The Little People of Pea Ridge

David Sutherland

Western Kentucky University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/theses

Part of the Folklore Commons, and the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/theses/978

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses & Specialist Projects by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.
THE LITTLE PEOPLE OF PEA RIDGE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Department of English and the Folk Studies Program Faculties
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
David C. Sutherland
May 1973
THE LITTLE PEOPLE OF PEA RIDGE

Kenneth Clarke
Director of Thesis

Mary H. Clarke
Approved

Date

Folmar Gray
Dean of the Graduate College

Approved September 12, 1973

Date
Acknowledgments

A thesis of this kind is not the work of a single individual, but is the culmination of the efforts of many different people. I wish to express my sincere appreciation to my thesis director, Dr. Kenneth Clarke, and his wife, Dr. Mary Clarke, for their guidance and invaluable aid in proofreading and editing the material.

I am grateful to Dr. Lynwood Montell who has given me needed encouragement and understanding. Without his inspiration, this project would never have begun.

I also wish to thank my typist, Renda Smith, who spent several nights typing when she should have been sleeping.
# Table of Contents

## Introduction  
1

### The Farm  
- Cord Groce 4  
- The Watsons 15  
- The Spears 18

### Joe Neathery, Outdoorsman  
22

### The Crafts  
- Ruth Spear, broommaker 31  
- Burley Long, craftsman 36  
- Frank Long, chairmaker 38  
- Bow Baskets 40

### The Women's World  
- Mrs. Spear, spinner 43  
- Mrs. Neathery, poet 51  
- Mrs. Groce 58  
- Barbie Daniels, quilter 60

### The country store and a country auction  
63

## Conclusion  
66

### Appendix one: a map of the area  
69

### Appendix two: glossary  
70

## Sources consulted  
71
Introduction

Cumberland County, Kentucky, is situated on the Tennessee line just at the western edge of the Appalachian Mountains. The county's terrain is typical of land in the foothills of a mountain range and varies from flat farmland and good bottomland along the Cumberland River to steep, wooded hillsides and rough, rocky ridge tops. Areas often take part of their names from outstanding topographic features of the land. Community names such as White's Bottom, Howard's Bottom, Cherry Tree Ridge and Bow Schoolhouse Ridge are common in Cumberland County.

On Pea Ridge, which runs along the north shore of Dale Hollow Lake, is the small community of Peytonsburg. To the casual observer, Peytonsburg would probably appear similar to other small communities scattered upon the countryside, but a closer examination of the area's culture will show that the people of Peytonsburg still cling to a lifestyle that disappeared in most of the United States more than half a century ago.

A farmer who uses only mules as a source of power splits fence rails from hickory logs; two women still spin wool on their spinning wheels, and most of the women in the area make patchwork quilts, one man makes his living by such traditional activities as digging
ginseng and sassafras roots and hunting and trapping; a traditional chairmaker and several broommakers still practice their crafts, a farm wife makes butter by hand in an old crock churn with a wooden dasher; and one family operates a sorghum mill to make molasses for community members each fall.

A community in which people still retain this many elements of traditional lifestyles is unique, indeed. But even more remarkable is the fact that they all live on a one-mile strip of Pea Ridge, starting just above the Peytonsburg Post Office and extending to the backwaters of the lake. (Appendix one on page sixty-nine contains a map of this section of Pea Ridge.)

The purpose of this study is to document the unusually rich folk culture of this small community and to discuss the reasons for the tenacity with which the folk cling to their traditional way of life.
The Farm
CORD GROCE

Cordell Groce is a little man. He stands about five and a half feet tall and might tip the scales over a hundred and forty pounds. But he is as tough as a pine knot and can follow a No. 19 Oliver plow for as long as his mules will pull it. At about seventy-five years old, Cord has acquired that ageless weathered look that only country folk get after many long years of exposure to the sun, wind and rain.

In his three-quarters of a century of living, Cord has tried his hand at several lines of work. He has worked for a logging operation, carried the mail on the back of a mule, farmed, and for a while, he and his brother ran a moonshine still until the brother was elected sheriff of Cumberland County and had to "bust" stills instead of build them. "You know," Cord once said, "If I was sheriff and had run off as much whiskey as he had, I don't think I would have been so hard on some of those fellows."
Back around 1930 when there was still a big lumber business in Cumberland County, Cord worked for a logging operation which cut logs and rafted them down the Cumberland River to Celina, Tenn. Cord told this story about one of his logging experiences:

Back in those days we used to raft logs down the river to Celina in the daytime and walk back home at night. We had just run a raft down the river and were beginning to cut some timber for another raft. Me and my partner ran up on this big chestnut tree that had had the top knocked out by lightning. We got ready to cut that tree but it was so big our saw wouldn't reach across it at the bottom. We had to build a scaffold twelve feet high so we could get our saw through that tree. Then after we finally got it sawed through, the thing was so big it wouldn't fall. We had to get a team and pull it over.

It may seem hard to believe that this story is not just a tall tale. But when Cord sits down by the fire on a cold winter evening and eagerly relives an experience aloud, there can be no doubt that it really happened. A few of the facts might have mellowed with time, but the stories he tells are true.

Just as Cord's stories are hard to believe without hearing them, his present way of life on his farm is hard to believe unless it can be seen. With his old straw hat pulled low across his face and his weather-beaten clothes, Cord is transformed into just another part of the landscape. Cord relies largely upon traditional methods of farming in the operation of his farm. While his neighbors all around him use tractor-powered machinery, Cord feels more at home behind a team of mules. Mules have been a part of his life since the 1930's when he drove teams of six mules for the logging operation, and now he continues to operate his farm very successfully with an eighteen-year-old team of mules as his only source of power. When asked why he still used mules instead of buying a tractor, Cord replied, "I just don't love to work with a tractor."

Cord repairs most of his own equipment in his blacksmith shop where he can make such things as plow points and harness attachments. A huge pump bellows takes up a corner of the small shop and the rest is filled with old wagon wheels, tools and many oddly shaped pieces of scrap metal.

The activities of a traditional farmer are extremely varied; so to illustrate the work involved in traditional farming, a detailed look at one segment of Cord's work follows.

