BUCHANAN
DICKENSON
WISE
RUSSELL
TAZEWELL
BLAND
GILES
PULASKI
WYTHE
SMYTH
LEE
SCOTT
WASHINGTON
GRAYSON
CARROLL

Bootlegging In The Bible Belt
A Social History of Drink in Southwest Virginia
1864 - 1933

Benjamin M. Gaston, IV

The story of drink is one of the few unbroken threads in the strange and sad tapestry of the history of southern Appalachian highlanders.[1] In every generation it played an important role in their lives. Great themes in American history, such as the conquest of the frontier, the conflict over slavery, the "reform" spirit of the nineteenth century, capitalist expansion in the era of laissez-faire, and the advent of the labor movement are woven into this tapestry and overlap with the history of drink. This study will concentrate on drinking patterns in nine low-income counties in the center of the region: Lee, Scott, Wise, Russell, Buchanan, Tazewell, Giles, Dickenson and Bland counties, Virginia.[2] It will attempt to explain how social and economic changes influenced these people's drinking habits from Reconstruction through Prohibition.

In the eighteenth century the first people to settle this area were a few eastern Virginians of English descent, seeking land or escaping justice. These pioneers brought with them a taste for drink.[3] In the 1770's the southern migration of Scotch-Irish from Pennsylvania reached the Clinch and New River valleys, which run through these counties.[4] These people, by all

1. Horace Kephart's *Our Southern Highlanders* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1922) and Jerry Bruce Thomas, "Coal Country, The Rise of the Southern Smokeless Coal Industry and Its Effect on Area Development, 1872-1910" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1971) are the only works that ever made concentrated efforts to study this subject, though they do so within broader context. C.C. Pearson and Edwin Hendricks' *Liquor and Anti-Liquor in Virginia, 1619-1919* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1967) has a good deal to say about the interaction of religion and drink in Virginia in general, but it says relatively little about Appalachia. It also shares with Alvin Hall's "The Prohibition Movement in Virginia, 1826-1916" (M.A. Thesis, East Tennessee State University, 1966) the characteristic of dealing primarily with political history rather than with social history.

2. It would be virtually impossible to deal with this subject in terms of the complete expanse of the southern highlands, which cover thousands of square miles and are located in seven states. This study will therefore focus only on a few counties, making were possible some general points about the region as a whole.

3. See Pearson and Hendricks, *Liquor and Anti-Liquor.*

4. James W. Hagy, "Castle's Woods: Frontier Virginia Settlement, 1769-1799," (M.A. Thesis, East Tennessee State University, 1966), p. 2.

accounts, were a rugged group of Presbyterian farmers. The Scotch and the Irish invented whisky; the Scotch-Irish migration to America made it a favorite American beverage, particularly on the western frontier. The Germans, who migrated into the region by 1780, loved their beer, but they quickly learned from the Scotch-Irish how to make and drink whisky as well.[5]

Liquor production developed fairly rapidly. When the state of Virginia required counties to set rates for tavern keepers in the beginning of the nineteenth century, Giles County set the price for beer, whisky and cider considerably lower than it did for rum or wine, almost certainly indicating that the former were produced locally.[6] Tazewell County's rates showed a similar pattern.[7]

Drinking among highlanders, as among Americans in general, seems to have been a family recreation throughout this period. Mountain songs from the period demonstrate this point. One, called "Hot-Corn, Cold-Corn," goes as follows:

> Hot corn, cold corn, bring along a demi-john,
> Fare the well, Uncle Bill, see you in the morning,
> Yes, sir.
>
> Old Aunt Peggy won't you fill 'em up again,
> Ain't had a drink since I don't know when,
> Yes, sir.
>
> Yonder come the preacher and the children are
> a-crying,
> Chickens are a-hollering, toe-nails a-flying,
> Yes, Sir.[8]

Notice here that drinking relatives and a visiting preacher are lumped together as part of the ordinary course of domestic events. The song is not moralistic, but simply realistic and a little humorous.

Religion, which became extremely important in the area, never challenged existing drinking patterns. Both religious meetings and drink provided something to which lonely mountain farmers could look forward. With the general dearth of diversions, drinkers would not want to miss the monthly church services and rare "camp meetings," and preachers could ill afford to come down too heavily on the jug they knew

5. Klaus Wust, *The Virginia Germans* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1969), p. 55.

6. Robert C. Friend, et al., *Giles County, 1806-1956,* ed., Eaton K. Goldwaite (Pearisburg, Va.: Giles County Chamber of Commerce, n.d.).

7. William C. Pendlton, *History of Tazewell County and Southwest Virginia, 1748-1920* (Richmond, Virginia: W.C. Hill Printing Co., 1920), p. 481.

