

A woman in a blue dress is walking away from a rustic wooden cabin towards a white picket fence. The scene is set in a wooded area with trees showing autumn foliage. The woman is carrying a white bucket in her right hand and a dark bucket in her left. The cabin has a dark roof and a chimney. The ground is covered with fallen leaves.

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Mountain Farm Museum

self-guiding tour

introduction

For centuries, before the first Europeans set foot on this land, the Smoky Mountains were part of the vast Cherokee homeland. The Cherokees lived in permanent towns, farmed the fertile river valleys, and used a far-ranging network of trails for trade, travel, and warfare.

The Smokies saw only minimal non-Indian settlement prior to 1800. Rough mountain terrain limited travel and much of the region was officially recognized as Cherokee land, closing it to other settlement.



Following the American Revolution, the new United States government began opening more Cherokee land to non-Indian settlers. Some of this was accomplished through treaties and purchase, but in the late 1830s, as part of a national policy, most Cherokees were moved to the Oklahoma Territory.

Many of the newcomers to the Southern mountains could trace their ancestry to the British Isles, but there were those of other European descent, especially German. People of African ancestry were also among the newcomers, but were brought primarily as slaves.

Few of these new settlers came directly to the mountains from Europe. Most were at least second or third generation Americans, and were part of the migration into what was then considered the frontier. Most were farm families looking for more, better, or cheaper land or a chance for a new start.

As families became established and their numbers grew, more and more land was cleared for agriculture, new homes were built, and churches, schools, grist mills, sawmills, stores, post offices, and roads began to appear. For much of southern Appalachia, the frontier period had ended by the time of the Civil War.

Life began to change for many residents of the Smokies with the approach of the 20th century. Along with the construction of railroads into the mountains, one of the most significant catalysts of change was commercial logging. Timber companies eventually logged about two-thirds of what would become Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Logging not only changed the landscape, but people's lives as well, as many individuals left the farm for jobs with the timber companies.



In the late 1920s, the states of North Carolina and Tennessee began buying the land that they would deed to the nation to become Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Although most of the land was owned by timber companies, more than 1,200 families also had to sell their land and homes for the creation of the new national park.

The Mountain Farm Museum is part of an effort to preserve some of the cultural heritage of the Smokies. These buildings, most dating from about 1900, were moved from their original locations throughout the Smokies to this site to create an open-air museum. These structures offer a glimpse into the past and, hopefully, a greater appreciation of the rural heritage of this country.

Davis house



Moved from the Indian Creek/Thomas Divide area, north of Bryson City, NC.

When John E. Davis began building this house about 1899, he had been farming in the Indian Creek area of the Smokies for about ten years. He



John E. and Sarah Lucretia (Creacy) Parris Davis family in 1908.

spent almost two years building this new home for his wife Sarah Lucretia (Creacy) Parris Davis and their young family. The last three of their seven children were born in this house.

Although sawmill-produced lumber was readily available and many new houses were of frame construction, Davis chose to build a log house. Tradition and personal preference may have played a role

in his decision, but he probably also considered cost and his own woodworking skills.

Davis constructed the house with “matched” chestnut logs. A log was hewed flat on two sides, then split in half along its length to produce two building logs. These were used in “matching” positions on opposite walls. The ends of the logs were joined with half-dovetail notches.

The half-dovetail joint took more time to prepare than some other notches, but it “locked” the logs together and the downward sloping surfaces of the notch shed rainwater away from the structure. Unlike many log houses, Davis chose to seal the chink, or crack, between the logs with hand-split boards instead of clay. More than 50 years later, Davis recalled, “when it was finished I had myself a mighty fine place.”

The house may seem small by today’s standards, but farm families spent a great deal of time outside. Separate structures like springhouses, corn cribs, and meathouses provided space for food storage. During warm weather, the front porch became an extra room for work and socializing.

woodshed

Keeping a woodshed full was an unending chore. Wood provided heat during the winter and fuel for cooking year-round. After a fire had warmed a room or cooked a meal, the ashes were also put to use.