"Make hay while the sun shines" is a saying not taken lightly by Cord Groce. A rain on cut alfalfa hay can decrease the yield by half. Cord hopes for a long period of good weather
at hay-cutting time, for putting up twenty acres of alfalfa is a week-long job for one man. Cutting the hay in spiralling strips around the field is only the first step. Many trips around the field are made before the hay is cut, and a bit of cut hay in the seat of the mower makes the ride softer.

The hay must be raked after it is cut. The rake catches the hay in its long, curved teeth and pulls it into an elongated pile. A foot switch allows the teeth to be raised and the pile of hay is released. Cord guides the mule-drawn rake back and forth across the field and releases the hay in parallel strips called “windrows.”

After the hay dries slightly while in the windrow, Cord stacks it with a pitchfork into small piles called “hand shocks.” The hay is hand shocked so it will not dry to a crisp, which would cause the leaves to fall off when it is handled. The shocks shade most of the hay and keep in the moisture.

Cord then prepares his hay frame, which is simply his team wagon with stout poles attached to the sides to hold the hay, and takes the wagon to the field for loading. Layer upon layer, Cord stacks hay onto the wagon a pitchfork load at a time. Cord must occasionally get on top of the wagon to even out the load and to pack the hay down tighter. When the wagon will hold no more, Cord finds a comfortable seat atop the load and gets a short rest while the mules tug the load to the barn.

Arriving at the barn, Cord begins unloading the hay into the loft. While the loft of this barn is used strictly for hay storage, other parts of the barn serve different functions. In the sheds on the left and in the center, tobacco is hung to cure. Underneath the loft are stalls for housing cattle, hogs, and sometimes, the mules. The barn also serves as a shed for storing tools from the weather.

Cord stores most of his alfalfa hay in the loft of this barn. Putting the hay in the barn is a two-step procedure. First, he throws hay into the loft from the wagon. He must then climb into the loft and throw that hay into the back and on top to make room for more hay to be pitched up. He repeats that process until the wagon is emptied.

After all the hay is unloaded, Cord rakes up hay which has fallen on the ground and throws it across the fence to his cattle. Then he heads back to the field for another load.

When Cord runs out of barn space, he stacks his hay outside around a small cedar tree from which he has trimmed the limbs to a height of about twelve feet. Only grass hay is stacked outside and it is always fed before hay that is stored in the barn.
The summertime chore of hay-making is only one segment of the life of a traditional farmer like Cord Groce. Even the winter season is filled with work. During this season Cord must cut enough wood to last the year round, since he depends upon it for heat in the winter and for cooking throughout the year.

Winter is also the time for repairing fences. With a froe, Cord splits boards out of green hickory logs which he cuts off his land. He uses a froe his father made and used for the same job a century ago.

Hogs must be killed in the winter when there are no insects and when it is cool enough to prevent the meat from spoiling. Cord and his wife do most of the work themselves, from butchering the hogs to grinding the sausage and curing the hams.

When springtime arrives and the dogwood blooms, the winter chores are forgotten and spring plowing begins in preparation for the year's corn crop. Another year of hard work has begun.

The life of a traditional farmer is a year-round struggle with the land and weather. The farmer becomes closely attuned to the elements, and if it rains today, he probably has work to do in his blacksmith shop anyway. When a man has worked on a farm for thirty years as Cord Groce has, the farm becomes a part of the man and the man becomes a part of the farm.
MOWING HAY

Haymaking begins with a team of mules, a man, and a mowing machine. Cord harnesses up his team, above, and begins cutting his alfalfa hay, below.
RAKING THE HAY

After the hay is cut it must be raked into windrows to dry. The rake has long curved metal teeth which gather the hay.
HAND SHOCKING

The hay is taken from the windrows and piled into small stacks called hand shocks to keep it from getting too dry and brittle. This work is done entirely with a pitchfork.
LOADING THE WAGON

The hay is loaded onto the wagon a pitchfork full at a time. After a hand shock is loaded, the wagon is pulled to the next shock. Loading is a tiring and dirty job, as can be seen from the photograph at the left.
When no more hay will stay on the wagon, Cord finds a soft seat atop the load and heads his team toward the barn. The hay is unloaded into the loft above the central hall of the barn.
Plowing with a team of mules and a No. 19 Oliver plow may be hard work, but when springtime arrives Cord Groce can always be found down in the bottom by the creek preparing his land for corn planting.
OTHER FARM WORK

Splitting rails with a froe his father made, Cord prepares to repair a fence, above. Bringing in the milk cow is a daily chore, right. Woodcutting, below, is a year-round activity, since Mrs. Groce cooks on a wood stove. The Groces kill their own hogs and cure their own meat in a smokehouse, bottom right.
The Watsons

While Cord Groce relies heavily upon traditional farming techniques, he is an exceptional case, even in the Peytonsburg area. Most of the farmers of the area own tractors and modern equipment, but many of these farmers still employ some traditional methods because the methods are economical and practical.

Homer Watson owns a farm near the Peytonsburg Post Office. Homer has a tractor and some small tractor-powered implements, but cannot afford to buy a large piece of equipment like a corn picker, so he picks his corn by hand and hauls it to the barn with a team and wagon.

The Watson family has many members in the area and they often “swap work” with each other. For example, Homer helps prepare his cousin’s tobacco plant bed; then his cousin Delton helps Homer fix his own.

At hog-killing time, Leonard Watson, Delton Watson, and Homer Watson and sons, all get together and butcher their hogs. Hog-killing is a job that requires several workers, so by combining their labor all three families’ hogs can be killed with less effort and time than it would take if each individual family killed their own hogs.
CORN HARVEST

Picking corn by hand is the traditional method of harvesting corn. Leonard Watson, right, and his work crew strip a field quickly, below. Otis Watson urges the team toward the barn after a load is collected, bottom.
WORK ON THE FARM
Preparing a tobacco plant bed is a springtime job for Homer Watson, above right, his cousin, Delton Watson, and grandson, Michael Watson. Another traditional farming activity, hog killing, takes place in the winter. Otis Watson, left, sharpens a butcher knife while other workers are busy cutting and scraping, below.
In the past, community gatherings were common throughout the country. House and barn raisings, corn husking bees and quilting bees gave the people a chance to socialize with their neighbors. These community projects--"workings" as one old-timer called them--have disappeared with the increasing availability of mass communications and the ease of travel. But on Pea Ridge, a "working" of this kind is held each year at molasses-making time.

