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Chester Cornett: A Study of the Effects of Culture Change on a Traditional Kentucky Craftsman

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Beatty,

Roger Dean

1975

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Film

Well!

Chester Cornett



Chairmaker



"He is isolated among his contemporaries,
by truth and by his art, but with this consolation in his pursuits,
that they will draw all men sooner or later.

For all men live by truth, and stand in need of expression.

In love, in art, in avarice, in politics, in labor, in games,
we study to utter our painful secret.

The man is only half himself, the other half is his expression."

—Emerson, "The Poet"

CHESTER CORNETT: A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF CULTURE
CHANGE ON A TRADITIONAL KENTUCKY CRAFTSMAN

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Center for Intercultural and Folk Studies

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Roger Dean Beatty

December 1975

CHESTER CORNETT: A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF CULTURE
CHANGE ON A TRADITIONAL KENTUCKY CRAFTSMAN

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I would like to thank: Archie Green and Anne Grimes, who independently helped direct me toward folk studies; Dr. Kenneth Clarke, who saw the value of this followup study; Dr. Jim Benedict, the chemist and apprentice chairmaker; Dr. Michael Owen Jones; and my friend Chester.

I hereby acknowledge my great debt to Dr. Karl Ahrendt at Ohio University--this text is dedicated to him.

PREFACE

The Spring 1973 issue of Appalachian Heritage, published quarterly by the Appalachian Learning Laboratory at Alice Lloyd College, contains a full-page picture captioned "Portrait of Mountain Man." How ironic it is that the person portrayed as the symbol of a mountain man is Chester Cornett. The picture itself is not misrepresented; the image is indeed that of Chester Cornett. However, the statement under the picture reads inaccurately:

Mountain man--Portrait of Chester Cornett, widely-known chairmaker from Dwarf, Ky.

The note, as it was published in 1973, was incomplete and misleading. Cornett moved just north of the Ohio River during 1970. Presently, in 1975, he resides in Cincinnati, Ohio. This particular mountain man, used as a provocative symbol by people seeking to extol their Appalachian heritage, is but another Appalachian migrant in a northern urban area.

This study is directed toward the documentation of several effects of urbanization and enculturation on Mr. Chester Cornett, a traditional Appalachian chairmaker from Kentucky.

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CHESTER CORNETT; A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF CULTURE
CHANGE ON A TRADITIONAL KENTUCKY CRAFTSMAN

Roger D. Beatty

December 1975

99 pages

Directed by: Kenneth Clarke, Lynwood Montell, Jim Wayne Miller

Department of Intercultural
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The problem considered was the nature of traditional Appalachian chairmaking in a northern metropolis. The subject was an Appalachian migrant who moved to Cincinnati, Ohio. Culture change was viewed through the sociological, socioeconomic, and cultural effects of urbanization. Fieldwork focused on interrelated factors of individual personality, style and creativity, and chair production. Information on the chairmaker's background was extracted from Michael Owen Jones's, "Chairmaking in Appalachia: A Study in Style and Creative Imagination in American Folk Art" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1970).

Dramatic changes in the folk art tradition occurred as a result of culture change. Given economic solvency and personal self-respect, the Appalachian migrant adopted certain aspects of the urban image. His personality changed in the new environment. This traditional artisan created unusual chairs in order to become successful in an urban area. A certain style was accepted by the urban consumer group. Creativity was not encouraged because the customer specified how the chair was to be built. This observation suggests that folk art traditions in an urban area persist or die out depending on the rapport between the craftsman and the consumer. A successful craftsman cannot stabilize his art in an urban setting; influences for change and opportunities to change are too numerous.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Investigation of American Folk Art
by Michael Owen Jones

The study of folk chairmaking was advanced greatly through the fieldwork, research, interpretation, and publication of Michael Owen Jones,¹ who, between 1965 and 1967, investigated the creativity, style, aesthetics, and producer/consumer relationship of chairmaking as practiced in a five-county area in southeastern Kentucky.²

The results of his investigation of the folk arts in Appalachia were published in the form of a doctoral dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School at Indiana University in 1969. The 986-page dissertation, "Chairmaking in Appalachia: A Study in Style and Creative Imagination in American Folk Art,"³ examined and revised a broad range of concepts and methodologies in folk art and folklore. Significantly, there have been few similar analyses of style and creativity in folkloristics, and fewer intensive studies involving folk utilitarian art.

¹Jones was a folklore student at Indiana University at the time. He is presently an Associate Professor in the Center for Comparative Study of Folklore and Mythology at the University of California at Los Angeles.

²For an elaboration of the geographical region surveyed by Jones see Michael Owen Jones, "Chairmaking in Appalachia: A Study in Style and Creativity in American Folk Art" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1969), p. 916 (hereafter, the Jones dissertation will be cited as Diss.).

³Ibid. Xerographic and microfilm copies are available from Xerox University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

One of the major purposes of Jones's study was to "examine folk artistic procedure and by such an examination to arrive at some basic features of traditional art and aesthetics."⁴ An intense investigation into one aspect of American folk culture, chairmaking, was utilized to construct his theory of folk art. Through the use of observation and interviewing techniques, he assembled ethnographic data which enabled him to construct a model of folk art which could be subjected to analysis from the standpoint of taste, style, aesthetics, and creativity.

The value of his study is derived not merely from the additional knowledge of the details of assembly in chair production but also from the application of a systems approach to the concept of folk art specifically and of all art generally. The Jones thesis asserts that folk art is integrated with and inseparable from folklore.⁵ But the ultimate value of his theory of folk art is not limited to the discipline of folklore; his conclusion that "there is, indeed, only one art, not two or three or four, and it is to be found in all societies in the past as well as the present"⁶ could enhance the cross-cultural perspective of all disciplines and all peoples in the area of human relations.

The postulation that man has only "one art," i.e., art is a fundamental unit of universal behavioral response in a system of interacting physical and social elements, cannot be proven until the E Pluribus Unum association between "primitive" art, "folk" art, and "elite" art has been disproven. The systemic theory of folk art as

⁴Ibid., p. iii.

⁵See his discussion of the definition of "folk" in Michael Owen Jones, "The Well-Wrought Pot: Folk Art and Folklore as Art," Folklore Forum, Bibliographical and Special Series, No. 12: 82-87.

⁶Diss., p. 902.

posited by Jones is used throughout his dissertation to demonstrate the fallacies and inadequacies in other theories of folk art and craft. He offers criticisms and corrections to purported scholars as well as to acclaimed researchers--among them, anthropologists, antique dealers, art historians, folklorists, and museologists. He uniformly devalues the limited perception in folk art analysis, the culturally-biased and object-oriented conclusions, and the misconceptions resulting from failures to conceptualize folk culture. His textual arguments, data interpretations, and concluding set of postulates are developed to bring forth the concept of "one art."

Jones's theory of folk art, then, must be broad enough to include every occurrence of aesthetic experience regardless of the function of the precipitating causes. The aesthetic qualities in a painting or sculpted work are likely to be perceived much more readily and rapidly than those of a carefully shaped ventilator hole on a plank-walled barn. The failure to apprehend and comprehend subtle forms of artistic creativity in folk architecture does not render them non-aesthetic for all individuals. In point of fact, aesthetic projection and reception is communication, whether verbal or non-verbal. The completion of the communicative chain is not a necessary condition for the premise that an aesthetic response was engendered, but it is vital to the conscious acknowledgement of that impulse. In terms of the concept of "one art," a cornshuck doll and a cornfield scarecrow may exhibit manifestations of the same individual aesthetic: design, stylistic lines, and ornamentation.

On a regional geographic scale, the various material manifestations of culture indicate the level of group consciousness in aesthetic perception. For example, one subtype of the transverse crib barn is confined to a small region in Kentucky. The "hip" barn, as it is locally known in

Barren, Metcalfe, Monroe, and adjoining counties, is a feeder barn characterized by angled, indented side walls. According to local farmers the indented walls are more efficient in the utilization of manger feed space.⁷ The limited geographical distribution of this barn type isolates the original builders/owners of these barns in terms of aesthetic perception. But the nature of this common consciousness cannot be analyzed by mere speculation. To determine whether or not the form was favored for utilitarian qualities over the aesthetic ones would require careful field research supported with historical comparisons. The "hip" barn with two indented feeder walls might appear to be constructed with a greater aesthetic emphasis, based on symmetry, than the one-walled version. But again, the investigator, without completing a field investigation, could do no more than base speculation on internal biases.⁸

The "hip" barn, so common on the cultural landscape in a small part of Kentucky, illustrates well the subtle forms of folk utilitarian art which Jones considers worthy of further study:

If one is to find the manufacture of aesthetically satisfying forms among the American folk generally, whether on the frontier or today, the search should be directed not to painting and sculpture but to architecture, smithing, furniture, pottery, basketry, crafts of horsehair and leather, clothing, vehicles for transportation, quilts, rugs, funerary art, and many other forms of aesthetic utilitarian technics.⁹

This advice has given direction for investigation, but it is not sufficient to provide an expansive grasp of the artistic nature of products

⁷Lynwood Montell, "Barns and Cribs of the Upland South," (unpublished, undated manuscript): 49-50.

⁸Folk art and folklife studies are often oriented toward descriptive and comparative analysis. One folk studies graduate student recently observed: "The tendency in folklife and folklife-related research has been to document a particular process because it exists--without considering why it exists."

⁹Diss., p. 21.

of folk manufacture:

A concept of art must be broad enough to include forms in which artistic and aesthetic principles are evident but the aesthetic function of the object is only secondary to the utilitarian or other purpose for which it was made.¹⁰

The theory of art put forth by Jones, intentionally of a grand design, is inclusive of what has historically been dichotomized into art and craft. As in the "hip" barn example, if some form of aesthetic function was felt by the original barn builder, it was certainly secondary to the utilitarian purpose served as a stock barn. The clear distillation of either emotion in the conception and construction of the barn would be impossible to achieve. The communicative and social interaction among the builders, owners, and bystanders was certainly complex. Tools, technology, building materials, and physical setting forged the final form. The great variation in aesthetic and utilitarian impact on the final form of the barn was confined inside a complex network of variables. The common kernel of holistic interpretation of such social action as seen by Jones in folk chairmaking and by others in folklore studies before him¹¹ was communication.

The great dependency on the communicative factor in Jones's theory of art is obvious:

The development, continuity and change of individual, social, and epochal style result from the nature of the interrelationships of the factors in the system of folk art as they remain relatively

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 22-23.

¹¹Ibid., p. 64. For articles considering the communicative aspects of folklore see Robert A. Georges, "Toward an Understanding of Storytelling Events," Journal of American Folklore, 82 (1969), p. 317; Alan Dundes, "Texture, Text, and Context," Southern Folklore Quarterly, 28 (1964): 251-265; and Dan Ben-Amos, "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context," Journal of American Folklore, 84 (1971), p. 10.

stable or are altered by a precipitant resulting in the occurrence of unique events within the several processes of the system.¹²

The central concept of this theory is that of a system. The systematic interaction between elements affects the equilibrium, either enforcing it or disturbing it. The precipitant is identified as the source of all effects, whether they be positive, negative, or neutral. That changes in style will occur is implied by the inclusion of "development, continuity and change." The source of stylistic change must be caused by the precipitant through some form of communication. In folk chairmaking, Jones identified the relationship between the producer (chairmaker), the consumer (chair customer), and the unifying artistic transaction (exchange between the producer and the customer). His model of analysis is a complicated extension of the producer-consumer-transaction triumvirate:

The model of analysis employed is that of a system within a physical and social environment consisting of processes (a passage of a continuity through a succession of sequential alterations, as in production involving creativity and the techniques of construction, or in consumption involving distribution, utilization and evaluation) precipitated by a social demand or individual need (economic, technological, or psychic) at a juncture of multiple forces (technological, psychological, cultural, social) and resulting in the objectification of ideas both as technological means (tools and instruments to achieve some active end; these instruments and techniques determine one another and affect the nature and use of the product) and as cultural ends (art and aesthetic enjoyment; the nature of the product is dependent on taste, cultural norms, and the personality of the creator) in a society in which the technological and cultural orders of reality are not clearly distinct.¹³

The intent of the present study is not to analyze this system-environment model for folk art. Jones does this quite adequately in Chapter II of his dissertation. His model for analysis was derived from theoretical methods in art history, cultural geography, anthropology,

¹²Michael Owen Jones, "Chairmaking in Appalachia: A Study in Style and Creativity in American Folk Art," Dissertation Abstracts International, XXXI: 6, p. 2813-A.

¹³Ibid.

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psychology, and sociology. He utilizes the tools from many disciplines to further investigation and interpretation. Jones identifies this methodology as being similar to the current approach in American Studies inquiry. Approximately eight hundred pages of his dissertation are devoted to the detailed analysis of his model using the interdisciplinary approach.

With his modular framework in mind, Jones concerns himself with the ramifications of his theory for the individual artist. Again, his approach is interdisciplinary:

A study of contemporary folk art provides data on the personality of the artists, determinants of style, folk aesthetics, and the processes of creativity which do not appear in historical interpretations based on artifacts of which do not coincide with those interpretations.¹⁴

His emphasis is at the individual level since he believes that any given object is an individual composition created through varying degrees of style and creativity by the producer subject to the effects of the consumer. At the individual level, then, style and creativity are subjected to values communicated between participants in the artistic transaction.

This approach facilitates correction of inaccurate concepts postulated by art historians and museologists. Jones has published numerous articles in an attempt to advance the conceptualization of folk art phenomenon as it occurs at the individual level in Appalachia. These few basic ideas can be traced to articles published in the more prominent folklore journals: (1) folk utilitarian art is a business endeavor; (2) consumers have a "folk" typology for chairmakers; (3) the

¹⁴Diss., p. 28.

producer is influenced by the consumer;¹⁵ (4) a craftsman's ability and aesthetic principle is not always apparent in a given work; (5) traditional craftsmen do have standards which may be transgressed for any number of reasons;¹⁶ (6) folk art is not anonymous; (7) folk furniture is not without style and variation; (8) folk craftsmen do stand out as individuals;¹⁷ and (9) Appalachian folk often lack verbal aesthetic response when considering utilitarian art products.¹⁸ These are but a few of the 491 postulates set forth in Jones's concluding chapter (Chapter VI), entitled: "Set of Postulates." The basic structure of these propositions can be reduced to seven concepts:

- (1) Art is a system
- (2) Art can be conceived of as process and event in a physical and social environment
- (3) Material folk art in Appalachia is a system
- (4) It is utilitarian
- (5) It exhibits an artistic quality
- (6) Taste is the criterion for judgment
- (7) Material art forms exhibit stylistic change

The present study is concerned with a subset of the last postulate. The subset contains his analysis of culture contact, instability, and change. When Jones introduced the dissertation by noting that his intent was to investigate "the dynamic conditions in contemporary folk art under which individual art styles develop, and discern the effects of a major force in culture change, urbanization, on various aspects of a single

¹⁵Michael Owen Jones, "'They Made Them for the Lasting Part': A 'Folk' Typology of Traditional Furniture Makers," Southern Folklore Quarterly, XXXVI: 1 (March, 1971): 44-61.

