Rusty Coat” (or rusticoat or leathercoat). This apple is probably identical to Keener Seedling. Small to medium in size with dark greenish-yellow skin and indistinct red striping overlaid with a heavy, coarse russet coat. Flesh is crisp, tender and somewhat dry with a pleasant, sweet nutty flavor. Grown in Conner orchard. ³⁹¹
Summer Sweetling/Sweeting (possibly also referred to as John David’s sweet)	H	June-July (September?)	eating and cooking	May be same as August Sweeting, which is another name for Sweet Bough, an early-season apple. May also refer to Virginia Sweet, an apple of unknown origin, which was a dessert apple. ³⁹²
Winesap	N	October	eating; commercial	Also known as: Holland’s Red Winter, Blacktwig, Winter Winesap, Royal Red, Texan Red, Old Fashion Winesap, Potpie, Refugee, Wine Sop, Banana, and Dukes. Probably the most popular apple in the South

³⁹⁰ Reg Hancock, Oral History Interview, p. L11; Higgins, Adrian. “Why the Red Delicious No longer Is.” 2005. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/08/04/AR2005080402194.html>> (Accessed December 29, 2015).

³⁹¹ Hancock OH, 1975, L11; Big Horse Creek Farm. “Rusty Coat.” 2013. <<http://bighorsecreekfarm.com/rusty-coat/>> (Accessed December 29, 2015). “Russet Apple,” 2015, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russet_apple (Accessed December 29, 2015).

³⁹² Mary Alice Atkins Osborne. “Writings,” p. 3 ; U. B. Handy, Oral History Interview, p. M8; Big Horse Creek Farm. “Sweet Bough.: 2013. <<http://bighorsecreekfarm.com/sweet-bough/>> (Accessed December 29, 2015); Big Horse Creek Farm, 2013, “Virginia Sweet.” <<http://bighorsecreekfarm.com/virginia-sweet/>> (Accessed December 29, 2015).

				but is of northern heritage. Originated in New Jersey around 1800 and has given rise to many other famous Southern apples including Kinnaird's Choice, Stayman, and Arkansas Black. Grows well in nearly all soil types and noted for its excellent storage qualities. Fruit is medium-sized with dark yellow skin mostly covered with stripes of dark red. Yellow flesh is crisp, firm and very juicy. Grown in Conner orchard. ³⁹³
York (York Pippin or York Imperial)	H	October-December	cooking	The York apple is still a favorite in the Gorge area. It is an odd looking, long-shaped apple that is a bit tart but sweetens in storage for up to six months. Ripens in October but can be harvested through December. A good baking apple that holds its shape. Its real name is York Imperial. Grown in Conner orchard. ³⁹⁴

*In this context, "Heirloom" means trees that were planted or passed on through families for multiple generations.

³⁹³Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 18. Big Horse Creek Farm, "Winesap." 2013, <<http://bighorsecreekfarm.com/winesap/>> (Accessed December 29, 2015).

³⁹⁴ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B1; Leslie Shelor Allen, email communication, 20 January 2014; Spencer Ambrose Beach, *Apples*. Vol. 1, p. 385-387. <<https://archive.org/details/applesofnewyork01beacrich>> (Accessed December 29, 2015).

7. Meals and Diet

Further supporting the local subsistence economy for this later period was that of meal preparation and consumption. Meals were always home cooked; the food and drink at church suppers and Easter gatherings at Bare Rocks, or other gatherings, was always home prepared. Nearly all food was produced on site at a homestead, except for coffee and sugar or other non-local items. Unlike the mid to late 1800s period, no molasses was made or it was made only in small quantities, but everyone bought or traded for it at local stores.³⁹⁵ Meals were therefore usually healthy and hearty, although perhaps heavy in lard or fatback at times.³⁹⁶ They consisted of items typical of the area: cornbread, beans, berries (when available), pork, chicken, or wild game that was available (turkey, squirrel, rabbit, quail, grouse, fish, and turtles³⁹⁷), gravy, wild greens, eggs, cooked garden produce, nuts, especially chestnuts when available, dried or fresh fruit, especially apples, and coffee, cider, milk, or water. Whiskey was not commonly drunk at meals, but a dram or two was often put in breakfast coffee.³⁹⁸ Opossum, groundhog, and raccoon were eaten by some, but shunned by others.³⁹⁹ No one ate snake, carnivores (bobcat, mountain lion, weasel, or lynx), or grubs. Frying of food was very common. Sweetener, usually sugar or honey, was also used in coffee and, if enough was available, in desserts. Molasses was used on biscuits, cornbread, corn “pancakes,” and bread, and in some desserts such as stack cakes.⁴⁰⁰ With the use of milk cows, butter, buttermilk, and cottage cheese would have also been served.

Sunday dinner was commonly a special meal with fried chicken and larger than usual or more numerous choices and quantities of dishes. Commonly families came together at a grandparents’ house for a Sunday meal and women would bring dishes or cook them at their mother’s, grandmother’s or mother-in-law’s home. The Austin/Conner House was one such place. Perhaps a special pie, such as a chocolate pie, would be baked.⁴⁰¹ In keeping with the serving patterns just outside the upper rim of the Gorge near Mabry Mill, the women of the house hosting the meal would serve others and they, the preparers of the meal, would eat last.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁵ Verona. Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 12.

³⁹⁶ Verona. Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, pp. 10-11.

³⁹⁷ Verona. Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, pp. 27-28.

³⁹⁸ Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 11.

³⁹⁹ Verona. Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 27.

⁴⁰⁰ Leslie Shelor Allen, email communication, January 25, 2014.

⁴⁰¹ Verona. Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 10-11.

⁴⁰² Michael Ryan, *Ed and Lizzie*, p. 37. Leslie Shelor Allen, personal communication, December 29, 2015.



Photo 6.1. Communal Meal probably at the William Tilden ("Til") Underwood House (See Map 5.1). Date unknown, but, based on clothing, probably in the 1920s or later. Photo courtesy of Beverly Belcher Woody.

Sunday afternoons would be spent in various extended family gatherings from the telling of stories, playing music or singing ballads or hymns, to gender-specific activities such as talking while cleaning up for women and outside activities (games, making non-essential items, or teaching young children different skills) for men and male children. Other more spontaneous activities, not unlike those described for the earlier period of Gorge life, also happened often:⁴⁰³

. . . [T]he men would sit on the porch and discuss, uh, planting the crops and politics and, who had the best hunting dog, and uh, the ladies would, uh, sit in the kitchen after they did the dinner dishes and, they'd talk about the children, who was courting in the neighborhood and (laughs softly) swap recipes and, dress patterns and the children played outside.⁴⁰⁴

Breakfast included bacon, ham, or sausage, eggs, and biscuits, frequently with gravy or molasses, but other meals usually had cornbread.⁴⁰⁵ If families grew wheat, and most

⁴⁰³ See also pp. 34-35 for a description of some of the fun and relaxation activities up to about 1870.

⁴⁰⁴ Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, p. 1.

⁴⁰⁵ Verona Conner Moran. Oral History Interview, p. 12.

grew at least some, or if they could barter (“swap”) for wheat flour, then they used flour for pies and other desserts. Specialty items could be served at any meal from time to time depending on the cook.

At the Austin/Conner House, meals were taken in the dining room at a large table. There were no chairs, however, but stools that were about two feet in diameter and three inches thick on top.⁴⁰⁶

Meals for men when they were working away from their home, which was very common for most, commonly consisted of only two meals, breakfast and supper (the evening meal). They found it impractical and unnecessary to pack a lunch.⁴⁰⁷

8. *Women's Activities*

Women's activities often involved highly creative and time intensive functional art endeavors. In addition to food preparation, cooking, and cleanup activities, women also made or purchased cloth and sewed clothes, although the buying of cloth was becoming more common by 1920.⁴⁰⁸ Flax was processed and spun into linen by women and sheep's wool was carded, spun, dyed, and woven into wool or linsey-woolsey garments.⁴⁰⁹ Women also took care of the gardens (planting, hoeing, and harvesting), rounded up the cows for milking and then milked them, often made their own soap, laundered clothes, kept house, and, of course, bore, nurtured, and reared young children with all the activities that included. All of the above tasks provided opportunities for creative expression within the framework of highly utilitarian tasks. In addition, however, many women knitted, embroidered, and crocheted, sometimes making intricate and creative doilies, lace items, and afghans.⁴¹⁰

Other jobs, commonly considered men's work, were also done by women as needed, such as taking grain to a mill.⁴¹¹

B. After the Chestnut Blight

Nearly all oral history sources note the impact of the chestnut blight from the fungus *Cryphenectria parasitica* on Gorge households. The loss of this critically valuable cash, trade, and subsistence resource to residents permanently transformed community life and forced radical restructuring of the local socioeconomy. The valued nuts that had

⁴⁰⁶ Verona Conner Moran. Oral History Interview, p. 11-12.

⁴⁰⁷ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, pp. 47-48; Michael Ryan, 2013:37, noted that the Mabrys routinely ate only two meals as well.

⁴⁰⁸ Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, p. 20.

⁴⁰⁹ Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, p. 4. She noted that they had their wool carded in Floyd and then dyed it after a garment was made, in contrast to most others who dyed their yarn before knitting or weaving. See also Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, “Writings,” p. 2. Henry Dillon's report is more likely to apply to the early periods pre- and just after the Civil War up to about 1900.

⁴¹⁰ Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, pp. 4-6 and 19-22.

⁴¹¹ Melly Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. K4.

provided mast for hogs and other domestic animals was now gone, and residents had trouble growing enough feed to feed more than a few hogs or cows all year. The thousands of pounds of nuts that they sold or traded at local stores was also gone, so most households had no major, predictable source of income to buy or trade for necessary items, which ranged from shoes to property taxes. This loss was especially hard on those who had fewer surpluses of other items, such as fruit, that could be sold in local or regional markets or, in the case of apples, dried and used as a trade good. In addition, a significant subsistence resource for human meals and snacks was also lost.

With the closing of the DeHart Distillery in 1916⁴¹² and prohibition as well beginning in 1920, a major source of income through the selling of residents' stillhouse apples for those who had surpluses large enough to sell also had a significant impact on the Gorge economy. While apple production actually increased somewhat, the cash generated from the sale of these apples for the making of brandy had a significant impact on several homesteads (See table 6.2).

Adding to this disaster was also the infertility of arable land, as well as extensive soil erosion due to problems with crop management practices. Now, the surrounding forest was peppered with thousands of dead chestnut trees with their huge trunks as well. Where land had provided the foundational resources necessary to survive and even thrive, it now provided most with just basic survival needs, if that. But it did provide them with marketable timber that they exploited as much as they could (see section C. "The Cash Economy" below)

With this major loss, landowners and their adult children now needed to seek out wage labor employment to earn money so that they could to purchase goods and supplies that they formerly obtained almost entirely from their hard work, their animals, and the land itself.⁴¹³ This major socioeconomic shift also meant that residents became more aware of national commodity markets as they heard about and then desired the commodities they could buy, particularly those that facilitated their wage labor at non-local sites such as West Virginia coal mines, reduced social isolation at home, or provided both entertainment and some relief from everyday drudgeries. Yet, only a few Gorge residents had the monetary capital to acquire them. One, however, was Sam Underwood, who used a DELCO generator to produce electricity (see Table 5.1 and pp. 57 and 81).

In addition, Calvin Mangrum owned the first radio in the lower Gorge area, acquiring it in the mid 1920s. He powered it from a wet cell battery, similar to an automobile battery that he charged using water power. On weekdays, neighbors arrived to listen to Gabriel Heeder at 6:45 PM, then Amos and Andy at 7:00 PM, and then Lum and Abner at 7:30

⁴¹² Sullivan, Jack. *Those Pre-Pro Whiskey Men*. < <http://pre-prowhiskeymen.blogspot.com/2011/11/deharts-of-virginia-moonshine-in.html> > (Accessed December 26, 2018).

⁴¹³ Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, p. 12 discussed her family's transformation to a cash economy. She noted that, "We didn't, uh, raise as much, as many products on the farm. We depended more on the, salary he brought in, for our clothes and, things. We still had a garden. We still do."

PM. Saturday nights found his house full of Gorge residents who came to listen to the Grand Ole Opry and then Uncle Dave Macon's banjo picking at 10:00 PM. Listening time was limited, however, because the battery would go dead. Reception was good, allegedly because interference from other signals was minimal.⁴¹⁴

While a telephone co-op was created just outside the upper limits of the Gorge, telephone service was provided only to the Austin/Conner house.⁴¹⁵

Also central was the acquisition of automobiles by cash, trade, or gift, although many continued to use horses and mules for riding, buggy, or wagon transportation until Parkway acquisition. The first car to attempt to travel near the Gorge (along what is now Route 8) was tobacco tycoon R. J. Reynold's Studebaker in about 1915 or 16. It got stuck in Jackson Creek, located outside the Gorge, and had to be hauled out with a team of horses. Nevertheless, it was driven in the Gorge. Locally, Joe DeHart of Woolwine may have been the first to own one. It also was a Studebaker.⁴¹⁶ Trucks were useful and were present by the time of intense sawmilling in the early 1920s; whether they fared better on the roads than the cars is questionable.⁴¹⁷ (See chapter 8 for a legend about a car carrying bootlegged whiskey.) While horses were still used for farming, they were gradually replaced by Fordson tractors.⁴¹⁸

In addition, changes in work habits and employment for wages also required the purchase of work clothes and dress suits in greater quantity than earlier when Gorge communities relied almost entirely on land-based labor and resource harvesting. While women still made shirts and other smaller items, the need for cash to purchase work and other clothes at stores was now much greater and they began buying their cloth for these smaller items.⁴¹⁹ They also began buying more food at local stores.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁴ M. Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 10; see also pp. 49 and 81.

⁴¹⁵ The Ballard telephone co-op was created near Belcher Mountain in the 1930s. At first one could buy stock at \$50/share and receive a phone and service. Later, as membership increased, the shares were devalued to \$10/share (U. B. Handy, Oral History Interview, p. M15), but telephone service was run only to the Austin/Conner House, presumably because they could afford it (see also p. 82). Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, p. 13, noted that they had a phone as far back as she could remember, but no other report of a phone at the Sam Underwood house was mentioned.

