"Parting Friends": Southeastern Kentucky Funeral Customs. 1880-1915

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At the turn of the twentieth century, southeastern Kentucky remained a sparsely settled region where traditional values abounded. Throughout society, funeral rites and changes in them evince values of family, community, and religion. Visitors to the area, whether settlement-school teachers, preachers, or researchers, vividly described deathbeds, burials, and funeral occasions which illuminate local values. Reflecting the writers' urban prejudices, these journals and publications along with contemporary newspaper accounts provide insight into southeastern Kentucky mourning customs during the years 1880 to 1915. Although the turn of the twentieth century brought change in the way urban dwellers dealt with mourning, their mountain neighbors held strictly to traditional means of expressing grief which helped transmit these traditions to future generations.

John Jay Dickey and Katherine Pettit kept journals which provide the most detailed southeastern Kentucky funeral accounts. Dickey was a forty-year-old minister when he chose Jackson in Breathitt County for his home in January 1883. He served in Breathitt and Clay counties from 1883 to 1901. Pettit, a member of the State Federation of Women's Clubs, was twenty-seven when she began making summer trips to Knott County in 1895. Both came with convictions and codes of etiquette which included prescriptions as to appropriate burial and funeral customs. Although born and educated in Kentucky,

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they held to rites of passage which had a more urban bias.  

Pettit and Dickey found southeastern Kentucky very rural indeed. Breathitt County's 1880 population of approximately 7,700 nearly doubled while Clay County's population of over 10,200 had a one-third increase by 1900. Although Knott County and Perry County were less populated in 1890, the 1910 census reported that their populations had nearly doubled. However, the communities remained quite small; the 1896 population of Barbourville, the largest town in the area, was 1,200, at least double the number of residents in other nearby communities.

During this era of limited medical knowledge, deaths occurred frequently and often from unknown causes. Children under five years of age accounted for almost one out of two deaths in southeastern Kentucky in 1880; of the 347 deaths by unknown causes, 272 were of that age group. In 1900 one of every ten deaths in the area resulted from unknown causes. Of the remaining cases, typhoid fever, pneumonia, influenza, and heart disease were most frequently recorded as cause of death.

1 Although no articles were found on John Jay Dickey, Katherine Pettit has been the subject of much interest; see Lucy Furman, "Katherine Pettit, Pioneer Mountain Worker," Register of the Kentucky Historical Society 35 (1937): 75-80; and Nancy K. Forderhase, "Eve Returns to the Garden: Women Reformers in Appalachian Kentucky in the Early Twentieth Century," Register of the Kentucky Historical Society 85 (1987): 237-61.

2 Office of the Census, Department of interior, Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880) (Washington, 1883), 62-63; Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce and Labor, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910 Population By Counties and Minor Civil Divisions 1910, 1900, 1890 (Washington, 1912), 195-204.

3 The Kentucky State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1896 (Detroit, 1895).

4 Census Office, Department of the Interior, Report on the Mortality and Vital Statistics of the United States ... Tenth Census (June 1, 1880) (Washington, 1885), Part I, Twelfth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1900, Vital Statistics (10 vols.; Washington, 1902), Vol. III, Part II, 140-44. The method by which the census office tabulated these statistics means that the figures given are for Kentucky state group 1 which includes a few additional counties. See also John C. Campbell, The Southern Highlander and His Homeland (New York, 1921), 208-14.
Both Pettit and Dickey recorded poor health conditions and ignorance of proper hygiene. Consumption, flux, fevers, and gunshot wounds were common causes of death. Dickey expressed his horror on 3 October 1886:

"Today I attended the burial of Green Taulbee and his daughter Dulcenia. They died of flux and were buried side by side. It was a solemn scene, one that I never looked upon before. Flux is raging in this county though not like it is in some others. In Salyersville and within five miles there have been 100 deaths. In Lee County there have been 400."\(^5\)

Pettit's description of preparing a Knott County child's body, still clothed in the same dirty garment which she wore to bed the week previous when stricken with flux, included their use of the family's "dishpan, which was the only pan they had."\(^6\) Another child sick with scarlet fever attended the large gathering which included the funeral of her two siblings. Her parents "did not seem to realize the danger to their sick child or the danger to all the other children there. In fact no one seemed alarmed."\(^7\)

At the deathbed, friends and relatives gained assurance that the deceased had accepted death and looked forward to a reunion with loved ones in Heaven. In September 1885, Mrs. W.B. Brown "died the death of a Christian, died shouting the praises of Jesus Christ."\(^8\) While spending the summer of 1901 in Hindman, Pettit visited a grieving mother whose daughter died after being ill only a few days. Pettit recounted:

All the family were at her bedside except one brother. She begged her husband to quit drinking and he promised to do so. She fell into a deep sleep and on waking said she had

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5 John Jay Dickey Diary, 3 October 1886. Excerpts from the original copied by Mrs. W. E. Bach of Lexington. Microfilm copy is available at the Kentucky State Archives, Frankfort. Hereinafter cited as Dickey.