At least one weekend and usually two are set aside each fall for making sorghum molasses. Troy Spear operates a sorghum mill on a hill behind the home of his mother, Mrs. Maggie Spear. Anyone in the community with sorghum cane can bring the cane to Troy's mill to have the sweet juice ground out and boiled into molasses. The whole Spear family helps in the process. While Troy oversees the operation, repairs broken parts, and keeps things running smoothly, his brothers, Dale and Grady, work over the pan where the sorghum juice is boiled down. The juice must be stirred constantly so it will not scorch or get overcooked or too thick. Mrs. Maggie Spear seems to be everywhere at once--giving Bee Long a rest from feeding cane into the mill, offering a few words of advice on whether a batch of juice has cooked long enough, greeting neighbors with a smile from under her big floppy blue bonnet, and helping her sons' wives prepare dinner on a makeshift table at the scene. (Dinner is the noon meal in the country.) Once the pan is heated it cannot be left, so the men eat with one hand and work with the other.

Before noon, news of the work has spread over the community and the neighbors start dropping in to offer a bit of help and a lot of advice. Pretty soon, twenty or thirty people are milling around, helping stir here, tasting the juice there, and always reminiscing about earlier experiences at making molasses.
MOLASSES-MAKING
Each fall, Troy Spear starts up his sorghum mill and grinds cane for the community members. Top, Mrs. Maggie Spear feeds the mill while Bee Long takes a rest. Above, Grady and Dale Spear stir the juice while it cooks. Left, Grady pours a bucket of molasses through a straining cloth.
...A COMMUNITY PROJECT
People from all over the community stop by to lend a hand, and more often their advice, to the Spears at molasses-making time, top. The women set a table at the scene, above, and take food to the workers, who eat and work at the same time, since the pan cannot be left untended. Right, Mrs. Maggie Spear takes time out to socialize with a neighbor who has stopped by.
Joe Neathery, Outdoorsman
Joe Neathery, Outdoorsman

When the frogs at Dale Hollow Lake start peeping out their songs in early March, the fishermen begin flocking to those shores, angling for the lake's treasures of catfish, trout and bass. One of the first to get a line in the water each spring is Joe Neathery, who lives on the north shore of Dale Hollow. Fishing is only one segment of the outdoor life of Joe Neathery. In the winter, trapping occupies most of his time. Early spring is for digging sassafras roots, and summer and fall days are for hunting, fishing and roaming the woods looking for ginseng. Nearing sixty-five years old, Joe is one of the country's last men who truly makes his living off the land by traditional methods.

The following interview was made in early spring while Joe was fishing at the lake.

Interviewer (I): We're talking with Joe Neathery here on Dale Hollow Reservoir. He's been down here fishing today. Mr. Neathery, how long have you been fishing on this lake?
Joe: About 35 years.

I: You started fishing here when the lake was first opened, then?

Joe: It come up about 35 years ago.

I: We've seen in some pictures that you do a lot of other outdoor activities, like ginseng digging. How long have you been digging ginseng?

Joe: All my life. Ever since I was eight or nine years old.

I: How old are you, Mr. Neathery?

Joe: I'll be sixty-five the thirteenth of July.

I: And you've been working the outdoors your whole life?

Joe: All my life. All my life, practically.

I: What other kinds of outdoor work do you do?

Joe: Well, I work at farm work, raise tobaker and stuff like 'at. Through the summer season I fish; through the winter season I trap all the time; first one thing and then another, and some work on the farm through my spare time; get wood.

I: How did you learn how to trap and dig ginseng?

Joe: Well, I just took it up. I don't know. Hit's, uh, the longer you do it, the more you learn about it.

I: Then nobody actually taught you?

Joe: No, I just done it myself just practically. Well, I had brothers that hunted all the time, and uncles. It's just all in the generation. We all done it.

With his "snake gun" strapped to his hip and a foot adz in his hand, Joe is prepared for a day's work of digging ginseng roots in the hills and hollows near his home. Ginseng is native to the region and thrives in heavily wooded areas. A foot adz and a lot of stamina are the only requirements for this job, since the plant frequently grows on almost perpendicular hillsides.

The ginseng plant is a perennial and its distinguishing characteristics are its serrated leaves and, in the fall, bright yellow leaves and flaming red berries. Ginseng plants occasionally grow two feet tall and may have from one to eight branches, or "prongs." Commonly found plants are about a foot tall with three prongs. Joe sells his roots locally, but they eventually end up in the far east where the Chinese prize powdered ginseng for its supposed aphrodisiacal properties. In 1972, dry roots brought fifty dollars a pound. That may sound like easy money, but Joe will explain that it takes a long time and a lot of walking to get that pound.
When winter arrives at the Neathery place, Joe's mind turns to trapping. Two traplines are usually maintained at a time—one in a creek, for catching mink and muskrats, and another on a nearby hillside, for trapping foxes and possums. A series of eight or ten traps makes up each trapline. Joe uses two types of traps—No. 1 traps with a single spring, and No. 2 double spring traps.

For the trapline in the creek, the traps are situated in the shallow water near the bank where mink walk. The traps on the hillside are placed in almost any clear space where foxes might run. Mr. Neathery gave this answer when asked why an animal would not drag a trap away: "Well, I don't care for 'em dragging it. See, I've got that on a drag set. They'll drag it a piece and then their leg'll swell and then they'll stay put. They'll get all wound up round something."

After tying the trap to that "drag set," a pole about six feet long, Joe sets the trap and places it on a hillside. Next, he hides it by covering it with leaves. The final step is baiting the trap with meat scraps, balogna, or persimmons if they are in season.

Checking the traps the next day—Joe calls this "running the trapline"—is a discouraging job if nothing has been caught. But the sight of a big red fox or even a possum caught in one of his traps is a cause for elation. The animal is caught alive and held by the trap until Joe kills it with his rifle. On a good day, Joe might catch a mink and a red fox, as well as a couple of possums and muskrats.