¹⁶Idem, "Violations of Standards of Excellence and Preference in Utilitarian Art," Western Folklore, XXXII: 1 (January, 1973): 19-32.

¹⁷Idem, "'I Bet That's His Trademark': 'Anonymity' In 'Folk' Utilitarian Art Production," Keystone Folklore Quarterly, XVI: 1 (Spring, 1971): 39-49.

¹⁸Idem, "The Useful and the Useless in Folk Art," Journal of Popular Culture, VII: 1 (1973): 794-818.

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form of art production," he was concerned with folk utilitarian art in Appalachia. And Appalachian craft is bound by many geographic and socio-economic constraints: personality, relative isolation, rent, materials, local economy, politics, transportation networks, family size.

The study of a form of artistic production that is considered a craft has the advantage of treating problems of folk economics and socioeconomic relationships of producers and consumers as they affect style and creativity.¹⁹

Given the hypothetical case that an Appalachian chairmaker, well-documented in his native social, cultural, and economic environment, was thrust into the midst of an urban area, what effects could be expected in terms of culture change as seen in style and creativity? The case is no longer hypothetical. Chester Cornett, a resident of eastern Kentucky when studied by Jones, presently practices chairmaking in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Justification: The Value of Re-examination
Revision, and Extension in Folkloristics

A perusal of any of the numerous folklore journals and texts will rarely reward the researcher with the discovery of an investigation which continues a previous study. There are many reasons for this prevalent publishing tendency, most of which trace back to the nature of the discipline rather than to editorial policy. It is my intention to note the need for re-examination of "discarded" informants in folkloristics: first, to establish the fact that fieldwork techniques need to be adjusted to promote followup studies by other researchers; second, to justify the present study which uses a previous investigation as its foundation.

Followup studies with informants have been rare. The few early folklorists in this country who were actively involved in collection

¹⁹Diss., pp. iii-iv.

bore allegiance to folklore's mother disciplines, English and Anthropology. These scholars naturally approached the study of folklore as an extension of their other academic interests.

The pioneers in folk studies included amateurs as well as professional scholars. While each group's academic training was different, they were primarily interested in the same aspect of fieldwork--collection. This emphasis resulted in the devaluation of the individual informant. Cecil Sharp traversed many counties in Appalachia generally stopping only long enough to collect a few "ballets" before moving on.²⁰ Frank C. Brown collected the genres of North Carolina lore on practically any piece of paper which would fit inside a shoebox.²¹ Even today, the students of Eliot Wigginton in north Georgia avidly collect material for Foxfire magazine,²² but rarely return to review their informants. Demonstrating Alvin Toffler's insightful theory of intransience in the twentieth-century world, folklorists have collected from "throw-away" informants.²³ And with a "field" of millions of informants, there was no time to revisit an earlier one unless it was suspected that more lore could be quarried to splice a gap in a specific genre collection.

Interdisciplinary approaches have increased the scope of folkloristic inquiry. Geographic boundaries have been extended from rural areas into the urban centers. Folklore has been found wherever man goes, and folklorists have gone there to study it. The concept of

²⁰Evelyn K. Wells, The Ballad Tree (New York: Ronald, 1950), p. 263.

²¹See the introduction in Newman I. White, ed., The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore (Durham: Duke Press, 1952).

²²The accumulation of their initial efforts was published as The Foxfire Book (New York: Anchor Press, 1972).

²³Alvin Toffler, Future Shock (New York: Bantam, 1970), p. 51.

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urban tradition is yielding ethnic lore, occupational lore, and applied folklore.²⁴ The field is wide open, and anyone could be a valuable informant.

The infinite depth of folklore and folklife is part of the reason why re-examination of informants is not common in folkloric publications. The growing number of folklorists and folklore students are determined to pioneer new territories and cordon off these regions for their personal specialization. Informants are befriended, and although they are on the "open range," they are henceforth branded as the exclusive property of the engaging folklorist. The customary etiquette in the folklorist's peer group requires each fieldworker to address himself to the lore and life of undocumented informants. Based on previous publications, it appears that informants are virtually branded for life. Since there are so many informants available, it is always a simple matter to find alternate informants, thus perpetuating a somewhat wasteful practice. Informants are frequently forgotten after the initial research and study are completed because the folklorist must make new discoveries and research new topics. This prevalent psychology impels the scholar to file away the informant's name and transcripts once the research objective has been met, never to return again.

This resistance to followup research activity can indicate many things. First, it can suggest that fieldworkers in folk studies are pressured to achieve. This possibility is implied by the prestigious and lengthy publication vitae of many folklorists. Second, it can reflect the nature of a competitive discipline. Aggressive folklorists,

²⁴See Americo Parades and Ellen J. Stekert, The Urban Experience and Folk Tradition (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1971); Papers on Applied Folklore, Folklore Forum, Bibliographical and Special Series, No. 8; and Bruce E. Nickerson, "Is There a Folk in the Factory?" Journal of American Folklore, 87: 344 (1974): 133-139.

much like pioneer homesteaders, are continually seeking the edge of the frontier to build their intellectual analogue of the log cabin. With the accession of each new territory, edited texts and thematic journals instantly appear in an attempt to quickly offer definition, description, form, function, and structure. Third, and most importantly, the resistance to followup study can point out a serious oversight in fieldwork technique and theory. The problem involves cultural change in the lives of informants. Granted, certain fieldwork manuals and published articles have dealt with testing for textual variation in narrative performance, and even simulating transmission in a controlled environment, but by and large, research aimed at determining the effects of cultural change on previously documented informants is virtually non-existent.

The present study is proposed on the premise that the effects of cultural change, in this case urbanization, can be considered in two distinct frameworks. The first concept of urbanization sees the value system of an urban area encroaching on a rural area and its inhabitants. Here, the two regions have concrete boundaries and urbanization represents the accepted standards of the popular, or mass culture as they affect the resident rural culture. This influence in Appalachia has been conveyed by absentee coal company owners, Vista volunteers, non-regional colleges which train future teachers to return to the area with dominant culture values, ministers, federal regulations, interstate highways, "outsider" government officials, and tourists.

The second concept of urbanization is the actual geographical relocation of a rural migrants to an urban metropolis. This type of culture change exerts intense pressures on the sociological, economic, and psychological composition of both the resident urbanites and the

transient migrants. The migrants enter a strange, unfamiliar arena of confusion. The urbanites deride the perplexed migrants for clustering in groups characterized by economic deprivation. Although certain individual migrants and urbanites would invalidate the above generalizations, these patterns of cross-cultural communication have been reported in many studies.²⁵

The primary concern of the Jones dissertation was to "arrive at a more complete comprehension of the nature of art in general and Appalachian folk art particularly."²⁶ But the motive underlying his study in style and creative imagination is the effect of cultural change. His theoretical concern with folk art in the modern world is centered directly on the encroachment of urbanization into Appalachia. Cultural instability is the main ingredient in his system of folk art. In response to his question, "What happens to a folk art tradition that is affected by the forces of acculturation, urbanization, and industrialization?" Jones discusses the similar concepts of creativity offered earlier, and separately, by Ruth Bunzel and Henry Glassie,²⁷ and decides that "culture change and the introduction of a new audience or consumer public may release the creative person from the restrictive influence of his community."²⁸

²⁵See Roscoe Giffin, "Appalachian Newcomers in Cincinnati," in The Southern Appalachian Region, A Survey (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1962): 79-85. The urban migrant is considered by sociologists in articles in The American Journal of Sociology, LXII: 4 (1957); and the American Sociological Review, XI: 6 (1947), and XXI: 1 (1956).

²⁶Diss., p. 900.

²⁷Ibid., p. 546. Jones discusses Bunzel's The Pueblo Potter and Glassie's Patterns in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States.

²⁸Ibid., p. 547.

Jones makes many statements which postulate the nature of change caused by cultural disequilibrium. His lengthy dissertation considers the restrictions of the local community and the redirections of a new consumer public. He attributes "taste" as one factor:

Sudden and major stylistic changes in the art are precipitated by a perceptive, sensitive artist, such as Maria of San Ildefonso, Ben Owen of North Carolina, or the Kentucky chairmaker Chester, under the influence of external pressure and general cultural instability, such as results from Westernization, or urbanization and industrialization, which contribute to the disequilibrium of the conjuncture of forces operative within the system of folk art.²⁹

Economy is yet another factor:

Craftwork may be economically feasible for a few persons of considerable talent as well as commitment to this kind of creative work.³⁰

The relocation of one of Jones's chairmaking informants from Appalachia to an urban area offers an ideal situation to investigate his hypothesis about culture change. It permits a comparative study of personality, style and creativity, and production. The Appalachian urban migrant has been studied from social and psychic viewpoints, but leading scientific journals do not contain work on Appalachian craftsmen in urban areas. This continuation study will use fieldwork data to examine the effects of cultural change on a previously documented Kentucky chairmaker. In addition to updating the study of this particular man, the conclusions should reflect the possible effects of urbanization on the group values of the Appalachian migrant through the survey of "inadequately explored geographical areas and among groups whose culture have not yet been examined."³¹

²⁹Ibid., pp. 683-684.

³⁰Ibid., p. xi.

³¹Ibid., p. 114.

The set of 491 postulates Jones presents in a long narrative outline was designed to "serve as a basis for additional field research of the folk arts" to be "tested by me or other investigators."³² His appendices contain important information pertaining to field techniques, the obligation of folklorists studying folk craft production, and ethnographic illustrations. His point is clear: the study of folk arts needs extensive and effective study. The present study will extend Jones's study of folk art, as seen through folk chairmaking, based on recent fieldwork with his principal informant.

Chester Cornett: Principles in Selection
and the Methodology

The conception of this thesis developed relatively slowly. It began when I was a folk art buff living in Columbus, Ohio. I first saw Chester at the Cincinnati Convention Center on May 5, 1974. He was in the center of a ring formed by stacked split logs. His mere presence was an anachronism. He looked like a person from the most remote hollow in Kentucky, the wild hair and beard in decided contrast to the other craftspeople at the Appalachian Fair '74 (a crafts show for craftsmen from the Appalachian region and surrounding areas). His clothes were strangely syncretized--an expensive, long-sleeve shirt was crippled by the irreverent overalls which completed his outfit. When I left that day, he was straddled over a hickory pole, stripping bark with a draw-knife.

I entered the folk studies program at Western Kentucky University on August 24, 1974. It was most amazing to me that this chairmaker had been written about in so many journal articles. I suppose it was a form

³²Ibid., p. 857.

of subliminal persuasion which later led me to decide to order a rocking chair from this man during my next visit to Cincinnati.

It was on November 9, 1974, when I first went to see Chester about ordering a chair. Coincidentally, a young married couple from Chicago, Illinois, arrived shortly afterwards to pick up their cherry rocking chair. This chance occurrence was fortunate for me, since I was having some difficulty communicating with Chester. The man from Chicago suggested that I call on a man named Jim Benedict, who was a chemist in Cincinnati and who knew Chester well. This, he felt, would help me overcome some of the obstacles in ordering a chair from Chester.

During the evening of the same day, I went to see Jim Benedict and his wife Pam. The minute I walked in the door, I knew that I wanted to order a chair. Jim and Pam have six pieces of Cornett furniture, but the two rocking chairs are definitely the trophy winners. As Jim explained the economic and technical aspects of ordering a Cornett rocker, I became aware that he had a great knowledge, understanding, and love for these unique handmade objects. During this visit, I encouraged him to write down this knowledge, but it seemed apparent that this energetic man had too many other plans and activities. At any rate, I left his house with the information I needed to order a chair. On November 27th, I wrote Chester a check for \$100 and promised to return December 12th to purchase the wood to make the chair, which was to be completed by April 14, 1975.

The origin of this thesis was a letter I wrote to Jim Benedict sometime between November 28, and December 2, 1974. In this letter I proposed that it would be advantageous for both of us if he consented to provide the information for my study. He agreed. Shortly thereafter, I began reading Jones's dissertation.

Jones's theory of folk art is based on the notion of change:

The folk art tradition, then, is not static but continually changes in all its aspects. Culture contact, instability, and change may thus stimulate artistic creation in folk society investing it with a new vitality to suit the changing needs of the times.³³

Just as cultural disequilibrium may cause positive results, a special type of instability, urbanization, may generate negative results, "Whereas urbanization is partly responsible for creating folk craft as an occupational specialty, it is also the harbinger of the decline of traditional craft production."³⁴ The intent of this paper will be to speak with authority about Jones's several similarly prophetic statements.

Coincidentally, of the twelve chairmakers studied by Jones, chairmaker Chester Cornett was the only innovative craftsman who provided the unique products which forcefully propelled Jones's theory. Without Cornett, the Jones dissertation would have been much different, both in length and in content. Numerous references are made to Chester's abilities:

Check [Chester], probably the most knowledgeable of the craftsmen and certainly the most adept at identification, differentiation, and evaluation . . . is fully committed to his role as a creator.³⁵

The products of this exacting craftsman, as seen chronologically through his career, exhibited "major innovations causing other craftsmen to stand in awe at his skill and imagination."³⁶ The discovery of this one particular craftsman made it possible for Jones to learn that folk art is not anonymous, does have style, and can be created by craftsmen who

³³Ibid., p. 684.

³⁴Ibid., p. ix.

³⁵Ibid., p. 171.

³⁶Ibid., p. 170.

stand out as individuals.³⁷ Cornett and his rocking chairs represent the antithesis of the homeostatic Appalachian chairmaker. His unique creations caused such a descriptive problem that Jones used a tripartite analysis:

. . . one could refer to Chester's chairs as "part folk" (the techniques of construction, the basic slatback design), "part popular" (design elements from or appealing to mainstream consumers), and "part Chester" (the unique personal element in design).³⁸

The urban relocation of this creative producer of folk utilitarian art encourages a new study based on Jones's theories and postulates concerned with culture change. While the accuracy of his statements is not questioned in this study, many are merely instantaneous slices on the time/space continuum. The displacement of either time or space encourages change. Dramatic changes in either of these two conditions might render the following statement obsolete, "Chester has not been able to find a pleasant working or living environment nor has he found happiness . . . he has self doubts about being a craftsman because it has kept him in the throes of poverty and placed a burden on his family."³⁹ It is important to the original study, and to the phylogenetic understanding of folk art, to know whether Chester has overcome his personal problems. And, if so, has his craft also changed?

Perhaps sufficient data now exist to speculate on the evolution of folk art tradition. Jones was concerned with Chester and his products more than with any other chairmaker. Through the study of this one chairmaker, we can observe the transition from a youthful maker of carefully-reproduced traditional settin' chairs, to an elder master of the

³⁷Jones, "Anonymity," p. 48.