Dusting the leaves of garden plants with ashes was a common method of insect control. When worked into the ground in the garden, ashes added nutrients to the soil.

One of the most important uses of ashes, however, was to produce lye. Ashes removed from stoves and fireplaces were kept in an ash hopper like the one standing beside the woodshed. Water poured through the ashes leached out the alkali in them and the liquid collected was lye. The most common use of lye was to combine it with animal fat, usually lard from hogs, and cook the mixture to produce lye soap.



beegums

Honey was an important source of sweetening and was frequently used as a sugar substitute. Many families kept hives of bees not only to produce honey for their own use, but also to sell.

Because older black gum trees are often hollow, sections of gum trees were commonly used as beehives, or “beegums,” as they came to be known. With the addition of a wooden bottom and a hinged lid, hollow “gums” also became storage containers for food stuffs and other items.



meathouse

Moved from Little Cataloochee, NC.

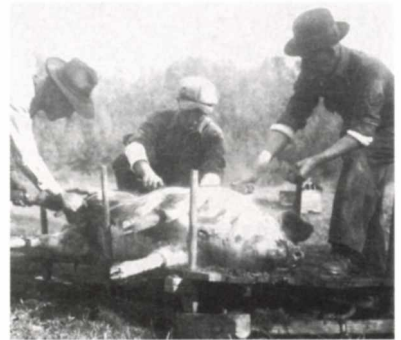
The meathouse was usually closer to the main house than any other building on the farm. This was for convenience and for the security of the family's meat supply.

Although a family's diet might include a variety of meat, it was pork that was found most often in the meathouse. Hogs were

butchered in the fall after the weather was cold enough to keep the meat from spoiling until it was cured. Salt was the primary curing ingredient. The meat was covered with salt, then placed on shelves or in boxes or barrels in the meathouse. The salt was absorbed by the meat and it retarded the growth of bacteria. During the winter, a family cut the meat they needed from the larger pieces in the meathouse.

When the weather turned warm, the meat was often coated with mixtures that included pepper to help repel insects. Some families packed the meat in boxes or barrels filled with corn meal, shelled corn, or clean, sifted wood ashes. Many felt this not only protected the meat from insects, but "sweetened" it, as well.

If the meat was to be smoked, it was hung in the meathouse and subjected to a smoky fire for a week or longer. Smoke added flavor, but also produced chemical compounds that helped protect the meat from bacteria and insects.



chicken house

Moved from Indian Camp Creek near Cosby, TN.

Farms were often populated with a variety of fowl, ranging from geese and ducks to turkeys and guineas, but chickens were usually the most numerous. They provided eggs and meat, as well as feathers and stuffing for pillows and mattresses. Instead of a chicken house, some families simply let the chickens roost in trees near the house or

nest around the farm. Some families planted a cedar tree near the house just to provide a protected roosting place for chickens. A common chore for children was to find the hens' nests and collect their eggs.



Apple house on its original site in Little Cataloochee.

apple house

Moved from Little Cataloochee, NC.

For most mountain families, fruit meant apples. The cooler climate of the mountains provided good apple growing conditions and most families had at least a few trees. Apples were eaten raw and used to make cider, vinegar, apple sauce, apple butter, and pies. If protected from freezing, some varieties stored well through the winter and continued to provide “fresh” apples for several months.

Apple slices were often dried for later use, and some families “sulfured” apples to preserve them. To “sulfur” apples, slices of fruit were exposed to sulfur smoke to kill the bacteria. Sulfured and dried apples were used in the winter for stack cakes and fried pies.