Returning home late in the afternoon, Joe gets help from his grandsons when he skins his day's catch. Joe spends a large amount of time teaching his grandsons, Doug and Mike Neathery, the details of trapping, and helps them set up traplines of their own.

After skinning the animals, Joe stretches the hides onto boards. Then he hangs them in a shed behind the house until they are dry and enough are collected to sell. Furs were taken from red and grey foxes, raccoons, possums, muskrats, mink, two skunks and a weasel in the winter of 1972. The collection of pelts shown in the following photographs was about half of those caught by Joe and his grandsons that winter.

When the sap starts running in early February and trapping season is over, Joe gets up early in the morning and heads for the woods, this time to dig sassafras roots. Sassafras trees sometimes grow to diameters of five feet, but the roots from those larger trees were dug years ago. Now roots are usually dug from trees with diameters of from six to ten inches. A shovel and foot adz are used to uncover a root and dig a trench around it. Smaller roots are
cut away with a foot adz. Then an ax is used to cut the root at both ends allowing the root to be removed, or "pulled," as Joe would say. As many as sixty pound roots are frequently dug from a single tree without killing the tree.

To prepare the roots for sale, the black outer bark must be scraped off. Since the inner bark brings twice the price of the woody part of the root, it is stripped off and collected to sell separately. In the spring of 1973, Joe sold his roots for ten cents a pound.

In early March, the frogs start singing down by the lake once again. It is a call that a veteran fisherman cannot resist, so Joe trades his shovel and ax for a fishing line and leaves the woods for the lake shore. But soon the hunting seasons will interrupt the fishing, and that patch of ginseng just recently discovered growing over by Kettle Creek needs to be dug. Each season brings a lot of hard work. But more important, each season brings its own special joys which can be fully appreciated only by a truly traditional outdoorsman like Joe Neathery.
SASSAFRAS ROOT DIGGING

Digging sassafras roots is an early springtime activity for Joe Neathery, top right. The only tools required for the work, top left, are a shovel, ax, foot adz, and stuck in the top of the tree, a file and pocket knife. Right, Joe shows off a 60 pound root. Before the roots are sold, the bark is stripped off and sold separately. The photo above shows a root as it comes from the ground and another after the bark was peeled off.
GINSENG DIGGING

In late summer and fall, Joe roams the woods looking for ginseng, above. Below left, Joe examines a small ginseng patch he has started near his home. A large "three-prong" plant grows beside a tree near Kettle Creek, center. Wherever "seng-pointer" grows, bottom right, ginseng is likely to be found. A tray of ginseng roots dries by the stove at the Neathery home, right.
THE TRAP LINES
Joe Neathery runs two trap lines at the same time, one in Sulfur Creek, top left, and one on a nearby hillside, top right. He generally uses two kinds of traps, like the Number 2 double spring at the top of the picture above, and the Number one, at the bottom of the photo. Left, Joe heads home after removing a possum from a trap.
SKINNING THE CATCH

After the animals are brought home, they must be skinned. Below, Joe gets help skinning a possum from his grandson, Doug Neathery. After the skin is removed, it must be stretched onto a board and hung in the shed for drying, right. Joe poses in front of half of his winter's catch, bottom.
The Crafts
If the old proverb "A new broom always sweeps clean" is true, the people around Peytonsburg should have the cleanest floors in the country. Most of the older residents of the Cumberland County Community, like Mrs. Ruth Spear, above, make their own brooms from home-grown broom corn, and at least one veteran broommaker ties brooms to sell to other members of the community. Ruth Spear's sister, Maggie Spear, also makes brooms. She recalls tying fifty brooms for one man a few years ago, but she generally ties brooms only for herself and her family.

The round homemade broom is so common in the area that many of the children have grown up not realizing that there was any other kind. One of Mrs. Spear's nephews, Dale Spear, told a story about a young boy in the community whose mother had always made her own brooms. The boy's family went to Burkesville one Sunday to visit some relatives. As most children do, this lad went exploring around the house and spied a store-bought
broom in the corner of the kitchen. He promptly searched out the lady of the house and asked her who had mashed her broom!

Mrs. Spear, commonly known in the community as Aunt Ruth, makes two kinds of brooms—large round brooms with wooden handles and small whisk brooms. She keeps one of the small brooms near the wood stove in her kitchen and uses it to keep loose bark swept back under the woodpile. Mrs. Spear, now eighty-six, has been making brooms since she was a young girl. She learned the process from an old blind broommaker in the community. The photographs in this section show Mrs. Spear in the process of making one of her small whisk brooms.

The first step in the process is trimming the broom corn stalks. She trims away about half of each stalk of corn with her pocketknife. This will allow the broom's handle to be drawn into a smaller diameter in later steps.

Next, she uses heavy string called staging to tie each of the trimmed pieces of broom corn together, being careful to get all the flat trimmed edges facing down. Then she rolls the corn up and ties it.
In the kitchen, a pan of hot, soapy water has been heating on the stove. Mrs. Spear takes the roll of corn into the kitchen and dips the water onto the broom corn stalks to soften them in preparation for the next steps. Mrs. Spear feels that a bit of detergent aids the softening of the stalks.

After the stalks soften, Mrs. Spear goes to her front porch where she has hung a rope from a hook on the ceiling. She wraps the rope around the bundle of corn and applies pressure by pressing her foot on a board tied to the bottom of the rope. This squeezes the stalks that were trimmed earlier into a much smaller diameter than the rest of the broom and begins forming the handle.
After resuming her position inside, Aunt Ruth begins weaving the handle of the broom. The handle will consist only of broom corn stalks woven together with staging, so Mrs. Spear splits each stalk of corn with her knife to make the handle tie tighter. To weave the handle as tightly as possible, she wraps the staging around a corn cob to keep the staging from cutting into her hand as she pulls as hard as she can. To weave the handle properly takes a lot of strength, and by the time Aunt Ruth finished the broom she was exhausted.
After weaving the handle to a length of eight to ten inches, Mrs. Spear wraps the staging around the top and uses a screwdriver to force the end of the string into the handle so it will not come untied. To complete the broom, she trims off the excess stalks with her pocketknife and evens the sweep end with her scissors.