³⁸Diss., p. 419.

³⁹Ibid., p. 568.

intentionally-unique Cornett rocking chairs. The selection of this particular chairmaker is ultimately based on the value of re-examination as it reflects the evolution of folk art style on a temporal and spatial continuum. It is hoped that the questions of futuristic orientation posed by Jones can now be answered:

Who can determine which of these men is the "next and necessary evolution of the tradition?" . . . I think these questions are insoluble, for the next step is unpredictable, although, if certain conditions were to obtain in the future, it might well be Chester's personal vision that would most strongly affect the art tradition.⁴⁰

Since the selection of the principal informant in this study was positively reinforced by a previous study, the methodology could not be developed until a synthesis of his dissertation could be compiled. My collection of field data was based on carefully selected aspects of utilitarian art production which would suitably reflect culture change. The approach to the collection of information in the field was constructed by considering personality, style and creativity, and production, in terms of the technological, psychological, cultural, and sociological factors in the physical and social environment which formed the framework for Jones's system. The methods of field investigation were a combination of participant, participant/observer, interview, and ethno-photographic techniques. Interviews were conducted indirectly and directly. Direct interviews were of three types: informal without notebook; formal with notebook; and formal with tape recorder. The latter method was not used initially because Chester is suspicious of strangers. Indirect interviews were informally generated and involved noting questions posed by other parties such as friends, customers, and the neighborhood children. In one case, I sat behind Chester while a customer was driving him to

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 394.

survey some walnut logs and was able to record in writing a complete dialogue of the interaction between them.

Informants were selected on the basis of their relationship to the problem of change. Chester, as an urban resident, was my primary interviewee. Next in importance were his two friends, Pam and Jim Benedict. Their viewpoint, based on almost four years of association with Chester, was invaluable as a safeguard to correct and clarify Chester's responses and to extend my comprehension of both products and events. Essentially, the Benedicts served as both a control factor and as a source for consumer values. The yard manager at a local lumber company, where most of the customers buy their wood, was also vital to the collection of socioeconomic data. Several customers were questioned about the chairs they owned in order to obtain information to consider the urban producer/consumer relationship. These "interviews" were disguised with casually and informally posited queries in order to elicit spontaneous responses. Customers whose chairs exhibited special stylistic innovation were given priority treatment; several recent customers were not contacted. One owner of a Cornett rocker, former President Nixon, was contacted via correspondence to his California office. A complete list of interviews, informants, and dates is provided in Appendix I.

Jones's dissertation will be abbreviated Diss. Parenthetical footnotes in the text will be parenthesized using the abbreviation and the page number of the passage in the dissertation, e.g. (Diss., 418). References in footnotes will be written: ¹Diss., p. 418. To make the ideas extracted from Jones's study more accessible, some footnote references from the dissertation will include the location of the same concepts as found in the more available form of published journal articles by Jones.

The quotations taken from my field notes involve communicative interpretation by the investigator and therefore may be subject to incomplete recording of the actual dialogue. I hope any unintentional errors will not alter the importance or meaning of the message. Quotations from taped interviews will be presented in standard English. Grammar and syntax will be transcribed verbatim; interjections, contraction punctuation, and imitative phonetic spelling will be avoided since each tends to be a result of the subjective approach of the researcher, often resulting in condescending "eye-dialect." Spelling will be verified with The Oxford English Dictionary when applicable.

A linguistic analysis of the speech of the primary informant is presented in Appendix II. This material will provide insights into the nature of his dialect (quoted in standard English in this text). This informant's chair terminology reflects an English historical and social background dating to the period of Chaucer in England.⁴¹

In summary, the present study is a continuation of an earlier project by another folklorist. It is justified by the fact that the primary informant has moved from a rural mountainous area to an urban center. Fieldwork methods were employed to discern the nature of change in the chairmaking process.

⁴¹Based on the author's findings in The Oxford English Dictionary and statements on mountain speech by James Watt Raine in The Land of Saddle-bags (New York: 1924; reprint ed., Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1969).

CHAPTER II

SOCIOCULTURAL EFFECTS ON PERSONALITY

Sociological Aspects of Jones's Theory of Folk Art

There are two directions to explore in the study of folk utilitarian art; one is object-oriented, the other event-oriented. Object-orientation limits the researcher to an analysis of form and composition. Beyond the point of assigning a typology and determining the production materials, all conclusions become more speculative than scientific. Event-oriented research requires additional information and careful field techniques. This contextual approach emphasizes the total tradition as it exists in terms of four factors: technology, psychology, culture, and sociology.

This chapter will investigate the sociocultural effects on the personality of Chester, first in Appalachia, and then in Cincinnati. The cultural factor is the group tradition in which a producer works. The social factor defines the social role of the producer in his environment. The socioeconomic relationship between the producer and consumer, a much finer degree of the sociological aspect, will be considered in terms of object production in Chapter IV.

Jones sees the creator's psychic need as a large factor in the objectification of products. This force, representing the producer's personality, can be advantageously viewed in the context of the social environment. Based on Jones's conception of art as a product of human behavior, "personality is one of the important factors that must be

taken into account in an investigation of the way in which individual style develops and changes."¹ Obviously, each act of creation must be preceded by the action of the creator. To disregard the personality of the creator, and why he creates, would be to ignore the function of production.

A craftsman's personality is not the sole precipitant in folk utilitarian art, but its importance is not preceded by any other factor except the culture which in part determines the personality. The process of learning how to produce a chair must germinate from some significant personal trait. Glassie suggests that individuals are driven to create.² Jones believes that creation may be readjustment to intense personal grief.³ He bases this information on the fact that the "stylistic tendency in Chester's work is coincident with the growing severity of his problems and his attempts to adjust to several losses."⁴

As Jones demonstrated, the social system is too complex to summarize in terms of one phase of social intercourse. Different creators approach utilitarian art production with varying degrees of dedication. The social effects on a craftsman's personality are attributable to any number of determinants: unsatisfactory social status, unfulfilled aspirations, consumer preferences, material gain, publicity, and religious salvation.

In folk art tradition, individual personality may change dramatically as a result of the displacement of time or space. The

¹Diss., p. 165.

²Ibid., p. 552.

³Ibid., p. 549.

⁴Ibid., p. 547.

passage of time will reflect a change in values, while an increase in space will cause a change in culture. Whether the reaction to these changes is positive, negative, or neutral depends on the individual case. It will be demonstrated in the next two sections of this chapter that Chester's Cincinnati personality is different from his Appalachian personality. These changes in personality must be fully discussed in order to consider the effects on style in Chapter III and production in Chapter IV.

Chester in Appalachia

In spite of the value of his 1937 account of the handicrafts in Appalachia,⁵ Allen Eaton reveals little about the personality of craftspeople. "Individual Chairmakers," the title of a small section in the woodworking chapter, contains nothing more than a variety of explanations of materials, techniques, and products. All were garnered through questionnaires sent to twenty chairmakers in the region. The author noted that the correspondence was "one of the most interesting, enlightening and altogether pleasant features of this study."⁶ But no attempt was made to go beyond the descriptive aspect of the craft.

Eaton's book is not unique in its presentation of chairmaking in Appalachia. To date, publications in folklife studies have been designed to serve as reference tools. The Foxfire Book tells how to make a chair in 36 steps.⁷ Henry Glassie points out what they looked like and what

⁵Allen H. Eaton, Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands (New York: Russell Sage, 1937; reprint ed., New York: Dover, 1973).

⁶Ibid., p. 157.

⁷Eliot Wiggenton, ed., The Foxfire Book (New York: Anchor, 1972): 128-138.

they could be called.⁸ Not until Michael Owen Jones wrote "The Study of Traditional Furniture"⁹ was it suggested that the personality of the chairmaker might have an effect on craft production. 25

The present discussion of Chester in Appalachia will depict him as he was described by Jones in his doctoral dissertation. During the period of Jones's last fieldtrip in 1967,¹⁰ Chester was very much a mountaineer. A comparison between Eaton's report and Jones's results revealed that this man utilized materials, wielded tools, and conducted business in the cultural tradition of Appalachian chairmakers. The difference between the two studies is that Jones offered a psychological analysis of several chairmakers' personalities. Jones provides this summary:

. . . his rejection by a father that deserted the family . . . his rejection by his mother, the girl he intended to marry, the girl he did marry, and his second wife . . . the intolerable experiences in the army when he was stationed for two years in the Aleutian Islands during World War II, experiences that enter into nearly every conversation and which he alleges left him with a nervous condition, a skin disease, bad teeth, and severe eye troubles . . . he has complained often of the traffic that roars along the major highway . . . the lack of close companions or friends owing to his eccentric behavior and marked inability to relate to other people . . . and his poverty which is one of the most severe cases that I saw in Kentucky.¹¹

Jones, temporarily isolating Chester's married life, makes one general statement which is subtle in its understatement, "Chester's own marital life has been imperfect." The first girl he married, who was

⁸Henry Glassie, Patterns in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), 233-245.

⁹Michael Owen Jones, "The Study of Traditional Furniture, Review and Preview," Keystone Folklore Quarterly, XII: 4 (Winter, 1967): 233-245.

¹⁰Letter to the author from Michael Owen Jones, July 8, 1975.

¹¹Diss., pp. 730-731.

sixteen years his junior, refused to sleep with him after the first few nights. The girl he had later planned to marry refused; it was not until afterwards that he found that she had been pregnant at the time. The woman he did marry had been deserted by her husband and had custody of her young daughter. This second wife subsequently deserted Chester and left him a "frightened, lonely man who craves to be loved and protected in a world seemingly controlled by malevolent forces."¹²

The problems with women may have been a result of his inability to function in social situations. Chester's desire for dominance and control in his marriages have apparently been intolerable for his wives. Jones used Jung's model of personality types¹³ to determine that Chester was an "introverted thinking type" (Diss., 465). As such, Chester disliked society and felt very uncomfortable and conspicuous in large crowds. His self-awareness, lack of confidence, and paranoia are effectively demonstrated in these selected excerpts from a shocking passage:

Chester was nervous, as he always is away from home and his work . . . Several times I have noticed a wild look in his eyes. . . . Chester was virtually paralyzed with fear . . . "crowds" bothered him.¹⁴

The intensity of apprehension and fear in mountain people is similarly disclosed in Jack Weller's controversial book, Yesterday's People. Weller attributes the mountaineer's paranoic personality to cultural instability. He states that fear and suspicion were perpetuated economically, medically, and religiously. Psychological security was found in reference group association, often what sociologists refer to as the "extended family." These symptoms, later observed by Jones,

¹²Ibid., p. 464.

¹³Ibid., p. 465. See G. C. Jung, Psychological Types, translated by H. Godwin Baynes (London, 1964).

¹⁴Ibid., p. 447.

amplify Weller's slightly earlier study:

Beneath his stoical manner, the slow-moving, apparently peaceful, self-assured mountain man or woman may well be the victim of intense anxieties. . . . The simple request to speak a word or lead a meeting in public will strike debilitating fear into the hearts of most mountain folk.¹⁵

While Weller's observations are useful to the reinforcement of Jones's unexpected results, his comment that the mountain folk "ask for defeat" is grossly tenuous. Likewise, his analyses of the personality and character of the mountaineer do not consider the fact that contradictory motives may be revealed through the observation of personality. Chester's person-orientation toward his family, accompanied by his object-orientation toward his craft and economic success, invalidates Weller's conclusion that,

Mountain people seek a minimum of object goals, and these goals are used in return to enhance the personal relationship within the reference group.¹⁶

Chester also had problems with his business. He would refuse to make products according to customer's specifications (Diss., 449). He approached salesmanship with naivete and often misunderstood the details agreed to verbally (Diss., 734). Customers often took advantage of him because he needed money to pay bills or buy food (Diss., 713). His personal ledger was filled with entries on chairs he built to sell at a high price but eventually sold at a much lower price. Jones was involved in some of Chester's business deals:

Chester, as an extreme introvert, has never learned how to behave in social situations. . . . On the several occasions that we tried to find timber at saw mills, for example, Chester's meekness and actual groveling before the bossman of the mill disconcerted and embarrassed me.¹⁷

¹⁵Jack Weller, Yesterday's People (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1966), p. 44.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁷Diss., p. 448.

Jones subjects his personal observations of Chester's social life to psychological analysis in an attempt to comprehend the dominant aspect of Chester's life. He decided that Chester was the "introverted thinking and sensation" type (Diss., 479). This model explains the inner conflicts of this man who can manufacture rare products, but bears great mental anguish created by social immaturity. In one respect, it is easy for him to use hand-made tools that are extensions of himself and serve his inner needs. But it is with great difficulty that he comprehends the dynamic social effects caused by his unconsciously demanding personality. The depression resulting from his unsuccessful marriages and disheartening business career has beset him with isolation and loneliness.

Jones suggests that Chester's mental and social isolation have been caused by inner realities which have suppressed his outer consciousness, "He gives little or no attention to his relationships with the world, even to the point of not noticing what is happening or understanding how other people think or feel." In his own world, Chester has become omnipotent. His domain is a "lonely island where only what is permitted to move moves."¹⁸

Chester's mental retreat and happy home is on top of Pine Mountain in Kentucky. The comfortable setting, familiar dwellings of his own construction, and his family were remembered to be more pleasurable than they were in the reality of his youth. His nostalgia is a source of consolation, and perhaps the inspiration for his song about that place. With a need to create words similar to his need to create wooden forms with his hands, Chester composed a song about Pine Mountain. The written composition (in Chester's case it's more nearly a new medium to objectify

¹⁸Ibid., p. 465.

thoughts normally expressed in wood) of this song represents an important link between Chester's life on Pine Mountain, in Dwarf, and other homes in Kentucky, and Cincinnati. It will be seen that the personality of this creator can be revealed quite precisely through analysis of his lyrics.