⁴¹⁶ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J30. See Ward Compton, Oral History Interview, p. F5 for a description of the roads at this time.

⁴¹⁷ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 17 and 79; Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, p. 7 and 13. She noted that their truck would often get stuck going up the Gorge. Those children riding in the back would have to get out and help push it up the hill.

⁴¹⁸ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J32.

⁴¹⁹ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 23; Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 6; Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, p. 19.

⁴²⁰ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 12, noted that everyone bought their molasses at the store; Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 3, 25, and 96. He noted the purchase of White House vinegar and Vancamp pork and beans. He also noted his father bought him Coca-Cola and candy at the DeHart Store; Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, p. 11, however, cited

In terms of how they earned the now-vitally necessary cash, Gorge residents responded to this transformation in four ways:

1. Men sought permanent or seasonal employment elsewhere, particularly in the coal mines of West Virginia. Others sought employment in the textile mills in the Virginia and North Carolina Piedmont. Still others moved out of the Gorge, seeking various forms of independent employment as skilled craftsmen or day laborers while still maintaining a farming orientation, albeit not in the Gorge.⁴²¹
2. Many took advantage of their remaining major resource of timber and either expanded their own sawmills or worked for others who came to the Gorge to mill.⁴²²
3. The Conners, and a few others, including those living at the Nancy (Liney) E. Lee homestead, continued cultivating their apple orchards to increase yields as much as possible and make more of a profit, along with other activities such as sawmilling and harvesting of forest resources. The Austin property, for example, had between 500 and 600 apple trees by the time of Parkway acquisition, producing a sizable crop of various types of apples selling for different prices and at different times of the year (see Table 6.1 above).⁴²³
4. Residents became very resourceful in looking for additional ways to make or increase modest cash incomes by selling sassafras oil, rabbit pelts, ginseng and other herbals, maple syrup, and dried apples,⁴²⁴ among other items.

By the mid 1930s, however, when the Parkway began purchasing Gorge properties, the Gorge ecology had been significantly altered and was, for the most part, in decline. Photos 6.2 and 6.3 below capture both the extent of Gorge deforestation in the 1930s as contrasted with its current re-forested state.

the buying of canned goods at stores with stamps during World War II, but said it mattered little because of their farm produce.

⁴²¹ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 29, Moran noted that “all” the men went to work in the mines; Era Conner, Oral History Interview, p. G6; Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, however, contradicted this claim, at least for his father and himself, as does Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, p. 9. The Blues either found work in surrounding Piedmont cities or towns or in the textile mills, while Howell’s father eventually found wage-labor with the Parkway when it was actually being built.

⁴²² See pp. 77-79 above. Among others, Thomas Belcher (Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. 10-11) and Robert Blue (Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 68) worked at the sawmills.

⁴²³ Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 4.

⁴²⁴ Wyatt Conner, Oral History Interview, p. H2; Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J26; U. B. Handy, Oral History Interview, pp. M1-M2; John Austin, Oral History Interview, p. A21; Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 118; Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 17.

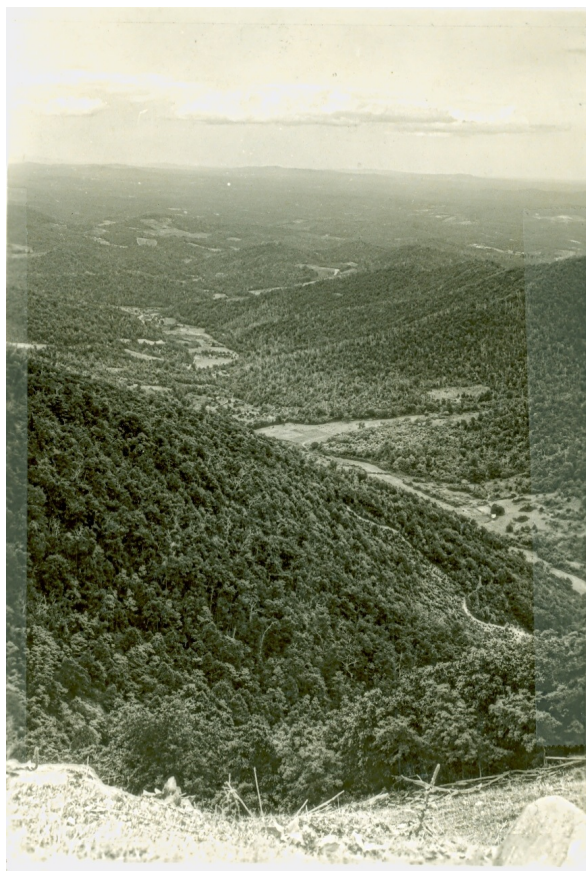


Photo 6.2. Photo of the Gorge from the Parkway Looking towards the CCC Camp Circa 1936. Photo courtesy of BLPLIB.



Photo 6.3. Contemporary Photo of the Gorge Using Google Earth. CCC Camp area would have been at the bottom of this photo. Photo produced by Philip Prince, 2012 (same as photo 1.1).

C. The Cash Economy

This section of chapter 6 focuses first on the cash or cash equivalent of commodities or goods prior to the chestnut blight (1880-1920) and then concludes with a description of the post blight cash income sources in the Gorge.

1. Pre-1920

The Table 6.2 below details cash values for labor or sale of products when chestnuts were available. It reveals that most cash income was derived from marketing of products that were also used for subsistence. Cash, while necessary, was, therefore, secondary to the basic farming economy that dominated the Gorge during this period. Items that were sold for small amounts and at random periods, such as, for example, excess production of rye or eggs, have not been included because no reliable information on their price was found. Most of these items, if they were traded at all, were most likely bartered rather than sold for cash at local stores. Items having cash value were most often traded for goods as well, but at a set price. For example, 500 pounds of chestnuts @ 5¢/lb. would be worth \$25. The seller would then “buy” commodities up to that value, but only very small amounts of cash or a type of scrip would change hands as the storeowner would keep an account for each seller.⁴²⁵ For large amounts of surplus, the shopkeeper would simply run a credit.

2. Post 1920

The chestnut blight invaded the trees in the Gorge circa 1916. One resident had 10 to 15 acres of chestnut trees where the blight first appeared and then spread until nearly all trees were dead by about 1920.⁴²⁶ As men left for the West Virginia coal mines or elsewhere for seasonal or permanent work, those land owners remaining in the Gorge sought to develop commercially viable resources in ways that required a certain amount of investment capital. Timber holdings were sold to lumbering operations, yielding some cash or capital for investment in a sawmill.⁴²⁷ To obtain it as cash or to purchase the necessary equipment to establish a profit-making business, most had to contract with non-Gorge businessmen or investors. Logging and lumber production was the most lucrative area for these investors and several relatively large sawmills emerged. At one point, circa 1930, about eight sawmills were in operation at the same time in the Gorge. The outside operators were discussed above (pp. 78-79).

The dead chestnut was harvested quickly before it became wormy, but operations then turned to logging black walnut, oak, maple, poplar (locally known as “cucumber”), ash, hickory, and locust.⁴²⁸ Many of these trees were six to eight feet in diameter; chestnuts

⁴²⁵ Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, p. 20; Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 9.

⁴²⁶ Wyatt Conner, Oral History Interview, p. H9.

⁴²⁷ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, pp. 137-138.

⁴²⁸ See Table 9.1 below for an inventory of what had been logged and what remained to be logged.

commonly were about 100' tall.⁴²⁹ The Strickley operation could produce up to 10,000 board feet/day, which meant it was earning a gross income of about \$100-\$150/day when the saw was operating. The other mills were making about one half that amount. A percentage would go to both the landowner and the mill owner, so income for labor was often low and hours long.

With a reduction in local adult men in the Gorge for labor, mill operators had to employ a few local workers, sometimes teenagers (which was common at the time), and then hire temporary help from outside the Gorge. They needed to be housed and fed, further changing the earlier subsistence-based system as rent or other forms of compensation had to be charged to provide room and board. At least one operator installed a few shanties to house his workers.⁴³⁰ Workers during this period worked 10-11 hrs./day, earning about \$1/day. Saturday labor for cleanup and other maintenance tasks was also expected. No work was done on Sunday. Income for a worker was therefore low and the work very hard.⁴³¹ Operator Compton made only \$200 profit in three years and his partner, Epperly, made only \$100.⁴³²

⁴²⁹ Ellis Conner, Oral History Interview, p. G12.

⁴³⁰ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J42-J43. See also pp. 77-79 above.

⁴³¹ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 68. He was about 15-16 years old at the time of his employment.

⁴³² Ward Compton, Oral History Interview, p. F10.

Table 6.2
Cash and Cash Equivalent Income by Product ~ 1900-1920⁴³³

Activity	Product	Quantity	Price	Comments
hog raising	hogs	hams and shoulders sold ⁴³⁴		Sam Underwood raised many hogs and then sold them to residents in the Gorge. Gorge residents then fattened them up and sold them on the market or kept them for personal use. In the early 1930s, he sold them for \$3/shoat. ⁴³⁵
chestnut gathering	chestnuts	approximately 10,000 lbs/yr	3-5 ¢/lb.; but 8-10 ¢/lb or even 25 ¢ at first of season	loaded into barrels, then taken to local store. Families purchased school books, shoes, school clothes from income. ⁴³⁶
apple harvesting	fresh apples			“culled,” or damaged apples were sold to DeHart distillery, which made apple brandy for the US govt.; ⁴³⁷ the brandy sold for about \$1/gal. ⁴³⁸ good apples were trucked out to boxcars to be shipped to North Carolina and other destinations. ⁴³⁹
apple drying	dried apples	800 lbs listed	3-5 ¢/lb	Dried by placing a sheet of iron over a rock flue or

⁴³³ Data are derived from oral histories of residents alive in 1975-1977 or 2011. Therefore these are based on the memories of residents who were old enough to remember cash values at the time they lived in the Gorge, which occurred around the turn of the 20th century (1910-1925). Some reported amounts told to them by their parents or grandparents. These are included when available.

⁴³⁴ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 11.

⁴³⁵ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, pp. J5-J6; Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 127.

⁴³⁶ Ellis Conner, Oral History Interview, p. G12; Ira Wade, Oral History Interview, p. N5; Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J8; Melly Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. K16; Wade Conner, Oral History Interview, p. H3.

⁴³⁷ Ellis Conner, Oral History Interview, p. G6.

⁴³⁸ Ellis Conner, Oral History Interview, p. G7.

⁴³⁹ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 18.

		by one resident	depending on quality; or 10-25 ¢/lb	built small stone “houses” with racks for trays to make a kiln. Atkinson’s store in Woolwine was one buyer. Apples were graded. Bleached and white apples fetched a higher price. Depending on variety, 8-12 lbs of dried apples in a bushel. One major source of money. ⁴⁴⁰
rabbit hunting	rabbit furs or rabbits with skins ⁴⁴¹	varied;	prices unavailable	
maple syrup making	maple syrup	low; a few quarts of syrup and a few pounds of sugar	25 ¢/ pint of syrup; 40 ¢/lb of sugar	Intensely hard work with a rather small stand of sugar maples in early spring. ⁴⁴²
sassafras oil production	sassafras oil			Residents took the roots to a mill they had made where they pressed the roots to obtain sap from which they made sassafras oil. ⁴⁴³
ginseng gathering	ginseng root	varied	\$16/lb. for ginseng in the 1930s, ⁴⁴⁴ but price would have been roughly equivalent earlier	diggers replanted berries to keep the crop going. ⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴⁰ U. B. Handy, Oral History Interview, pp. M1-M2; Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J26.

⁴⁴¹ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, pp. 49-50; Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, p. 21.

⁴⁴² Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, pp. 118-119.

⁴⁴³ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J43.

⁴⁴⁴ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, pp. 60 and 180.

⁴⁴⁵ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 17.

galax gathering/cohosh gathering	galax leaves; cohosh leaves ⁴⁴⁶			
lumber production	rough hewn boards from hardwoods	varied, depending on the operation	\$10-12-15/1000 board feet; paid workers about 50 ¢/day.	Conner mill hired men from time to time to help out. Laborers cut the timber from the woods, logged it, sawed it, kiln dried it, and finished it with a machine. Lumber was hauled out by oxen or horse to whomever would buy it. Later it was hauled out by truck. Much of their lumber was sold to Bassett Furniture company, but was also sold to individuals needing it for home or small business improvements. The Conner mill was sold to John Epperly who brought in a steam-powered engine. ⁴⁴⁷
grinding of corn/grain	mill-ground grains	varied from household to household	1 gallon out of a half bushel or 1 peck to a bushel of ground meal ⁴⁴⁸	
selling of eggs	eggs	by dozens	15 ¢/doz.	Sold or bartered at local stores. ⁴⁴⁹

Purchased at store by everyone were coffee, salt, sugar, soup beans, and, by the end of this period, cloth, coveralls/overalls, school supplies, and shoes.⁴⁵⁰ Other items were purchased by individuals as needed or as they had resources to do so.

⁴⁴⁶ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 17.

⁴⁴⁷ Ward Compton, Oral History Interview, pp. F6 and F10. See also pp. 80-81 above.

⁴⁴⁸ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J15.

⁴⁴⁹ Ira Wade, Oral History Interview, p. N8; R Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 106.

⁴⁵⁰ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 20

Similarly, apple production increased, particularly in the Conner orchards, and a few wage labor employees had to be found to spray, pick, grade, and truck the apples to box cars or the DeHart distillery for sale.⁴⁵¹ Nevertheless, profit margins were low. Weather was also a factor. High winds that blew trees over and late freezes nearly ruined or actually ruined most of the crops in 1932.⁴⁵²

Workers received 50 ¢/day for very intense labor, particularly in the spraying of Adominol spray, an oil base spray, in early spring used to keep bark smooth and trees healthy.⁴⁵³ Profits for landowners and income for workers was positive, but too low to produce livable income alone. Gorge landowners still living in the Gorge were still dependent upon subsistence farming and the products of the forest to augment wages or from the meager profits earned by lumbering or the selling of fruit crops.