After working strenuously for a little more than an hour, Aunt Ruth handed the broom to the photographer and would not accept payment for it.
Burley Long, Craftsman

Craftsman is the only title for Burley Long. In his sixty-eight years of living, Burley has made straight chairs, dinette chairs, rocking chairs, baby cradles, broad ax and chopping ax handles, fancy canes, shuck mops and hundreds of brooms. Almost every house on the ridge has a Burley Long rocker sitting by the stove and some of his straight chairs scattered around the house and on the front porch. Burley made chairs mainly from maple and sugar trees, and bottomed them with white oak splints or hickory bark. Burley quit making chairs a few years ago, but his son, Frank Long, carries on the tradition (next chapter).

Each year Burley raises a patch of broom corn in a small field next to his house. To dry the corn, he builds a scaffold from saplings which grow near his home. He puts his broom corn on top of the scaffold and covers it with tin to keep the heat in and the rain out. After it dries, Burley uses the corn to make brooms like those shown on the next page.

Burley has been the handyman around the community for years. He not only made many items, but he also was the person the community members relied upon to repair their broken and bottomless chairs. If anyone needed anything made from wood, they checked with Burley to see if he would make it for them. The confidence in Burley Long’s craftsmanship was best demonstrated by Mrs. Maggie Spear who once said, “If you need a spinning wheel, Uncle Burley Long could build you one.”
MORE BROOKS

Burley Long grows his own broom corn each year, bottom right, and builds a drying scaffold for his corn, bottom left. Right, he ties a broom on the front porch of his house. Below, he shows off some of his finished products.
A few years ago Burley Long quit making chairs and passed his turning lathe on to his son, Frank Long. Until recently chair-making only supplemented Frank's income which came mainly from farming a small plot of land. But Dale Hollow Lake has been attracting customers to Frank's doorstep lately. He has had orders for chairs from people living in California, Michigan and New York, and the craft is now keeping him at work full-time in his outdoor workshop during good weather.

Innovation by a traditional craftsman is rare. Henry Glassie recently wrote: "It is only a rare folk artist who strives for innovation; his replication is an affirmation of a tradition." While the craftsman might polish and refine his craft, he almost never makes big changes in the method of craftsmanship or in the final product. For years Frank used his father's lathe and tools, used maple and sugar trees for the frame just as his father did, made the bottom of hickory bark just as his father did and made chairs by a similar pattern to his father's. But recently Frank has become one of those rare folk artists who makes innovations.

About a year ago Frank told this author that he was thinking of making a chair of cedar because he thought it would make a beautiful chair. Soon after that he exhibited a straight chair made of cedar with a hickory bark bottom. While this may not seem to be a great change to a person unacquainted with woodworking, a person knowing how unsuitable cedar is for chair-making would wonder how such a thought could ever cross the mind of a traditional craftsman. Red cedar is extremely knotty and has a great tendency to split when worked. To turn red cedar posts for chairs would literally be a "knotty problem" and would require much experimentation and patience. Frank overcame these difficulties and produced a chair that is indeed beautiful.

---

FRANK LONG, CHAIRMAKER

Making chairs is a full-time job for Frank Long, whose workshop is situated under a tree by his home on Pea Ridge, above. Framed by some bottomless chairs, left, Frank pounds another chair together. With his pocketknife, below, Frank cleans out a groove for a slat for the back.
Bow Baskets

In Bow, Ky., just a “holler” away from Pea Ridge, live two sisters who work at several crafts. Dovie and Mary Bow make brooms, toys they call “Limber Jims” (more commonly known as Jumping Jacks), and are the last people in the area who still keep alive the traditional craft of basket-making.

The sisters make baskets of white oak, which they cut from the hillsides on their farm. They make baskets mainly in three sizes—gallon, peck and bushel. They learned to make baskets more than fifty years ago from an uncle. The Bow sisters still practice the craft largely because of a market for their baskets at the annual crafts fair at Burkesville.

The Bow sisters’ method of broom-making differs from Ruth Spear’s and Burley Long’s method in two steps, but their finished product looks very dissimilar. Instead of tying the pieces of trimmed broom corn with staging, Mary Bow strings them together with a needle and thread. Then, after rolling the corn around a handle and soaking it with hot water, they squeeze it tight with a rope and treadle. But instead of weaving the stalks of broom corn at the shank of the broom, they simply squeeze it in several places and tie it tightly. Their broom is as functional as those Burley makes even if it is not as pleasing aesthetically.

For a step-by-step description of basket-making see David Sutherland, “Traditional Basketmaking in Kentucky,” Kentucky Folklore Record, XVIII (October-December, 1972), 89-92.
BOW BASKETS
Dovie Bow starts weaving the splints into her basket frame, left. The frame and splints were roughly split out of white oak strips with a froe, below left, and trimmed to their final size with a pocketknife, below. An old basket and two new ones are shown with her mallet and froe, bottom right.
The Women's World
The sounds of spinning, once heard in almost every cabin in the Upland South, no longer echo through the doors of the houses along the road. In the corner of the room where the spinning wheel once stood in most homes, one now finds a TV set, and the spinning wheel stands forgotten in a corner of the attic.

But in Peytonsburg one wheel is used almost daily during the winter. Mrs. Maggie Spear has continued the tradition of spinning since her mother taught her how almost seventy years ago. Mrs. Spear recently reminisced a bit about her work:

I spun enough thread once to weave four blankets. Took a lot of it. Lord, I've set up here of a night and spun when all of 'em was in bed asleep but me. I've been spinning ever since I was fourteen years old. My mother learned me how. She's spun. She wove cloth. She had a loom, and she wove cloth and made blankets and made us clothes to wear. They's a big family of us, but she done that. And then when she'd quit weaving this wool she'd
have enough cotton spun that she would always weave some hand towels—a few yards for hand towels. They wasn’t no such thing as a hand towel bought out of a store when I could first remember. Never heared tell of it. Yes sir, I’ve been here a long time. I’m eighty-three years old.

For Mrs. Spear, the spinning process actually begins on the farm of her son, Dale Spear. In May, Dale, with the help of his brother Troy, shears his flock of sheep. Hand shears were once used for the process, but now electric clippers make the job much easier. While Dale sells most of the wool, he always puts a couple of sacks aside to take to his mother. Mrs. Spear washes the wool and picks out burrs and other trash which are matted into the wool.