7 Pettit-Stone, 7 September 1901.

8 Mountain Echo [London], 11 November 1885.
died already, had been to the beautiful City above, where everything was bright and shiny and the trimmings were of gold; she hated to die again but had come back to say good bye to Joe, who came in while she slept, and she made him promise to stop drinking. She sang and shouted at the last.9

Similar depictions of Heaven, heavily embellished with imagery popular in the late Victorian period, often were intended to give those persons who had made promises to the dying an incentive

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9 Pettit-Stone, 28 July 1901.
to remain faithful to their parting agreements.

Frequently, a family member summoned a minister to the bed of a patient whose symptoms indicated imminent death. Reverend Dickey's diary contains many accounts of deathbed conversions and religious discussions. In June 1886, Clifton Cockerell, who believed he was dying, sent for Dickey, asked the minister to take him to the church and baptize him, and, after Dickey's refusal, insisted that he preach before leaving. On the occasion of Ike Combs's burial in 1889, Dickey wrote: "His conversion seemed genuine, he continued to talk to all about him till his death, warning[,] exhorting and entreating them."10

On several occasions, persons on their deathbeds requested certain hymns and sermon texts to be used at their funerals. After saying "I am all right and ready to go," G. P. Freeman gave instructions that his 1905 funeral should discuss "what an awful place hell was and what it took to make a christian [sic]."11 Newspaper and journal accounts of deathbed scenes emphasized the importance southeastern Kentuckians placed on both family and religion. Death notices often stated which family members were in attendance at the dying person's bedside. A friend of the family chronicled the Jackson County death of a young woman who died surrounded by her father, mother, and husband. When a resident of London died, the *Mount Vernon Signal* recorded: "Of her large family of nine children, with the husband all were at her bedside when the end came, except the two sons ... who live in Denver."12

Many accounts recorded the dying family member's

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10 Dickey, 16 June 1886, 27 January 1889. See also 3, 10 June 1888, 18 February 1899.
words of comfort to his family. Nineteen-year-old Charlie S. Hodge called his mother to his bed and told her that he was not afraid to die. Even young children often knew of their impending deaths and shared their insight with others. The obituary of little Schooler Lee Adams, who died after a six-day bout with diphtheria, remarked: "Mother[,] I am going away off." He in his innocence did not know how those words would pierce his mother[,]s heart.

The London Mountain Echo published an obituary in which the writer recounted that during her lengthy illness a resident said: "I am going to see my baby. I don't want it back here, but I am going to see it." On her deathbed, she reassured her gathered friends, stating that she had told her husband and three children "to trust in God for their protection in their lonesome hours and live prepared to meet her in Heaven, where all is peace and love."

Family members shared their ministers' convictions about the validity of deathbed salvation experiences. Samuel James Smith of Booneville wrote an obituary and memorial poem for the Mountain Echo, depicting his relative's conversion to Christianity as he was dying. Thus many southeastern Kentuckians used their deathbeds as pulpits from which they preached family, community, and religious values. These area residents expected the same kinship bonds to direct the actions taken by loved ones and friends in preparation for burial and funeral attendance.

Physical necessities and community expectations impelled southeastern Kentuckians to follow basic rituals from death to the burial of a loved one. Preparation for interment varied according to personal preference and the availability of

13 Ibid., 31 August 1905; Mount Vernon Signal, 22 January 1897.
14 Mountain Echo, 28 December 1905.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., 20 December 1895.
professional services. The undertaking profession was evolving in late nineteenth-century America in the larger communities, but very few persons became undertakers in sparsely populated areas.

The *Kentucky State Gazetteer and Business Directory* for 1879-80 listed no undertakers for county seats in the area surrounding Pettit and Dickey's residences. Although the journals make no mention of mortuary professionals in nearby larger county seats, James E. Allen opened his undertaking establishment and cabinet-making business in Mount Vernon in 1868. On 23 December 1887, *The Mount Vernon Signal* described him as "always at his post ready to wait upon them on short notice." Allen and Vincent Boreing of London in Laurel County were included in the index as undertakers in the 1887-88 directory. Both men also operated furniture businesses.

Allen, who could receive orders by telegraph, stocked an assortment of coffins, caskets, burial robes, linen bosoms, and cuffs. In the mid 1890s, Willis Griffin of Mount Vernon advertised similar services and by 1906 he offered embalming. After the turn of the century, London and Mount Vernon undertakers operated hearses. The Murphy Furniture Company of London advertised in 1905: "Caskets delivered in any part of

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17 *Kentucky State Gazetteer and Business Directory*, 1879-80 (Louisville, 1879).