On its original site, this apple house was built into a hillside. The earth surrounding the lower portion insulated the apples from summer heat and winter cold. The hillside also permitted direct access to the upper floor. This structure was part of a farm that included large orchards and was used to store apples until they could be hauled to market.

cane mill and molasses shed



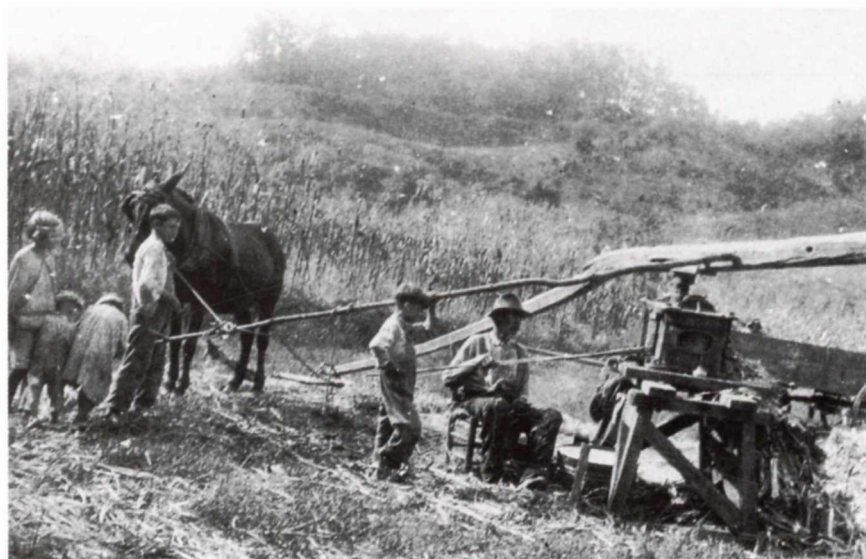
Cutting sorghum cane.

Sorghum cane was grown on many mountain farms. Juice from the cane was cooked to produce sorghum molasses which was spread on biscuits or used in baking.

To extract the juice from the cane, the stalks were fed between the turning rollers of the cane mill. Power for the rollers was provided by a horse or mule harnessed to the end of a long pole that was attached to the top of one of the rollers. The juice was cooked in a large pan, pot, or kettle until it thickened. Ten gallons of juice produced about one gallon of molasses.

Not every family could afford the equipment needed to produce molasses. Some took their cane to a neighbor who had a mill and cooker, and in return the owner of the mill received a portion of the molasses.

Molasses making was often a social event as families gathered to help one another transform the sweet, green juice of the sorghum cane into a rich, dark syrup.



Grinding sorghum cane on a mule-powered cane mill.

corn crib



Moved from Thomas Divide, north of Bryson City, NC.

Because of its many uses, corn was the most important crop on mountain farms. The crib protected the dried ears from the weather and animals. This crib originally included a hinged section of roof that could be propped open to make loading corn easier. The small door on the front was used only for removing corn from the crib.

corn crib and gear shed



Moved from Indian Creek, north of Bryson City, NC.

A wagon loaded with ears of dried corn was driven under the shed portion of this structure and the corn was tossed over the log wall into the crib. The shed also provided covered storage for gear (harness) and other farm equipment.

barn

This is the only building original to the site, although it was moved about 200 yards to this location.

No single building better symbolizes a farm now or in the past than a barn. It was a stable for livestock and the loft above stored much of the feed that would sustain the animals through the winter. Barns often provided a sheltered place for various endeavors, ranging from woodworking to equipment repair. It was also where many farm tools, ranging from hoes and harrows to plows and wagons, could be found when not in use.



Barns varied in size, depending on the size and location of the farm and the prosperity of the family. Farms in broad, fertile valleys were generally capable of producing more crops and supporting more livestock; consequently these farms had larger barns.

Long after many families abandoned their log homes in favor of houses of frame construction, many barns and other farm buildings continued to be built of logs. This was due to the abundance of raw materials, the relative ease of construction, and the durability and low maintenance of log buildings.

blacksmith shop

Moved from Cades Cove, TN.