3. Stores Pre- and Post- Chestnut Blight

Two stores were the major trading outlets for Gorge residents from about 1900 to Parkway Acquisition: the Edwards Store, located near Mile Post 174 on the Parkway (also called the Compton Store),⁴⁵⁴ and the Steve DeHart store (or Brammer store) located on what is now the CC Camp Rd. approximately .5 miles from the site of the DeHart Mill (see Map 5.1).⁴⁵⁵



Photo 6.4. Site of Edward's Store. It was at the corner of Current Willis Road (formerly Meadows of Dan Road) and Rock Church Road. Willis Road was moved from its earlier location at this site, so store location is presumed to have been in the middle of this new Willis Road roadbed.⁴⁵⁶ Photo by Anita Puckett, August 27, 2011.

Both stores were relatively small, engaged extensively in a type of cash equivalent barter with farm-raised goods or commodities, and sold/traded necessities (coffee, sugar,

⁴⁵¹ Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J25.

⁴⁵² Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, pp. 47-48.

⁴⁵³ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, pp. 58-59.

⁴⁵⁴ Era Wade, Oral History Interview, p. N3. Ryan, *Life in Rock Castle, Virginia*, p. 64, contains a picture of Edwards Store.

⁴⁵⁵ Ward Compton, Oral History Interview, p. F9, noted that the DeHart store was owned by various DeHart families and to one Brammer.

⁴⁵⁶ Leslie Shelor Allen, personal communication. August 27, 2011.

coveralls, cloth, eggs, molasses, etc.) rather than luxuries. Neither functioned as a post office. A third store, the Shelor Store, was outside the Gorge closer to the CCC Camp Rd. and Route 8 intersection. In the later period of Gorge occupation (post 1920), residents at the lower end would purchase more specialized items, such as overalls and suits, from this store.⁴⁵⁷ Post offices for the lower end of the Gorge were in Woolwine and Tuggle Gap.⁴⁵⁸ Actual mailboxes, however, as noted above (p. 50), were located at the lower end of the Gorge close to the junction with Rt. 8, and probably at the top of the Gorge in a similar easy-to-access location.

In the later years, residents frequented other general, grocery, and specialized stores in the region, particularly in Floyd, Woolwine, Stuart, Hillsville, or even further away in Roanoke or North Carolina to purchase specialty items, such as saw blades, fencing, dishware, automobile parts, and trucks. Residents became more engaged in buying and trading at county and regional markets as they became more and more integrated into a cash economy and acquired automobiles and trucks that facilitated travel to such destinations. As an example of how local wage-earners spent their cash, Madison Hubbard's great grandfather earned \$68/month working for the Commonwealth of Virginia to maintain local roads. He kept an account at a grocery store that he paid in full at the end of each month, leaving with a small amount of cash in his pockets for other needs. Those who lived by farming, however, did not engage in regularly paying off accounts from cash earnings, but by more by barter and trade.⁴⁵⁹

It was these local stores, however, that became the hub and center of both social and economic activity, then, functioning as far more than just as a point of economic exchange. As Howell noted, they were the social center of the area, bringing both men and women together to share information, bond socially, and just enjoy the company of others:

. . . [I]n the wintertime, the men would, uh, gather at the country store and spend a lot of time, when their wives would rather they'd had been at home (chuckles). And, uh, in the spring and summer and fall it was all just, uh, habit, well habit's not exactly the word I want, but they would, uh everybody in the neighborhood planned to go to the store on Saturday afternoon. It was, you know, really part of our social life to meet everybody at the country stores. . . . The kids, of course, liked to play together. And it was, you know, just, the things that women usually talk about when they get together.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁷ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 23. See also p. 48 above.

⁴⁵⁸ Letter to J.H. Dillon from J. H. DeHart, May 6, 1951 reports that the Ayer's store was located across the creek from the Thomas Hubbard's home in Rock Castle [Woolwine] and was the local post office. The term "Rock Castle" did not necessarily refer to Rock Castle Gorge but contemporary Woolwine. Rock Castle was Woolwine's name at the time. Ancestry.com reports that a Thomas Hubbard was living in the Woolwine area in the second half of the 19th century as well. Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 11.

⁴⁵⁹ Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, pp. 8-9.

⁴⁶⁰ Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, p. 5.

By the time of Parkway acquisition, most residents in the Gorge were well-incorporated into a monetary economic system, even if they still engaged in older land-based systems of subsistence. Actual poverty, however, was becoming an all-too likely possibility for many if they stayed, so many had left by 1935. That only 12 households were still occupied in 1935 when the Parkway began the process of acquiring the land is in itself a statement to the fact that living in the Gorge was not a choice or not a preferred choice for many.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁶¹Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 33; Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, p. 12; Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 118. Parkway land acquisition files documenting NPS efforts to obtain Gorge properties is full of communications discussing difficulties in reaching non-local property owners who were either heirs to a deceased resident, children of an existing one, or, in a very few cases, simply non-local owners. Most owners were simply not living on the Gorge land they owned. See Table 9.1 for further information.

7. Education, Religious Expression, and Religious Rituals

Because of Gorge topography, Gorge residents attended church services and schools either outside the Gorge itself at the upper end or at the foot of the Gorge where the land flattened somewhat. There simply wasn't enough suitable land that could be dedicated to a church or school house without sacrificing good planting acreage, and that was accessible enough that people could get to relatively easily.

The importance of educational credentialing, as opposed to self-taught mastery of basic skills, became more important as the need to obtain wage-labor or salaried employment in which mastery of standardized literacy and math skills were critical became greater for Gorge residents. This need, in turn, was related to the shift from an agrarian, subsistence farming-based economy to a monetary, industrialized one.

A. Education

Most children in the period before the Civil War in this area of Virginia were either home schooled or attended private schools taught in an abandoned home or a schoolhouse; for Gorge residents, the nearest schoolhouse was five miles from the top of the Gorge.⁴⁶² Occasionally, private schools occurred in an abandoned house prior to the establishment of public schools.⁴⁶³ Pre-Civil War teachers at one of these private schools included Professor Barnett Price, noted for his rigid discipline, Charles Jackson, who moved to Henry County after the Civil War, and Caleb Boyd, who also taught after public schools were established. Mr. Boyd was noteworthy for his relaxed teaching style that included giving the boys brandy and the girls candy when his school closed for the day. The school was co-educational.⁴⁶⁴ U.S. 1850-1870 Census data report that most Gorge residents had at least one family member who could read, but no information exists that books of any number were kept in the homes other than the family bible during this time period.⁴⁶⁵ Educational content was weak, as one memoir reports that Isaac Underwood

⁴⁶² Isaac Underwood, pp. 44 and 58-61. He noted that each freeholder paid for each child; those without land had their tuition paid by the state at 5 cents/day. Parents furnished books and supplies. Terms ran in the summer rather than the winter, mostly to accommodate weather conditions.

⁴⁶³ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 5. No indication as to where this school was located or what type of structure it was (house, school building, or church) was indicated. No other information on exactly where Gorge children attended school was identified for this period. However, Osborne cites Mr. Dillon as indicating it was a private endeavor.

⁴⁶⁴ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 5. Mr. Price appears on the U.S. 1850 census as living on the Floyd Turnpike area of the County, near what is now Rt. 8 and close to the lower end of the Gorge.

⁴⁶⁵ For example, see Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, p. 65.

had his Gorge education supplemented when he moved to Floyd County and learned arithmetic as an adult on his own when he started a business.⁴⁶⁶

Public schools were established in Virginia in the early 1870s.⁴⁶⁷ The first one in the Gorge was built in 1880. It was located at the lower end, just at the foot of the Gorge (see Map 5,1). It was built of hewn logs. Chinking consisted of wedged pieces of wood covered by red clay. There was a 6' fireplace at one end and a window, held in place boards that were, in turn, held in place by wooden pegs. Flooring was rough hewn timber, cut locally that shrank as it cured to create large cracks. Benches were also locally-produced rough hewn slabs with holes drilled at both ends for round legs. Twenty to 30 students attended. This schoolhouse burned on a snowy night, and was replaced by a frame building with four windows, but it never had a ceiling, and was reportedly more uncomfortable than the log house. It, too, burned through carelessness of the teacher, and was replaced by a two-room frame schoolhouse in the 1920s that was reportedly quite comfortable. This two room school had two teachers, one for each room, and accommodated approximately 50-60 students.⁴⁶⁸

By the 1930s, the two room school had been closed and children were bussed to a school in Woolwine [formerly Rock Castle]. They met the bus, which was just a pickup truck early on, at the junction of what is now Rt. 8 and what is now CCC Camp Rd.⁴⁶⁹

Education in the post 1880 public school was basic. In general, schools in the area went only to the eighth grade, and the terms were short. Students might walk as much as three miles to get to the schoolhouse or bus stop, regardless of weather, or, if available, ride a horse.⁴⁷⁰ Some of the teachers at the lower Gorge school rented housing in the Gorge itself. Teachers often taught for short periods at this school. One, J.C. Carpenter, of unknown origins, built a hut on the mountainside with no windows and then disappeared after two months. He was later reported to have engaged in some shady livestock deals in North Carolina and then Virginia.⁴⁷¹ Most often mentioned was Mr. J. H. (Henry) Dillon, who also often substituted as a doctor. "Squire" Dillon taught school for 28 sessions, was a county surveyor, and a constable in addition to providing medical services. He was held in very high esteem by Gorge residents.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁶ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, p. 39.

⁴⁶⁷ Patrick County Historical Society, *History*, p. 195.

⁴⁶⁸ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 3. Wyatt Conner, Oral History Interview, p. H10; Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B28; Ward Compton, Oral History Interview, p. F12.

⁴⁶⁹ Verona Conners Moran, Oral History Interview, pp. 2 and 18. She describes the school bus as actually being a truck. It had a closed, man-made bed in the back in which the children rode. See also Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 5.; Era Wade, Oral History Interview, p. N3.

⁴⁷⁰ Mary Alice Atkins, "Writings," p. 3; Era Wade, Oral History Interview, p. N3; Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, pp. 6 and 8.

⁴⁷¹ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 1. The author of this collection of newspaper articles compiled by Osborne, was James Henry Dillon, who was the teacher who actually lived in the Gorge for most of his life.

⁴⁷² Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 2.; Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, pp. J19-J20.

Children living near or at the top of the Gorge went to the Stamping Birches school located on Boyd land. Photo 7.1 is the likely site of this school, which fell or was torn down. “It was just a one-room school. One teacher taught all the, grades. We didn’t have desks. We just had benches. So we’d sit and hold our books in our lap.”⁴⁷³ One student, Ruby Underwood Howell, boarded at the Harris Chapel Mission School for two years, presumably to have better educational opportunities.⁴⁷⁴

This school was located in Floyd County, so Patrick County eventually forced Gorge children to walk to the bottom of the Gorge or to its top to be picked up school buses that took them to a Patrick County school in Woolwine.⁴⁷⁵



Photo 7.1 Likely Location of Stamping Birches School. Photo by Anita Puckett, August 2011.

B. Religious Expression

Religious expression in the Gorge in the ante bellum period primarily aligned with Primitive Baptist beliefs,⁴⁷⁶ and adult and older residents rarely made the trip out of the Gorge to attend one of the few churches in the region, the closest being eight miles from the top of the Gorge.⁴⁷⁷ Younger residents, however, would travel miles to services

⁴⁷³ Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, p. 8.

⁴⁷⁴ Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, p. 8.

⁴⁷⁵ Era Wade, Oral History Interview, p. N3.

⁴⁷⁶ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, p. 43-45; Patrick County Historical Society, *History*, pp. 228-275.

⁴⁷⁷ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, p. 44; see pp. 65-68 for a discussion of his conversion experience and the rest of this memoir for his subsequent beliefs.

wherever they may have been held,⁴⁷⁸ presumably to socialize and meet potential spouses as much as to worship. For Primitive Baptists, who affirmed the doctrine of Predestination, the geographical isolation of the Gorge and concomitant separation from formal services was less of a spiritual impediment than for those affirming more of a free will or sacramental stance. Home bible study and worship and personal prayer were considered adequate. Churches were made of logs.⁴⁷⁹

During the post bellum period, formal religious expression was entirely consistent with Protestant sects or denominations. Primitive Baptist beliefs now vied with other Baptist sects, Methodists, and, eventually, Presbyterians, and perhaps others. Churches of various Protestant denominations in Meadows of Dan, Vesta, Willis (Floyd County), Tuggle Gap area, and Woolwine provided opportunities for congregational worship.⁴⁸⁰ The schoolhouse at the bottom of the Gorge, in its various incarnations, was also used as a place of worship by itinerate preachers of various denominations and sects. Their ministerial and preaching skills were of various quality, often quite low, and residents rarely took them seriously.⁴⁸¹ With the creation of the various stone churches contracted by the popular Presbyterian missionary minister, Robert Childress, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, many upper Gorge residents became more regular and committed to attending a specific church, such as the Slate Mountain Presbyterian Church, especially as they acquired automobiles and trucks to assist in faster and easier transportation to get to one.⁴⁸²

“Singing schools,” or workshop opportunities to learn shape note singing and other forms of harmonization, were available to Gorge residents beginning in the late 1870s or early 1880s primarily at surrounding schools and Primitive Baptist churches in the area. These could last as long as two weeks and offered venues for social contacts as well as religious music development that were incorporated into church services.⁴⁸³

⁴⁷⁸ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, “Writings,” p. 62. Patrick County Historical Society, 1999, pp. 228-275.

⁴⁷⁹ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, p. 51.

⁴⁸⁰ Churches mentioned in oral histories include Mountainview Church, Vesta Baptist Church, Concord Church in Meadows of Dan. Ellis Conner, Oral History Interview, pp. G9-10.

⁴⁸¹ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, “Writings,” p. 13; V. Conner, Oral History Interview, pp. 20-21. The denominational association of these occasional preachers is unknown, but the Methodists had historically been active in providing circuit churches. Patrick County Historical Society, *History*, pp. 254-255.

⁴⁸² Slate Mountain Presbyterian Church, founded by well-known Presbyterian minister Robert Childress and near the top of the Gorge, was built in 1932, only a few years before Parkway acquisition of Gorge lands. Descendants note that Mr. Childress was quite popular as a preacher and that many traveled to Slate Mountain Presbyterian Church, still active, to hear his sermons. Richard Davids, *The Man Who Moved the Mountain*.