The following material is extracted from Jones's discussion of Chester's song. The material presented here will be relevant to my presentation of Chester in Cincinnati, as well as the consideration of continuity and change in Chapter III:

When I first met Chester in August, 1965, he mentioned having been at work on a song during the previous three or four months. He obviously wanted to sing it to me . . . so I asked for a rendition, and then requested that I be permitted to tape record it. At first, I misunderstood and thought that the song, because of its contents, had been created a few months after Chester's service in the army during 1939-1945. My "natural" mistake, that of taking the song literally, is significant not so much because of the historical inaccuracy I nearly introduced, but because of the relevance and extreme importance of the song to Chester now, not in 1945. . . . Metaphorically speaking, perhaps Chester has had other battles to fight since the Second World War . . . the imagery deserves close attention.¹⁹

The song, entitled "My Old Kentucky Mountain Home," is included in Appendix III. Jones's analysis continues:

Obviously the words of the song express the loneliness and despair of a man who longs to return to his home . . . Entries in my notebooks for the summer of 1967 indicate that every day he reviewed his war experiences . . . If my thesis is correct, that a song or story or other work of art is often created as a means of adjusting to a loss and of readjusting to life, then the song should have been created in the mid-1940s . . . the song was not composed until mid-1965 . . . The only conclusion is that Chester never really adjusted to his war experiences or additional losses since then. . . . Chester has tried to adjust to these by creating a song. . . . Chester lives daily with the war . . . there have been other problems--occupational frustration, poverty, illness . . . the song was an expression of deeply held emotions . . . it is debatable whether the war is really over for him; there have been many additional conflicts since World War II . . . If the song concerns Chester and his feelings and experiences, then

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 559-561 passim.

there is an apparent contradiction between the song and reality. . . . He was left alone "with a prayer in my heart" and little else . . . has requested divine assistance to help him through yet another struggle. . . . Chester has not been able to find a pleasant working or living environment nor has he found happiness. The alternatives for Chester to find happiness are becoming fewer.²⁰

Although this discussion of Chester's song is somewhat sketchy, it does serve to point out the tremendous emotional problems which can be wrought by social mishaps. Although it may not be apparent at this time, each passage from Jones was carefully chosen for comparison in later sections of this study.

The final note on Chester in Appalachia concerns his corporal image. Jones believed that Chester was "an anachronism in the modern world, purposively," in order to help generate chair sales, and for nostalgic purposes (his link to Pine Mountain). His appearance was distinctive: a beard; long hair; overalls; no shoes. Jones cited a portrait of Chester's maternal grandfather as evidence that Chester was emulating the appearance of his relative. He felt that beneath Chester's stereotypic hillbilly attire was a man with a desire to return to an idealized lifestyle which was irretrievably lost.

This is the Appalachian personality of the chairmaker named Chester who "conceives of himself as a master craftsman or even as a king of chairmakers, which in fact he is."²¹

Chester in Cincinnati

The last section dealt with Chester as he existed in a broad region in Appalachia. In this respect, his personality was an aggregation composed of the effects from living in various residences. Much of the

²⁰Ibid., pp. 561-573 passim.

²¹Ibid., p. 546.

material in this section will be representative of his life in Cincinnati, but the reader should not infer that his recent experiences have accumulated in one specific geographic area.

When Chester left the mountains in May 1970, he first moved to North Bend, Ohio. His move from Troublesome Creek in Kentucky to just north of the Ohio River was initiated by an unfortunate incident (his workshop was dynamited). This author has never been to the location of Chester's first home and shop in Ohio. According to Jim Benedict, it was a two-story frame house located in the valley of the Little Miami River. The actual address is difficult to trace; in three different newspaper accounts he was classified as a resident of Elizabethtown, North Bend, and Harrison. Chester calls it "E-town," so it would seem reasonable to speculate that Elizabethtown is most correct. When he moved to Cincinnati, he located on a street which is inhabited in part by fellow migrants from Indiana and Kentucky.

Chester has been influenced by his trips outside Cincinnati. He had demonstrated chairmaking at numerous expositions and fairs in Indiana and Ohio. He personally delivered a special chair to Washington, D.C., in May 1973. The main point is that he has been influenced by, and has projected influence on a wide geographical area not limited to the Cincinnati megalopolis.

Virtually every discussion with Chester, the Cincinnati resident, will slip into the past. Typical themes revolve around his family, friends, marriages, frustrations, chairs, chair customers, and World War II. I cannot think of one customer who has not been invited to review his box of photographs and memorabilia. Chester's past is an important link to the present.

Chester's present urban environment is in a rented-house, migrant area. His second-story apartment and backyard "shop"²² is located on Sidney Avenue, in the Camp Washington area. Downtown Cincinnati is about five miles away. The incessant traffic from north-south Interstate 75 can be heard 500 yards to the east. The local residents I met were primarily from "the country." The majority had migrated from rural areas in Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. Some had lived in the city many years. Families tend to run large. During two weekend fieldtrips, I personally met only a small percentage of the friendly, attention-seeking children living on the street, and they numbered twenty-five. This large number represented only about ten of the fifty-plus households on the one block avenue.

Through the children (aged 5-13) I was able to survey the local culture. One young girl commented that her "mommy" was going to move when it was time to have her baby. The mother will be going home to Kentucky for the delivery of her child, apparently to a hospital.²³ One boy related that his family was preparing to move back to the country, which is an indication of personal preference, if not a social comment on the temporal aspects of urban migration and emigration. Another boy plucked a hair from his sister's head and stated very positively that if it curled she was jealous (Brown 482).

²²His shop is actually a garage with a work area downstairs and a loft upstairs for storage of wood. It contains both hand and power driven tools.

²³Ellen Stekert also notes that mountain women do return to their mountain community to have their babies in hospitals. However, she claims that they do not regularly participate in prenatal or postnatal care. I do not have sufficient data to comment on the mother's intentions at this time. See Americo Parades and Ellen Stekert, eds., The Urban Experience and Folk Tradition (Austin and London: The University of Texas Press, 1971): 99-100.

The local culture was also as curious about me as I was about it. While engaged in my folk art fieldwork, and somewhat off-handedly recording the local culture via the "principle of serendipity,"²⁴ I discovered that my own activity had been monitored and had given birth to local gossip. My frequent use of a camera had caused at least one local mother to speculate that I was making a movie.²⁵

The local attitude toward Chester has been tolerant, if not cordial. An elderly neighbor lady stopped to admire his work, but admitted that she didn't know Chester very well. In general, the local adults above driving age (16 in Ohio) do not visit Chester. The neighborhood children are his only friends. The children's consensus was that Chester was "a nice man." It was my observation that he was more than nice. During one four-day period I witnessed a watermelon feast one day, a picture-taking session the next, free soda pop the next, and finally, the distribution of more than two dozen ice cream bars. Also during that period, the children drank nearly ten gallons of homemade lemonade.²⁶

Unfortunately, the children are constantly in danger of injury in the shop and yard. In summer, he works in the yard outside his shop. His tools are usually within the reach of the children. These objects

²⁴Edward D. Ives, A Manual for Field Workers (Orono, Maine: University Press, 1974), p. 47.

²⁵In an appendix to his dissertation, Jones fully considers the effects that may result from the influence of the fieldworker; see "Folk Craft Production and the Folklorist's Obligation" (Diss., pp. 903-915). He made an interesting remark concerning the folklorist and his projected image as a photographer, "the camera almost became part of their concept of my body image since I seemed always to have it in front of me, and it became the expected norm that I take pictures each time I stopped to visit" (Diss., 920). I experienced this same phenomenon.

²⁶His formula was 36 lemons, 1 quart lemon extract, 10 lbs of sugar, and add water (about 8-10 gallons) to taste. Chester figured that a batch of lemonade was much cheaper, gallon for gallon, than Pepsi.

include those with sharp edges and points, such as drill bits, a draw-knife, a pen-knife, axes, and chisels, and those that are blunt, such as the hand maul, hickory gluts, and hewed chair parts. When the shop is open, the children sneak in with little regard for either the potential danger or Chester.

It is possible that Chester's generosity may be his undoing. In a sense, Chester runs an unofficial and unpaid baby-sitting service. Although parents rarely retrieve their children at times other than dinner-time, one boy told me that his father said he would sue Chester if any of his kids were hurt on Chester's premises. Chester is not unaware of the possibility of being sued and keeps his shop locked. But he cannot keep up with the children.

Chester's emotions vary by the minute. I approached the assessment of his contentment through an investigation of spatial analysis. I believed that the degree of dissonance between his attachment to his present residence and an ideal, if it existed, would reflect his personality. Essentially, it did, not independently as a function of space, but rather, dependently in response to social and economic needs.

Jones often mentioned Chester's preoccupation with Pine Mountain.²⁷ He believed that the chairmaker's nostalgia reflected insecurity and immaturity. During my early field work I often offered Chester the leading question, "Would you like to go back to Kentucky?" He consistently said no. This denial surprised me in view of Jones's assertion. It was not until a weekend demonstration at Bethel, Ohio, that I solved the apparent contradiction. While he was working on a sewing rocker, a group of ladies gathered around him and one asked, "Mr. Cornett, where do you

²⁷Diss.: pp. 453, 458, 463, 465, 498, 682. This is only a sampling of the frequent discussion of Pine Mountain.

live? [His reply was Cincinnati]. Where would you like to live?" With vigor and without hesitation, he leaned back and said, "The top of Pine Mountain." So, Chester has not severed the emotional ties to his boyhood home. It was my approach that had been faulty. In the context of my questions, he had understood that I had meant his last residence in Engle Mill, Kentucky.²⁸ His association between Engle Mill and Pine Mountain are decidedly different. He identifies Engle Mill with regret and humiliation, but Pine Mountain is the place he would like to return to live.

With the knowledge that Pine Mountain was still Chester's ideal retreat, I proceeded to assess his satisfaction with his present home on Sidney Avenue. In reply to my hints that the neighborhood seemed nice, he said:

I believe that someone sends those kids over here to bother me. But they don't, they keep me company . . . It's a lonesome place. The kids are the only company I got except Jim [Benedict]. If it weren't for the kids I'd go crazy . . . I like it here, but I go somewhere else and I like it better.²⁹

In a later discussion, he said that he was thinking of moving back to "E-town." At this point, the economic aspect of his life was in better balance than it had ever been before, according to his ledger book, but the social part was deficient. His chair orders were booked for a year and a half (9 chairs); the rent was higher in Cincinnati, and the social life was somewhat worse:

When I lived in E-town, I had a lot of company. One time I had a hundred people in my front yard. When I lived in the country, all the people from the city came out to visit. But when I moved to

²⁸Engle Mill was named for a family named Engle who had a grist mill on Troublesome Creek near Chester's workshop in Kentucky. The post office address is Dwarf.

²⁹Field Notes, July 12-13, 1975.

the city, they all quit coming. All except Jim, I haven't seen Pam in six months.³⁰

Another time, as we walked from his backyard to the front porch of a house facing I-75 he said, "I'd like to live here, I sure like the view." Minutes later, he totally surprised me by saying, "I'd liked this place the first time I came here thirty years ago. I wanted to live here. But I never thought I'd make it." This revelation was in direct contradiction to Jones's statement that Chester had been scared to death when he first came to Cincinnati (Diss., 544), and also adds suspicion to Jones's observation that Chester often complained about the traffic that roared along the highway near his Kentucky home (Diss., 567).

My observations suggest that Chester is not seeking a particular space for habitation. In spite of various complaints, he likes his present home. The noise of the nearby freeway does not bother him because he can't hear it. He is annoyed because he has to lock his doors all the time, including the doors to his bathroom and kitchen, which are separated from his bedroom and living room. The impersonality of city associations disturbs him: "City folk just aren't the same as country folk." But he does move freely in the community--walking to the store, bank, and the dry cleaners. He likes the city zoo and hopes to go to Kings Island, which is a popular amusement park near Cincinnati.

On a recent trip "home," Chester again realized that Pine Mountain had changed. The land is now owned by the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Regardless, he said that he thought he would go there and live in a cave that no one else knows about. Then again, he thought he might go there and camp for a week on a vacation he was planning. While I personally

³⁰Field Notes, June 27, 1975.

doubt that he will do either, his comments do verify his emotional dependence on the memories afforded by Pine Mountain.

Now that his economic situation is relatively stable, with deposits on chair orders extending for the next year and a half, he desires friends and companionship. I believe he hopes to find this by returning to Elizabethtown, in spite of his numerous hardships there.³¹

Chester still entertains visions of courtship. He recently told me, "I want a helper." Since he had been talking about housecleaning and housecleaners, I assume that he meant he needed a woman to do his housework. But with this one statement, he had turned the conversation from a discussion of his difficulties in finding a housekeeper to his difficulty in finding a female companion. In earlier conversations, he had often remarked that he felt as good as he did when he was younger. I accepted these statements as innuendoes about his potency. Another time he revealed that he had never been a ladies' man. Probably the reason that he never discussed his previous courtships or marriages can be traced to this fact. He spoke of his second wife only if asked about her: "She's a woman that used to live with me." When asked if he had any children, he replied, "I'm not sure if they were mine. I can't prove it." These vague references to his past life are understandable. He and his second wife had several retarded children (Diss., 564). For the moment, I will note that this defensive tactic is perfectly understandable and is a significant understatement.

³¹In May 1974, Chester turned down an offer by Jean and Lee Schilling, of Cosby, Tennessee, to become a lifetime craftsman and resident at their Folk Life Center in the Smoky Mountains. Jim Benedict believed that Chester did not accept because he did not know them and, also, business was good at the time. The details are complex, but the offer and subsequent refusal are interesting.

Chester still turns to God for help through his difficulties (Diss., 573). The Lord, apparently in return, has "promised" Chester he would live to be 105 years old. Although Chester doesn't attend church, the strength of his faith is evident in manifestations of wooden objects. An eight-foot high cross, with Christ-figure attached, is mounted in the yard to the south side of his house (where he rents the second floor). Two intricately carved, but unfinished, crosses are located on his living room mantel. A three-dimensional color portrait of Jesus Christ, in praying position with a sunray connecting heaven and the aura around his head, is on his color television set. He reads the Bible, but is most concerned and interested in the sexual aspects of the scriptures, especially adultery, adulterous hypocrites, and the relationship between prostitution and masturbation.³²

Chester watches the news on television daily. He is quite concerned with politics and world events. His work schedule is set to the daily news. In winter, he stops working at six to watch the news and retire for the night. In warmer weather, he breaks at six to see the news, and then proceeds to continue working until it gets too dark to see. When I was with him, he did not mention wanting to see the news. Therefore, I would conclude that visitors are more important to him than the news. Sometime during the spring of 1975, he began to wear a headband with a red, white, and blue button stating, "I Support President Nixon." Oblivious to the three-inch-in-diameter anachronism, he is still grateful that Nixon ended the Vietnam War; he spoke about

³²Chester cannot believe that adultery can be condemned and punishable by death in the Old Testament, while Jesus was forgiving in the New Testament. He further believes that no man alive has not committed adultery even though few confess to it. He inferred that prostitution is more acceptable than masturbation since the Bible says it is better to "sow seed in the belly of a whore than to sow it out."

the former President:

[He's the] best President there ever was. . . . I didn't like that [Vietnam] war because it wasn't declared like a war ought to be. . . . President Johnson started it . . .³³

I believe that Chester meant that the late President Lyndon Johnson began the increased involvement in the Vietnam War, rather than actually initiating the conflict. At any rate, his pessimistic world view is not totally unfounded: "I look for the bottom to fall out any time. World War III is coming around the bend."³⁴

Chester's clothes and material possessions bear attention. Until the spring of 1975, I had not seen Chester in any clothes other than his overalls. Now Chester has become a stylish dresser. I would have to concur with Jim Benedict that "Chet" does exhibit good taste (by our middle-class urban values). His wardrobe is rather extensive. He has purchased suits, a winter coat, several pairs of shoes, and numerous shirts and pants. His favorite outfit is a matched shirt, pants, and short-pants ensemble.³⁵ He has often told me that he wanted a car. He isn't concerned about his hearing problem or the fact that he is nearly 62. He is obsessed with owning a car and having mobility. An important factor pointed out by Jim Benedict is that Chester wants to be like other people and have the same things they do. Chester did press the point with me that everyone seemed to own a car. Parenthetically, he was very curious to know if my father had given me the car I presently own. During a three week period, his preference changed from a Honda Civic,

³³Field Notes, July 11, 1975.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵The outfit was manufactured by Fruit-of-the-Loom; the material was a bright yellow 65-35 polyester/cotton fabric with a mildly corrugated motif.

to a Toyota Celica, to a Volvo stationwagon, roughly corresponding to the type and order of the vehicles he rode in during that time. I suspect that the type of car is not that important to him; he would merely like to have "a car." To date, he seems to favor the small foreign compacts.