8. Peter Wernick, *Bluegrass Songbook* (New York: Oak Publications, 1976), p. 46.

every family had in its cabin. In the absence of saloons, which were far removed from mountaineers' farms even when they did exist in Appalachia's larger cities, church and community get-togethers provided the only contexts in which people could drink outside the home. Yet the whole family was generally present at these meetings. Thus drinking remained almost exlusively a family recreation.

Moreover, although Baptist and Methodist preachers began making inroads among the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians in the 1790's, all three faiths agreed doctrinally on the subject of drink.[9] Drunkenness was sinful to the extent that it led to adultery and thus to violation of the Seventh Commandment, but drinking itself was not necessarily evil.[10] All three churches, where they formally existed and met regularly, acted on this principle by trying severely or repeatedly drunken parishoners in church courts. Yet no evidence exists that any of them encouraged abstinence at this time.

Where the formal church did not exist – and it did not in most mountain areas – the family regulated the use of drink. Rural areas had few police of any sort, and even fewer liquor laws for them to enforce. There was no point in having the county sheriff ride around to all the little farms in the mountains to see if anyone was disturbing the peace. After the repeal of the famous whisky excise in 1800, the federal government imposed only one shortlived tax on the production of liquor, and none on drinking it, until 1862.[11] Nor did Virginia tax liquor in any way, or seek to regulate its use or manufacture save in requiring tavern and saloon keepers to be licensed.[12]

The customs of the highlanders changed little until the Civil War. Traditional customs such as log-rolling, house-raising, spinning, and weaving as well as whisky-making and emotional religion, went unchallenged before 1860. Local historians like Pendleton, Addington, Johnston and Friend, who generally wrote from oral traditions or their own recollections, had a difficult time finding anything new to say about their subjects once they had finished discussing the colonial period. They often used mid-nineteenth century examples to demonstrate the existence of certain traits among eighteenth century settlers. In fact, many travellers of the 1920's still found people weaving

9. Accounts of Methodist and Baptist expansion are given in George W.L. Bickley, *History of the Settlement and Indian Wars of Tazewell County, Virginia* (n.p., 1852).

10. Benjamin Bedone, *A Scriptural Exposition of the Baptist Catechism* (Richmond: Harrold and Murray, 1849), p. 192; Thomas Vincents, *An Explicatory Catechism of the (Presbyterian) Assembly's Shorter Catechism* (Richmond: Harrold and Murray, 1849), p. 192.

11. The brief Federal tax, enacted in 1813, was repealed by 1817. See Harry E. Smith, "The United States Federal Internal Tax History from 1861 to 1871" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1914), p. 185.

12. Pearson and Hendricks, *Liquor and Anti-Liquor*, pp. 33-35.

homespun, living in log cabins, going to camp meetings and drinking home-made whisky.[13]

On the other hand, people in more accessable parts of the area changed a good deal during the antebellum years. The great thinkers and reformers of the nineteenth century, particularly in Great Britain and America, believed that, through moral regeneration, society could do away with evil and consequently come closer to earthly perfection. Eventually, some Appalachians came to see such mountain traditions as drinking, emotional religion, community industry and family handling of social deviants as either irrational or inefficient. The extent to which they took up these causes against their own traditions generally depended on their wealth, social class, and the extent of their contact with the outside world.[14] The poorer, more remote mountaineers had usually never heard of, never understood, or never accepted popular reform schemes of the nineteenth century, whereas middle and upper class farmers and merchants in most cases had.

Many people in the lower, more accessible parts of the highlands were also anxious to see their region grow economically. Knowing the value of local mineral and lumber resources, they encouraged the investment they thought would lead their backward neighbors out of poverty and ignorance. In 1852 George Bickley, a leading citizen of Tazewell County, wrote that local citizens needed:

> . . . a spur to urge them on to greater exertion . . . To those who would spend a summer in the mountains, a more pleasant retreat from the cares and turmoils of business, could not be found . . . To the capitalist the country opens a wide field of operations.[15]

Believers in the region's potential, feeling that the area could become a New Switzerland, set out to begin the transformation.

Yet, these changes had little impact before the Civil War, as the experience of the Sons of Temperance illustrates. This organization was one of the first to advocate total abstinence from liquor as the best means to social improvement. By 1848, when membership had begun to level off in Virginia, the Sons had one thousand fifty-five members in the Shenandoah Valley, but only sixty-nine in the southwestern mountains, though the population of the two areas was roughly equal.[16]

13. Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders,* chapters 5, 14 and 15.

14. Often a gradient of accessibility and wealth existed. Four progressively more remote, poor, and backward settlements in the Virginia mountains are described by Mandel Sherman and Thomas Henry in *Hollow Folk* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, Co., 1933).

15. George W.L. Bickley, *History of the Settlement and Indian Wars of Tazewell County, Virginia* (n.p., 1852), pp. 45-46.