Out of necessity, farmers were often Jacks-of-many-trades. It was not unusual for a farm to include a small blacksmith shop where iron could be heated and worked by the farmer. However, these individuals rarely considered themselves professional blacksmiths. The forge, anvil, and bellows of a farm blacksmith shop might sit unused for weeks until some job required the farmer to put his skills to work.

Although shoeing horses is most often associated with blacksmithing, much of the work involved making repairs to a variety of tools and farm equipment. Items for the farm and home produced by farmer-blacksmiths tended to be more functional than ornamental.

Since it was a durable material, iron was routinely recycled. Iron that started out as a horse shoe might eventually become part of a door hinge.



springhouse



Moved from Cataloochee, NC.

A reliable source of drinking water was an important consideration in selecting a house site. A good spring met that need, and also provided a means for keeping perishable foods. Water from a spring was channeled through the springhouse by means of a wooden or stone trough where containers of eggs, milk, and butter were “refrigerated” by the cool, flowing

water. Other perishable foods were sometimes stored in crocks in the springhouse, especially during warm weather. The building also protected food from wild and domestic animals.

livestock

The types and numbers of livestock found on mountain farms in the past varied with the size and prosperity of the farm. Often included were milk cows, cattle, sheep, chickens, and other fowl. Horses were the most common work animal, far outnumbering mules and oxen. But of all the live-

stock found on a mountain farm, hogs were the most numerous and the most important meat producers.

There were a number of reasons why families preferred hogs when it came to putting meat on the table. Hogs were more prolific than most livestock, often producing several litters annually. They also reached butchering size more quickly, usually in less than a year. The meat was relatively easy to preserve and the lard produced from the fat was used for cooking and soap making.

In addition, hogs were so self-sufficient they could be raised at little cost. Most families turned their hogs out into the woods to forage for food and fend for themselves.

To keep track of their hogs and other large, free-ranging livestock, and to avoid disputes over ownership, farmers often cut identifying marks into the animals' ears. To keep their hogs from wandering too far or becoming completely wild, families sometimes took corn to a feeding spot in the forest. This also made it easier to catch the hogs in the fall when it was time to pen and fatten them for butchering.



crops

A wide variety of crops and garden vegetables were grown on mountain farms, including wheat, rye, potatoes, squash, pumpkins, beans, and sorghum cane. However, none was as important, as widely grown, or had as many uses as corn.

Corn was eaten fresh as “roasting ears” or corn-on-the-cob, but was more important as a grain after it was dried and stored in the corn crib. Dried, shelled corn was taken to the grist mill each week, usually on Saturday, to be ground into cornmeal for cornbread and other cornmeal dishes. The dried kernels were also cooked to make hominy. Many families ate corn in some form at almost every meal.

If a family produced enough corn, some might be fed to the livestock, but it was the corn fodder, the dried leaves of the plant, that provided much of the winter livestock feed. Corn cobs were used to start fires and to make smoking pipes. The tough, pliable shucks, or husks, were sometimes twisted and woven into chair seats that many swore would outlast the chair. Shucks could be braided into ropes, made into hats, dolls, rugs, and mops, or used to stuff mattresses. Removing the shucks from the ears of corn was often a social event, with family and friends gathering to help with the work.

fences



“Horse-high, hog-tight, and bull-strong” was the saying often used to describe the requirements of a good fence. Before the days of stock laws, grazing livestock was allowed to range free through the mountains. Fences were used more for keeping livestock out of gardens, fields, and yards than keeping the animals confined.

One of the most common fences in the Southern mountains was the split rail fence. A rail fence could take a number of forms, but the most popular was the “snake” (or “zig-zag”) fence. Although this type of fence seems wasteful due to the number of rails

required, it did have advantages. Since the rails were stacked end-on-end at an angle, the fence was self-supporting and did not require posts. This was important in areas where rocky ground could make post hole digging nearly impossible. This type fence was also portable. It was relatively easy to dis-

mantle and move as the boundaries of fields changed.