18 *Mount Vernon Signal*, 23 December 1887. Allen's failure to be listed in the 1879-80 directory as an undertaker may indicate his hesitancy in the early years to be identified with that new profession.

19 *Kentucky State Gazetteer and Business Directory*, 1887-88 (Detroit, 1887). In the 1887-88 directory, only 228 undertakers were listed for the entire state, and most were located in urban areas. One sociologist has observed that, "in rural areas the combination of furniture sales and undertaking has had a functional vitality that has lasted into the present century." See Robert W. Habenstein, *The American Funeral Director: A Study in the Sociology of Work* (Ph.d. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1954), 120.

20 *Ibid.*, 11 December 1896, 5 January 1906; *Mountain Echo*, 4 May 1905. Undertakers from Stanford in Lincoln County also ran advertisements in the *Mount Vernon Signal* and thus persons within the Stanford area might have used their services.
the county and funerals attended with hearse without charge. 21

Other than supplying burial receptacles, garments, hearses, and embalming, the southeastern Kentucky undertakers played an occasional role in the funeral ceremonies. In the 1880s and 1890s, Vincent Borenig preached the funerals of some of London's deceased. One obituary noted that Willis Griffin conducted the procession to the family burial grounds. Through newspaper references in obituaries, wealthier citizens possibly sought to bring their use of funeral services to the community's attention. Although London and Mount Vernon residents made use of local professionals, the residents of Jackson and Hazard appear to have had no undertakers until 1913. 22 Thus, the availability of an undertaker was dependent on more than simply the community's population.

Personal preference and community expectations also played a role not only in the hesitancy to have an undertaker participate in burial preparations but in the slow growth of the profession in southeastern Kentucky. In the Laurel County community of Beech Creek, for example, the consciousness of kinship bonds caused neighborhoods to render proper respect for their deceased members by assisting in burial preparations. Failure to do so was to risk "severe censure." 23 The lumber industry came to Beech Creek in the 1870s and 1880s, and one sociologist noted that the introduction of this industry "began, or rather hastened, the long process of changing Beech Creek from an independent rural neighborhood into a neighborhood . . . more and more influenced by the values of the outside

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21 Mountain Echo, 4 May 1905.
22 Louis Pilcher, The Story of Hazard, Kentucky: The Pearl of the Mountains [Hazard, Ky., (1913)], 43; Mountain Echo, 4 November 1885, 16 August 1895; Mount Vernon Signal, 27 August 1897.
But other scholars have recorded the continued reliance of Beech Creek residents on kinship rather than formal institutional arrangements despite exposure to the forces of modernization and industrialization. In other communities in which consciousness of kinship obligations was strong, sociologist Elmora Matthews documented a resistance to professional undertakers' services and a preference for community burials. Although undertakers were burying some townspeople, the majority of rural southeastern Kentuckians continued to render burial preparations for their fallen loved ones.

For most residents, the process of burial followed a distinct pattern in most rural communities. In order to prepare a body for burial, one or more close friends or relatives of the same sex as the deceased washed, dressed, and laid out the body on boards or a bed in the home. Coins were placed over the eyes to hold them closed and a cloth was tied around the chin and knotted at the top of the head until rigor mortis set in. Often, a saucer of salt was placed on the chest as it was believed to help preserve the body, and camphor on a cloth was used to delay discoloration of the face. Although men were customarily buried in their best available clothing, neighbors usually made clothing in which to inter women and children.

Pettit's diary was particularly detailed on the burial

preparations for a child named Corie Combs. On 19 July 1901, Pettit and her colleague May Stone were called to the child’s deathbed on Yellow Creek. Asking what would be required of them, they learned they would need to “make the clothes, line and cover the coffin, strip and wash the child and put her in it.” Pettit continued:

I never in my life shrank so much from doing anything and all the way up [the creek to the home], I kept wishing and wondering how we could escape the ordeal. Nothing had been done. The child was still lying on the bed just as she had died.

Pettit and Stone washed and dressed the body and combed her hair. The parents expressed pleasure and gratitude at her appearance. The mother asked that they place “cotton in the bottom of the coffin to make it soft and then they collected an old pewter spoon ‘which hit loved so’ and a picture card to put in the coffin.”

Pettit detailed Corie’s burial garments. In the depths of her personal despair, the child’s mother gave precise directions as to how she wanted the clothing made: “The dress must come to the shoe tops, the underskirt must have pretty hamburg on it and come an inch below the dress.” The child’s aunt, who was sent across the mountain for material, had further instructions on the garments’ production: the cap was to have two ruffles of lace and two strings to tie in a bow, the skirt should be notched rather than hemmed with “a mother hubbard ‘fer we don’t like none of them long waists.”