16. From the *Minutes of the Guard Division of the Sons of Temperance of the State of Virginia* (Richmond: McFarlane and Fergusson, Printers, 1848).

II

In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the less liturgical Protestant churches, which were to be found in southern Appalachia, began to develop a high moral tone. Clergy believed that if the church was to be of value, it would have to become primarily an enforcer of morality. The Presbyterian, Christian, Methodist and Baptist churches were especially well-suited for this sort of work.[17] Unlike the Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran churches, the individual congregations of these churches had the power to discipline and to excommunicate. Thus, they had the means to enforce the moral law they had decided to emphasize.

One must realize, however, that the temperance movement never reached the hills and hollows where the real mountaineers lived. Temperance advocates were most often respectable middle-class farmers and merchants, who were closely attached to a particular church with a particular minister held in a particular building. Most mountaineers were likely to see an itinerant preacher only once a month, and had their meetings in schoolhouses, homes, or even fields. There was no church to expell them for drinking, no elders to chastise them after a wild night.

Curiosity seekers who traveled around the southern mountains in the 1870's and 80's remarked upon the differences between the two types of southwestern Virginians. One group consisted of the respectable, temperate, middle or upper class farmer or merchant. The other included altogether "disreputable" mountain men who were similar in character to their turn-of-the-century ancestors, were emotional about religion, and who drank heavily. Furthermore, they usually drank heavily with their families. One traveler, Charles Warner, observed that, among the latter group, "Men, women and children drank from whisky bottles that continually circulated, and a wild orgy resulted."[18]

The Civil War deepened the division between the groups. Most importantly, many mountaineers became extremely violent. Those who once loved hunting animals above all other amusement learned to hunt men. No one, local or otherwise, even mentioned feuds among the mountaineers before 1860. Area newspapers reported little local violence at all before that date.[19] Thereafter, however, there were a rash of grizzly incidents. The *Clinch Valley News*, for example, printed in 1867

17. See Isidore Thorner, "The Churches and Alcohol," *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol (1945)*, pp. 45-48.

18. Charles D. Warner, *On Horseback: A Tour in Virginia, North Carolina and Tennessee, with Notes of Travel in Mexico and California* (London: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1889), p. 48.

19. Antebellum highland papers are scarce, but there is the *Buchanan Advocate*

the autobiography of Benjamin F. Harden, who after a long series of brawls, armed robberies, extortions, and murders throughout southwest Virginia and eastern Kentucky, eventually was tried and hanged in Jeffersonville, Tazewell County. Curiously, he seemed to have had, in every county he visited, friends willing to shelter him or assist him in some crime.[20] The rising tide of violence led Wise County to build its first jail in 1868.[21] In 1863, Devil Anse Hatfield shot the first McCoy just across the Buchanan County line in Logan County, West Virginia.[22] Hatfield was at the time a captain in Logan's Raiders, a wild and bloodthirsty confederate cavalry unit. In 1880 the famous Martin-Tolliver feud,[23] from which John Fox, Jr. derived the Falin-Tolliver feud of his *Trial of the Lonesome Pine*,[24] began just across the Buchanan county line in Pike County, Kentucky.

Once the shooting started, mountaineers did not just aim at one another. The war brought them another enemy, a foe hated by all mountaineers alike. In 1862 Congress, in desperate need of funds, began for the first time in fifty years to tax liquor.[25] After the war, the tax remained, largely to fund the huge war debt, and new federal revenue agents in the south began collecting. Up to this point, mountaineers had been virtually untaxed, and had virtually nothing with which to pay a tax. Theirs was basically a subsistence lifestyle, and currency was scarce. What little currency they had came largely from the sale of liquor to lowlanders.[26] They were not about to pay a tax, aimed at large-scale distilleries, which was from five to eight times greater than the value of the product.[27] Yet giving up their stills was akin to giving up their souls. They made whisky the same way many of their ancestors had in Scotland and Ireland, and the refined product was generally one of their principal sources of happiness. So they fought the revenuers. The commissioner of Internal Revenue, in his report for 1876-77, wrote of moonshining in the southern highlands:

> The extent of these frauds would startle belief. I can safely say that during the past year not less than 3,000 illicit stills have been operated in the districts

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and Commercial Gazette, as well as lowland papers like the Staunton *Spectator* and the Charlottesville *Jeffersonian Republican*. None reported mountaineer violence.

20. *Clinch Valley News* (Jeffersonville, Tazewell County), June 28, 1867.

21. Luther F. Addington, *The Story of Wise County, Virginia* (n.p., 1956), p. 94.

22. Jean Thomas, *Blue Ridge County* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1942), p. 46.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

24. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909).

25. Smith, *Tax History*, p. 185.

26. Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders*, p. 165.