⁴⁸³ Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, p. 7; Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, “Writings,” p. 9 and 11; Swartz, William P. “Singing Masters and Singing Schools.” *The Mountain Laurel*. August 1985. <<http://www.mtnlaurel.com/mountain-music/693-singing-masters-and-singing-schools.html>> (Accessed December 30, 2015).

C. Religious Rituals in Rock Castle Gorge

The practice of Christian rituals, customs, and rites certainly occurred in the Gorge, even though physical church buildings were not present. Among them were funereal rites and burials, Easter community gatherings, use of the Baptismal Pool (see Photo 5.4, p. 52), and ministering to the sick.

Funereal rites were commonly carried out in homes or at the gravesite. The deceased was laid out without embalming in a locally crafted coffin, a viewing or wake was held, services were performed in the home by lay ministers or church elders, and then the body was buried in a local cemetery within a short period after dying.⁴⁸⁴

At least two cemeteries⁴⁸⁵ existed in the Gorge, although small graveyards of one to three or four graves occurred for various reasons, including contagious illness.⁴⁸⁶

Celebrations of Easter occurred at Bare Rocks when the entire Rock Castle community gathered for a picnic and other festive communal activities.⁴⁸⁷ Finally, the existence of the Baptismal Pool on Rock Castle Creek (see Map 5.1) indicates baptisms occurred, although no specific details have been recorded as to when and how.⁴⁸⁸ This pool is still anonymously maintained as of the date of this study.⁴⁸⁹

For those who were sick, church people would sit up with them and nurse them until well. Weddings were not generally conducted in churches, but a preacher performed them at or in homes.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁴ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B21.

⁴⁸⁵ Discussion of the two cemeteries is brief and their locations are not indicated on Map 5.1 because of vandalism to the graves in the past. At the request of Gorge descendants, their location is deliberately withheld.

⁴⁸⁶ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 6 reported James Henry Dillon's account concerning his second cousin who died of dreaded smallpox during the Civil War. County officials objected to the transport of the body on a public road to the Tuggle Gap graveyard outside of the Gorge, so he was buried, with complications, as the family would not assist in the actual interment out of fear of catching the disease. This single grave expanded to a graveyard of about 20-25 graves, however, over time. Reg Hancock, Oral History Interview, p. L2.

⁴⁸⁷ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B17; Jim Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. J18.

⁴⁸⁸ Melly Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. K17.

⁴⁸⁹ Ralph Lutts, personal communication, gust 2011. See p.52.

⁴⁹⁰ Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, p. 2.

8. Folklore, Folk Beliefs, Legends, and the Circus

As was consistent with surrounding Protestant Europeans of the time period, Gorge residents engaged in folk activities that provided necessary goods and services while at the same time offering opportunities to socialize, bond with near and distant kin or non-kin residents, and amass cultural capital. These activities were commonly segregated by gender or one's stage in the life cycle, but, nevertheless, the events themselves were commonly with mixed company and of various ages. They continued in rather consistent form and function from first settlement until after the death of the chestnuts when the local socioeconomy changed significantly and people voluntarily left the Gorge area. In addition, for those who stayed, automotive forms of transportation became common such that gathering at local stores and attending local events became more infrequent. Access to extra-Gorge activities, both during the day and at night, became much easier, although most of the men were gone to the West Virginia coal mines or other worksites much of the time.

A. Folklore

"Working bees" were perhaps the most or one of the most common settings for communal folk customs, music, or verbal art that created or expressed folklore. Harvesting, log-rolling, "chopping" (a group activity for clearing new ground), and corn husking bees were among them. With the latter, a singer would lead a corn song while other workers responded with a loud "con-ga-ree."⁴⁹¹ With respect to farming and as consistent with customs throughout the region, most residents planted their crops and performed other agricultural activities, such as hog butchering, by the "signs."⁴⁹²

Quilting parties or "bees" were common after dinner events for women. For homes that permitted it, after dinner occasions might include dancing; for all homes, the playing of games such as "pining," "stealing partners," and "the old brass wagon," among others were common.⁴⁹³

The playing of music was almost universal among households, and musicians performed on homemade fiddles and banjos. The guitar and mandolin were unknown. Some of the musicians in a local fife and drum corps band organized during the Civil War were from the Gorge. A second fife and drum band was, however, made up entirely of Gorge residents:

Rock Castle had another fife and drum band consisting of E. W. Hyton as fifer, his two sons kettle drummers and J. W. DeHart, bass drummer. J. W. DeHart moved to Pulaski City and Walter G. Weaver, purchased the drum and joined the

⁴⁹¹ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 3.

⁴⁹² Leslie Shelor Allen, personal communication, February 1, 2015.

⁴⁹³ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 13.

Hylton band. This band remained in tact for several years, till the Hyltons moved to Roanoke County, VA.

Thus ended the Rock Castle fife and drum band.⁴⁹⁴

At Christmas time, local bands would go around to the houses and play dance music. Over time, distinctive playing styles emerged that garnered some local musicians trans-county recognition.⁴⁹⁵ Storytelling was also a well developed folklore genre; Reed Belcher was noted as an excellent one.⁴⁹⁶

Weddings were also festive occasions. Ruby Howell recounted

Well, the weddings took place usually in the bride's home. The preacher would come and perform the ceremony and, then they would go to the home of the groom for the wedding dinner, and, uh, what they called a serenade. They would serenade the bride and groom. Sometimes they'd, uh, they'd carry the bride around the house in a washing tub, (chuckles) and then they would ride the groom on a rail.⁴⁹⁷

Material lore produced individually included furniture that exhibited the maker's own style and artistic expression. These included metal products; food growing styles and techniques; food storing procedures and food recipes or ways of displaying and serving dishes; weaving and sewing; folk architecture, especially chimney construction; and other items useful in daily life.⁴⁹⁸

B. Folk Beliefs

Folk beliefs were consistent with rural southern Appalachian areas for the entire time period of Gorge European settlement.⁴⁹⁹ They included, but are not limited to belief in

⁴⁹⁴ Dillon, J. H., Sr. "Rock Castle Creek & Vicinity Recalls Fife and Drum Crops of Confederate Soldiers." Floyd, VA: *The Floyd Press*. August 9, 1951.

⁴⁹⁵ One fife and drum band mentioned by James Henry Dillon was located near contemporary Woolwine after the Civil War, not in the Gorge itself. However, Gorge men played in it. A second band existed, however, for well after the Civil War. Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 8; Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, pp. 34-36; Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, pp. 48-49.

⁴⁹⁶ Robert Blue *Little Blue Boy*, p. 19.

⁴⁹⁷ Willie B. Underwood, *Isaac W. Underwood*, p. 49; Ruby Howell, Oral History Interview, pp. 2-3.

⁴⁹⁸ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," reports on these items through James Henry Dillon's discussion of early life, although not from the perspective of folklore per se. Nevertheless, individual modes of self-expression in all matters of daily life, while not done by everyone, were ubiquitous in the region and distinctive of Blue Ridge Appalachian life. See American Folklife Center and the National Park Service, *BlueRidge Parkway Folklore Project Collection 1977-1981*. Washington, DC: Library of Congress. Accession #AFC1982/009. <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.afc/eadafc.af013011>> (Accessed December 27, 2018).

⁴⁹⁹ See, for example, Wigginton, Eliot. *The Foxfire Book*. New York: Anchor Books, 1972; Wigginton, Eliot, *Foxfire 2*, New York: Anchor Books, 1973; and Wigginton, Eliot, *Foxfire 7*.

witches, ghosts, signs, and tokens of strange or unaccounted for sights and events attached to specific places and geographical features, especially graveyards. The verbal narratives describing these phenomena functioned in part for children and teenagers to construct ways of asserting one's their courage among their peers. A youngster willing to pass a graveyard alone after dark, for example, was considered a hero. Following are direct quotations from family notes regarding ghosts and angels:

In talking with Fred Dillon today, we revived a long ago story that hovered around a large sycamore tree (7 ft. diam.) that stood on the farm of his mother, Lina Dillon Lee [*aka Nancy (Liney) Dillon Lee*] on Rock Creek at the mountain. Namely: A ghost man nicely dressed in black would occasionally appear at this tree, and would soon disappear in a mysterious manner; as the stories were told to him by Reed Belcher who saw it three times, and by Henry Jack Dillon, Harvey Hopkins and Ada Dillon, who also saw the man in these circumstances.

Mr. Dillon says that in his boyhood he saw a peculiar Angel? Creature with a wing spread of about 7 feet rush in thru the branches of this tree and light on the ground and then disappeared in most beautiful display. The tree is now gone.⁵⁰⁰

Various forms of contagious and sympathetic magic were also present. For example, women would keep horseshoes in their fireplaces to prevent hawks from catching their chickens, while men would avoid taking an axe into the house for fear it would cause sickness in the family. Likewise, seeing the new moon for the first time through the branches of a tree indicated someone's heart would be broken. If a child spun a chair around he would be spanked. At the same time, no one carried a rabbit's foot for good luck.⁵⁰¹

C. Legends

Also consistent with southern Appalachian rural communities, Gorge residents shared a repertoire of stories about events in the past that were extraordinary, heroic, or bizarre. Also consistent with all real-life occurrences that become legendary, the narratives differ in fact and thematic emphasis. Therefore the following summations should be taken as representations of what former residents and their descendants heard, rather than being factually accurate.

1. *Benjamin Belcher Legends*

Benjamin Belcher was one of the first, many claim he was the first, settler to own land, build a house, and then live in the Gorge. He therefore claimed some of the best farming land to be had in the Gorge and became very successful in Gorge community terms.

New York: Anchor Books, 1982; and Shifflett, Peggy, *The Red Flannel Rag*. Pittsburgh, PA: Commonwealth Press, 2005 and *The Living Room Bed*.

⁵⁰⁰ Anglin, Walter. *Some Random Observations*. Bassett, VA: Bassett Printing. 1963, p.11.

Italicized material added by Puckett.

⁵⁰¹ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 3.

Therefore it is expected that stories of his life would be elevated to the status of legends. Two major ones survive and are widely known in the general Gorge area.

a) Settlement Legend.

The settlement legend assigns a certain spiritual or other worldly meaning to why Benjamin Belcher moved from the piedmont area of Franklin County to the rugged area of the Gorge. In so doing, it gives his reasons for settlement a mythic quality as if God had ordained him to settle there. Following is one written version of this legend:

Belcher, then living in Franklin County, began looking for a more secluded area to raise his family. He loaded up his wagon and began looking to the southwest for land. Late in the day he saw a campfire in the distance. He tried to steer his horse and wagon away from it in the opposite direction. No matter which way he turned, however, the campfire jerked him towards it until he gave in and let the horse move towards it. A solitary Native American sat at the fire. He said, "I've been waiting for you. Where have you been? Surprised, Belcher nevertheless sat with the man. The Native American told Belcher that there was a beautiful valley nearby where the "great spirit" lived. When Belcher awoke the next morning, no sign of the Native American could be found. He did, however, discover the gorge through which Rock Castle Creek flows the next day where there were 100 foot chestnut trees five feet in diameter. He decided to build his homestead there.⁵⁰²

b) Civil War Legend. Multiple versions of this legend are in print. The main differences are over who actually hung Benjamin Belcher and whether his son, Reed Belcher deserted the Confederate Army for the Union Army after the event in disgust for the behavior of the alleged Confederate perpetrators of the hanging. Following are two versions, each tracing back to two of his daughters:

Version 1: Benjamin and Sarah Belcher had settled in the Gorge around 1820. Benjamin and Sarah were living alone, in the gorge, at the time of the Civil War. They were often at the mercy of deserters or stragglers.

One day, a group of Union stragglers rode into Benjamin's yard, got off their horses, and demanded that he get them what money, gold, or anything of value he had. He refused, saying he had nothing of value they would want. Not believing him they decided to force him to help them. One got a rope, threw it over the limb of an apple tree, and tied the other end around Benjamin's neck. They would pull him off the ground and hold the rope until he gasped for breath then they let him down and repeated their demands. Getting the same answer, they would pull him up again. (Benjamin) had been pulled up a third time when (Sarah) observing what was taking place from her kitchen window, knew

⁵⁰² Eliza Winston, "Hike Back in Time in Rock Castle." *Martinsville Bulletin*. September 10, 2010. <<http://www.martinsvillebulletin.com/article.cfm?ID=25223>> (accessed January 30, 2015).

something had to be done. She opened the door and walked deliberately to where they were, looked up at Benjamin gasping for breath on the ropes and in a soft, calm voice said, "Benjamin dinner is ready." The turning to the Yankee stragglers, she said in the same courteous soft voice, "We would be much obliged if you would have dinner with us too." The Yankee stragglers were so taken by surprise that they let Benjamin down! To have-starved men not even a hanging can take the place of food. The all ate and rode off—and left taking Benjamin's horses. The stragglers left their half-starved, run to death horses in place."

Back in Ohio Reed had been in service about five weeks when contacted small pox and entered the based hospital; this was the beginning of a series of illnesses. Next were pneumonia, then dysentery, and later chronic diarrhea. Then, on December 1, 1864, he came out of service with an honorable discharge and full military pension.⁵⁰³

"This information is to clarify that Reed Belcher was not a deserter as the Confederacy has listed (all military history of Reed Belcher was obtained from the National Archives)."⁵⁰⁴

That he enlisted in the Union Army is indisputable, but whether he left the Confederate Army because of the torturing of his father is assumed by his descendants.⁵⁰⁵

Version 2: Reed Belcher's story was one that is remembered by the family. He and at least one of his brothers went into service with the Confederate army, but their father kept one or two of the boys at home, either because he needed the help or he felt that he had risked enough with sending the boys that had gone. There are conflicting versions of this tale, but Ruby's story is partly supported by documentation. A Confederate conscription force came through Rock Castle "hunting for Belchers", according to the Confederate captain's diary. They found the old man at home but the boys had fled into the rhododendron thickets and were well hidden. One version of the tale has the mother of the children flinging a dipper of water in the captain's face when he demanded refreshment for his troops. Most versions agree that when the troops couldn't locate the elusive

⁵⁰³ Patrick County Heritage Book Committee and Shirley Grose, *Patrick County, Virginia*, pp. 114-115.