A more permanent type of wooden fence, used most often around yards and gardens, was the palen (or picket) fence. The palens were hand-rived, or split, from blocks of wood using a froe and mallet.

Stone fences were also found in the mountains, but were often the result of clearing land for cultivation. Additionally, stone walls were sometimes constructed as part of a terracing system to help level a hillside field. One advantage of stone fences was that the building material did not rot.



family work

Work on a mountain farm tended to be divided according to gender, with the women primarily responsible for child care and domestic chores while the men handled the heavier farm labor. Sometimes the lines between roles became blurred with the death or departure of a husband or wife. Older children often had to take on many of the responsibilities of an absent parent. Almost all family members were expected to do their share of the farm work; only the very young, old, or infirm were exempt.



Farm work varied with the seasons. As winter slowly gave way to spring, gardens and fields were prepared for planting. Some cold-tolerant plants, like lettuce, turnips, and potatoes, could be planted as early as March, but most planting was done after the chance of a killing frost had passed. Corn was planted when oak leaves were "the size of a squirrel's ears." Much of the early part of summer was spent cultivating and hoeing the corn to try and keep the weeds under control.

Late summer and fall were times for harvest. Corn fodder (the tops and leaves of the plant) was gathered and dried for livestock feed. Sorghum cane was cut and pressed to make sorghum molasses. Ears of corn were gathered and stored in the corn crib. And finally, after the weather was cold enough, hogs

were butchered to provide meat for the coming year.

Winter, with its colder weather and shorter days, found family members spending more time inside catching up on repairs around the house and farm. It was also one of the times of year when school might be in session because a lighter work load on the farm gave children a chance to attend classes.

There were a variety of chores that required the family's attention throughout the year. Livestock had to be fed and tended, cows milked, firewood cut, clothes washed and mended, the house cleaned and meals cooked. Some individuals carried on crafts or worked outside the farm to bring in additional income. These efforts ranged from hiring out as labor for other farmers, to blacksmithing, woodworking, sewing, broom making, and basket making. Some trapped animals for their hide and fur, while others gathered plants like ginseng or galax that could be sold for medicinal or decorative purposes. One old gentleman described how, after his father's death, his mother whittled hammer handles to trade at the local store for items the family could not produce.

Despite the hard work, life for rural mountain families was not without its lighter moments. Activities ranging from quilting and sewing bees to corn shuckings, bean stringings, apple peelings, molasses making, and barn or

house raisings were often turned into social events. Family, church, and school gatherings also provided an opportunity for people to meet and catch up on the latest news. These activities were often the only opportunity young people had to socialize and court with the consent of their parents.

gardens



The family garden was normally located close to the house as a matter of convenience, and was usually enclosed by a fence to protect it from livestock. Unlike larger agricultural fields which were often abandoned as they became less productive, it was not unusual for gardens to be planted in the same spot for generations. This was possible because manure could easily be hauled from