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27 Pettit-Stone, 19 July 1901. For additional information, on May Stone, see Pauline Ritchie Kermlet, “May Stone - The Ladyst,” Mountain Life and Work 22 (Summer 1946): 12-14, 28-29.

28 Ibid.


30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.
The Combs child's coffin, constructed by the men, was a plain wooden box covered with cheap black cambic and lined with "bleach" (bleached muslin) and edged with cotton lace. The lid was trimmed with six colorful bows of deep purple and bright watermelon pink ribbons. Other contemporary descriptions included use of black broadcloth or gray muslin for covering, padding of cotton or a quilt, and white cotton or satin linings. Coffins conformed to the body's length and girth. A shortage of carpentry skills could delay the funeral. Dickey's diary told of a burial which was delayed while the coffin was constructed.

News of a death usually reached the community by word of mouth. Although printed funeral invitations were popular elsewhere, no evidence points to their use in southeastern Kentucky. On hearing of a death, the men of the area took their picks, shovels, and mattocks and proceeded to the cemetery to dig the grave. Newspaper accounts indicate that most rural residents were buried in family graveyards. If the death occurred late in the evening, they waited until the next morning to dig the grave and inter the body. As embalming was rare, most burials took place within forty-eight hours after death. In such a case, family members and friends sat up with the corpse. During the wake, they watched the body for signs of life and prevented cats or rodents from bothering it. The mourners passed the hours by singing hymns, listening to local ministers preach, eating a large meal, and visiting informally.

32 Ibid.
33 Dickey, 22 May 1900; Slone, What My Heart, 57; Jess Wilson, The Sugar Pond and the Fritter Tree (Berea, 1981), 192-93; Lambert, "Mountain Funerals," 46; Ewell interview; Stidham, Trails, 124; Harry M. Caudill, Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area (Boston, 1962), 80.
34 Knott County Bicentennial Committee, [58]; Stidham, Trails, 124; Ewell interview; Lambert, "Mountain Funerals," 45-46; Caudill, Night, 80; Raine, Land of Saddle-bags, 88; Wilson, Sugar Pond, 192-93; Marie Campbell, Cloud-Walking, 172-73. The scarcity of local newspapers may provide the clue to the absence of funeral invitations, also known as funeral notices. Residents of the larger communities were often buried in city cemeteries.
Difficulty arose when the deceased lacked the community's love and respect. On 16 March 1890, Dickey recorded the death of a white woman who, although she had never married, had three Negro children and two white children:

I took a mattock and shovel and spade and started to the graveyard... but found before I reached there that no one would help dig the grave, as the report had obtained that Judge Blanton had allowed William M. Combs $100 to keep the woman till she died and bury her. I returned about noon and found that the story was without foundation, but I declined any further attempt to have the grave dug today.35

The following day Dickey noted that Edward Marcum had taken charge of the corpse.36

Around the turn of the twentieth century, the majority of rural, southeastern Kentuckians were interred following a short burial service consisting of remarks by a clergyman (if one was available), the singing of a few hymns, and the final viewing of the remains. At the burial of a former Clay County sheriff, Dickey and Alice Callan sang a duet, Dickey prayed, and then the one-hundred mourners sang "Nearer my God to Thee" while the grave was filled.37 Dickey frequently recorded the reading of a burial service at the time of interment. When residents also chose to conduct more elaborate funeral services, the scheduling of these events varied greatly throughout the area. The family selected an hour based on the deceased's request, their preference, the time of year, road conditions, the size of the community, or the availability of a minister.

In the larger communities by the turn of the century, one or more ministers often delivered funeral sermons at the home or the church prior to the burial. On 15 June 1888 Dickey preached his first funeral sermon in the five years he had lived

35 Dickey, 16 March 1890.
36 Ibid., 17 March 1890.
37 Ibid., 4 June 1898.
in Jackson. In addition, the Presbyterian Church had its first
dead body within its walls. Dickey had earlier recorded his
surprise at being requested to preach a funeral sermon immedi-
ately following a death as it was "never done in this country."38
In the Methodist Episcopal Church of Booneville, two clergymen
preached to a large audience prior to a 1905 burial conducted
by the fraternal order of Odd Fellows.39

Several factors contributed to the custom of delaying
funerals. Without embalming, the brevity of time prior to burial
made it difficult to notify the minister, family members, and
friends who lived at a distance. Even when notified, the poor
conditions of roads frequently made travel nearly impossible.
Delaying the service allowed the area newspaper to publish an
announcement, distant relatives and friends to receive word by
mail, and the ministers to be scheduled.40