27. *Ibid.*

> named. These stills are of a producing capacity of 10 to 50 gallons a day. They are usually located at inaccessible points in the mountains, away from the ordinary lines of travel, and are generally owned by unlettered men of desperate character, armed and ready to resist the officers of the law. Where occasion requires, they come together in companies of from ten to fifty persons, gun in hand, to drive the officers out of the country.[28]

The wealthier mountain farmers began to respond with righteous indignation to this violence, which they readily associated with moonshining. The whole situation played right into the hands of the local churches, which were learning that to survive, they would have to preach rational morality and domestic decency rather than "ol' time religion." Temperance agitation spread quickly, and just as quickly caused conflict with the mountaineers. A Russell County judge refused to renew the licenses of retail liquor dealers between 1877 and 1885, but, said Russell County's *Virginia Protectionist* in 1885:

> Observing citizens tell us that in consequence of this refusal to grant license the peace and morals of the people have improved little.[29]

Warner, in the 1880's, noted that in one community:

> The unrestrained license of whiskey and assault and murder had produced a reaction a few months before our visit. The people had risen up in their indignation and broken up the grogeries. So far as we observed, temperance prevailed, backed by public opinion.[30]

Yet, the mountaineer saw neither rhyme nor reason to this postbellum assault on his traditional drinking habits. He was attacked on one hand by dedicated federal agents, and on the other by irate Victorians who, though his neighbors, were from a different world – a different century. A later traveler through the hills, Julian Ralph, related a story told him by a highlander at whose house he was staying which illustrates this confusion well:

> "I was down at the Springs," says the man, "an' I heard one o' them loud-talkin' city women fussin' a great deal 'bout the evils of drink. I wouldn't 'a' minded her she'd a-leaved me 'lone, but she kept talkin' at me. After a bit I jest let her have what was

28. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
29. *Virginia Protectionist* (Lebanon, Va.), Sept. 11, 1885.
30. Warner, *On Horseback*, p. 48.

> bilin' in me." "I allers 'low'," says I "that whiskey is a good thing. A little whiskey and sarsparil' of a mornin' fer me and the ole woman," says I, "an' a little whiskey an' burdock every mornin' fer the chillen – why, it's a pervision of natur' fer turnin' chillen inter men an' women."[31]

The activities of federal revenue agents and temperance advocates served only to drive moonshining underground. As a result, little tax was collected on retail liquor dealers in southwest Virginia. The average per-capita federal income from a twenty-five dollar tax on each Virginia retail liquor dealer in 1870 was $4.01. The per-capita collection for the southwestern tax district was 52 cents, less than one-seventh the state average.[32]

The postbellum period in southern Appalachia saw the advent of something that would eventually prove more significant to the mountaineers than feuding and moonshining. Foreign and northern capitalists began to notice the investment potential of the region's lumber and mineral resources. In 1871, an investment firm in Philadelphia advertised one-hundred thousand acres of land it had acquired in Virginia.[33] Its brochure boasted that the acreage, which covered parts of Giles, Craig, Monroe and Bland Counties, was near a planned railroad (which was never built), had plenty of timber, had "celebrated springs" for vacationers and, almost incidentally, had possible mineral resources. It even had a section curiously entitled "suggestions for colonists,"[34] as though America had suddenly found a colony within herself. Predictably, the pamphlet cited Switzerland as an example of what the area was likely to be like in the future.

The expansion into southern Appalachia began with a seemingly innocuous, if very prosperous, summer resort business. The cool, shady wilderness mountains, with their mineral springs, were particularly inviting to those suffering through the summer months in crowded cities. Resort owners hired local mountaineers to maintain their establishments. Mountaineers had generally never received wages before, and their employment seemed, to the resort owners, good for them as well as for the tourists. Although these businesses operated only during the summer, and workers were paid only three

31. Julian Ralph, *Dixie, or Southern Scenes and Sketches* (New York: Harper and Bro., 1896), p. 334.

32. U.S., House, *Report to the Commissioner of the Internal Revenue, No. 4*, House Documents of the 41st Congress, 2nd Session, 1871.

33. (Anon.) *Description of 100,000 Acres of Land in Giles, Craig, Monroe and Bland Counties, State of Virginia* (Philadelphia: Leisuring Steam Printing House, 1871).

34. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

months out of the year, summer resort work attracted men and boys both out of curiosity and out of a tremendous desire for the items cash wages could buy. In 1905, one frequent traveler in the mountains, Emma Miles, wrote of these summer workers:

> The value of money, the false importance of riches, is evident to their minds before the need of education. . . . They became avaricious.[35]

But when money ran out at the end of the summer, the highlanders were often left with nothing but the run-down farm from which they had tried to escape, often in worse material straights than they had been in originally, and with new, ungratified desires.