⁵⁰⁴ Patrick County Heritage Book Committee and Shirley Grose, *Patrick County*, pp. 114-115. Mrs. Moran's claim that Benjamin Belcher was living in the Gorge in 1820 is somewhat questionable, given other accounts and that the deed for his land was not filed until 1839 [see p. 28 above]. However, the 1820 U.S. Census does have him living in Patrick County in 1820, but not in Rock Castle Gorge. He is living in Franklin County in the 1830 census. U.S. Census inventories do indicate he was in the Gorge by 1840, as indicated by a careful reading of whom his neighbors were and their known whereabouts at that time.

⁵⁰⁵ Oral history conversations. First Rock Castle Descendants' Reunion. Meadows of Dan, VA: Slate Mountain Evangelical Presbyterian Church. September 23, 2017. Ms. Beverly Woody, organizer. See also Ryan, *Life in Rock Castle, Virginia* pp.55-56 for images of Reed Belcher's Union Army discharge and pension papers.

Belcher boys, they 'strung up' the old man from a tree in the yard by his neck. Apparently they just pulled him up in the tree to strangle, rather than actually hanging him and breaking his neck. The boys were nearby and with their mother were able to rescue their father. Reed, the grandfather, never liked to hear the children sing "Dixie" and their mother would try to get them to be quiet. Grandpa would jump up and pop his fists together.⁵⁰⁶

2. *Other Civil War Legendary Narratives*

Other Civil War narratives that can be considered legends or of near legendary status are sparse. Those that do exist revolve around two topics: how deserters were cared for (or not) when they hid out, and, secondly, raids in the Gorge by them for supplies and food, especially towards the end of the War.⁵⁰⁷ Here are two that have survived:

a) Smallpox Anecdote

James Henry Dillon reported that his second cousin, Phyrhus Dillon, died of smallpox. Burying him was difficult because county officials were concerned about spreading the disease when the corpse was to be carried three fourths mile over a public road to the Tuggle Gap Graveyard. Instead, he was buried on this father's land as a single grave.

After the grave was completed, the neighbors retired to a safe distance from the grave. His father conveyed the corpse to the burial place, lowered it into the grave, and after partially filling it retired, his neighbors returning to the grave and completing the interment.⁵⁰⁸

b) Woman's Murder Anecdote

Also of note was the murder of one of John MacAlexander's daughters after the end of the War:

Van Wade, who had returned home, after the Civil War, and had served as a volunteer in Company "D" 51st. VA Regiment, commanded by Captain R. J. Woolwine, made a proposal of marriage to this young lady, which she promptly refused. Maddened by refusal to wed him, he went home, obtained an army musket, returning to this young woman's home in a quiet unostentatious manner and while she was washing dishes, he caught her off guard and shot her through the brains, the bullet striking the wall and rebounded, falling into the pan she was

⁵⁰⁶ Ruby Underwood, Oral History Interview, p. 2.

⁵⁰⁷ Era Wade, Oral History Interview, p. N13, noted that she had not heard of any deserters tales in the Gorge, but that her great grandmother's brother had hid out nearby and nearly starved to death; see also John Austin, Oral History Interview, pp. A23-24.

⁵⁰⁸ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, "Writings," p. 6. Quotation is from James Henry Dillon's remarks.

using. . . . Wade was tried for murder and convicted but his attorney, appealed the case and it finally came to naught.⁵⁰⁹

3. *Legends of the Caves*

The legends of the writings in Bare Rock caves are commonly discussed among Gorge descendants and others. However, as discussed above (pp. 49-51), oral and written documentation available at the time of this study indicate only a few etchings using the Latin alphabet.

4. *Other Widely-Known Legends*

Two other widely-known legends exist. One involves the death of a presumed “drummer;” the second, the wreck of a car carrying bootlegged whiskey.

a) Drummer Legend

One widely-known legend passed on orally is that of the traveling salesman who panned his wares in the Gorge. Allegedly he was not allowed to sleep in a home one night during his journey because of the owner’s young, single daughter. Therefore he had to sleep outside. He was found dead the next day in a hollow log where he presumably took shelter. It was a chilly or cold time or year so that residents presumed he died from exposure or a heart attack. They couldn’t remove him from the hollow log, so they cut the log below his feet and above his head and then buried it with him still in it. “Sometime later some people came in and dug him up for his gold-topped walking cane. They said it had a gold handle.” The location of this log was near Henry Dillon’s place near where the collection of mailboxes were for those living at the lower end of the Gorge.⁵¹⁰ No date as to when this occurred is available and a grave has not been found.

b) Car Loaded with Moonshine

A narrative regarding the old car wreck that can still be found near the main Gorge trail revolves around a car that attempted to transverse the Gorge to run bootlegged whiskey during Prohibition.

This automobile came in, picked up a load of brandy. And here’s the two versions. One, he ran off the road, the other one, the car quit on him and they pushed it off of the road. They walked out to the top of the mountain and got a telephone. Called Bluefield, West Virginia, got another car in there, loaded the liquor on the

⁵⁰⁹ Mary Alice Atkins Osborne, “Writings,” p. 9.

⁵¹⁰ Robert Blue, *Little Boy Blue*, p. 148; Walter Anglin, *Some Random*, p. 11; Leslie Shelor Allen, personal communication, July 28, 2015.

other car, went back to West Virginia and left the old car setting there. And it's still there.⁵¹¹



Photo 8. 1. The Old Car Wreck. Photo courtesy of BRPLIB, 2011.

5. *Lesser Known Legends*

a) **Benjamin Belcher Hunting Legend**

Ben Belcher told me that above his house near top of the Brammers spur of the Blue Ridge, north of the trail in the big ivy is the grave of an unknown hunter killed by Indians and buried by the hunter's companions. Mr. Belcher said he saw two eyes shining in a pile of rolling leaves on a mountain path, so he knew he was in for a battle, and cut a club and won. The panther gave up the fight and ran away. One day a bear walked up to his door and looked in. He caught two young wildcats. He shot and broke a wild turkey's wing; then it outran him. Many turkeys would said away and land dead after being shot. Mr. B. killed a large wild cat.⁵¹²

D. **The Circus**

In approximately 1910, a circus came to the lower end of Rock Castle Gorge on its way through the Gorge. The circus had no admission fee, but a side show with slight of hand

⁵¹¹Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 10. See also Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B18.

⁵¹² Walter Anglin, *Some Random*, p. 42.

tricks required a dime admission. Of especial importance were the elephants that caught everyone's attention since no one had ever seen one. Residents from both inside and outside the Gorge walked to it with their children. One elephant got loose and went to Mr. Weaver's house, causing him much fright.⁵¹³

⁵¹³ Ellis Conner, Oral History Interview, p. G5; Melly Dillon, Oral History Interview, p. K21. These small, traveling circuses were common during this period. Whether this one was linked to the Sparks World Famous Shows whose performance in Erwin, Tennessee, in 1916 led to the hanging of the elephant Mary is unknown, but possible. See Powell, Douglas Reichert, *Critical Regionalism: Connecting Politics and Culture in the American Landscape*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press. 2007, pp. 8-12.

9. The Civil Conservation Corps and Parkway Acquisition

A. Parkway Acquisition

With the exception of the Austin/Conner House, all land parcels in the Gorge were transferred to the Blue Ridge Parkway by 1938. Most were transmitted in 1937. Justification for land acquisition was based in New Deal initiatives.

In 1934, the parkway submitted an application for funds from the National Emergency Council for the purchase of lands for recreational parks. The states had agreed to purchase the necessary land for the right-of-way for the parkway, but the wayside parks were beyond the scope of the original agreement. A year later, the federal Resettlement Administration made funds available to purchase. "submarginal lands" from impoverished landowners in order to move them to areas where they would have a better chance at improving their economic standing. The lands would then be used for recreation or other projects for public use. . . . Much of the land was purchased under the direction of project manager Sam Weems, who would succeed Abbott as parkway superintendent in 1948.⁵¹⁴

One actual program involved in the actual land acquisitions process, however, was the Agricultural Demonstration Projects, Submarginal Land Program, Land Policy Section, Program Planning Division, Agricultural Adjustment Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture.⁵¹⁵ John Saxon performed most of the surveys, and appraisals were done by or directed by Sam Weems, Project Director. Table 8.1 following captures the results of those efforts.

⁵¹⁴ Richard Quin., *HAER* Report, pp. 76-77.

⁵¹⁵ Government office information appears in the various Tract Files on "Tract Files Ownership Data" forms. (see References, Tract Files, for a list of Tract Files pdf documents).

Table 9.1
Landowners' Appraisal and Sale Data

(A) = Appraisal Reports included in Tract Files (see Bibliography, Government Documents, BRPDLIB).

(B) = Rocky Knob Area LP-VA 8 List of Tracts. Estimated cost of Needed Land Acquisitions.⁵¹⁶

(C) = Notice of Disbursement included in Tract Files (see Bibliography, Government Documents, BRPDLIB, for list of specific documents in these files).

(D) = Division of Land Acquisition, Land Status Map 23, Blue Ridge Parkway, 1975.

(E) = Patrick County Deed Book Information (see Bibliography for deed book listings).

Original Tract # at Time of Acquisition	1975 Land Status Map 23 Tract #	Landowner	Acreage⁵¹⁷	Appraised/Sale Value⁵¹⁸	Comments⁵¹⁹
6 & 6a	23-148	J.M. Compton (James Monroe & Laura DeHart Compton)	226.50 (Trk 6) (A); 250.25 (Trk 6) (B) 218.6(C) 239.90 (D)	\$2,725 (Trk 6)) (A) \$2,813.90 (Both Trks) (C, E)	Farmland marginal to poor; Timber classed grade "c."

⁵¹⁶ Gaps in numbering of tracts is due to the tract being located within the Rocky Knob Recreation Area but outside of the Gorge area as defined for this project, that is, within the drainage basin of Rock Castle Creek and within the boundaries of the Parkway. One tract (No. 50) was omitted because it was assigned a tract number, but was never purchased by the Parkway.

⁵¹⁷ Acreage varies from the different sources for a number of reasons. Sometimes a tract was surveyed more than once, and the steep terrain resulted in variant totals. Sometimes the tract was re-recorded because multiple parcels or fewer parcels were included in a given tract. Sometimes tracts were divided because of ownership clarifications. Other reasons are also possible.

⁵¹⁸ Appraised and sale values varied due to reasons listed in footnote 518 so that the final per acre value for a tract was calculated differently. Sometimes figures differ because of liens or other charges against the property that were settled after appraisal but before sale. Sometimes figure differ because the landowner had negotiated a higher price or the Park Service had demanded a lower one for a specific reason such as loss of potential income due to timber harvesting after appraisal.

⁵¹⁹ Information provided in the Comments column was obtained from Appraisal Reports from 1935-38. See References, Tract Files. Appraisals varied in their level of detail, however, so some information is more general for a given tract than for others.

			281.6 & 21.3 acres (E)		
8	23-149	T. G. Moore (T. G. and Gladys Moore)	185 acres (A, B) 176.3 acres (D, E)	\$3,305.00 (A) \$555.00 (B, E)	Payment for timber on land reserved until 1938, hence the low sale value. Much of the timber is merchantable, but no road access was a major impediment. No improvements, no cultivated land.
10	23-116	J. R. Cockram (James R and Leah Cockram)	31.5 acres (A, B) 28.10 acres (C, D, E)	\$320.00 (A, B, C, E) Condemned.	Impoverished farm with only six acres cleared for cultivation. Rest was timber that had been clear-cut. Orchard.
11	23-134	D. C. Mangrum (Dolphus Calvin and Pearl G. DeHart Mangrum)	118 acres (A, B) 84.2 acres (C, D, E)	\$1,728.00 (A) \$1,725.00 (B, C, E)	Timber had been clearcut, but small merchantable plot present. Twenty- four acres in farmland in good to fair condition. Orchard. Mill. Improvements.

12	23-127	Joshua Nester (Joshua and Martha Brammer Nester)	181 acres (A, B) 160.7 acres (C, D)	\$2,503.00 (A) \$2,500.00 (B, C, E)	Farmland assessed as "fair"; timber noted as "merchantable"; orchard contained 600 trees. Improvements
13	23-128	G. W. Conner (Heirs) (Heirs of George W. Conner)	50 acres (A, B) 43.7 acres (C, D, E)	\$1,010.00 (A, B, C, E)	Not cultivatable, for timber use only. Tract had not been clear cut, so merchantable timber left, but graded as "C." No improvements.
14	23-121	I. W. and G. W. Conner (Heirs) (Heirs of George W. Conner)	174.6 acres (A,B) 153.4 acres (C, D)	\$766.56 (A, B, C, E)	Tract nearly all timber which had been recently clear cut in 1935. No improvements.
15	23-130	W. H. Hatcher (W. H. & Annie M. Hatcher)	75 acres (A, B) 81.5 acres (D) 61.5 acres (C, E)	\$802.50 (A, B) \$658.05 (C, E)	Timber merchantable on this tract; no cultivated land. No improvements.
16	23-114	S. H Underwood (Samuel H. and Martha Belcher Underwood)	106.5 acres (A, B) 110.5/110.3/110.0 acres (C, D, E)	\$2,100.00 (A, B, C, E)	Merchantable timber on 25-30 acres but of poor quality. Thirty acres clear cut. Orchard. Average to poor farming or grazing about 47

					acres. Hydraulic power plant. Improvements that are above average.
17	23-110	Thomas Whorley (Thomas and Rosa B. Whorley)	58 acres (A, B) 67.2 acres (D, E)	\$1,400.00 (A, B, E)	Land "thin" and unproductive except for 10 acres; clear cutting going on at time of survey, Orchard contains about 200 trees past their prime (35-45 yrs. old with the exception of a few recent trees). Improvements.
18	23-117	J. H. Hylton (Jeremiah H. Hylton)	46.0 acres (A, B) 56.7 acres (D)	\$1,000.00 (A, B, C, E)	Orchard; farmland quality not assessed; 50% in merchantable timber. Mill. Other minor improvements.
19	23-141	N. B. McDaniel (Heirs) (Heirs of Henry B. McDaniel)	37 acres (A, B) 39.4 acres (D, E)	\$130.00(A, B, E) Back taxes owed.	Reported as all woodland, no assessment provided. Orchard. Improvements.