Before spinning, the wool must be put through a process called “carding.” Wool cards are simply rectangles of leather which have had several hundred staples stuck through the leather to form rows of wire teeth. For support and ease of handling, the leather strips are attached to boards with handles. Mrs. Spear puts a small amount of clean wool between the cards and pulls one card across the other. This process forces the wool into a uniform layer across the cards and pulls the fibers of the wool straight for spinning. The top card is then used to gently form the mat of fibers left on the bottom card into what Mrs. Spear calls a “roll.” Many rolls are carded before spinning starts.

The spinning wheel is composed of three main parts—the bench, the head and the rim. The bench is simply a support for the other two parts. The term “rim” refers to the circular hoop, the hub and spokes of the wheel. The hoop has a groove around it to hold the band, a string which runs around the rim and turns the spindle in the head.
The head supports the spindle, the horizontal metal rod on which the wool is spun and wound. On the spindle between the two small posts is the grooved whorl in which the band runs. Mrs. Spear made the whorl out of a piece of elder (see photo, below).

Before beginning the spinning, Mrs. Spear has an ear of corn brought from the barn. With her sewing scissors, she cuts off a piece of the shuck. Then she wraps the shuck around the spindle with just the end of the spindle exposed. Mrs. Spear secures the shuck with a piece of thread which she spins on the bare spindle. To start that thread, Mrs. Spear licks her finger and moistens the spindle. This causes a roll of wool to stick to the spindle and allows Mrs. Spear to spin a short thread.

The shuck is placed on the spindle to allow a large bundle of thread to be removed from the spindle without having to unwind it (see photo, right). Mrs. Spear calls this bundle of thread a "broach," and the whole thing—shuck and thread—can simply be pulled off the spindle.

After the shuck is wrapped onto the spindle, the actual spinning process begins. In her left hand, Mrs. Spear holds the middle of a roll. With her right hand she starts the wheel turning. Then, at the same time, she increases the speed of the rim and pulls the roll back to a length of about five feet. This is spun until it "feels right" to her. Then that thread is wound onto the spindle and the second half of the roll is spun in the same way. To start another roll, Mrs. Spear gently presses the end of a new roll onto the end of the roll she is spinning. They are twisted together so perfectly that the joint cannot be seen in the finished thread.

When enough thread has been spun to form a broach, it is removed and another broach is spun. The threads from the two broaches are then pulled off and wound together into a ball. The two threads are attached to the spindle and twisted together to form a single thread of double strength.

After the thread is twisted, Mrs. Spear winds it into hanks. Then she washes the hanks to remove any dirt which collected during the spinning and twisting. This washing also tends to preserve the twist.
The spinning process is complete after this washing, and the thread is ready for use. While Mrs. Spear can remember seeing her mother weave thread into cloth, she never did any weaving herself. She uses all her thread for knitting and crocheting socks, gloves and sock caps. Although she has sold a few pairs of socks for as much as five dollars, she gives most of them to her family.

It is easy to see that a lot of labor goes into making the thread, gloves and socks. Mrs. Spear spends many hours during the winter carding and spinning, and most of her spare time all year round is filled with knitting.

The traditional methods of spinning have almost been completely forgotten in the United States, even in its last stronghold, the Upland South. Only a scattered few people remain who can remember spinning as an active part of their lives. Fewer still are willing to give their time and effort to such a project. Most are content with their memories. Mrs. Spear is one of the last who will ever know the hardships and pleasures of making clothes for her family literally from the sheep’s back, just as her mother did a century ago.
PREPARING THE WOOL

Troy Spear shears the wool from one of his brother's sheep, top left. Shears like those at the top right were once used for the job. The wool is taken to Mrs. Maggie Spear, above. Mrs. Spear picks and washes the wool before using it. The difference between raw and cleaned wool can be seen in the picture at the right.
CARDING
After washing the wool, Mrs. Spear must card it before it can be spun, right. The cards have many wire teeth, below, which pull the fibers straight. The wool is taken off the cards in a "roll," bottom, which is then spun.
SPINNING

A corn shuck is cut and wrapped around the spindle before spinning begins, top. About half of a roll is spun at a time, above. After the thread is spun, it is wound onto the spindle, right.
KNITTING
After the thread is spun, it is gathered into hanks, above right. Mrs. Spear uses thread from these hanks to knit socks. She also crochets sock caps and gloves on a cedar crochet hook, right.
Fairy Neathery, poet

Joe Neathery's wife, Fairy, lives in a two-room log cabin, spins wool on her spinning wheel, knits socks and caps for her family, cooks on a wood stove, helps kill hogs each year, knows how to prepare a dozen wild greens and several wild animals for the table, makes delicious sassafras tea, and...writes poetry.

While the work may not be particularly valuable from a literary viewpoint, it does give excellent insights into the life, and sometimes into the heart, of a member of the folk.
Shearing Sheep

The sheep written about in this poem belong to one of Mrs. Neathery's neighbors, Dale Spear, and have a special meaning to her. When Troy Spear, above, and Dale shear the sheep each May, some of the wool is given to Mrs. Neathery to spin and make into caps and socks for her family.

the woolie Sheep I pass on My Way
as I go to church Each Sunday.
They sure look proud of their wool so white
when it is Sheared off they will look a Sight.
They will run around and Bleat and Snort
They are not so pretty when their wool is Short
it will haft to be cut when the weather gets warm
They will round them up and put them in the Barn 
Take the Shears start cutting the wool  
and fill five or six Bags full.  
then open the doors and let the Sheep out on the grass  
the poor little fellow wont be so pretty when I pass  
But I will look at them anyway for it wont be long  
until their wool grows out and they will be to warm:  
They will lay in the dew in the green grass:  
and I will think they are Pretty again when I pass.
Mrs. Neathery wrote this poem about the place where she grew up, above. Originally a log cabin, the house has been added onto and boarded over. It was also the homeplace of her mother and father, right. The old house still stands on the land owned by the Neatherys.