The second phase of development coincided with the opening of the coal mine during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. As Pennsylvania coal began to give out, industrialists and coal companies turned south. In 1880, there were 105 miners in Tazewell County, and none in the others.[36] In 1883, the Norfolk and Western Railway reached Pocahontas, Virginia.[37] By 1890, Wise County had 2,419 miners, Tazewell County 477, and Russell County 108 as Pennsylvania miners responded to advertisements to come mine Virginia coal and mountaineers came down out of the hills to work alongside them.[38]

The seasonal calendar of work also plagued the miners. In the fall and winter, owners hired additional labor to dig the coal needed for winter heating. In the spring and summer, these men, who had moved their families and possessions to mining camps, had to fend for themselves, often by raising a small garden on company property.[39] Nor did the resorts provide an alternative source of employment. They had limited hiring capacity, and were rarely near enough to the coal camps to take up the summer slack. Moreover, the coal industry was highly unpredictable. Half-deserted boom towns were common in the mountains, and the miner was generally the last to know whether the year would be boom or bust. The Depression of 1893 hit the miners particularly hard, as did the pre-World War I glut created by the opening of new mines by fortune-

35. Emma Miles, *The Spirit of the Mountains* (New York: James Poff and Co., 1905), p. 193.

36. U.S., Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Valuation, Taxation and Public Indebtedness*, Vol. 7.

37. William Pendleton, *History of Tazewell County and Soutwest Virginia, 1748-1910* (Richmond: W.C. Hill Printing Co., 1920), pp. 662-63.

38. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890: Wealth, Debt. and Taxation*, Part 2.

39. Malcolm Ross, *The Machine Age in the Hills* (New York: James Poff and Co., 1905), p. 193.

seekers. Once in a mining camp, it was often difficult for mountain families to move back to the farm, regardless of whether they experienced boom or bust. Many sold their land to the company; others were simply unwilling to return to the old life as long as the possibility of owning fashionable clothes, furniture or other manufactured goods still seemed possible. So they waited in the mining camps, living on money from an occasional work day, a few vegetables from the garden patch, whatever could be caught in the woods, and charity.[40]

The poorer farmers from the backwoods were particularly likely to seek employment in the coal mine. As a result, there was always a tight bond between moonshining backwoodsmen, who stayed on the farm, and the miners. The miners may have given their poorer friends an opportunity to enter the market place by paying them a good cash price for whisky. Illustrating the close bond between the lower class farmers and the miners was the statement of a mountaineer quoted in Malcolm Ross's 1933 study of the impact of the Depression in industrialized mountain life:

> There's a queer town up the hills a piece. We call it widowville – mostly women who have lost their husbands, not a grown man in the place. You can count four kinds of widow women there: Volstead widows whose husbands are in the pen for making moonshine; widows whose men wandered off from 'em; widows who never got married properly, and the real ones with their men folks killed in the mines.[41]

All of the people, wives of miners and moonshiners alike, lived together in the same misery.

It was within this context that, in 1886, the Virginia General Assembly approved a Local Option Act, giving individual counties or parts of counties the power to stop granting liquor licenses. Surrounding states soon passed similar acts, if they had not already passed them, foreshadowing the passage of national prohibition in 1919. The grounds were laid for confrontation between drinking interests in the back country and mining towns on the one hand and temperance advocates and law enforcement agencies on the other.

40. *Ibid.* Also see Fox's fictional account of his first-hand observation of the same phenomenon in *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909).

41. Ross, *Machine Age*, p. 120.

III

During Prohibition, outsiders paid an unprecedented amount of attention to "poor Appalachian whites." Curiosity about their strange customs, embarassment over their testimony to dire poverty in an affluent society, and indignation over their heavy involvement in bootleg traffic spurred this interest. In 1922, the *New York Times* ran one article on the mountaineers. By 1927, the level of interest was so great that the paper ran ten such stories. These articles dealt with such topics as mountain poverty, feuding, moonshining, lawlessness and lack of educational opportunities. Nationally, the mountaineers were associated with four main characteristics: illiteracy, emotional religion, feuding and moonshining. In 1920, one author in the widely read *Literary Digest* evaluated the southern highlanders as having:

> no news, no travel, no visitors, from outside, no recreation – no vent for any unpreaching thought or emotion except whisky and fights.[42]

This stereotype was not new, but had its roots in the postbellum discovery of mountaineers who increasingly fit this mold. In 1902, Jean Yelsew felt compelled to "do justice to a much maligned folk"[43] with whom he had lived for many years. He asserted that, contrary to newspaper articles the mountaineers of Wise, Scott, Giles and Tazewell counties were mostly temperate (in the older sense of the word), well-mannered and the greatest Christians in the world. Yet Yelsew's grounds for defense were subject to dispute. Emma Miles, who thought mountain Christainity outrageously credulous and wondered that drink and the Bible could go so readily hand in hand, wrote at the same time as Yelsew, that:

> Drugged barrel-house liquor takes the place of the clear, firey product of the still, making the evil of drunkenness ten times worse. . . . Even the old religion is passing . . . [the mountaineer] has become a day laborer, with nothing better in store.[44]

Further, Miles agreed with Warner, who traveled in the 1890's, and Horace Kephart, who lived in the back woods in the early twentieth century, that the mountaineers were mostly feuders and moonshiners. These characteristics became stereotyped and still are widely associated with the lifestyle of the Appalachian backwoodsman.