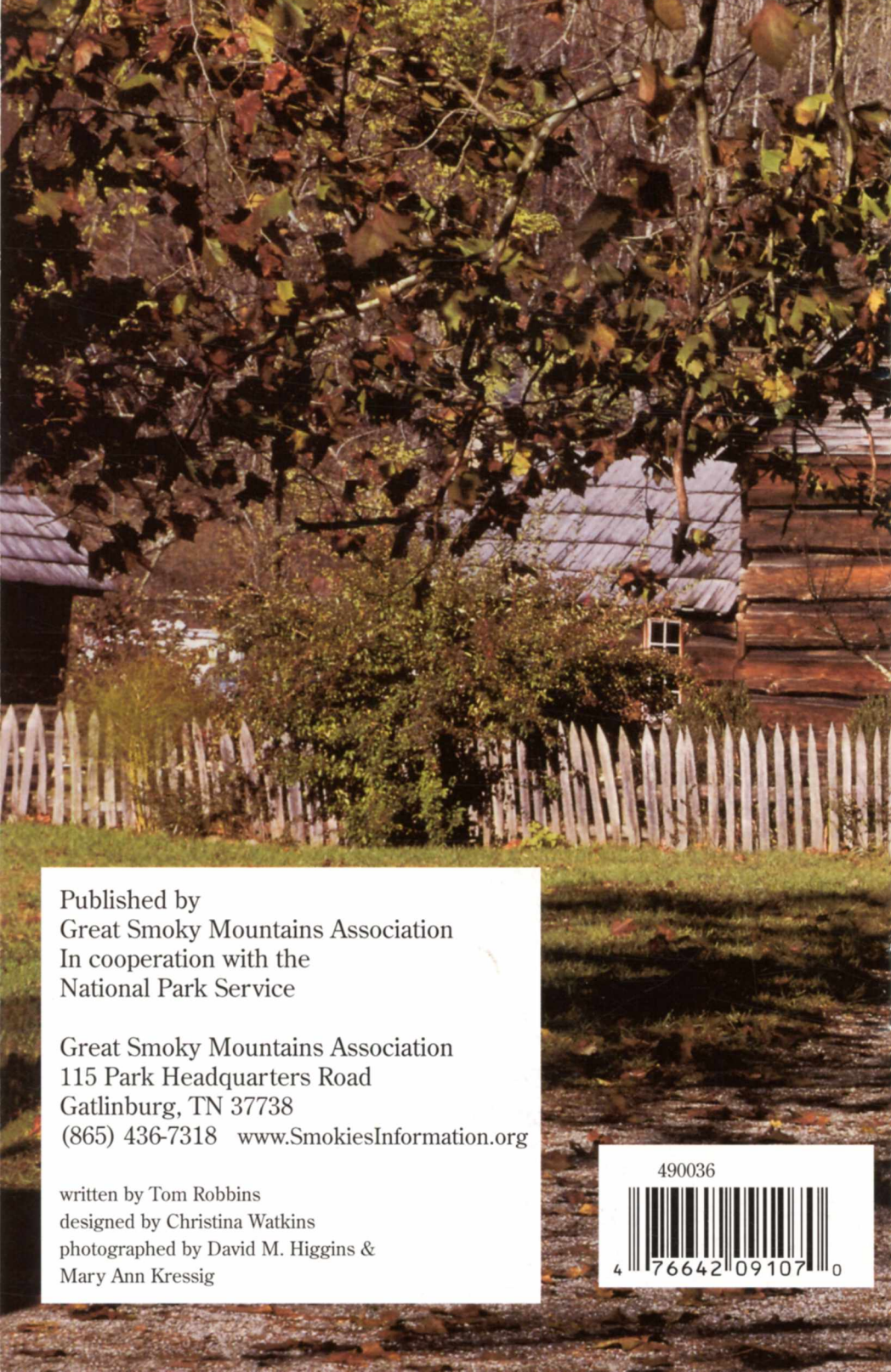
the barn and spread on the garden to help keep the soil productive year after year.

Gardens not only produced vegetables to be eaten fresh, but also food to be preserved for the winter. Before home-canning became widespread, the most common methods for food preservation were drying and pickling. Some foods, like potatoes, turnips, and cabbage, stored well for winter use if protected from freezing.

With early and late plantings of crops that could tolerate cool weather, like lettuce, turnips, and cabbage, gardens could produce fresh food through much of the year. In addition to the food they grew, many families also gathered a wide variety of food from the forest, including wild greens, fruits, nuts, and berries.

yards

Yards in many rural areas in the past were not the manicured lawns we are accustomed to today. The area around the house was swept almost daily and kept free of grass. This type yard was easier to care for and many felt it helped control insects and kept snakes away from the house. During warm weather, the yard, especially the cool shade of a tree, sometimes became an extension of the house for work or socializing.



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