But Pettit also attended funerals of persons deceased for ten
years, and Dickey knew of services conducted fifteen years after
death. One observer noted that funerals were preached as
many as fifty or seventy-five years after interments. In some
cases one funeral was preached for several deceased family
members. After attending the burial of a father and daughter in
1886, Dickey returned a year later to preach a funeral service
for them and two of the sons. On a Sunday in November 1889,
he conducted services for a mother (deceased six years) and her

38 Ibid., 16 September 1887, 15 June 1888.
39 Mountain Echo, 23 November 1905.
40 Raine, Land of Saddlebags, 8; W. T. Price, Without Scrip or Purse; or "The
Mountain Evangelist," George A. Barnes (Louisville, 1883), 172; Lambert,
"Mountain Funerals," 48; Dickey, 11 October, 9 November 1889; Pettit-Stone
Journal entitled "Summer of 1899," The Hindman Settlement School Collection;
William Roscoe Thomas, Life Among the Hills and Mountains in Kentucky
(Kenova, West Virginia: Big Sandy Valley Historical Society, 1983: originally
published in 1926), 93-94; Caudill, Night, 80; John Campbell, Southern
Highlander, 148-49; Marie Campbell, Cloud-Walking, 165. Appalachian fiction
also documented the practice of delayed funerals. For examples, see James
Still, River of Earth (New York, 1940), 174-81; Lucy Furman, Mothering on
Pertious (New York, 1915), 87-88, 151-56.
daughter (deceased eight years).  

A more unusual occurrence was the preaching of a person's funeral prior to death. Around the turn of the century, Archibald Crawford of Breathitt County announced that his funeral would be conducted at his home the following day and that everyone was invited. During the service Crawford sat at the head of his coffin, which he had made from a black-walnut tree on his farm and kept under his bed. Attendance was large; friends traveled fifteen to twenty miles on foot or by horseback. The guest of honor "seemed to enjoy the service more than anyone else present."  

May Stone recorded a Knott County man having his funeral preached at the time of his wife's service in order not to bother anyone at his death.

Announcements of funeral services appearing in the newspaper gave the name of those deceased who were to be eulogized, the location, date, time, names of participating ministers, and an invitation to the community to attend. Funerals provided an excuse for friends and acquaintances to socialize. A Mountain Echo announcement in a column for the Langnau community of Laurel County further encouraged attendance by stating that, "Many of his friends from adjoining counties will be present." The majority of southeastern Kentuckians considered it most appropriate to hold a funeral service...

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41 Josiah Henry Combs, The Kentucky Highlanders From A Native Mountaineer's Viewpoint (Lexington, 1913), 31; Dickey, 3 October 1886, 9 October 1887, 3 November 1889, 11 October 1899; Pettit, 21 July 1901. See also the description of the Smith Adams service in Rockcastle County in Mt. Vernon Signal, 24 November 1887; Marie Campbell, Cloud-Walking, 168-69; Fess Whitaker, History of Corporal Fess Whitaker ([Louisville, 1918]), 46.

42 J. Green Trimble, "Recollections of Breathitt County" (typescript, 1908), copy available at the Kentucky Historical Society Library, Frankfort.

43 Pettit-Stone, 22 September 1901.

44 Mountain Echo, 25 September, 23 October, 4 November 1885, 24 May, 16 August, 25 October 1895; Mount Vernon Signal, 9 July 1897; Breathitt County News, (Jackson), 1, 22 September 1905. The 1905 issues of the Mountain Echo and 1906 issues of the Mount Vernon Signal contain no announcements of forthcoming funerals.
during the summer or fall following the death. The 24 May 1895 issue of the *Mountain Echo* announced that the memorial service of R. R. Watkins (who died 10 December 1894) would be preached the third Sunday in June.45

On the appointed day, friends and family members gathered at the gravesite, church, or schoolhouse to hear the sermons delivered by as many as six preachers. A settlement school teacher's depiction of a funerallying included nine preachers who proclaimed good hard doctrine and bragged on the deceased. After traveling in the region surrounding Knott County collecting folk ballads in 1914, Josephine McGill concluded that the scheduling of the funeral meeting depended "above all upon the possibility of getting several preachers."46

Katherine Pettit wrote of dress for funerals in her journal depicting the summer of 1899. As she "aimed to be just as well dressed as any other grand-daughter," a Perry County woman chose a black-calico wrapper and a blue and red checked apron. Never having attended a funeral in the area at that time, Pettit insisted that the granddaughter leave off white beading. As a Lexington native, Pettit would have preferred that the apron be left off as well. But in her journal she added the comment: "No woman was well dressed that day who did not wear an apron and yarn mits."47 In July 1901, Pettit described a second wife who attended her husband's first wife's funeral: "She wore a heavy red and green woolen dress, trimmed in various colored velvet, ribbon and silk, a heavy blue felt hat and a long green calico apron."48 May Stone's only mention of funeral attire was

47 Pettit Stone Journal entitled "Summer of 1899,"
48 Pettit-Stone, 21 July 1901.
an indication of the pride two boys, seven and eight years old, took in telling her on 21 September 1901 that they already had new shoes and shirts to wear to a funeral planned for November.  