20	23-126 (map error; this tract listed under several original tract numbers, all as owned by Dillon et. al.)	I. C. DeHart (Isaac C. and Alice Thompson DeHart	120 acres (A, B) 99 acres (C1)	\$952.80 (A, B) Adverse possession/condemnation threatened; title issues (C); no record of owners receiving payment for this tract. Notice of Disbursement to US District Court for the Western Division of VA issued March 26, 1938 (C2) .	(Not on 1975 map, but two tracts listed on 1936 map as tracts 20 and 21). No cultivated land; timber only that was reported to be merchantable.
21	23-132	I. C. DeHart (Isaac C. and Alice Thompson DeHart)	139 acres (A) 126 acres (C) 126.7 acres (D) Not listed on (B)	\$859.50 (A, C, E)	(Not on 1935 list of tracts to be purchased, but one of two tracts listed on 1936 map as tracts 20 and 21 and Appraisal Report exists). No cultivated land; no improvements. Timber only that was reported to be merchantable.
22	23-133	W. G. Wade (William G. and Earie A. Wade)	34.2 acres (A) 54.2 (B; probable typo) 32.7 acres (D, E)	\$250.00 (A, B, E)	Timber had been recently clear cut. Three acres cleared for cultivation or for improvements.

23	23-144	W. D. McAlexander	50.4 acres (B) 14.46 acres (D) (This acreage probably represents one of the three tracts included in 1936 survey)	\$303.00 (A, B, C)	Timber had been clear cut or burned from 1915 forest fire, so none merchantable; land sub-marginal for farming. About 35 neglected fruit trees (apple, pear, and cherry). Improvements. Deed information unavailable.
24	23-145	J. H. Dillon	40.0 acres (A, B) 41.6 acres (C) 40.91 acres (D)	\$383.75 (A, B, C, D) No deed recording sale filed in Patrick County Courthouse; adverse possession executed.	Timber and young tree growth on 30 acres indicating some clear cutting; cultivated 10 acres, condition poor; orchard
25	23-146	Leah DeHart	106.5 acres (A) 106 acres (B) 70.8 acres (C1) 108 acres (C2) 50.51 acres (D)	\$646.00 (A, B) \$431.17 (C) Lien of \$172.50 No deed recording sale filed in Patrick County Courthouse.	Two acres in orchard; 2 acres in grazing land. Timber land is 102.5 acres, of which 55 is merchantable. No improvements.

26	23-147	V. D. Moran (V. D. and Hester Moran)	79 acres (A, B) 54.5 acres (B, C, E) 40.02 acres (D)	\$667.00 (A) \$665.60 (B) \$448.56 (E) Deductions made for costs and liens.	Sixty-six acres in timber; 50 acres merchantable. Thirteen acres in cultivated land. Two of these in orchard. Improvements.
30	23-129	Mrs. A. L. Conner (Annie L. Belcher Conner)	72.67 acres (B) 48.5 acres (C, D, E) Acreage discrepancy due to surveying error and error in tract history of parcel division	\$684.67 (A, B, C, E)	Eight acres of poor grazing and orchard land. Sixty four and two thirds acres in timber; Orchard in good condition with young trees; Improvements.
31	23-122	R. L. Poff (Robert L. and Mary P. Poff)	68 acres (A, B) 87.5 acres (D, E)	\$400.00 (A, B, C, E)	Timber had been clear cut with very little merchantable remaining. No cultivated land. Old orchard. Improvement.
32	23-131	Mrs. N. E. Lee (Nancy Emeline Brammer Dillon Lee)	250 acres (A, B) 323.5 acres (C, D, E)	\$3,117.00 (A) \$3,100.00 (B, C, E) Condemned due to a daughter's refusal to sign deed of sale as a co-owner because of payment dispersal concerns and past money issues with Mrs. Lee.	Property contains good to fair ratings in all categories. Fifty acres in grazing or crop land; 200 acres in timber, much of it clear cut, but 100 acres

					merchantable. Orchard with 75 trees. Significant improvements.
33	23-119	A. E. Cockram (A. E. and Dora Cockram)	31.5 (A, B, C1) 10.7 acres (C2, E) Discrepancy in acreage due to title issue; 20 + acres belonged to J.R. Cochram (see tract #10)	\$255.00 (A, B, C1, C2, E)	Four acres cleared for cultivation. Timber clear cut with small stand inaccessible or of poor grade. Orchard. Improvements.
34	23-140	Andrew Wade (Andrew and Octavia Wade)	40.0 acres (A, B) 34.5 acres (C, D, E)	\$291.00 or \$229.50 (A1 and A2) \$250.00 (B, C, E) \$250.00 price negotiated (C)	Readily accessible timber had been clear cut; rest inaccessible. Remaining 3.5 acres cleared, but only one acre suitable for cultivation. Orchard. Improvements.
35	23-111	G. W. Conner (Heirs of George W. Conner)	92 acres (A, B) 99.9 acres (C, D) 99 acres (E)	\$1,500.00 (A, B, E)	Forty-one acres of merchantable timber; 51 acres in cultivated land, 25 as open pasture. Six is rated "good."

					All in good to fair condition. One improvement.
36	23-103	Vacant (A, C1, D); owned by Commonwealth of Virginia (1975 map)	about 40 acres (A) (C1) 23.6 acres (C2) 106.12 (1975 map)	\$80.00 (A)	Woodlands/Timber
37		Vacant (D); owned by Commonwealth of Virginia	80 acres (A) about 60 acres (C2)	\$240.00 (A)	Woodlands/Timber
38	23-142	Mary Dillon (Mary and Henry J. Dillon)	70 acres (A, B) 114.3 acres (C, D, E)	\$957.50 (A, B) \$1,563.05 (C1, E)	Given a "license to occupy" by the state for 20 yrs. Approved by Dept. of Interior (C2). Fifty-nine acres in timber, 30 acres merchantable. Eleven acres in fair or poor crop land. Improvements.
39	23-143	H. L. and S. G. DeHart	75 acres (A, B, C1) 76.2 acres (C2) 62.60 acres (D)	\$1,122.00 (A)	Two acres poor crop land; 73 acres in timber; 60 acres merchantable. Orchard. No improvements.

40	23-136	H. L. DeHart (Heirs of Henry Lee DeHart, Jr.)	147.75 acres (A) 107.2 acres (C, D, E) Acreage disparity probably due to inheritance issues .	\$1,309.00 (A, C)	Eight acres in crop and grazing land; 139.75 acres in timber; 75 acres merchantable. Improvements.
41	23-139	Mellie E. Dillon (Mellie and A. G. Dillon)	7.5 acres (A, B, C, D, E)	\$155.00 (A, B, C, E)	Two acres in fair crop land; 5.5 acres in timber, none merchantable. Orchard. No improvements.
43	23-135	G. W. DeHart (heirs) (Heirs of Green W. DeHart)	25 acres (A, B) 23.8 acres (C, D, E)	\$339.50 (A) \$337.50 (B) \$321.30 (C, E)	Entire tract in timber; 18 acres merchantable. No improvements. Reservation attached because spring on this tract serves owners' homes on adjoining tract outside govt. acquisition area.
44	23-137	E. D. DeHart (E. Daniel and Brooksie DeHart and Millie DeHart)	15 acres (A, B) 15.6 acres (D, E) This tract a portion of two others listed as E. Daniel DeHart tracts.	\$448.50 (A, B) \$466.44 (C, E)	Two acres in grazing land with gravel pit; remaining in merchantable timber.

45	23-113	Sarah J. Hall (Sarah J. Hall)	18 acres (A, B) 15.7 acres (D, E)	\$90.00 (A, B) \$78.00 (E) Property condemned due to title issues; Mary L. Conner, sister, refused to sign a quitclaim.	Timber sold to a private harvester before efforts by National Park Service to acquire land. Unclear if harvested before sale. No improvements.
46	23-138	W. W. DeHart (W. W. and Eliza A. DeHart)	6 acres (A, B) 3.3 acres (C, D, E)	\$39.00 (A, B) \$21.45 (C, E)	All six acres in merchantable timber. No improvements.
47	23-126 (map error; this tract listed under several original tract numbers, all as owned by Dillon et al.)	O. K. DeHart (O. K. DeHart, Henry L. DeHart, and Lillian DeHart)	3.5 acres (A, B, C)	\$177.50 (A) \$175.50 (B, C) Property condemned due to title issues.	All in open land. Old DeHart mill site with mill equipment (42" mill stones, 18" turbine wheel, and other equipment). Improvements. Deed information found with Tract 43.
48	23-126 (map error; this tract listed under several original tract numbers, all as owned by Dillon et al.)	O. K. DeHart	16 acres (A, B) 26.5 acres (C)	\$321.50 (A) \$321.12 (B) \$531.86 (C1) Property condemned due to title issues.	Two acres in crop or land; 14 acres in timber, 10 merchantable (average). Spring. Improvements. Deed information unavailable.

49 and 49a	23-120	J. W. Handy (John William and Rozina Virginia Conner Handy)	52 acres (A, B) 54.2 acres (D, E) Known as "Sam Boyd land." Surveyed as 49 and 49a (C2)	\$946.00 (A) \$945.88 (B) \$985.90 (C, E)	Grazing and pasture land on 35.75 acres; 16.25 timber land, with 12 merchantable (average). Spring. Improvements.
51	23-115	Zelotes Boyd (Zelotes and Lillie Pendleton Boyd)	48 acres (B) 43 acres (C, D, E) Govt. requested this smaller amount from a larger 165.75 parcel conveyed as an inheritance.	\$695.66 (A) \$695.52 (B) \$623.07 (C, E)	Twenty-seven acres in grazing and pasture; 21 acres in timber, some (not submitted in acres) merchantable. Spring. No improvements.
52	23-112	J. Tyler Boyd (John Tyler Boyd)	55.8 acres (C,D)	\$773.85 (A) \$770.00 (B) \$781.20 (C, E) Condemned due to Mr. Boyd's state of mental health.	Thirty-three acres in open pasture or grazing land, some of it cultivated. Twenty-two acres timbered, with 20 acres merchantable. Spring. Minimal improvements.
53	23-123	W. T. Underwood (William Tilden and Mary Harter Underwood)	7.6 acres (A, B) 9.4 acres (C,D, E) Confusion over what the tract boundaries were led to acreage discrepancy and	\$59.32 (A,B, C, E)	Three acres in grazing or open pasture; 4.6 in timber. No assessment of timber provided; no improvements.

			original mis-assignment of value.		
54	23-118	Aaron Hylton (Aaron Hylton)	30.75 acres (A) 24.1 acres (B) 27.4 acres (C, D, E)	\$191.62 (A, B, C, E)	Six acres in grazing or open pasture; 24.75 in timber with some merchantable, but no acreage given. Improvements.
56	23-124	Mrs. Lillie G. Hancock (Lillie G. Burgess and Simon T. Hancock)	20 acres (A, B) 16.1 acres (C, D, E) Two acres of originally surveyed 22 acres retained by Mrs. Hancock.	\$188.00 (A, B) \$151.34 (C, E) (A information to be found in Tract 57 eFile, pp. 20-24).	Appraisal found under tract 57 file. Four acres in fair crop land; 5 acres in grazing or open pasture; 11 acres in timber, none listed as merchantable. No improvements.
57	23-125	Mrs. Lillie G. Hancock (Lillie G. Burgess and Simon T. Hancock)	10 acres (A, B) 17.1 acres (C, D, E) Suit of adverse possession resolved through discovery that deed of trust was filed in Floyd County when tract is located in Patrick County.	\$85.00 (A, B) \$145.35 (C, E)	Ten acres in open pasture or grazing land. Some merchantable timber indicated, but by board feet, not by acreage. Appraisal indicates no improvements, but other documents indicate occupancy. Such occupancy probably refers to

					one of the other Lillie G. Hancock tracts.
58	23-126 Misabeled as Dillon tract	S. T. Hancock (Lillie G. Burgess and Simon T. Hancock)	58 acres (A, B)	\$382.00 (A) \$381.54 (B) Condemned due to lack of deed of trust for the tract to Mr. Hancock. Mr. Hancock refused to go to court to resolve the issue.	Twelve acres in open pasture or grazing land; 46 acres in woodland, but no acreage given for merchantable portion. Spring. Walnut and apple orchard. No improvements, but other documents for this file indicate Mr. Hancock occupied this tract. Deed information (E)unavailable.

Since the time lapse between appraisal, signing of deeds, receipt of checks by landowners, and then moving of landowners and their families to other properties was often extensive (perhaps up to a year), leases to land owners during the interim were quite common. As a result, many were able to plant their gardens, raise hay, and take care of their stock before they moved. One elderly resident, Mary Dillon (Tract 38) was given a 20 year lease because of her advanced age under the premise that a move was unwarranted and might end her life prematurely.

Most of the Gorge tracts were listed as having timber lands clear cut⁵²⁰ or as having less than good crop, grazing, or pasture lands, thus justifying the label as “submarginal” and therefore eligible for acquisition under Resettlement Administration guidelines. As noted above, the Austin property was not part of this appraisal process and was therefore not purchased by the Blue Ridge Parkway because its natural resources were extensive and the acquisition costs too high for the funds allocated.⁵²¹ It therefore remained and remains in private ownership, accessed by a fire trail beginning at the bottom of the Gorge. It has no electricity or indoor running water.⁵²²

Most oral histories and family descendants’ oral narratives indicate that purchases were made without objection to the government taking their land.⁵²³ The oft-published photo of Mr. Joshua Nester receiving the first check for his land in Rock Castle Gorge supports this claim by his expression and willingness to be photographed in 1937 in what is obviously a posed photograph (see Photo 9.1). Nevertheless, the situation was more complicated than residents’ simple agreement to relocate because, allegedly, payments would enable them to have better living opportunities elsewhere. Instead, several residents were, indeed, reluctant to sell their land because they were attached strongly to it or felt they were being cheated by the low valuation placed upon it. However, through rumor, they had heard that *not* signing an agreement to sell would result in “condemnation” or acquisition through eminent domain. In such a case, they understood they would receive no payment at all. Another reason some expressed was that they would be left isolated and alone in the Gorge when so many others had left.⁵²⁴

⁵²⁰ Thirteen appraisals explicitly indicate clear cutting had occurred, but nearly all the rest indicate that only a portion of the timbered land was “merchantable,” meaning harvestable for sale. This suggests that they, too, had already been harvested. That a significant portion of the timber had no monetary value was attributable either to the land being too steep or rugged to access for logging or that it had already been logged.