Although it may not appear important at this juncture, the previous discussion of Chester's neighborhood, the children and their thoughts, Pine Mountain, his sexual desires, religion, politics, material possessions, and car envy, is actually a framework for the results presented in Chapter III and IV. Without an understanding of the individual personality and the forces acting on this individual, the urban and socioeconomic effects on Chester's style, creativity, and production would not be presented contextually. An individual is the product of all that has gone on between himself and other human beings all his life. The past, present, and future are all components in the reality of each individual. To support this point, I will refer back to the song discussed in the previous section of this chapter. Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his essay "The Poet," proposed that "man is only half himself, the other half is expression."³⁶ Chester carved the song out of the despair in his mind, much as he hews his chairs from boards and logs, to express concretely his mental instability. As an individual, he is constantly expanding and expressing his ideas and continually learning to cope with the struggles in his life. In his loneliness and malcontent, he asserts his identity through unique and dynamic manifestations of his art.³⁷

³⁶R. W. Emerson, Essays and English Traits (New York: P. F. Collier, 1909), p. 168.

³⁷The Royal Bank of Canada Monthly Letter, June 1975.

Jones wrote of Chester's song in Appalachia, "Chester's own song expresses the fear and loneliness of a man lost in the world who is seeking the love and security he once had."³⁸ When Chester read me a song he had written, I had already known about it from the dissertation. The song, as with other items from his past, was stored in his cardboard box of pictures and memorabilia. It was hand-written on three nine-by-six-inch sheets of stenographer paper. Joking that he couldn't play music anymore, he read the song, not as a song, but as poetry. I felt, just as Jones had ten years before, that Chester was anxious to read his song to me. It was important to him. His rendition, almost dispassionate with his intense concentration on reading his own non-standard writing, was touching in its sincerity. The message was clear, although the motive was not. Again, Chester used creative expression to expose his troubled mind to the world.

At that point, I had known that the mere act of his recitation gave me important information about Chester. His past, which still envelops much of his present, is displaced only by anticipations for the future. He read about the war from which he had sought deliverance, and lamented again, through his poetry, for Pine Mountain. What I hadn't noticed at the time, although it is now evident, is the relationship between Chester and his song. Chester's song has become his personal palimpsest. The song, as Jones noted in 1965, and Chester pointed out in 1975, is unfinished. Since Jones recorded the song (Diss., 561), several stanzas have been added. Symbolically, the text has been erased and given a new image, much like the early parchments. With the analysis of each stanza, his life, progressing unfinished and unfulfilled, unfolds before the auditor.

³⁸Diss., p. 296.

The presentation of the song has changed in time. It is now more a poem than a song. The aesthetic aspect of the song, the synchronization of words with music, has been stripped by faded guitar-playing skills to reveal a dominant utilitarian function.³⁹ The poem (see Appendix IV) is a vehicle to express his anguish, confusion, and isolation, and is just as functional as the song.

The present version contains historical information added during the last ten years. It documents his request for divine assistance after his wife left with the children. The comment that he prays every day for the return of his family is an emotion that would not easily be recognized in Chester today. In conversation, he talks little of his family and children. The recognition of Chester's marital discord and ensuing reliance on God adds information about his enigmatic personality. He never responded to my questions about his second marriage.⁴⁰ His love of the neighborhood children is one of replacement. They are his main friends in Cincinnati. In return for their friendship, he feeds them, entertains them, and employs them. He does not talk about his former wife, but does discuss his need for a "helper."

Chester notes in the poem that he turned to the Lord. Apparently, he has accepted his salvation and the "promise" that he will live to be 105. Certain artistic creations of his production symbolize his faith. But I find that the omnipresent religious artifacts mask his overt sexual deprivation. His religious concerns--adultery, hypocritical

³⁹I am not considering the creator's pride of accomplishment as a possible function with utilitarian elements in this argument.

⁴⁰I diplomatically avoided any mention of his first marriage since it would possibly reveal to him a prior knowledge of his past on my part.

adulterers, prostitution, and masturbation--expose his emphasis on the carnal nature of man. I believe that this reflects the survival of his social immaturity and latent physical desires; his need to love and be loved has not changed in ten years.

Chester inadvertently suggested the characteristic continuity of his poem.⁴¹ In retrospect, I almost missed the tipoff, "I don't know if I'll ever finish it [the song]. I guess some day I'll have to add the part about coming to Ohio."⁴² He seems to recognize that the poem is following him, and not leading him. A Cincinnati newspaper article, written a few months after Chester's move to Ohio, grimly capsulized the characteristics of those troubled days at E-town; "Once famed, now he lives in loneliness."⁴³ In contrast, Chester recently boasted,

I'd like to work at the [Ohio] state fair again, but they'll have to contact me. I'm getting too famous to write them. . . . I believe I'm making my comeback. I believe I'm getting famous again.⁴⁴

As long as Chester is content that he is indeed regaining his lost "fame," I do not think that he will resort to his song. I concur with Jones that "Chester has tried to adjust to these [problems] by creating a song," but I suggest further that Chester will not continue his song until he is compelled to do so by the next tragedy. If one can judge from his present personality, Chester in Cincinnati will not be finishing that song; he is too preoccupied with "getting famous again."

⁴¹The word "poem" is used to recognize the current form of the song's presentation. Chester still refers to it as a song.

⁴²Field Notes, July 13, 1975.

⁴³"Sunrise--Sunset," The Cincinnati Enquirer, August 28, 1970.

⁴⁴Field Notes, July 13, 1975.

There is no doubt that Chester's personality has changed since he left Appalachia. It is difficult to determine what caused this change. Jim Benedict feels that Chester's new urban image is more a consequence of having money to spend rather than having moved to the city. With the success of Chester's business, he has unprecedented prestige and wealth. His prosperity has accelerated the acculturation which is shown in his activities and material acquisitions. Like most urbanites, Chester desires to improve his social level and "be like other people."⁴⁵

⁴⁵Tape-recorded interview with Jim Benedict, July 12, 1975.

CHAPTER III

URBAN EFFECTS ON STYLE AND CREATIVITY

Conjunction of Forces from the Dominant Culture

A study of the interaction between rural and urban cultures in a society is interesting and useful to the contemporary folklorist. Usually, the effects of culture change are not easily uncovered. Changes wrought by urban technology and industry are a conjunction of many factors: voluntary and involuntary reaction; conscious and unconscious selection; political and economic factors; religious and social constraints. The complete network of communication is complex. In general, the diversity of urbanization tends to dilute homogenous cultures, while isolation from urbanization supports cultural stability. In the United States, industrial technology has formed an urban society. The folk society has changed, and with it, folk arts and crafts.

The urban effects of change on tradition are more illustrative in a region (the macrocosm) than an individual (the microcosm). For example, the prominent Pennsylvania Dutch folk have prevailed in the upper Ohio River valley since their original settlement, yet the continuation of their traditions has been recently questioned:

Time will show how long the Pennsylvania Dutch will be able to maintain themselves as a group. Advancing radially from the big cities, the standardization and mechanizing forces of today's steel-and-concrete civilization are steamrolling over the peasant minority of the countryside.¹

¹August C. Mahr, "Pennsylvania Dutch Barn Symbols," in The Study of Folklore, ed. Alan Dundes, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 399.

Unfortunately, the statement is overly sentimental. The author's metaphor implies that change is always forced by the dominant culture and reluctantly accepted by the subculture. Since urbanization is a cultural and social outgrowth of mass progress, it is unlikely that any culture forces advance along radial lines. In multi-level societies, the progressive group is necessarily dominant and adaptable. Even so, urban values cannot progress linearly, especially when the boundaries of rural and urban societies are speculative. An Illinois study concludes that group change transitional, rather than transcultural:

What happens to a group's folklore when the group's solidarity is weakened? . . . The hypothesis is that as a rural folk community becomes more urbanized, it also becomes less homogenous and less well integrated. . . . If the folklore survives, it generally fulfills a function other than that which it originally fulfilled.²

It would seem more supportable to advance the theory that changes in folk tradition take place in transition, rather than in the tour de force style of popular culture.

The notion of gradual change in traditions emphasizes the aesthetic factor in individual transactions. The process of folk selection slowly delineates regions of influence. The results of selection eventually reveal aesthetic preferences:

The most usual result of the influence of popular upon folk material during the past 130 years in American, and particularly the past fifty, has been the replacement of the traditional object by its equivalent.³

The comparison of the stability of folk culture, then, with the instability of popular culture, must be based on the individual aesthetic in processes of selection over a period of time.

²Herbert Passin and John W. Bennett, "Changing Agricultural Magic in Southern Illinois: A Systematic Analysis of Folk-Urban Transition," in The Study of Folklore, p. 314.

³Glassie, Patterns, p. 17.

Urban and rural individuals exist in a symbiotic environment. Not only are folk objects replaced by popular equivalents, but popular objects are based on folk prototypes.⁴ A folk object which is traditional and non-popular may be constructed with factory-produced raw materials. Objects produced in either tradition may be adapted for uses alien to the intent in their original design. The dynamic forces affecting the rural/urban symbiosis can be seen in folk utilitarian art, specifically chairmaking.

Historically, chairmaking in Appalachia has been a ubiquitous folk craft. The isolated mountaineers manufactured handmade products out of necessity, not as a result of creative compulsion. Chairmaking was merely one aspect of woodworking craft when wood supplied the raw material for almost every need: hammers, tree nails, brooms, pails, paddles, rakes, mallets, benches, hay forks, pestles, yokes, braces, sleds, cups, tankards, scoops, spoons, churns, piggins, funnels, dippers, and kegs.⁵

Prior to Jones's dissertation, most studies of chairmaking viewed the producer as a specialized craftsman.⁶ These craftsmen were represented as being makers of common traditional chairs, and portrayed as being typical men who made standardized products. While many variables between chairs is not striking: "In Appalachia, most chairs made in the past and present are rather plain and simple in appearance, which facilitates their primary use."⁷

⁴Ibid. See the discussion by Glassie, pp. 24-28.

⁵Eric Sloane, A Reverence for Wood (New York: Ballantine, 1965), p. 73.

⁶See The Foxfire Book; Michael Owen Jones, "A Traditional Chair-maker at Work," Mountain Life and Work (Spring, 1967): 11-13; and Richard Krizman, "Manuel Vaguasewa, A Chair-Maker From Alamos, Sonora, Mexico," Keystone Folklore Quarterly 13 (Summer, 1968): 103-120.

⁷Diss., p. 267.

The artistic appearance of chairs made in Appalachia prior to urbanization must be viewed in terms of cultural aesthetics. Most investigators have referred to them as being plain and simple in design. Generally, by further qualification, these adjectives were expanded into a negative analytical framework. A summary of many of the articles would suggest that these products are inherently "crude, naive, or rugged." Viewed from the perspective of the society that produced the objects, three main factors were at work. First, chairs were made by different types of chairmakers who had varied skills and needs. Chairmakers approach the act and art of making a chair in dissimilar ways. The subsistence farmer, the specialized farmer, and the specialized craftsman exhibit different qualities in their products. But the appearance of the chairs may be the same even though the quality of construction may vary greatly. As Jones discovers in his folk typology of chairmakers, a chair is evaluated on the basis of whether it "lasts good" or "looks good."⁸ Chairmakers are differentiated by their reputation to "make them for the lasting part." In spite of the fact that these phrases of distinction are simply stated, they prove that distinctions between Appalachian chairmakers are made by local folk.

Local awareness of skill, quality, and construction in folk chair-making shows recognition of the second factor in chair production, function. The folk utilitarian art object is usually produced within the craft tradition. Generally, the craft aspect is identifiable as the utilitarian, or functional component, while the art aspect is the aesthetic component. To many Appalachian people, a chair was suitable if it was solid and sturdy; the ornamentation was not significant, or

⁸Jones, "A 'Folk' Typology," p. 58-59.

even desirable. A good chair was made in the traditional manner, with a plain design, and good construction.

This selectivity leads to the third factor, the Appalachian aesthetic. In chairmaking, the standard principles are soundness of structure and simplicity of design. The traditional technology is efficient and practical; the techniques are refined and accurate. The finished utilitarian product does more than satisfy the functional needs of the people, it pleases them psychologically.⁹ When one of Jones's informants said that he preferred a "decent, plain-made chair" (Diss., 510), he was voicing his preference for an object with a simple design and character. Other rural folk have revealed their preferences for traditional practices. George May used a mule for plowing because it "seems like stuff just grows better."¹⁰ Mrs. Dale Spear felt that "food tastes better when cooked on a wood stove."¹¹ If put to the test, chairmakers would probably agree with a potter from North Georgia who wasn't aware of the ancient roots of wheel-kicking, but believed that his craft "happened to be that way because it is that way, and it can't be any other way."¹² Behind these narrowly-conceived folk analyses are the facts that many families had to make do with what they had, or do without. This is quite different from the urban, or popular aesthetic.

Urban styles reflect lifestyles which value products that are new and different. Change is normal and expected. Henry Glassie notes the character of popular culture in relation to folk culture:

⁹Consider Henry Glassie's point in Patterns, p. 17.

¹⁰John Burrison, "Echoes from the Hills," (a film by WQKI-TV, Atlanta, Georgia).

¹¹David C. Sutherland, "The Little People of Pea Ridge," (M.A. thesis, Western Kentucky University, 1973), p. 67.

¹²Burrison, "Echoes."

Folk material exhibits major variation over space and minor variation through time, while the products of popular or academic culture exhibit minor variation over space and major variation through time. The natural divisions of folk material are, then, spatial, where the natural divisions of popular material are temporal; that is, a search for patterns in folk material yields regions, where a search for patterns in popular material yields periods.¹³

Since urban tastes are temporal, constant change is an element in the aesthetic perception of urbanites. They do not uniformly resist innovation and creativity, as is common among the tradition-minded Appalachians who have managed to retain their lifestyle until the present day.¹⁴ Curiously, for whatever sentimental reasons, the urban consumer has an interest in folk crafts, especially furnishings which are new and different.