Whatever type of burial and funeral service was held, southeastern Kentuckians attended the rite of passage to show respect. Large attendance was equated with the deceased’s importance and the community’s sense of loss. Journals and newspaper accounts remarked on the number present at burials and funerals and on the value the community placed on the deceased. At the 1887 burial services of a well-known Rockcastle County citizen, which included funerals for his deceased mother and three children, the procession to the grave included nearly three hundred people. After a prominent resident of Barbourville died on 4 October 1885, a reporter commented on his death in three issues of the Mountain Echo. As late as 16 October the paper informed its readers that “Barbourville is still in mourning for W. F. Engle. It will be many a day before his place is filled.”  

Josephine McGill observed that, “In these sparsely settled regions the loss of one person makes a deep mark upon the community; hence it is the custom to make as much as possible in an emotional and ceremonial way of bereavement.”

Some communities had an annual service for all who had died during the previous year. These delayed funerals often served as the major social event of the summer. Of the funeral meeting at a Perry County orchard, Pettit wrote in 1901:

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49 Ibid., 21 September 1901.  
50 Dickey, 16 September 1887, 3 November 1889, 4 June 1898, 22 May 1900; Mount Vernon Signal, 24 November, 23 December 1887, 30 July 1897, 28 September 1906; Mountain Echo, 9, 16, 28 October, 16 December 1885, 29 June, 7 September 1905; Pettit-Stone, 21 July, 7 September 1901; McGill, “Following Music,” 382.  
On the seats under the trees were gathered perhaps a hundred people. Others were grouped around trees near by, the men talking politics or "horse swapping," the girls and boys sauntering around[,] the boy with his saddle pockets of moonshine trying to sell it. These funeral occasions are not so depressing as one would naturally expect. They are really the only time the people have for general meeting and diversion and they all looked forward to [them] from year to year.52

Sarah Slone's deathbed request that her service be held before her burial was influenced by her knowledge of similar occasions: "She did not want any drinking going on at her funeral, and she was afraid there would be, if it was delayed for a year."53 With so many distractions, newspaper reports often commented on occasions at which the audience paid marked attention.

But holding a funeral at the time of burial did not guarantee an absence of distractions. A Clay County burial service underwent a major disruption. While the participants sang a hymn, a dogfight commenced and a mourner tried to part the canines by striking them with a board. One of the dogs had belonged to the deceased. Charles Parker, his father, jerked the board from the man's hands and knocked him down. The women screamed. Mrs. Parker fainted. Reverend Dickey later recalled that "the relatives all rushed together for battle, but no one offered resistance. The Murrays who were enemies of the Parkers got their guns and pistols, but the people dispersed and no further violence was offered."54

Under whatever circumstances the funeral was preached, most ministers delivered a message based on the religious doctrine predominant to southern Appalachia. In 1905 author Emma B. Miles characterized her religious upbringing in the east Tennessee mountains as based on courage. In an

52 Pettit-Stone, 21 July 1901; John Campbell, Southern Highlander, 149; Marie Campbell, Cloud-Walking, 165-70.
53 Slone, What My Heart, 58.
54 Dickey, 8 September 1898.
environment where the forces of nature humbled humanity, the mountaineers usually chose one of the more fundamentalist denominations, such as Missionary Baptist, Primitive Baptist, or Methodist. Speakers' addresses recorded in extant accounts of funeral services focused on the salvation of the deceased's soul. Characteristically, late-nineteenth-century evangelists used funerals to preach to members of the audience who did not frequently attend religious services.55

Attendants heard admonitions to receive salvation and remain faithful to their belief in God in order to be reunited with Christian loved ones in Heaven. A Knott County preacher directed his remarks at the widower on 21 July 1901: "I believe there is a crown for Sister Liz and she is wearing it to-day. Friend Stacy, if you never find God and he snatches life from you to-day, you'll never meet Liz in the upper world."56 When considered necessary, clergymen publicly denounced the wicked lifestyles of widowers and other family members and declared that only repentance would save them from eternal condemnation. As one minister prayed:

We've all been called out on a sad occasion to say comfortable words to her companion, who has asked me and others to