42. "The Southern Highlanders Wake Up, But Still Make Corn 'Likker'," *Literary Digest*, Apr. 3, 1920, p. 56.

43. Jean Yelsew, *The Mountaineers, or Bottled Sunshine for Blue Mondays* (Nashville: M.E. Church, 1902), p. 5.

44. Miles, *The Spirit of the Mountains*, pp. 194-95.

Despite the patent wickedness of this lifestyle in the Victorian world-view, there was a growing respect for the beastial bravado image of these mountain people among writers of the 1920's, who increasingly rejected Victorian values. In the 1920's, *The Outlook*, a popular journal, carried articles about the southern highlanders that were less judgmental than sardonically humorous. Typically, one author wrote,

> . . . the mountain folks are sternly pious. They are Fundamentalists who take their religion as they do their liquor – straight! . . . These are our last Primitives.[45]

Not only outside people, but the wealthier locals as well, were intensely interested in studying their poor neighbors. In 1925, for example, people interested in studying and exchanging ideas about their economic, moral and religious improvement founded a new journal named *Mountain Life and Work*, at Berea College in Kentucky. Local people wrote of the strange religion and customs of their poorer neighbors in the hollows. To these local reformers, the backwoods seemed to constitute a classic mission field. Local churches often used the area as a training ground for foreign missionaries.[46] Though it seems curious that they were in the business of converting Christians to Christianity, the faith of the mountaineers was almost unrecognizable to these reformers. Their own world was a rational one of moral self-improvement in which Christ figured as a great moral teacher. In sharp contrast, backwoodsmen seemed to cling to the less scientific teachings of the Bible. One author in *Mountain Life and Work* set the task of the mountain missionary to be this:

> He will point out that the sermon on the mount advocates no feuds, revenge, violence, stuffed ballot boxes, buying or selling votes, drunkenness or bribery. He will help people to understand that a religion which expends itself in an orgy of emotionalism, doctrinal disputation and prophetic speculation falls short of the religion of Jesus of Nazareth.[47]

The emphasis was on Christ's moral teaching. The missionary would not carry the pentecostal message to which the backwoodsmen were accustomed. Yet, these missionaries became increasingly effective and successful in the eight-county area, as they were throughout Appalachia. True to missionary form, they built schools, orphanages and hospitals throughout the region.

45. Don C. Seitz, "Mountain Folks," *The Outlook*, Sept., 1926, p. 148.

46. *Mountain Life and Work*, 5 (Oct., 1929), p. 3; *Ibid.*, 8 (Oct., 1932), p. 22.

47. Roy L. Ruth, "Rehabilitating the Mountain Church," in *Mountain Life and Work*, April, 1934, p. 24.

Less benevolent were the outside industrialists who actually had a greater effect on the backwoodsmen's attitudes that did the local reformers. After buying coal or lumber land from local farmers at minimal prices, these industrialists set up ramshackle mining or lumbering camps where the displaced and fortune-seeking mountain farmers, along with some imported foreign and northern miners, were to stay. Without exception they started a company store as well, stocked with convenience products from the north. Camps and their stores brought consumer desires, or "wants."[48] The post-bellum scheme of charging lower freight rates on finished products going from north to south than on those going from south to north, which complemented a reverse arrangement for raw materials, facilitated the development of these "wants" in mining and lumbering camps. These "wants" spread quickly into the rural communities: those who remained on the farm wanted the same cars, toys, candies, and clothes that their relatives in the camps could sometimes afford. Unfortunately, the frequent depressions left most highlanders badly overextended, with neither cash, land or their new products from the north.[49]

Thus the world outside the hollows and ridges, for both benevolent and capitalistic reasons, had begun to take an active interest in the backwoodsmen. In many ways, poor Appalachia was like a colony, with missionaries sent in, modern patterns of consumption encouraged for the benefit of distant industrial centers, massive amounts of raw materials exported to those industrial centers, and little respect paid to the culture and religion of the native inhabitants. The colonizers were convinced that the various fruits of reason and capitalism would ultimately benefit these people; in the meantime, the opportunity of cheap labor beckoned.