I went back today to see
My old Home
It stands on the Hill, it looks
So alone.
As I came to the step that led up
on the floor. I walk in and
went through the door.
I saw the old table that stood
on the right.
Where my dad read his Bible
every night
And there on the wall was
the comb pocket mama made
of cardboard so thin.
It looked like she had just
put her comb in
I saw the three cornered cubbard
so bare.
Where we kept our few dishes
We handled them with care.
I sat on the bench where I and
my friend once sat.
It brought back memories I
will never forget
There was happiness and a lot of
troubles that was so sad.
My dad and mother were the best
friends I ever had.
They have gone and left me
down here! I will stop my
Poem and wipe away
a tear.
Spring 73

Spring is a season anxiously awaited by women living in a traditional lifestyle, since it ushers in an abundant supply of food for another year.

Above, Mrs. Neathery's grandsons, Doug and Mike, follow the road to their grandparents home one early spring day.

the Storm Clouds have almost gone away
I sit here tonight and think of the day
When everything will be Pretty and dry.

it has rained so much this winter I could cry.
I hear the whiperwill singing his Song
he is a Beautiful Bird But he must be wrong.

for it is only March and April is when he comes along
I sure am glad to hear him I feel so Blue

I can't believe this Bad weather is Trough
The fish in the lake have begun to Bit

Pa Brought in a Bunch today they were a Beautiful Sight
The plant Bed is Sowed, the Violets are in Bloom
the creses are ready to cook. and soon will be the mushrooms.
the ramps are up ready to cat. you must cook them with Eggs and Meat
The thunder is Very loud. The lightning is flashing in the Cloud.
I saw a Butterfly to-day. So I guess spring is not far away.
When the Cat Bird comes he don't lie
spring will be here with the firefly
we will all be happy and start Barbingcuing
fish and meat. With Bread and Potatoes
we will have Plenty to Eat.
the June Bug Mike will tie on a string
the Locas are due here this spring
They make such a loud nois.
they will be the first seen by the Boys
They make good fish Bait.
so I guess we shouldn't hate
the dreadful Bugs. they look slick and cold
Fearo was glad to get rid of them I am told
I looked at the hearth.
I saw a Cricket in the crake
and that is all I am going to write about that
by Cricket dear: sing away for spring is near

---

3 plant Bed: seedbed for tobacco plants.
4 creses: dandelion greens.
5 ramps: wild onions.
6 Joe Neathery has dug up seventeen year locust larvae while digging fish bait and knows that 1973 is the year for the "Locas" to return.
7 the Boys: Mrs. Neathery's two grandchildren.
Mrs. Groce

Hettie Groce is everything a person would expect the wife of a traditional farmer like Cord Groce to be. (Chapter one in this survey is devoted to Cord Groce.) She sews on a treadle sewing machine, churns butter by hand with a crock churn and wooden dasher, raises a garden each year and cans virtually hundreds of jars of fruits and vegetables, raises chickens and sells eggs, cooks on a wood stove and helps with the hog-killing each year. A neighbor once remarked that the only food Mrs. Groce buys is sugar because she raises everything else in her garden. He was not stretching the point very far. The Groces raise their own hogs and prepare the meat themselves. Even the pepper and thyme which spice the sausage is raised in the garden. The fruits and vegetables in the garden are canned and even this abundant supply is supplemented by blackberries which Cord picks and Mrs. Groce cans or makes into preserves. They have also had their own corn ground for meal.

Modern times have caused Mrs. Groce to stop using some traditional practices. Although she once made her own soap and brooms it is now more feasible practically and economically for her to buy them.
MRS. GROCE

Feeding the chickens is a daily job for Mrs. Groce, below. Left, she pauses for a picture after getting a bucket of corn for the chickens. Bottom, Mrs. Groce makes an apron on her treadle sewing machine.
Barbie Daniels, Quilter

Many women in the Peytonsburg area make quilts occasionally, but Mrs. Barbara Daniels sometimes makes two or three quilts a week. She works at her sewing continually and if she is not piecing a quilt top from scraps of material, she is working over her quilting frame which always hangs from her ceiling.

"Quilting and patchwork have been the most outstanding expressions in needlework" in the Southern Uplands. While quilting is practiced in every state in the Union, "the most extensive quilting industries in America" have been developed in Kentucky.²

Making a quilt in the traditional manner is a three-step process. First, the top must be prepared by either piecing together small scraps of material, or by appliqueing designs to the quilt top. Tops can be pieced randomly or in traditional patterns.

Second, a lining of wool, or more often cotton, must be prepared. The cotton or wool must be carded into "bats," which are rectangular mats of the fibers about the size of the cards. Enough bats must be carded to cover the quilt.

The third and final step is quilting the quilt. Before this step, the quilt is composed of three separate layers--a bottom which is usually a single piece of cloth, the lining of bats and the top. These layers are then attached to a quilting frame which keeps the quilt spread out and holds the layers together so they can be quilted. The term quilting refers to the process of piercing a needle and thread through all three layers repeatedly until the three layers form a unit and the quilt is complete.

Mrs. Daniels pieces all of her quilt tops and occasionally cards cotton bats for linings, although she now generally uses commercially prepared linings.

PATCHWORK

Barbie Daniels pieces a quilt top, top left, while her sister provides company. Above, Aunt Barbie quilts a baby quilt on frames suspended from the ceiling. Left, she gets help from her sister in rolling up a finished portion of the quilt so a new section can be reached for quilting.
The Country Store
and
A Country Auction
THE COUNTRY STORE
The country store is not only a place to buy
everything from a pocket knife to Vick's
VapoRub, but it is also a gathering place for the
members of the community to catch up on the
news. The store shelves are lined with a wide
assortment of merchandise, a couple of pairs of
sewing scissors and a string of dried peppers. A
note on the cash register, above right, reminds
postmaster and store owner Nick Jones that eggs
are now 68 cents a dozen. Nick prepares a sack
of groceries for a customer in the top left photo.
Tucked away in a corner of the general store, the Post Office at Peytonsburg is operated by Postmaster-Storekeeper Nick Jones, above. Top, Nick begins a morning's work by hanging out the flag. Nick is never too busy to take time out to answer a question for his visiting granddaughter who has just gotten out of bed, right.
A COUNTRY AUCTION

A pair of worn-out cotton cards on the auction block, top, drew few interested looks at the auction, but a good pitchfork got glances from everyone present, above. The old mule-drawn farm equipment drew a lot of spectators, right, but there were few bidders.
Peytonsburg is an exceptional community. While most of the rest of the country has been moving into a highly technological state, the people of Peytonsburg have retained many of the simple, slower ways of life which were common fifty, or even a hundred years ago. Although a degree of retention of tradition is expected in any society, the incredible amount of traditional folklife still practiced by the people of Peytonsburg leads one to ask why.