55 Emma B. Miles, The Spirit of the Mountains (New York, 1905), 138, 140, 144; Kay Baker Gaston, Emma Bell Miles (Signal Mountain, Tennessee, 1985), 1, 4; Elizabeth R. Hooker, Religion in the Southern Appalachian Area (New York, 1933), 67-73; John Campbell, Southern Highlander, 176; Schwarzweller, Mountain Families, 61-67; Combs, Kentucky Highlanders, 31, 36-39. See also W. D. Weatherford and Earl D. C. Brewer, Life and Religion in Southern Appalachia: An Interpretation of Selected Data from the Southern Appalachian Studies (New York: Friendship Press, 1962), 90, 98-99, 116-17; Thomas R. Ford, "Status, Residence, and Fundamentalist Religious Beliefs In The Southern Appalachians" Social Forces 39 (October 1960): 41-49; Glen William Davidson, "Basic Images of Death in America: An Historical Analysis" (Ph.d. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School and University Center, 1964), 159. Readers should remember that descriptions of Appalachian religious thought accentuated the dramatic, fundamentalist portions of the sermons. Although one can surmise that many local residents held more complex beliefs, extant accounts do not indicate more than this very fundamentalist viewpoint.

56 Pettit-Stone, 21 July 1901.
come and speak about her. . . . Show him the line that is
drawn between him and her that is gone. . . . May her dying
words be preaching to him. 57

A few days later, the same man spoke more sternly to a
mourning husband: "Friend Whittaker, if ye go on yer evil ways,
you'll so clap out Jesus. Don't fool yourself." 58

If the deceased had not lived a life consistent with
Christian doctrine, the speaker might denounce him. Pettit
recorded that Clint Combs, a moonshiner, spent several terms
in the state prison. When his funeral was preached the summer
after his death, the preacher told the widow, sons, and daugh-
ters who knelt weeping at his grave "a good many times in the
course of the service that he had known Uncle Clint all of his
life and had never known any good of him." 59

Many observers of southeastern Kentucky funerals found
the style of preaching rather emotional. Dickey's depiction of
Kentucky mountain funerals preached by hardshell Baptist
ministers stressed their emotionalism: "The effort is nearly
always made to touch the sympathies and excite the feelings to
the very highest point. It is really shocking to witness the
extent to which this is carried." 60 Former theology student
John C. Campbell discussed the "high intensity of emotional ex-
pression," concluding: "It is indeed the office of the preacher on
such occasions to stir the audience to tears and repentance, his
success is measured somewhat by the extent to which he
accomplishes this." 61

57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 4 August 1901.
59 Ibid., 5 September 1901.
60 Dickey, 11 October 1899.
61 John Campbell, Southern Highlander, xi, 183. It must be noted that this
practice was common to late nineteenth-century evangelical ministers. See
Davidson, "Basic Images," 159.
At these services, the ministers gave opportunity for public display and release of emotions that were a part of the rural expression of grief. The mourners publicly demonstrated their sense of loss at houses of bereavement, burials, and funerals. Shouting and fainting often occurred. After visiting the home where a child had just died, Pettit depicted the scene:

...the aunt was spread out on the floor with her hair streaming over her face and shouting at the top of her voice. The grandmother, Suze, broke forth in the most terrific shouts and with much loud crying and shrill voices, it was something terrific.  

62 Pettit, 19 July 1901; Caudill, Night, 80.
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\(^2\) Pettit, 19 July 1901; Caudill, \textit{Night}, 80.
Settlement teacher Marie Campbell described a widow, already remarried, as lying at her first husband's grave giving over to grief during the service held approximately six months after his death. At the annual funeral services on Mason's Creek in September 1901, the service closed with much shouting. Dickey described a Wolfe County burial:

His mother and father filled the air with their lamentations.

... An aunt, by marriage[,] shouted vociferously beside the coffin and the mother of the young man fainted and had to be carried away.

In calling it a typical mountain funeral, Dickey concluded: "I have noticed as culture comes these demonstrations, in great measure, subside. The people of this family are good, honest, religious people but are not very much improved by culture."

Although traditional public displays of emotion were acceptable, some mountain people were conscious of an urban bias, against such practices. One of them commented in 1905 that, "There is a tendency among certain classes of city people...