Like Alice in Wonderland, the mountaineers were anxious to try everything. Like Alice, they often went too far. Their adventurism and emotional volatility made a bad combination. Judge Willis Staton, in a biography of his notorious friend, Sam Hurley, said that Buchanan County's lumber camps around the turn of the century sheltered all sorts of problem drinkers. There Hurley, once an innocent farm boy, had had his first drink. There too he soon became party to prolific drinking, gambling and bootlegging among lumbermen. The liquor store near his camp was often the site of gun fights and murders. In 1891, the Clinch Valley Baptist Association, composed of Lee, Scott and Wise counties, complained that:

48. Warren H. Wilson, "The Lower Standard of Living," *Mountain Life and Work*, April, 1934, p. 24.

49. See Ross, *Machine Age*, Chapter 5.

> Intemperance is a great and growing evil within the bounds of the Clinch Valley Association – especially in the new towns that are growing up along the lines of the new railroads.[50]

Where industry increased, heavy drinking did as well.[51] Miners and lumbermen were generally either displaced mountaineers who came from drinking backgrounds, or displaced northerners and foreigners who had worked in mining camps elsewhere for whom heavy drinking was an established means of venting the frustrations that accompanied life in the camp.[52] Whether these groups drank together or separately is not known, but it is certain that they drank. In Tazewell County, local judges granted liquor licenses only in the mining towns while denying them to rural communities. In 1891, for instance, they granted a license explicitly to the Clinch Valley Coal and Iron Company for the new mining town of Richlands.[53] Subsequently, the granting and renewing of licenses for the mining centers of Pocahontas and Richlands became an annual routine, long after people from other towns and districts voted themselves dry under the Local Option Act.[54]

Drinking in the lumber camp, mine camp or boom-town saloon had the unquestionable effect of taking drink out of the family context. Unrestrained drinking was, if not increasing, increasingly visible to the unsympathetic. To get a drink in the Prohibition era, men in the policed mine towns had to slip off at night to the many "blind tigers" and "grog shanties" tucked back in the most remote parts of the mountains. Such clandestine, nocturnal activity was not usually a family event. Women were left to mind the younger children, who, if they came along, might let something slip about these activities to a schoolmistress or some other person of authority.

Contributing even more than industrialization to drinking problems among mountaineers was, curiously enough, the Eighteenth Amendment. Prohibition phenomenally increased the volume of whisky produced in the mountains, turning moonshining from a cabin custom to a large industry. A one-

50. *Minutes of the Clinch Valley Baptist Association Annual Meeting, Conan's Branch Church, 1891* (Lynchburg, Va.: Ligger and Holt, Electric Power Printers, 1891), p. 12.

51. This is unlike the situation in Lynn, Mass., where industry brought with it temperance agitation. See Paul Faler, "Cultural Aspects of the Industrial Revolution," *Labor History*, Vol. 15:3, (Summer, 1974), p. 367.

52. See, for example, Luther Addington, *Wise County Geography Supplement*, (n.p., 1928), for details on non-native miner population in that county over the years.

53. John Newton Harmon, *Annals of Tazewell County, Virginia from 1800 to 1924*, in two volumes (Richmond: W.C. Hill Printing Co., 1925), Apr., 1891, p. 102.

54. Leonard S. Blakey, "The Sale of Liquor in the South: The History of the Development of a Normal Social Restrain in Southern Commonwealth" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1912), plate 4.

time moonshiner claimed that mountain whisky brought twelve to fifteen dollars a quart during Prohibition.[55] He later claimed that, by 1927, everyone was in it for the money, and that they no longer distilled three times or had any interest in producing a quality product. "A new generation knowing not the old gods is springing up," he lamented. "The curse of America is upon the mountains. The slogan 'easy money and large profits' has proved a siren song."[56] Jean Thomas and Horace Kephart, both residents of the mountains and friends with mountaineers, devoted entire chapters to anecdotal discussions of the disparity and conflict between old-timers and their venal progeny during the Prohibition era.[57] In their stories, the younger "bootleggers" continually wanted to make a much larger volume of lower quality product, against the advice and sensibility of their elders.

The principal newspaper of Wise County's coal center, *Crawford's Weekly*, reported the breaking up of a still once or twice a month in the early days of Prohibition. Later, they only reported the breakup of large volume stills and raids which involved a gunfight, while publishing a monthly circuit court docket that was full of moonshining charges. One prohibition officer wrote to *Crawford's Weekly:*

> It is a fact, as about everybody knows, that whisky is being made all over the county and that automobiles are transporting whisky over about every road that can be traversed leading to a market. . . . It is impossible for such a small force to patrol every road in the county and to police all the mountainous country where whisky is being manufactured.[58]

Complaints from the dry sector were many. In 1920, the Valley Baptist Association, which included Giles, Tazewell and Bland Counties, felt the need to call for support of the law.[59] In 1927, the Association announced that:

> The attention of men and women, God-fearing men and women in our churches, those of the Clinch Valley Association, is called to the defiance, the disregard of law and order and decency of this motley crowd (of liquor traffickers).[60]

55. Francis Pridemore, "A Moonshiner on Prohibition," *The Outlook*, 135 (Nov., 1923), p. 406.
56. Francis Pridemore, "What Prohibition Has Done for the Mountaineers," *The Outlook*, 139 (July, 1927), p. 385.
57. Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders*, Chapters 7 and 8. Thomas *Blue Ridge Country*, Chapter 2.
58. *Crawford's Weekly* (Norton, Wise County, Va.), Jan. 29, 1921.
59. *Minutes of the Clinch Valley Baptist Association*, 1920.
60. *Minutes of the Session of the Clinch Valley Baptist Association*, 1927, p. 18.

The advent of a class of industrial poor, coupled with the enactment of Prohibition, had a profound effect on the original farming poor. These farmers had acquired a taste for consumer goods from their kin in the camp. Many outsiders complained, however, that the growth of materialism was a disaster for their culture and their finances.[61] Malcolm Ross put the problem effectively:

> The mail order house catalogue became more thumbed that the family Bible. New board houses, nearby schools, ready-made clothes, tinned foods and automobiles to carry the whole tribe over the mountain where lately one member had spent the whole day going to town on muleback . . . here was every temptation to give up the struggle on hardscrabble farms.[62]

Subsistence farming could not support lifestyles comparable to those of men who received a company salary. A general decrease in farm size aggravated the situation. In Russell County in 1860, for example, there were 777 farms averaging 273 acres. In 1925, there were 2,600 farms averaging 96 acres, the greatest number being between ten and nineteen acres.[63]

Increasingly, the solution to this problem was making moonshine. Originally limited to supplying people in nearby dry areas or industrial camps, the business expanded to a national scale during Prohibition. With moonshining and bootlegging the mountaineer who had stayed on the farm was no longer stuck between the rock of subsistence farming and the hard place of material wants. He, too, could buy into the modern world.

If bootlegging spread like wildfire, so did violence. Much violence was labor-related. In conformity with the colonial attitude northern capitalists took toward the south, southern mine workers were paid much less than their northern counterparts. This was also, in part, to undercut the United Mine Workers' organization in northern fields. The mine owners, no less violent or hardheaded than the mountaineers, stopped at nothing to try to prevent UMW organization in the southern Appalachians. In 1920 the Hatfields quit fighting the McCoys, and took up arms against the companies' Baldwin-Felts detectives. The result was "Bloody Mingo," probably the most sanguinary dispute in the history of American labor.[64] Railroad passenger cars rode empty through the Pocohontas coal region

61. See Chris Christenson, "The Economics of Agriculture," *Mountain Life and Work*, July, 1926, p. 7.

62. Ross, *Machine Age*, p. 68.

63. D.C. Pratt, *Russell County: Virginia's Bluegrass Empire* (Bristol, Tenn.: King Printing Co., 1968), p. 43.

64. Ross, *Machine Age*.

because of the danger of snipers. Nor was "Bloody Mingo" an isolated incident. In 1931 *Crawford's Weekly* described nearby Harlan, Kentucky as an "armed camp" during another labor dispute.[65] To this day miners in the area hate and distrust mine operators.

Even more, however, violence was related to moonshine. Sam Hurley, in 1905, worked with Buchanan County revenue agents to blockade the Virginia-Kentucky highway in hopes of intercepting moonshine runners.[66] They were successful, and there resulted a shootout in which there were many casualties.[67] The situation deteriorated as moonshining increased with Prohibition. Nearly every month between 1921 and 1933 *Crawford's Weekly* reported at least one death or shoot-out caused by drunken fights or raids on stills.

Thus the mountaineers came to hate the law, which they fought against for the right to satisfy those material "wants" to which they had taken faster than to any other facet of modern life. While the farmers fought for the right to make moonshine, and the miners and lumberjacks for a constant and respectable wage, all of them struggled for the right to attain a standard of living comparable to that of most Americans but so long unavailable to those living in the hills.

The Depression of 1929 is a less fitting stopping point for this story than the passage of the Twenty-first Amendment. The mountaineers had known long and bitter depressions before 1929. Their effect was always the same: those who had had land returned to their old lifestyles, bitter and disillusioned. Those who did not tried to make a go of it. Yet the passage of the Twenty-first Amendment in 1933 effected a great change. Bootleggers began to go out of business, and moonshine began to be much less ubiquitous. By 1933 Southwest Virginians began to be distinct from other Americans only in the violent legacy on which they modeled themselves.

65. *Crawford's Weekly*, Nov. 7, 1931.

66. Willis Staton, *A Colorful Career of a Miraculous Mountaineer: A Glimpse into Life of a Remarkable Character* (n.p., 1942).

67. *Ibid.*