⁵²¹ Descendants report that the property was not purchased because it cost too much and would have caused the National Park Service to have exceeded its budget. Living in Rock Castle Gorge: Community and History. Blue Ridge Heritage Association Program. Community Center, Meadows of Dan, Virginia, August 29, 2015. Another reason could have been that it did not qualify for “submarginal lands” status. Documentation justifying either reason is not available.

⁵²² Flooding from rains of approximately 22” over a 10 day period in early October 2015 washed out parts of this road so that vehicle access to the property was impossible for some time. However, access was reinstated by summer 2017.

⁵²³ Some descendants indicate that their ancestors reluctantly sold their land and didn’t want to leave. However, extensive correspondence in each tract’s file indicates that this was not the case. Disputes over land sales appear to have been more over intrafamily issues or problems with how and when deeds were filed with the Patrick County Courthouse, or if they were filed at all.

⁵²⁴ Wade, Mrs. Era. Oral History Interview, p. N6; Jon Senpach, “Rock Castle,” p. 13A.



Photo 9.1. Mr. Joshua Nester Receives his Check from Mr. Sam Weems, Project Manager. Photo courtesy of Mr. Danny Wood, Woolwine, Virginia. Original in BRPLIB 1937.

This documented pattern of willing sale for most properties was consistent with the patterns along the entire route of the Parkway because the farmlands of nearly everyone had played out, they had clear cut their timber reserves to the point that soil erosion was a major factor, the monetary value of the timber had crashed with the Depression, and local wage-labor jobs were scarce in this end-of-the-Depression era. “The Depression had impoverished the mountain economy, and lands were generally worn-out from poor farming practices.”⁵²⁵ In the case of the Gorge, however, the economy began declining significantly with the loss of the chestnut before the Depression. The Depression simply exacerbated farming decline. Like other areas, though, farming land was depleted, although many orchards, especially the Austin/Conner orchard, were still producing well. Also similar to other Parkway areas, the extensive sawmilling that began in the 1920s

⁵²⁵ Quin, HAER Report No. 42, p. 62; Land appraisals conducted prior to Parkway acquisition in the early 1930s by Sam Weem indicate that nearly all of the 60 parcels appraised in the entire Rocky Knob Recreation Area had poor to fair farmland and extensive clear cutting without regard to forest regeneration.

continued in full force, as residents wanted as much money from their properties as they could acquire before transferring it to the National Park Service and because their transformation to more of a monetary-based economy demanded they look for ways to obtain more money than in the very early 20th century.

The few residents who were still living in the upper Gorge area in 1937, however, and many, especially younger ones, were not,⁵²⁶ moved either to the rim of the Gorge or to property near it on land they already owned, on land they purchased or rented from a relative, or on land they bought on the public real estate market. Those living in the lower end of the Gorge moved nearby as well to land on Route 8, in Woolwine or its outskirts, or perhaps on land closer to Stuart, the county seat. Thus their cultural attachment to Blue Ridge land and land practices continued in much the same manner as it did when living in the Gorge, sans its specific ecological and climatic uniqueness. In addition, two former residents, Madison Hubbard and David Conner, are still living at the time of the writing of this study, and hundreds of descendants of deceased residents also live in the area. Their recollections, oral narratives, and tangible heirlooms constitute a collectivity of family, Gorge, and ancestral memories attached to a specific place that continue to be reproduced through occasional community programs in Meadows of Dan or elsewhere along the Blue Ridge, familial or extended kin social events and reunions, regular to frequent electronic social media exchanges, and reconstitutions of ancestral deeds and life events by hiking the Gorge itself. In this manner, Rock Castle Gorge, despite the forced exodus of nearly all of its white European residents in the 1930s, continues to be an extant cultural, historical, and genealogical landscape for descendants to reconstitute their place-based identities, even though the Gorge itself is now shaped by the needs and goals of the Blue Ridge Parkway, its current owners.

B. The CCC Camp

A Civil Conservation Corps camp, which is now a primitive campground, was constructed at the foot of the Gorge in 1938⁵²⁷ and assigned to do landscape development work.⁵²⁸ It was in existence for three years until the end of 1941, but served as a base for Civilian Public Service crews until 1943 when it was shut down.⁵²⁹ This camp therefore came into existence after Gorge properties, with the exception of the Austin/Conner House, were transferred to the National Park Service and after most residents had moved

⁵²⁶ Correspondence in the various tract files over land ownership reveals that many of the older residents' children or grandchildren were living outside of Patrick County. Common places mentioned were Floyd, Martinsville, Danville, Wytheville or Wythe County, Laurel Fork or Carroll County, various West Virginia locations, and Roanoke. One of Mrs. Nancy Lee's children lived in Indianapolis, Indiana.

⁵²⁷ Hall and FRIENDS of the Blue Ridge Parkway, Inc. *Images of America* pp. 24-25. See also CCC Legacy, *Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy*. Edinburg, VA. <http://www.ccclegacy.org/CCC_Camps_Virginia.html> (Accessed October 3, 2015); However, Richard Quin, *HAER No. NC-42*, 1997:76 and 213 noted that this camp was formed in November 1937.

⁵²⁸ Richard Quin, *HAER Report*, p. 76.

⁵²⁹ Richard Quin, *HAER Report*, p. 77.

away. Therefore discussion of it is actually outside the scope of this study. However, its impact on Gorge geography was significant, and a brief discussion of it is therefore included here.

Enrollees at this camp did landscape work such as building trails, comfort stations, and picnic areas and performing roadside cleanup and the planting of trees, shrubs, and ground cover within the Rocky Knob area or its perimeters. They also did some slope grading and rounding, constructed gutters, and built the Rocky Knob Overlook in 1941.⁵³⁰ Building of the Rocky Knob Cabins in the vicinity of milepost 174 is also attributed to this camp. They were built in 1941 as “roughing it” cabins for boy scouts and other outdoor groups.⁵³¹ Finally, they were the core of the fire crews.⁵³²

Oral historical accounts of another CCC camp in the Rocky Knob Recreation area close to the campground have yet to be substantiated, but the scope of these accounts among contemporary descendants and Parkway personnel suggest that at least a Gorge bivouac was camping near the Parkway itself for a period of time.⁵³³ Another possibility was possible conflation of the use of a convict gang that was bivouacked in the Tuggle Gap area in 1931-32 to build State Route 8.⁵³⁴

Given the lack of supervisory personnel at the The Bluffs camp at Doughton Park, North Carolina, which was another Blue Ridge Parkway camp, this Gorge camp also lacked the expected three reserve Army officers and non-local technical personnel. Instead, a lieutenant of the Army Corp of Engineers ran the Camp, and Mr. Compton of Tuggle Gap was one of the foremen.⁵³⁵

The enrollees in the camp had to have been within the required 17 to 21 years old age bracket, were from New Jersey, and were probably unmarried and not attending school. Workers were paid 60 cents/hour, a good wage at the time. They were allowed to keep \$25.00 of their pay for themselves; the rest was sent home to their families. Camp size was about 300.⁵³⁶

⁵³⁰ Hall and FRIENDS, *Images of America*, pp. 24-25.; Richard Quin, *Haer No. NC-42*, p. 77.

⁵³¹ Parks to the Side, *Cabins*. <<http://blueridgeparks.web.unc.edu/dhp-markers/cabins/>> (Accessed October 3, 2015). However, the Virginia Is for Lovers website indicates that they were built circa 1935 to house the CCC enrollees while they worked on the Parkway (*Rocky Knob Cabins*. <<http://www.virginia.org/Listings/PlacesToStay/RockyKnobCabins/>> (Accessed September 28, 2015). However, this date predates the establishment of CCC camps along the Parkway (HAER No. NC-42, 1997:76) and no documentation is provided to substantiate its claim of an earlier date.

⁵³² Richard Quinn, *HAER NC No-42*, p. 80.

⁵³³ Steven Kidd, personal communication, October 2, 2015; Leslie Shelor Allen, personal communication, October 2, 2015.

⁵³⁴ Donald Church. Oral History Interview, Don Dobey, interviewer. Asheville, NC: BRPLIB Code D, July 13, 1977, p. D1.

⁵³⁵ Donald Church. Oral History Interview, p. D1.

⁵³⁶ Donald Church. Oral History Interview, p. D1; Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 2-3; Mastran, Shelley Smith and Nan Lowerre. *Mountaineers and Rangers: A History of Federal Forest Management in the Southern Appalachians 1900-1981*.”Chaper IV: The Civilian Conservation Corps.” Durham, NC: The Forest History Society. 1983.

With respect to its impact on the Gorge itself, residents living at the Austin/Conner House, at the time, which had remained in private ownership, noted that they often visited the camp to watch movies or were invited to have meals with the men.⁵³⁷ The camp also brought technological innovations, such as the use of coal burning stoves rather than wood burning ones.⁵³⁸ This meant that coal had to be delivered to the site on a regular basis. Small pieces of coal can still be found just off the trail going by the camp location. The Gorge road also had to be widened and improved to accommodate federally-owned trucks. A few bear were also caged at the camp for while for release into the Gorge, but they escaped to live in the Rocky Knob area.⁵³⁹

The photographs of the early stages of the camp below capture early stages of camp construction. These tents were replaced by wooden barracks. There were 10 to 12 barracks and other buildings, as well as a 60-60 foot long infirmary. All were built from pre-fab materials.⁵⁴⁰

<<https://foresthstory.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/MountaineersAndRangers-chaps3-4-3.pdf>> (Accessed December 31, 2018).

⁵³⁷ Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, p. 1. Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, p. 31.

⁵³⁸ Michael Ryan, Interpreter, Blue Ridge Parkway, personal communication, July 2013 during tour of lower Gorge area.

⁵³⁹ Civilian Conservation Corps camp. Chapel Hill, NC: Parks to the Side, December 6, 2014. <<http://blueridgeparks.web.unc.edu/dhp-markers/civilian-conservation-corps-camp>> (Accessed October 3, 2015).

⁵⁴⁰ Donald Church. Oral History Interview, p. D1; Hall and FRIENDS of the Blue Ridge Parkway, Inc. *Images of America* pp. 24-25; Verona Conner Moran, Oral History Interview, pp. 1-3; Madison Hubbard, Oral History Interview, pp. 31-32.

Photos of the Early Stages of the Rock Castle Gorge CCC Camp



Photo 9.2 Camp Layout before Permanent Barracks Were Built. Photo BRPLIB 1938.



Photo 9.3. Panorama of Camp, Including Bridge to Camp. Photo BRPLIB 1938.



Photo 9.4.
Tented Barracks (Note Fire Barrels)
Photo BRPLIB 1938.

Photo 9.5.
Kitchen, Mess Hall and Menu Kit,
Washing Cans. Photo BRPLIB 1938.





Photo 9.6.
High Water Ford, Rock Castle Creek at CCC Camp Site.
Mangrum House in Background. BRPLIB 1938.

10. Conclusion and Recommendations

A. Conclusions

When Sam Weems argued successfully to expand the Rocky Knob Park (Rocky Knob Recreation Area)⁵⁴¹ to include Rock Castle Gorge lands,⁵⁴² he, knowingly or unknowingly, tapped into a rich source of detailed and highly contextualized cultural information about how 19th and early 20th century white European settlers were shaped by the environment and ecology of the Blue Ridge and by the larger economic forces facing the nation. Furthermore, Gorge cultural history reveals that they used their adaptational skills to make these forces work for them in positive and somewhat unique ways in order to not only live, but prosper until soil depletion, the chestnut blight, timber clear-cutting, and the Great Depression compelled them to change and re-adapt to a new eco-economic climate. This climate included numerous emigrations to West Virginia coal towns and camps or textile mill towns in Virginia and North Carolina for wage labor, as well as movement to locations just outside the Gorge proper for flatter and more accessible land or jobs with the Parkway. These changes were then merged into the various visions of the National Park Service and others to create a public trust out of the substantial natural resources of Rock Castle Gorge and the Rocky Knob Recreation Area of which it became a part.

The European cultural history of the Gorge is therefore not that atypical from the rest of the Virginia Blue Ridge⁵⁴³ in its dependence on kinship as a social organizational prerequisite; in its reliance on subsistence farming with home gardens, orchards, gathering of herbs and nuts for monetary trade, and hunting small game for trade; in its reliance on hogs and chickens rather than beef or sheep for domesticated meat; in its home weaving and sewing for clothing; in its home remedies for illness; in its Primitive Baptist religious preferences (until the arrival of Presbyterian minister Rev. Bob Childress in the late 1920s); and in its use of German, Scotch-Irish, and American frontier modes of creativity, play, and functional art. It is atypical, however, in its adaptation to a specific micro ecology that required careful attention to wind patterns, sunlight, and weather for the growing of fruit trees; in its choice of building locations with steep slopes and

⁵⁴¹ Rocky Knob Recreation Area was first known as Rocky Knob Park. See DocSouth. *The Digital Parkway: Rocky Knob Park*. Chapel Hill, NC: The Digital Blue Ridge Parkway. 2010. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/blueridgeparkway/content/14877/> (Accessed December 28, 2018).

⁵⁴² Richard Quin, *HAER Report No. 42*, citing letter from Weems to Abbott, 6 January 1938, Abbuehl interview, pp. 18-20 and Weems interview, p. 5. The Jaeger Company. *Rocky Knob Recreation Area, Blue Ridge Parkway: Cultural Landscape Report*. Atlanta, GA and Asheville, NC: National Park Service, Southeast Regional Office, Cultural Resources Division and the Blue Ridge Parkway. 2013, p. 45.