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63 Pettit, 8 September 1901; Marie Campbell, Cloud-Walking, 167-68.
64 Dickey, 9 November 1899.
65 Ibid. Dickey's analysis indicated his own urban bias against public expressions of grief. If Dickey had attended south-central Kentucky funerals of the 1870s which are described in Reverend George Browder's journals, his reaction would have been quite similar. See George Browder Journal, 26 November 1873, 29 December 1877, Browder Collection, Department of Library Special Collections, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green. This manuscript, written by a Logan County Methodist minister, is a photocopy of the original volumes in the possession of the Browder family, Olmstead in Logan County. For a more complete discussion of south-central Kentucky practices, see Sue Lynn Stone, "Blessed Are They That Mourn: Expressions of Grief in South Central Kentucky, 1870-1910," Register of the Kentucky Historical Society 85 (1987): 213-36. James S. Curl identified funerals as occasions of ostentatious displays of grief. Throughout history, Curl concluded, funeral rites have involved "actions, words, music, and movement which add up to a pattern forming the framework within which feelings are expressed." See James Stevens Curl, The Victorian Celebration of Death (Detroit: Partridge Press, 1972), 185. In addition, sociologists Habenstein and Lamers identified the public expression of grief as a part of Hebrew and Christian tradition. See Robert W. Habenstein and William M. Lamers, The History of American Funeral Directing (Milwaukee: Bulfin Printers, 1955), 392-93.
to make jest of these peculiarities, to which we of the mountains are becoming more sensitive year by year.\textsuperscript{66} On other religious occasions, the mountain residents spoke of their awareness of the "curiosity of the town."\textsuperscript{67} Having been reared in the southeastern Kentucky mountains, Josiah H. Combs emphatically stated about all aspects of society in 1913 that, "The conditions prevailing in the county seats and towns are not found in outlying districts."\textsuperscript{68}

Typically, funeral services included music which was "lined" - a leader sang the line before the participants repeated it. Solos and duets often added to the ceremony. Among the favorite hymns were "Parting Friends" and "Nearer My God To Thee." The first hymn in The Sweet Songster, a song book found in many Appalachian homes, was also transcribed by May Stone at a 1901 funeral:

\begin{quote}
A Twelve month more has roll'd around,
Since we attended to this ground;
Ten thousand scenes have marked the year
Since we met last to worship here.
Full many a friend and many a foe
Have left this weeping world below,
And many a homeless wander's tear
Has Fallen since we worship'd here.\textsuperscript{69}
\end{quote}

John C. Campbell depicted the singing of old burial hymns as being unforgettably beautiful and impressive. Of a 1914 gathering, McGill recalled that "the long drawn out melancholy phrases deepen one's sense of life, death and human rela-

\textsuperscript{66} Miles, \textit{Spirit of the Mountains}, 133-34.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} Combs, \textit{Kentucky Highlanders}, 36.
\textsuperscript{69} Lambert, "Mountain Funerals," 48; Rainey, \textit{Land of Saddle-bags}, 203; Dickey, 4 June 1898; Pettit-Stone, 8 September 1901; Edward W. Billups, \textit{The Sweet Songster. A Collection of the Most Popular and Approved Songs, Hymns and Ballads} (Catlettsburg, Ky., [1854]), 7; McGill, "Following Music," 382. See also Sarah Gertrude Knott, "Religious Music in the Kentucky Mountains" (typescript, n.d.). A copy is available at the Department of Library Special Collections, Folklife Archives, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green.
tion. 70

By the turn of the century, the newspapers of Mount Vernon and London included few announcements of delayed funerals. Although the Breathitt County News contained several announcements and reports of this type of service, it also gave evidence of its declining popularity in the larger communities. A full description of one 1905 funeral for several persons gave the order of the service:

Reverend Baker preached a fine discourse to a large assembly of people who listened to his good words very attentively. Reverend Caudill also spoke. Reverend Preston conducted a song service. The meeting closed at noon, which was a great improvement on the usual mode of holding on for weary hours, until everybody, preachers included, are worn out. 71

Because of the growing population of the county seats, differing opinions emerged after the turn of the century as to the time and type of funeral occasion most appropriate to honor the dead. While the deaths of county residents were noted, newspaper accounts increasingly focused on town funeral services held prior to burial. Although delayed funerals continued to be common well into the twentieth century, newspapers reflected the tendency of modernization to alter local funeral customs. Yet the townspeople continued to share the values of their agrarian neighbors.

Katherine Pettit, John Jay Dickey, and other observers found southeastern Kentucky residents firmly holding to traditional values of family, community, and religion at the turn of the century. Nowhere are their persistent beliefs more evident than in the way they buried and memorialized their dead. The use of professional services was slow in coming to the mountain area because of its low population and its citizens' understanding of proper respect for deceased loved ones. In a

70 John Campbell, *Southern Highlander*, 147, 186-87.
71 Breathitt County News, 22 September 1905.
time and place where death was a frequent, unwelcome visitor, southeastern Kentuckians bore witness to their belief in the importance of peaceful deaths, the existence of Heaven, eventual reunion with the deceased, and their dependence on the omniscience of God.