Whether the folk art student investigates Pueblo pottery, Navajo sand paintings, Japanese origami, or Appalachian chairmaking, the same problem is encountered--where does tradition end and individual style begin? Most contemporary folk artists have developed their own styles, even though they first learned to use traditional techniques and build traditional products. Urbanization and urban values have introduced a new consumer group to many traditional folk craftsmen. Glassie's statement that, "It is only a rare folk artist who strives for innovation; his replication is an affirmation of a tradition,"¹⁵ is no longer accurate. Folk artists and craftsmen are sympathetic to the desires of customers (except, perhaps, in the case of an art based on divine inspiration). Whether governed by economic or creative needs, most successful producers of handmade objects are sensitive to their public,

¹³Glassie, Patterns, p. 33.

¹⁴Refer to The Foxfire Book.

¹⁵Glassie, Patterns, p. 259.

and will create whatever is desired by the customer, for a price. Folk artisans and craftsmen who produce objects for sale at once subject themselves to a buying public that is particular about what it buys. The Kentucky chairmakers learned that the local buying public preferred simple, inexpensive chairs, while the clientele outside the local area purchased chairs with ornamentation and especially unique design. Ruth Bunzel notes that "the emphasis on originality and individualism in design is general in all villages and among all [Pueblo] potters. It indicates that everywhere art is regarded as a technique of individual expression."¹⁶ This statement would not be important to this consideration of urban influences on folk art and utilitarian folk art production were it not for her conclusion:

Every group is constantly subjected to outside influences, but unless there is something there, the stimulus does not take. No amount of white encouragement has been able to effect a revival of ceramics at Zuni.¹⁷

Thus, urbanization has affected the expression of folk artists in the United States other than in the Appalachian culture, but the forces of change often support or revive the tradition rather than eradicate it.

The contemporary folklorist must not permit the problem of development in individual style to stand in the path of contemporary folk art research. The style of the simple, symmetrical settin' chair and rockin' chair of traditional southern mountain culture reflected a particular economic and social environment. The traditional craftsman, whether he lives in the city or the country, will be subjected to cultural change. I agree with Bunzel—change may or may not take place.

¹⁶Ruth Bunzel, The Pueblo Potter (New York: Columbia University, 1929 reprint ed., New York: AMS, 1969), p. 87.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 88.

As Chester told me about an offer he had considered from a large metropolitan store, he refused because he "didn't like the arrangement." This same craftsman should not be considered non-traditional simply because he packs his traditional tools and techniques and heads for a city. This concept of culture change casts doubt on Glassie's restrictions on folk craftsmen's environment and influences:

During the time of the construction of a folk object, the tradition out of which it is produced cannot be part of the popular (mass, normative) or academic (elite, progressive) cultures of the greater society with which the object's maker has had contact, and as a member of which he may function.¹⁸

It remains to be seen whether or not his statement will hold true for the urban apprentice to the traditional folk craftsman in the city. In the case of such apprenticeships, it is not safe to speculate that the protege would develop his own style; his consumer group might demand replication of his master's products, or even replicas of the traditional objects from the master's traditional culture.

The urban effects on a craftsman's style and creativity are many. The dynamic forces from the dominant culture can be direct or indirect, subtle or obvious. Their conjunction is complex, and always varies with the individual craftsman. In Chester's case, economics (poverty and prosperity), politics, perfidy, religion, society, publicity, and especially, folklorists, have had effects on his style. Most all of these have been urban, and yet the urban influence does not dominate his traditional values. The concern is no longer one expressed in 1962, "The danger to the mountain craftsmen is not that he will change but that he may lose his individuality."¹⁹ The immediate problem is the

¹⁸Glassie, Patterns, p. 5.

¹⁹Bernice Stevens, "The Revival of Handicrafts," in The Southern Appalachian Region: A Survey (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1962): 279-288.

nature of continuity and change in individual art style. What are the specific effects caused by urbanization and culture change?

Continuity and Change in Individual Art Style

In most published studies about folk artists and craftsmen, the discussion of continuity and change in individual style is omitted or, at best, approached through a narrow perspective based on the interviewee's current repertoire. Yet there is no need to prove that folk art tradition is not stable. Jones has already carefully evaluated the effects of urbanization on traditional country craftsmen in "Culture Change and the 'Folk' Arts" and in "Violations of Standards of Excellence and Preference in Utilitarian Art."²⁰ His point has been made: ". . . there's gotta be new designs once in awhile."²¹

Jones views the Kentucky chairmakers as being alert businessmen: "Chairmakers also attempt to ascertain, in somewhat more subtle ways, the range of designs that have greatest appeal to their consumer publics, and they experiment with various traits until they find that which most appeals to the customers."²² Before and during his study, urbanization had been in a causal relationship with the old craft tradition: "Urbanization has created a consumer public with different values needing fulfillment which has resulted in the creation of a greater variety of objects, the encouragement of innovation, and the generation of new objects, designs, and stylistic traits." Urbanization not only encouraged

²⁰Michael Owen Jones, "'There's Gotta Be New Designs Once in Awhile': Culture Change and the 'Folk' Arts," Southern Folklore Quarterly XXXVI: 2 (March, 1972): 43-60; Jones, "Violations of Standards of Excellence and Preference in Utilitarian Art," Western Folklore XXXII: 1 (January, 1973): 19-32.

²¹Jones, "Culture Change," 58-60.

²²Ibid.

creation and innovation, it "stimulated the production of objects that might otherwise, owing to industrialization, have disappeared."²³

It is unlikely that individuality is a new element in folk utilitarian art. Individual stylistic traits are apparent in antique folk objects which are extant in contemporary museums. Previous studies by Boaz, Bunzel, and Crawford have uncovered the nature of personal preference, taste, and individuality. Jones found that the Kentucky chairmakers changed designs either by intent or accident. While intentional changes may have been the result of the producer's creativity, most often it was the result of consumer stipulation; Jones referred to those deviations as "violations":

Alleged violations may be of great importance to the researcher in gaining insights into taste, creative processes, and the network of social relations in which art is produced, for the canon of taste among various consumer publics and the social standards of preference and excellence exert pressure on the manufacturers of utilitarian art products, thereby influencing the nature of the product.²⁴

Accidents may be minor flaws in construction or major manifestations in object design. All violations and mutations in a craftsman's products must be considered in relation to the previous works: "There is no reason to suppose that all works of art are consummate, or that all utilitarian products serve as a paragon of the requirements of useful design."²⁵

The urban effects on Jones's rural chairmakers were related to the psychological nature of the urbanites. The production of chairs was no longer a home craft or a local part-time business; the craftsmen were artisans satisfying the aesthetics of a diverse metropolitan buying public. Cultural instability was introduced and maintained by nostalgic urbanites,

²³Ibid., p. 52.

²⁴Jones, "Violations," p. 19.

²⁵Ibid., p. 22.

tourists, folklorists, and others. The tradition was perpetuated by fulfilling the needs of these different individuals, who encouraged innovation by exerting their influence on the chairmaker via the producer/consumer business relationship. For this reason, it is difficult to judge the degree to which the individual craftsman and the individual customer influence the production of folk art objects. Jones calls this transaction "cultural drift," and suggests that it is complex:

By the conclusion of this essay, it should be apparent that the problem of culture change and the arts has no simple solution, and that change in the art traditions varies from one group to another with different results depending on the internal structure of the "system" of art in each group.²⁶

The theoretical approach to individual style in folk art should include an evaluation of continuity and change in the tradition. The aspect of continuation must consider two points: the constancy of traditional patterns and the retentivity of stylistic traits. The successful urban artisan/businessman must fashion his product with a proper combination of traditional construction and popular ornamentation. The final form of the utilitarian art object which is produced for sale will depend on the customer's knowledge of the craftsman's capabilities; the casual customer will purchase or order "a chair," while the informed consumer will state preference and stipulation in the construction of "my chair." Thus, continuity in the art tradition implies the adherence to traditional elements as well as the recurrence of popular stylistic features.

Discontinuity in design and construction can result in minor variation from product to product due to technique and technical errors, a unique mutation, or a new prototype in the craftsman's repertoire.

²⁶Jones, "Culture Change," p. 44.

The motivation for change in the system of folk art may be economic (consumer stimulation); social (the influence of urban society); or physical (the age and health of the craftsman). Explanations for variation in production must evaluate the traditional culture, the present culture, tools, materials, customers, and intentions and accidents.

Ultimately, the "systems" theory of folk art must hold true for the urban craftsman as well as for the rural. It must be expandable to define continuity and change in both diachronic and synchronic studies. In addition, the results of complicated interaction, such as syncretism and synergism, should be permissible. In Chester's case, Jones's theory must explain the chairs that have been built in Cincinnati. Several recent models will be used to document the effects of urbanization on continuity and change.

The fluidity of folk art products is a result of the nature of the tools, the construction techniques, the craftsman's purpose, and the preference in styles. This portion of the study was greatly aided by Chester's kind permission to photograph his ledger of transactions and products from January 1965 to December 1976.²⁷ His book contained detailed descriptions of what he sold, when he sold it, who he sold it to, and the price paid. The remainder of this chapter is based on these transactions and subsequent interviews with Chester and Jim Benedict in July 1975.

The so-called "machine made" chair (Plate I) is a good example of what unique mutations can occur when a chairmaker changes tools. In November 1974, Chester had just moved to Cincinnati from North Bend, Ohio.

²⁷The ledger entries for January 1, 1965 to November 17, 1965, are incorrectly labelled "1955."

Jim Benedict had located a suitable apartment and garage workshop for Chester's tools and wood. But Chester had no orders and little cash. Jim described the situation as being hand-to-mouth. As a last resort, Chester used scrap wood left over from previous chairs to make a chair for sale.

The "machine made" chair was never finished nor sold and still rests in his shop today. It is an anomaly in Chester's history representing a total lack of income (from chairmaking) from October 22, 1973 to January 24, 1974.²⁸ The chair does not have the brilliantly integrated features so characteristic of his hand made rockers. The two woods used in the chair, red oak and cherry, form an unusual and incongruent grain contrast. The chair was entirely machine made except for the knobs, which are ornamental spear-like spires on top of the back posts. The back of the chair is composed of a box-back combination of vertical and horizontal braces instead of the usual curved slats which are wedged into each back post.²⁹ The seat was to have been made of planks, and the arms would have been made from a straight board. The knobs were hewn with an axe into a four-sided spear-point shape. This is a variation of his standard knob design which is rounded and smoothed by his drawknife.

The production of the machine made chair illustrates what distinctive contrasts can result from the dynamic forces of economy,

²⁸This fact was established during a taped interview with the Benedicts on July 12, 1975. Chester's ledger also indicates no sales during this long period, but a page has been torn out. I have no information on its possible significance.

²⁹Jones used a picture of a chair with this design in "The Well-Wrought Pot," p. 816.

materials, and tools. Chester needed to produce an object for sale quickly and cheaply. He had hoped that he could use his power tools to shape available scrap wood into a chair that someone would buy. Chester will still finish that chair if he gets an order for it; and the shape of the seat, arms, and rockers will be influenced by the preference of the customer. The fact that he has not completed it, and that no customers have been interested in it, indicates that the chair is aesthetically and functionally useless to the urban consumer group. This chair is not useless to the folklorist, however, as it clearly underlines the conditions which can generate the creation of a unique mutation which concurrently combines the structural change in the frame caused by the use of power machinery with a technical variation in the knobs caused by the drawknife.

Chester's urban customers from August 1972 to June 1975 were explicit in their preferences for a chair made entirely by hand. Their unanimous choice for handmade chairs has forced Chester to continue using his traditional construction techniques and measuring system. As a result, each chair exhibits minor variation due to the impossibility of perfect duplication by hand. Chester is well aware of the difference between machine and hand production, and the significance of the material to each method:

You can't make two things alike by hand. It's impossible, but you can by machine. You can work about any kind of wood with a machine. The machine does the work; you do the head work and the pushing work. You make chairs like I do [by hand]; you cut and make every piece by hand. You have to pick the best [wood].³⁰

Chester's technology is old-fashioned to the urbanites, and in fact, the depth of his knowledge probably could not be matched by many other woodworkers. Harold H., a purchasing agent for Shiels Lumber

³⁰Field Notes July 12, 1975.

Company in Cincinnati, noted that Chester had "an odd way of doing things. He was very particular."³¹ Chester's skills have been described as a "lost art" representative of "vanishing Appalachia."³² His hand tools--the broad axe, hickory maul, dogwood glut, shaving horse, drawknife, slat press, and work bench with wedges and stobs--ring of another era, the age of wood. His measuring system--hands, thumbs, body, eyesight, and crude sticks with rough patterns--is based on approximation. But his raw materials must be perfect: a log cannot be "lockey," i.e., the grain of the slats must be straight; the wood for his carved "saddle" seats must be made from kiln-dried "milled" boards; the hickory bark must be boiled until it is "dark as a nigger's rump."

Although Chester owns a ruler and has patterns for the back posts and arms, his chairs are hewed and dressed by a method I will call "relative and comparative precision." Each chair is built in the same sequence, but the dimensions are not predictable. The ruler is not standard equipment, he uses it only when he wears his overalls. Generally, he uses his patterns only when he has an order to build a replica of either Jim Benedict's or Pam Benedict's chair out of milled lumber. He does not use a pattern when he hews the chair parts from split logs. The posts and rounds are made by relative precision; they are similar, but not necessarily exact in any respect. The slats, rockers, and pegs are made with comparative precision. Each piece is compared to the other pieces for uniformity. The mortised holes for the slats and the drilled holes for the pegs are laid out by measuring hands and thumbs. Thus, Chester uses approximate constants to measure the intersecting points

³¹Taped interview with Harold H., July 13, 1975, in Cincinnati, Ohio.

³²Informal interview with a potential customer, C. W. K., July 12, 1975, in Cincinnati, Ohio.

for relatively and comparatively precise parts; the posts and the slats; the posts and the rockers; and the posts and the pegs. Commenting on a recent chair, Chester was somewhat surprised by the resultant size, "That chair sure turned out big." And he was not sure how his three-weave pattern would turn out when he re-wove his personal settin' chair: "However it comes out will be good enough for me." Considering the various techniques which may be based on relative or comparative precision, it is apparent that minor variations must be expected in handmade objects. This trait might be universal; world traveler Christopher Williams noted:

The differences come from slight errors in construction, variations in material and, above all, because the indigenous artisan respects the individuality in product and person.³³

In folk art tradition, a craftsman's purpose will determine the nature of major variation in production. The "President's" rockers point out that a change in continuity can result in continuity without change. In each case, Chester created a new design unlike all previous chairs. Although there are actually two chair types which Chester refers to as the "President's" rocker, Chester has made three chairs which would have gone to a President under ideal circumstances. However, only one actually did go to a President of the United States.