When the people on the ridge are asked why they still do things the old way, they say it is because they like to. Cord Groce said, “I don’t love to work with a tractor,” when asked why he continued to use a mule team on his farm. Early one spring morning Joe Neathery was walking through the woods searching for sassafras roots. The sun had just come up and the early morning rays painted the woods with a golden glow. Suddenly, without any provocation, Joe exclaimed to this author, “Davie, I love the woods! I love every minute I’m out here!”

One of the residents of the ridge, Dale Spear, has a college education and is an administrator in the Cumberland County school system. Dale is one of the few natives of the area who can analyze the lifestyles of the people with a degree of detachment. “I’m a great believer in environmental determination,” he stated. “My mother expected me to stay in school, but I’ve got several cousins that didn’t go to school and they ended up making moonshine just like a lot of other people on this ridge.” Dale says the ridge people’s lack of education, travel and communication necessitated the development and retention of the traditional skills.

“You couldn’t develop the skills Burley Long did. There are too many other things to do. But Burley hasn’t had the chance to get an education or travel—well, he’s been to Burkesville.”

Folklorists seldom try to answer questions about culture change (or lack of change), but anthropologists have researched and theorized about this area of study for some time.
However, most anthropologists have attributed a lack of culture change to geographic isolation and lack of innovation. Such a simple explanation does not always fully explain the situation.

Robert F. G. Spier recently wrote:

Cultural change has been a focus of attention, but comparable interest has not been displayed in cultural persistence which is the other side of the same coin. The presumption is that persistence is the absence of change; under the rubric of technological change we should consider equally the topic of technological persistence, for together they form an illuminating pair.

A community like Peytonsburg may retain elements of traditional lifestyles, not because of a "lack of cultural change," but because of the presence of "cultural persistence." That is, the people in the community stay the way they are because they want to, not because they know no better. Anthropologist Spier calls this "attitudinal isolation."

Every house in the area has electric lighting, and each of the persons studied in this paper has a television set, even though modern television programming does not appeal to the people on the ridge. One informant said he watched only the evening news, and that was not worth watching. Five of the thirteen informants own automobiles or trucks, but only three--Troy and Dale Spear, and Homer Watson--use them extensively. Cord Groce drives his pick-up to Burkesville once a week, and the rest of the time it sits in the garage. Mrs. Groce and Mrs. Spear have electric ranges, but continue to do most of their cooking on their wood stoves. "Food tastes better cooked on a wood stove," Dale Spear's wife remarked. The people on Pea Ridge try modern conveniences and continue using them if they offer a needed service.

Spier makes this statement which concisely summarizes many of the reasons the people of Peytonsburg have retained the traditional lifestyles:

Attitudinal isolation may be as effective as geographic isolation. A group may hold itself aloof from its neighbors, feeling that there is nothing worthwhile to be learned from such benighted people. Or the isolation may

---


11 Ibid., p. 135.
be that of complete satisfaction with one's own culture, to the point that no improvements can be imagined. And there were some societies, like the Shoshonean-speaking Indians of the Great Basin in western North America, who evidently were aware of the advantages in the practices of their neighbors but made no effort to change, for change involves effort and adjustment.

In this matter of attitudinal isolation, most societies evidently fall between the extremes—somewhat satisfied with life as it is but willing to change if the rewards seem great enough. This group probably profits most in the long run from diffusion because the traits they accept meet substantial needs and are not accepted simply for their novelty. The acceptance of new traits is infrequent enough to make possible a satisfactory integration or assimilation of these items without upsetting the direction of the culture which manages to maintain its identity and general character throughout. 12

12Ibid.
Appendix two  
glossary

bat n: a mat of cotton or wool fibers carded into rectangles about the size of the card; used for lining quilts.

broach n: a bundle of new-spun thread which is wound onto a shuck on the spindle of a spinning wheel.

card n: a wire-toothed brush (they are used in pairs) for disengaging the fibers of wool or cotton. v: the process of using such a set of brushes.

creses n: wild dandelion greens.

drag set n: a pole, about six feet long, tied to a trap to keep a trapped animal from dragging the trap away.

foot adz n: a like tool with a single curved blade at right angles to the handle; used as a hoe, or for dressing wood.

froe, or frow n: a wedge-shaped cleaving tool with a handle set into the blade at right angles to the back; used for splitting wood.

ginseng n: an herb with a thick forked root that is prized as an aphrodisiac by the Chinese.

hand shock v: to place hay with a pitchfork into small piles so it will not dry to a crisp; n: one of those piles.

quilt v: to stitch together the three layers of a bedcover, n: a bedcover of two layers filled with down and stitched together.

ramps n: wild onions.

roll n: a mass of wool or cotton fibers that have been carded into a cylindrical shape for spinning.

shuck mop n: a mop made by attaching a handle to a board with holes drilled through it and inserting corn shucks through the holes.

staging n: heavy duty string; used in broom-making.

trapline n: a series of animal traps, usually consisting of from seven to twelve traps.

windrow n: a row of hay raked together to dry before being hand shocked.

working n: a community gathering for the purpose of raising a house or barn or for some other type of community project.
Sources Consulted


Eaton takes a strong revivalistic viewpoint, but the book does excellently describe many handicrafts in the Upland South.


This is an excellent article describing the folk artist, his work and his methods of production.


While this study emphasizes a cultural geographic study of architecture, much material is included on folk crafts.


Glassie presents a step-by-step description of making a pack pasket.


Jones introduces a chairmaker who makes many innovations in his chairs.


Montell reconstructs the history of a Negro community in Cumberland County and describes the ridges of the area, including Pea Ridge.


This book was consulted because it is a typical cultural anthropology text.


Spier has produced an excellent book on material culture, written from an anthropological viewpoint.


This article gives a survey and discusses procedure of traditional basketmaking in Kentucky.