⁵⁴³ Whisnant, Anne Mitchell. *Super-Scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

hillsides as almost the only possibilities; in its residents' tenacity in making the land produce corn and other crops even if it meant using hoes to plant seeds around stumps, rocks, and other hillside impediments; and in its use of Gorge-specific flora, fauna, and aquatic life for its natural resources and capital. When the federal acquisition of all properties but one for a Blue Ridge Parkway Recreation Area is also factored in, it assumes unique qualities and features that could make it an interpretive showpiece for the Parkway and the National Park Service.

These qualities cluster into three distinct interlocking components.

1) *Cultural Historical Aspects*

First, the human-ecological resource still exists, albeit in much more of an archaeological form than in the late 1930s because of the loss of the built structures of Gorge homesteads and because of the regrowth of the native micro ecology diagnostic of Gorge habitat. Even with these significant changes, however, it can serve as the major resource for historic interpretation of the Rocky Knob Recreation Area "for preservation and/or rehabilitation of the Parkway's landscape to a more historically accurate representation of the period setting."⁵⁴⁴ With the extensive photographic archives, oral histories, memoirs, and other documentation of Gorge daily life, the archaeological sites can be reconstituted in situ and with accuracy in design. In so doing, it has the potential to be the major contributor to a full implementation of the 2013 cultural landscape management plan for the entire Rocky Knob Recreation Area.⁵⁴⁵

In particular, Rock Castle Gorge meets all or nearly all of National Register Bulletin 16A criteria for landscape integrity that is consistent with those reported for the Rocky Knob Recreation Area.⁵⁴⁶ However, the content of this study as presented above presents a description of Gorge community life that warrants the Gorge being treated as a separate historical entity rather than as an extension of the core Rocky Knob Recreation Area along the Parkway itself. In residents' identification with Gorge features and each other, they established their own sense of community set apart from external Gorge social life, although one that was quite porous and dependent upon political, economic, religious, and social activity outside of it. This identity should dictate that the Gorge be recognized as a *National historic district* rather than as a set of individual building foundations, stone, or wood structures. In this way, an expanded site interpretation could be developed that is holistic and expressive of the interlocking and networked social organization and cultural meaning systems that make Rock Castle Gorge unique but, at the same time, symbolic of 19th and early 20th century Blue Ridge Appalachian life.

2) *Ecological and Prehistoric Aspects*

Second, the ecological landscape through which Rock Castle Creek and its tributaries run was and is a rich source of natural resources upon which prehistoric and historic human populations drew. It lends itself to treatment of Native American contributions to Parkway cultural resources. Perhaps the most spectacular of them are the "rock castles" themselves, the large clear quartz crystals that were probable attractants to Archaic and

⁵⁴⁴ The Jaeger Company, *Rocky Knob Recreation Area*, p. 1.

⁵⁴⁵ The Jaeger Company, *Rocky Knob Recreation Area*, pp. 221-223.

⁵⁴⁶ The Jaeger Company, *Rocky Knob Recreation Area*, pp. 221-223.

Woodland, if not Paleolithic, Native Americans for their aesthetic and functional properties as projectile points or pleasing trade goods. Subsequent use by European settlers as building stones and other daily life items place these gemstones in the forefront of valued human geologic resources.

The topography of the Gorge would have been a strong deterrent to any prehistoric village creation, but evidence of hunting camps, projectile points, possible cave petroglyphs, and possibly one corn field during the historic period, indicate that other Gorge natural resources were utilized by Native Americans to their advantage. These, too, can contribute to a master plan of Rocky Knob cultural resource interpretation.

Furthermore, the current recaptured ecology alone exceeds the goals and purposes of the Submarginal Land Program⁵⁴⁷ that justified Gorge land acquisition by the Parkway. The resurgence of different plant species and trees according to Gorge altitude and where along its slopes the flora are growing, in addition to rare aquatic and amphibious species, make this resource critical to understanding how the first European settlers adapted their farming knowledge to develop their homesteads. Not only is this resource a major natural environmental opportunity for Blue Ridge Parkway interpretation, but also an historical one for recreating a sensory experience of the original settlers, sans chestnut trees.

3) *Descendants and Parkway Staff Collaborations*

The third component necessary for distinctive Gorge interpretation is that of a collaboration between descendants of Gorge residents living in the immediate Gorge area, of whom there are hundreds, and Parkway interpretive staff in a far more structured manner than interpreter Michael Ryan has been able to do as a single person.⁵⁴⁸ Each of these two constituencies brings its own ideologies and orientations for interpreting the cultural history of the Gorge that, if merged, can enrich the execution of a cultural resource management plan. In developing co-interpretive sites and events, at least two outcomes are likely to occur: (1) visitors will engage in not only objective educational opportunities to learn about the cultural history and prehistory of Rock Castle Creek communities, but also interact with Gorge community descendants through interpretive programming that brings an affective “value” to their experiences; and (2) descendants and Parkway personnel can develop programming in which the common goal of cultural heritage preservation is expanded into a “knowledge commons.” Such a commons lessons boundaries between Parkway initiatives and community initiatives, as, for

⁵⁴⁷ Full text of "Laws relating to rural credits and land registration: Uniform state laws relating to same. Statement to the chairman of the Subcommittee on Land Mortgage Loans of the Joint Committee on Rural Credits, transmitting a copy of the Uniform land registration act as adopted by the twenty-fifth National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws, held in Salt Lake City, Utah, on August 10-16, 1915, by Child, S. R., chairman of the Committee" Internet Archive. <http://www.archive.org/stream/cu31924001712821/cu31924001712821_djvu.txt> (Accessed December 18, 2015).

⁵⁴⁸ See Michael Ryan, *Life in Rock Castle, Virginia* for a discussion of his efforts that resulted in his well-presented narrative-structured account of life in the Gorge.

example, the local Blue Ridge Heritage Inc.,⁵⁴⁹ in a manner that will promote economic sustainability for the area and potentially increase Rock Knob visitors in a manner that is both appealing to them and, at the same time, retains and sustains the intense cultural attachment⁵⁵⁰ many descendants have toward the physical place of the Gorge.

B. Recommendations

Recognizing that funding is likely to be a major consideration, following are a set of recommendations based on consideration of the three components mentioned above. They are offered as near and long-term possibilities that can be goals or opportunities as economic and professional human resources change, rather than as proscriptive outcomes that must be implemented.

- 1) Conduct a full archaeological survey of the Gorge to determine the degree and types of Native American activity during the pre-European settlement period.
- 2) Restore the Whorley House (see Map 5.1 and pp. 56-57) as a Rock Castle Gorge Trail to serve as an introduction to the interpretive materials and activities found further down the Trail. Interpretation of this house, the families that lived there, and the history of land ownership of Lighthorse Harry Lee up to Worley's possession, along with providing the context of surrounding homesteads and an overview of Gorge community history itself, could entice visitors to enjoy either the Gorge hike itself or other activities at the lower end [see 5) and 6) following].
- 3) Use of virtual communication systems such as Near Field Communication (NFC) technologies that use smart phones and tablets for linkage to websites and other electronic technologies to provide the information suggested in 2) at the Whorley House in a manner that will engage younger visitors to engage in more interpretive activities.
- 4) Construction of signage with NFC technologies along the Trail to provide interpretive information and videos. This will require the addition of cell phone access technologies, i.e., communication towers, however, and may not be feasible.
- 5) Development of an experiential learning site at the lower end of the Gorge that offer community/Parkway partnerships. Here, in the more fertile soils of the Gorge, heirloom crops and garden produce, including the types of heirloom fruit trees that were grown in the Gorge, could be planted and nurtured by local volunteers, farming organizations, or with Virginia Tech College of Agriculture students and faculty. Tourists and local residents could participate in workshops or internships to learn how Gorge residents farmed and prepared their food. A lower Gorge site is preferred because of better growing conditions and easier

⁵⁴⁹ Blue Ridge Heritage, Inc. <<https://www.dandb.com/businessdirectory/blueridgeheritageinc-stuart-va-25692725.html>> (Accessed December 19, 2015).

⁵⁵⁰ James Kent Associates. *The Scientific Validity of Cultural Attachment as a Social Phenomenon and the Basis for an "All Lands" Approach in NEPA Decision-making*. Expert Report. Denver, CO: James Kent Associates. Submitted to Preserve Craig, Inc. New Castle, VA, October 9, 2015.

access to Route 8 for those who do not want to engage in a more arduous Trail hike.

- 6) Reconstruction of the Mangrum mill at the lower end of the Gorge, again for development of an experiential learning site and again involving local residents and others. Grains grown at the agricultural site could be winnowed and ground in the same manner as they were in the 1920s and then sold. Participants would be required to maintain the mill and then grind the grain. The Mangrum mill was smaller and simpler in construction than the large DeHart mill that had been located only a short distance away. The cost of reconstructing the Mangrum mill would be less and using it for experiential learning more feasible. The millstones outside the Mabry Mill mill site are reported to be from the Mangrum mill⁵⁵¹ and could be relocated there for such an activity. This site would differ from the existing Mabry mill site in its interactive focus as an experiential learning site.
- 7) Preparation and serving of local foods produced from Gorge crops and garden produce at either the café at Mabry Mill or at another highly visible venue. Recipes and demonstrations of cooking methods should be incorporated into this event as well.
- 8) Creation of Internet-based interactive learning sites that reconstruct daily life in the Gorge circa 1900. These could be valuable learning opportunities for K-12 students and for the general public.
- 9) Other activities that would engage Parkway personnel and community residents in joint ventures to preserve the cultural history of Rock Castle Gorge and, at the same time, display it to visitors while maintaining the heritage valuation of it by descendants and other local residents.

The willingness of the Blue Ridge Parkway Cultural Resources personnel to invest in obtaining the cultural historic information presented in this study to preserve and interpret Rock Castle Gorge represents a commitment to determine in a focused manner “the shape of the Parkway and, more broadly, . . . the public good it has on the whole served so well.”⁵⁵² To serve this public good, however, should require investment by all those knowledgeable about and committed to Gorge preservation. Through the process of engaging in the historical ethnographic methodology assumed in researching study materials, those having such a commitment included descendants living in the greater Gorge area. It is therefore not enough to allow the historical facts contained in the preceding pages to become simply parts of an interpretive narrative shared with tourists and hikers who experience only the current scenery and ecology of the Gorge, spectacular as it is. Instead, more important in terms of meeting the spirit of the public good to which the Parkway has historically aspired is in the future to create common spaces where knowledge is shared and reconstituted by all stakeholders who, in the process of doing so, communicate to multiple users a dynamic appreciation of the doing and meaning of life in the Blue Ridge. Rock Castle Gorge history then becomes less of an archival artifact

⁵⁵¹ Thomas Belcher, Oral History Interview, p. B9.

⁵⁵² Anne Mitchell Whisnant, *Super-Scenic Motorway*, p. 330.

and more of a tool for a continuing an emergent process of making visible the complexities of what it meant and means to be part of the American experience.

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Legend

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BRPDLIB	Blue Ridge Parkway Digital Library, Asheville, NC
BRPPLIB	Blue Ridge Parkway Photo Archives, Asheville, NC

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G. Archived Photos

- Photo 5.10 Nancy E. Lee House 1953. "From road through valley, Rocky Knob, Rock Castle Gorge, residence of Mrs. N.E. Lee (Partially deteriorated and structural members rotted)." J. L. Orr, photographer. Asheville, NC: BRPPLIB. Classification No. 728.7, Negative 6678, January 11, 1953.
- Photo 5.11 Shabby House. From road through valley, 'Shabby House' L. B. Conner residence. (Partially collapsed completely rotted.)" J. L. Orr, photographer. Asheville, NC: BRPPLIB. Classification No. 728.7, Negative 6679, January 11, 1953.
- Photo 5.12 The Joshua Nester House. "From road through valley. Rocky Knob House." Asheville, NC: BRPPLIB. Classification No. 728.7, Negative 6681, May 28, 1936.
- Photo 5.13 Mangrum House Front and Side Views. "D.C. Mangrum residence-razed front of house 4 years old." Asheville, NC: BRPPLIB. Classification No. 728.7, Negative 6675, May 28, 1936.
- Photo 5.13 Mangrum House Front and Side Views. "Road in Rock Castle Gorge. Side of house, 4 years old. D.E. Mangrum residence. RAZED." Asheville, NC: BRPPLIB. Classification No. 728.7, Negative 6675, May 28, 1936.
- Photo 5.19 Photo of What is Believed to be the Hylton/Hilton Mill Circa 1936. "Water turbine mill along creek through Rock Castle Gorge." Asheville, NC: BRPPLIB. Classification No. 728.7, Negative 6673, October 23, 1936.
- Photo 5.20 Mangrum Mill. "Rock Castle Gorge Mill." Asheville, NC: BRPPLIB. Classification No. 728.7, Negative 6978, August 1, 1935.
- Photo 6.2 Photo of the Gorge from the Parkway Looking Towards the CCC Camp Circa 1936. Asheville, NC: BRPPLIB.
- Photo 9.1 Camp Layout before Permanent Barracks Were Built. "Camp Layout." Asheville, NC: BRPPLIB. Classification No. 728, Negative 8612, May 23, 1938.
- Photo 9.2 Panorama of Camp. "Panorama of Camp, including bridge to permanent camp." Asheville, NC: BRPPLIB. Classification No. 728, May 23, 1938.
- Photo 9.3 Tented Barracks. "Tented Barracks (note fire barrels)." Asheville, NC: BRPPLIB. Classification No. 728, Negative 8613, May 23, 1938.
- Photo 9.4 Kitchen, Mess Hall and Menu Kit, Washing Cans. "Kitchen, mess hall and menu kit, washing cans." Asheville, NC: BRPPLIB. Classification No. 728, Negative 8614, May 23, 1938.
- Photo 9.5 High Water Ford, Rock Castle Creek at CCC Camp Site. "High water ford, Rock Castle creek at CCC camp site." Asheville, NC: BRPPLIB. May 1938.

Photo 9.6 Mr. Joshua Nester Receives his Check from Mr. Sam Weems, Project Manager. Asheville, NC: BRPPLIB.