In late 1962 or early 1963, Chester made a "bookcase rocker" (not to be confused with the "bookcase masterpiece" owned by Michael Owen Jones) for Willy Dawahare, the mayor of Hazard, Kentucky. Dawahare's unique purchase may have been motivated by political ambition:

The seat is octagon shaped, there are 8 legs and 4 rockers, the three panels for the back are covered with hickory bark, the baskets that serve as arm rests may be used to hold books or knitting equip-

³³Christopher Williams, Craftsmen of Necessity (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 146.

ment, and there is a foot rest in front which may be extended for use. . . . I heard rumors from several people, although they were never confirmed, that Dawahare bought the chair with the intent to give it to President Kennedy ostensibly in gratitude for his program of economic assistance to Appalachia but really for the purpose of promoting himself politically.³⁴

President Kennedy was assassinated before the gift could be presented. Whatever motivation was behind the Hazard mayor's idea, it is likely that Chester developed his ambition to present a rocker to a President of the United States at this time. According to Jim Benedict, the Stock brothers, also furniture makers from the Hazard area, presented a President with one or more of their products. Although the truth about this has not been confirmed by me, Chester did endeavor to present a President with a chair, whether for prestige or personal gratification.

In 1969, he intended to build a chair for President Johnson. However, Johnson left office before he could start the project. In early 1971 (at Elizabethtown, Ohio), Chester made a chair (Plate II) which would have gone to President Johnson had he been in office. Instead, President Nixon was in office. But his plan failed: "The first chair I made for the President [Nixon], I couldn't get to him, so I sold it." The chair was bought for \$169 by W. A. B _____ sometime between March 12, 1971 and the following July 4th. Made of oak, the rocking chair was quite different from those he had made in Kentucky. It had scooped arm rests, finger grips on the ends of the arm rests, bowed-out front posts, and a six-inch long peg which attached the arm rest to the front post. Essentially, the final result was the integration of features which had been applied to a variety of previous chairs. This chair, i.e., the "President's" rocker, was Chester's point of departure from his Kentucky-

³⁴Diss., p. 710.

designed rockers. The special structural design became the prototype for his popular "Cornett rockers."³⁵

The chair which eventually was presented to President Nixon was begun in November, 1973, and completed during the following February. On April 9, Cincinnati Congressman Donald Clancy wrote a letter to the Honorable Max Friedersdorf, then Special Assistant to the President:

Mr. Cornett wishes to present a rocking chair to the President personally, but the problems involved in arranging this have been explained to him. If the President will accept this chair as a gift and cannot meet with Mr. Cornett personally, my office will be glad to arrange conveyance.³⁶

The offer was accepted and on May 17:

Chester Cornett, of Harrison, Ohio, called on the President to present him with a wooden rocking chair which Mr. Cornett had made completely by hand. He was accompanied by Congressman Donald D. Clancy of Ohio.³⁷

The next day, by proclamation of the Cincinnati newspapers, Chester had become "Cincinnati's bearded craftsman from Appalachia."

The Nixon chair (Plate III), made of sassafras, was structurally similar to the Cornett rockers, except for a hand-hewn "saddle" seat. They did not look the same at all; the Cornett rockers did not have the ornately carved posts, rounds, and slats, which were so dominant on President Nixon's rocker. The Cornett rockers became the popularized

³⁵This term is used since it appeared on one of Chester's hand-lettered advertising signs, "Handmade Furniture, Maker of Cornett Rocking Chairs, We Make Anything, You Name It, We Make It or Try." Pam Benedict wrote on an advertising pamphlet she made for Chester: "Chester Cornett carves and assembles his famous Cornett Rockers."

³⁶Letter from Congressman Donald D. Clancy (R-Ohio) to the Honorable Max L. Friedersdorf, Special Assistant to President Nixon, April 9, 1973.

³⁷U.S. President. Presidential Documents: Richard M. Nixon. "Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents," Vol. 9, no. 20, May 21, 1973, p. 682.

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version of President Nixon's rocker for economic reasons, specifically the difference in the labor fee, \$389 compared to \$669.³⁸

The "President's" rocker became the model from which Chester's customers could order chairs. Chairs like his Kentucky rockers sold for \$289 in the first half of 1975. A chair of that style is now referred to as being "like Peter S _____'s." The Cornett rocker, which was like President Nixon's minus the expensive carved embellishments, sold for \$389. In spite of the \$100 difference, the urban customers preferred to buy the expensive chair. Although each chair could be ordered with a variety of options--a wooden saddle seat or a hickory woven seat; notched or un-notched rounds and posts; any type of wood, any color for pegs; and two styles of slats--the \$289 rocker did not have the graceful curves in the arms and front posts, and most importantly, it came with flush pegs. As Chester was long suspected, the large, dome-shaped pegs are popular with his urban clientele. When I suggested to a potential customer at a crafts demonstration that he could buy the chair cheaper if he didn't order the dome pegs, he emphatically interrupted me by saying, "No sir, I want them pegs." Eventually, Chester quit offering to make the \$289 rocker:

I only make one kind of chair. I quit making them (\$289 type) last night. People got confused between the difference in chairs and the difference in prices. . . . They don't know the difference. They'd know it if they made the chair. . . . Everything's different.³⁹

As a result of the effect of urban values, Chester now makes one basic chair which can be ordered with many options. His urban craft has now gone from major change (the "President's" rocker) to continuity (the Cornett rockers), and from continuity (i.e., structural similarity) to minor change (variation due to customer stipulation).

³⁸These figures do not include the price of the wood, which must be supplies by the customer.

³⁹Field Notes, July 12, 1975.

The success of the \$389 Cornett rocker has been a result of the admiration of both migrants and urbanites in Cincinnati. The unique Cornett style, featuring octagon-shaped posts and rounds, contoured slats, throne-like knobs, carved pegs, and the distortion of size, is almost universal in its appeal to both the poor and wealthy urban dwellers I met in Cincinnati. Each chair exhibits graceful curvature in the posts, rounds, arms, and pegs; but I believe that much of his success has resulted from the various options from which a customer can order a chair.

The preference of style can be seen in two chairs which are referred to by customers as "Jim Benedict's" chair or "Pam Benedict's" chair. Jim's chair (Plate IV) was built at the same time as President Nixon's rocker, in December 1972. Pam's chair (Plate V) was built in July 1973. By mid-1974, many of Chester's customers were ordering chairs based on the style of either Jim's or Pam's chair. Several of the ledger entries are included here to illustrate the extent of the variation and the details of customer preferences:

- JB: 1 walnut rocking chair
 "full do" back
 Hickory Bark Seat
 Slightly smaller than usual
 Due by August 19th
- JW: Cherry Rocker
 Saddle Seat
 Large Walnut Pegs
 Half Do
 To be finished 1st week in July
- JP: Cherry Rocker like Jim Benedict's
 half do back
 saddle seat
 large dome pegs walnut
- KM: Cherry rocking chair
 hickory bark seat, half do back
 medium size carved pegs
 notch the rounds and the front
 and back posts below the seat
 carved arms, with large domed peg

seat the same size and same height
from the floor as Pam Benedict's
Due by Sept. 15

SW: Cherry rocking chair
hickory bark seat
tapered round with small notches (sic)
knotched (sic) on the posts and rounds
7 half do back slats

The seat should be the same height as the top
of a saddle seat.

10 inches from top of seat
to bottom of the arm
inside measure of seat 21x15x17
medium sized carved pegs
out of cherry

JP: (Like Jim Benedict's
Cherry Rocker)

Made from 3 large
pcs of walnut delivered
to Chester Cornett
on May 9th 1975

Seat as wide as
possible (Saddle Seat)

Posts as thick as
possible

Hand carved knobby pegs

low horn on seat

Chester's current chairs exhibit minor variations, but only on a superficial level. As far as style is concerned, his craft has now been stabilized by the continuous reproduction of a popularized product. Presently, there is no disequilibrium to inject change into the continuity. His customers are satisfied with their varied selections. But they are not ordering vastly different chairs; they are stipulating stylized versions of the same structural form. Even so, as can be seen in the examples from his ledger, the customers are explicit and ambitious in their specifications. To be successful, the traditional craftsman in

an urban area must provide a product with incidental variation (but not accidental variation as will be seen in the next chapter). The urban audience in Cincinnati has ratified Chester's design enthusiastically, but it has interrupted the process of creative change with its acceptance of continuity.

In summary, the urban effects on Chester's chair production were environmental. The psychological and sociological interaction between the urbanized producer and the urban consumer is not comparable to the rural process. Urbanites want custom-made products which reveal their conception of traditional furniture. The migrant folk craftsman must please a new audience which demands more than the traditional audience.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIOECONOMIC EFFECTS ON PRODUCTION IN AN URBAN AREA

Tools, Techniques, and Materials

In the production of a folk chair, there are several social and economic forces which determine how a chair will be produced. While a brief study of craft production might reveal aspects of continuity and change in the style of the objects produced, only a longer investigation into the tools, techniques, building materials, and consumer profiles can reveal the intricate socioeconomic relationship in the urban utilitarian folk art business.

Before the urban consumer group will expend large sums of money for a hand-crafted object, the tools and techniques in the craft must be approved. Each potential customer has standards to determine the authenticity of the craftsman, especially if the customer's present income is low enough to make the purchase appear to be a non-judicious disbursement of funds. Whether the hand-crafted artifact is a quilt, a musical instrument, or a chair, most consumers suffer through a period of rationalization. For two of Chester's 1975 customers, Judy J., and Bruce S., the decision was particularly agonizing.

The old-fashioned or hand-made tools in Chester's shop are greatly admired, but the power tools are viewed with great animosity. He has several Rockwell power tools he bought with an FHA loan¹ while

¹Chester never did repay the loan in full.

in Kentucky--a mortising press, jig saw, band saw and 4-inch precision jointer, belt sander, and a lathe. As Jones noted before, "Chester does not use much modern machinery."² He still does not; it is no wonder when the reception of the machine made chair is considered. For the most part, Chester's tools have served him well. His Pexto drawknife has seen fifteen years of service and is still being used although the blade is now wearing thin. He rejected a replacement given to him by a friend, "It's no account, it's got hard and soft places in it." His broad axe, saws, brace and bits, and pocket knife are durable and will continue to provide good service. The gluts, mauls, presses, workbenches, and shaving horse are all handmade and show deterioration which is expected with wooden tools. Two recent purchases were a set of ten sanding belts and a 3/8 inch mortising chisel.

Although Jim Benedict will normally tell an interested customer that no power tools are used in the production of a chair, Chester will use his modern machinery for either a rough cut or a polish operation. The band saw must be used to "rip out" the pieces which have been patterned on the planks. This maneuver insures accuracy and economy in utilizing expensive boards of cherry and walnut. When a log is used, it is split and then hewn to shape with his broad axe. Occasionally, he will use the belt sander to smooth the posts after the slats have been pegged, the precision jointer to smooth the rough edges of the rockers, or the electric drill. Since these tools are never used at his demonstrations, and because they are used infrequently and briefly in his shop, most customers are unaware that he uses power equipment at all.

²Diss., p. 179.

The urban customer prefers that the craftsman use traditional tools and traditional techniques. Many local customers visit his workshop to observe and photograph the production of their chairs. The visitors at Cincinnati's annual Appalachian Fair are fascinated to see Chester strip bark off a hickory pole, split a log, pound pegs, weave a seat, and work at his shaving horse. But they do not see all his skills. There are certain techniques he has abandoned for one reason or another, such as "cooking" and bending the back posts and "cooking" the rocker before rubbing in the oil finish.

Chester has had to change a few techniques to please his urban customers. It is unlikely that an urbanite would purchase the Cornett "Abner" rocker which is now housed in the Kentucky Library and Museum at Bowling Green. The red oak chair exhibits several flaws, such as splits in the thin back posts, front posts which extend through the top of the arm rests, and thin, straight pegs which are not flush with the posts and rounds they bind. In contrast, most of his present customers prefer walnut chairs. Chester believes that the light and dark walnut wood does not necessarily make a prettier chair, just one that is broken easier. He has complained on occasion that he had to "cut every spect of white wood off," and indeed, several entries in his ledger request "as little white wood as possible." This is ironic to Chester since he believes that the white wood is the strongest part of the tree.

Over the years he has developed three stylistic features which have probably contributed most to his current success: the 8-sided posts, the pegs, and the hand-rubbed oil finish. The octagon-shaped posts became his trademark when he quit using a lathe. During the July 1975 interviews, he explained to me that due to their octagon shape, his rounds would not split the posts when they were driven in. At first,

this seemed to be the practical reason and origin of his unique style. But when further questioned, he said that they were not made for that reason. The technique was developed for its stylistic uniqueness, rather than for a practical reason.

During the years when his craft was maturing, Chester has learned to exploit the pegs he uses in his chairs. The present large, dome-shaped pegs which many urban customers prefer were first made for Jim Benedict's chair. Chester revealed his devious intention, "I made those pegs extra large hoping that he wouldn't like it, so I could keep it for myself." To this day, he tells confidants the same thing he told Jones, "I believe that's what sells them chairs is the pegs." He may be right. One admirer told me explicitly, "I want them pegs." Although Chester has often said he doesn't like to finish chairs, the importance of the oil-finish is not to be overlooked. Jim has told me that he has been disappointed with almost all of Chester's recent chairs until they were finished. Many of the chairs made at Engle's Mill and Elizabethtown did not have a finish. Today virtually all of his chairs are sealed with a "secret"³ mixture of three common ingredients. The present labor fee for the hand-rubbed oil finish is \$50, but most people will pay it even when they know it is an extra fee.

Another popular technique which has not accounted for his success, but is the result of it, is the chair signature. Chester is no longer a producer of anonymous chairs. Outside of the standard picture-taking ritual, the last thing he does to finish a chair is to sign it. His signature is the final embellishment and a valued proof

³Jim Benedict revealed the formula to me, but I intend to honor Chester's secret formula until his death.

of craftsmanship. Most urban customers stipulate that he must sign his name on the bottom of the seat before they will accept it. One customer requested that he hand-carve his name on the bottom of the seat. I know of only two chairs which were signed on visible portions of the chair, Mike Jones's "bookcase masterpiece" (Diss., 738) and President Nixon's rocker which read "Hand Carved Buy Chester Cornett for the President of the United States of America Richard M. Nixon family With Our Lord Help." I asked him what he did when he made a chair with a hickory-woven seat:

I sign my name on the saddle seat. I put my name on a sheet of paper betwixt the bark on the hickory seat. But you can tell by looking. Ain't any chair in the world that looks like mine.⁴

Indeed, there are not any chairs which look like his, but the signature is expected, and always provided nonetheless.

Procuring the materials for a Cornett rocker is the responsibility of the consumer. The procurement of lumber is the most detrimental socio-economic effect for urban customers, since lumber is hard to get. And as Chester says: "To make them like I do, you have to pick the best." The choice in Cincinnati has been to buy milled wood at nearby Shiels Lumber Company (wholesale), supply a log, or purchase some "tornado" wood⁵ from Chester through Jim Benedict. Recently, more people have taken the last two choices. The prices at Shiels are becoming prohibitive for walnut. At \$1500 for a thousand board feet, the material alone for a walnut rocker would cost \$200. Cherry and mahogany cost about \$90, at \$800 for a thousand board feet. With the demand for cherry by furniture makers

⁴Field Notes, July 13, 1975.

⁵Durwood F. provided Chester with several cords of wood from walnut trees knocked down in Covington, Kentucky by the tornado on April 4, 1974.

who are making Colonial period pieces for the United States Bicentennial, and the competition for prime walnut from the veneer industry, the "tornado" wood is a good buy for \$75. It appears that the veneer buyers have combed most of the Ohio countryside around Cincinnati. They pay premium prices for undamaged walnut logs, and they are persistent. A rural sawmill operator from Hamilton County escorted me to a small country town to see the sign which one resident had placed in front of the walnut tree in his yard. It read: "This tree is not for sale."

The customer who provides a log runs several risks. First, if the log is "lockey," it cannot be used. Second, if the customer has a thick log and desires to have a "saddle" seat, the log will have to season for at least a year so it can dry out properly. Third, in the case of an Akron man, the log was not wide enough to permit Chester to make the slats the proper width. Consequently, the chair looks somewhat anemic in comparison to the prototype it was fashioned after. On the positive side, a chair made from a log is made more in the traditional mode than that made from a kiln-dried board.

In the urban system of utilitarian folk art, the socially and economically acceptable urban-produced folk chair is hewed and dressed by the tolerated tools and techniques using the most expensive woods that can be secured. Only in the cases of a rural customer and a folk art collector has any interest been shown in indigenous materials, such as sassafras. As seen in the previous pages, urban consumers are specific and demanding in their orders for chairs. What has not been discussed is the profile of this group and their effects on Chester.

Profile of Producer/Consumer Relations

By Dundes' definition,⁶ Chester's urban customers have developed into an identifiable folk group. They own one or more pieces of Cornett furniture. They have approached the fulfillment of their aesthetic desires with dedication and patience. They have valued the possession of a handmade object over money. They are competing to get their product. Chester told me: "Lots of people wants them chairs." In addition, they must take what they get, "I make a chair that's already sold." And that is the key to the almost prohibitive price they have to pay: Chester no longer makes a chair that he has to sell; it is already sold.

In spite of the fact that the chairs now cost \$389 plus the cost of the wood, and the fact that a chair cannot be ordered until the buyer pays a \$100 deposit and supplies about \$100 worth of wood, this urbanized folk group is diverse, not elitest. People of all ages admire and desire his chairs, but it is only a determined set of supporters who actually order and wait for their rocker. Neither age of the customer nor wealth are constant; the data are well-distributed between 25-40 years and yearly incomes of \$8,000 to \$60,000. There seem to be at least three common traits: an aesthetic attraction to quality hand-crafted objects; a possessive nature; and a pervasive desire to rescue some remnant of "lost art" in "vanishing Appalachia."

One of the interesting aspects of this urbanized folk group is their introduction to and use of a unique terminology. The language that must be learned to order a chair is a blend of archaic English and modern words. In essence, they must learn Chester's idiolect. They

⁶Alan Dundes, The Study of Folklore, pp. 2-3.

have to know whether they want their rounds, pegs, or "postes," in cherry, mahogany, walnut, or another hard wood. They have to find out what "lockey," "swag," "de-horn," "half do," "full do," and "culled," refer to. If they want to order a replica of a previous chair, they have to find out what the "crooked" chair, the "President's" chair, "Jim Benedict's" rocker, "Pam Benedict's" rocker, or the "nurse's" chair looked like. Many of them will ask for "tornado" wood for their chair. Recently, one of Chester's customers just wrote to me about the newly-named "beehive" log.

Chester has received much support from his past customers. When he moved to Cincinnati, Jim Benedict not only located a house for him but also organized a motorized fleet to transport Chester's vast accumulations from Elizabethtown.⁷ Customers have taken him shopping, to the zoo, to his out-of-town demonstrations, and even back to Kentucky. Diane W., a female customer and President of the Junior League in Cincinnati, paid for the printing of one thousand business cards in 1972. Jim and Pam Benedict designed and paid for a beautiful advertising pamphlet (Plate VI) which has generated business for Chester. With financial assistance from friends who were also customers of Chester, 5,000 pamphlets were printed for the 1974 Appalachian Fair, and 3,000 for the 1975 fair. There is no question that the Benedicts and their advertising brochures have been largely responsible for Chester's present business success. They have made sacrifices for him that no one else has offered to make.

The relationship between Chester and the Benedicts is quite interesting and deserves some attention. Although my field notes and

⁷R. B. Schoellkopf, ed., *Moonbeams*, 35 (July, 1974), 8-11. This is the monthly magazine for employees (among them Jim Benedict) of the Proctor and Gamble Technical Buildings, Cincinnati, Ohio.

observations cannot support any concrete statements, I had the feeling that Chester did not totally realize the extent of the effort put forth by Jim and Pam Benedict. He appears to expect their assistance whenever he wants it. I feel that the Benedicts derive great satisfaction from owning Chester's furniture, but their attitude does not even suggest that they feel burdened by helping him. They do like to assist him in every way possible. It is a curious association to be sure. But I have no idea at this time what psychological truth explains the symbiosis.

The customers react to Chester's prices with sympathy. In 1965, Chester's "regler" rocker was selling for \$89. Several rockers were sold for \$125 in 1967. Between then and August 1972, the chairs were selling for \$159, \$169, or \$179, depending on the wood and the finish. The first regular rocking chair he sold above that price was on August 30, 1972, when he sold one for \$279, plus \$50 for the wood. At this time, he had a version available for \$179 also. On February 17, 1973, he took an order for a chair for \$350, unfinished, not including the wood. During May and June 1973, his prices went to \$279 and \$379. Then, during October 1974, his prices rose again to \$289 and \$389. By June 1975, he was no longer taking orders for the \$289 model. During May 1975, the price of his "tornado" wood and hickory bark escalated from \$50 to \$75.

What does this mean? Primarily, it reflects his long-desired success in receiving the remuneration he expects for his chairs. Jim and I both tried to establish his per-hour wage, but failed owing to his flexible hours and his propensity to work on more than one project at a time.⁸ Jim said that the increase from \$169 and \$279 to \$279 and \$379 was unprovoked, an apparently hasty decision made prior to the 1973

⁸His weekday work day varies with the seasons: in winter, he works from noon to 6 P.M.; and in summer, from 10 A.M. to dusk.

Appalachian Fair at the Cincinnati Convention Center. The later increase to \$289 and \$389 was his reaction to a ten-dollar increase in rent by his new landlord. The increase in the price of his wood was made after the Cincinnati fair in 1975, probably because he now has to pay for hickory poles for his bark. I have no data on his inner motivations, but feel that he was taking advantage of his current popularity and the demand for his products. He knows his chairs are now as valuable as he thought they should have been years ago. An entry in his ledger for in January 1965 shows that he had priced a "2 in 1" rocker⁹ at \$269 but had only received \$30 for it.

While the urban consumer group is sympathetic to his prices, and has no hesitation to rationalize the payment he requests, Chester's accidents, or technical violations, have not always met with approval. When a local physician discovered that Chester had forgot to carve the grooved finger grips on the end of the arms (the feature created especially for the Nixon rocker), he brought it back and made sure that Chester made the correction. The couple from Chicago, who told Chester the chair was beautiful, would be disappointed if they knew that Chester also forgot to make the grooves on their chair. One reaction was highly negative:

I hate to say it but I think I'm disappointed with my chair. The top of one of the posts near the spire on top has a big chunk out [of] it and it looks like it's been plugged. I don't know how it will look after it's rubbed down but it looks like hell now. I want to talk with Jim [Benedict] about it and see if anything can be done. I was sick when I saw it. "Scratch and dent" for only \$439.00.¹⁰

⁹Diss., p. 707.

¹⁰Letter to me from customer Judy J., April 8, 1975.

On the other hand, customers can be estatic, "Thank you very much, Chester! Beautiful chair."¹¹

Presently, there are two major socioeconomic undercurrents which may re-vitalize Chester's repertoire. Both are urban effects. One is regressive, the other is progressive. Jim told me that he and a friend of his were attempting to talk Chester into making settin' chairs for them. In November 1974, I had approached Chester about making settin' chairs again and he said that he would not be able to make any money on them. In June, he told Jim that he would have to sell them for \$100 (compare to his sale of four settin' chairs for \$80 in July 1966). Jim said that he was willing to pay that price, so it may turn out that Chester may once again be making settin' chairs for sale.

Urban affluence is the reason for Chester's progressive motivation. For the second time in his life, he is "getting famous." But this time, his chair prices are higher, he does not have a family to support, and he has assistance from many of his urban admirers. In short, his business has never been more lucrative. Beginning in early 1975, he began to acquire the symbols of urban and affluent life which many people take for granted--a new suit, many new clothes, large quantities of soft drinks and candy bars, an expensive reclining chair, and a gasoline chain-saw. Jim feels that Chester "just wants to be like other people." At age 62, Chester has noticed that almost everybody else has an automobile, and he wants one, too.

At first, there may not seem to be a connection between Chester's visit to the zoo and his desire to own an automobile. During my July fieldtrip, a young couple who had ordered a chair from Chester took him

¹¹From Chester's business ledger, p. 87.

to the zoo. Although he liked the seals and the penguins the best, that night he had a dream about a diamond-back rattlesnake he saw. Prior to this, Chester had mentioned that he wanted to build himself a chair. When asked about the details he said, "I ain't the least idea, it would have 10 slats. It'd be a chair that's never been made." During the night of the day he went to the zoo, he dreamt of that rattlesnake. The next day he revealed the dream sequence; he had seen the snake all stretched out, with its head up, and its tail up. It was just like the diamond-back rattlesnake at the zoo: "What a pretty thing that was!" Then he told about the chair he was planning to build. He was going to carve heads on the front of the rockers, the front of each arm, and the top of each post. As a result of his dream, the rockers would have the head of a rattlesnake on the front, its rattles on the back, and a carved diamond-back between the front and the back.

Up to that point, Chester had been saying that he wanted to make a rocker for himself. Remembering his past history of selling chairs he had wanted to keep, I began to joke with him about the possibility of letting someone talk him out of his new "masterpiece." Shortly thereafter, he revealed that he was entertaining thoughts of creating a chair so magnificent that someone would trade an automobile for it:

I better make one I never made before . . . I want an automobile. If I make a right pretty one, I might trade it [the chair] for an automobile.¹²

With the close of this chapter, this discussion of the socioeconomic aspects of urban folk art must be terminated in the middle of an exciting period in Chester's chairmaking career. Chester's new "masterpiece" is

¹²Field Notes, July 12, 1975.

merely one more product from his creative mind. He is always associating his real-world observations with his artistic abstractions. As in the case of the other conceptions he makes: "It's not made yet. Don't say its made yet, [say] it's in his head."¹³

As the information in this chapter has shown, the socioeconomic effects play a major role in determining the nature of the handmade product and how it is made. The urban consumers indirectly consider the tools used in manufacture and, to a lesser extent, the techniques involved. The availability of production materials restricts the number of customers. In this particular case, Chester's success has depended on the patronage of his good friends, the Benedicts.

¹³Ibid.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Few folklorists have attempted to investigate the nature of folk craft in the city. The concern of this study was culture change in the folk art of traditional chairmaking. My primary informant was a life-long Kentucky resident who moved to Cincinnati, Ohio. The field-collected material reveals the nature of urban folk culture and the interaction between the northern city and the Appalachian migrant.

The present study was a followup to the doctoral dissertation by Michael Owen Jones, "Chairmaking in Appalachia: A Study in Style and Creative Imagination in American Folk Art." Selected aspects of the information reported by Jones in Appalachia were compared to the material I collected in Cincinnati. The theoretical model of folk art proposed by Jones is supportable, but several of his postulates concerning culture change are not (5c3f3a3, 5c3f3b1, 5c3f3b2). The limitation of his comprehensive study was time. He could form theories based on his observations of Chester's past and present, but he could only speculate on the future development of folk art and urbanization (see Appendix V). Diachronic and synchronic re-examination is a valuable approach to the scientific analysis of evolution in the folk art tradition. Jones asked: "What happens to a folk art tradition that is affected by the forces of acculturation, urbanization, and industrialization?"¹ This

¹Diss., p. 352.

thesis, which includes results from his study as well as from mine, suggests an answer to that question based on my fieldwork.

The study of culture change on this traditional Kentucky craftsman was centered on the sociological effects on personality, the urban effects on style and creativity, and the socioeconomic effects on production. These parameters were carefully selected to coincide and compare with Jones's line of inquiry:

A study of contemporary folk art provides data on the personality of the artists, determinants of style, folk aesthetics, and the processes of creativity which do not appear in historical interpretations based on artifacts or which do not coincide with those interpretations.²

Individual personality may change dramatically as a result of the displacement of time or space. In Chester's case, the passage of time reflected a change in values and personality and the increase in space reflected a change in culture. Financial stability engendered a materialistic attitude and desire to possess status symbols. Self-respect developed as the craftsman became successful and famous. At this particular time, Chester does not represent the Appalachian craftsman described by Jones. His modish attire exhibits the tastes of a keen observer of modern styles.

The influence of the Cincinnati consumer group reduced Chester's catalogue and dampered his tendency to innovate. Presently, he makes only one kind of chair. Each chair is fashioned after one structural prototype from which all replicas display minor variation. Since each customer stipulates the manner in which the chair will be built, each chair is different. Also, each chair has a unique combination of "folk" and "popular" elements found in Chester's styles. But the generation of

²Diss., p. 28.

new objects, designs, or stylistic traits may occur at any time. The completion of Chester's proposed "masterpiece" may become a new archetype and change the socioeconomic framework of his business. At some later date, events may transpire to cause the creation of a greater variety of products.

The economic picture of Chester's craft is the most changeable. His customers represent different age groups and income levels. The price of a rocking chair is currently increasing, but the increments are not constant due to Chester's unpredictable pricing pattern. The procurement of lumber has become increasingly difficult for the customers. But the urban consumer group is persistent and particular. They still order the most expensive and prestigious wood they can afford, usually cherry or walnut. Chester's customers actively promote his products. In addition, they pay increasingly higher prices without much rationalization. In this case, urbanites have objectified their respect for a traditional craftsman with their most distinctive commodity--money.

Although this study did not fully consider the psychological relationship between Chester Cornett and Jim and Pam Benedict, their association should not be overlooked. Most of the urban effects of culture change on Chester eventually trace back to the Benedicts. Several questions need to be answered to determine the causal factors in the urbanization process considered here. For example, did Chester consciously promote the Benedicts' friendship for his own purposes? What benefit do the Benedicts derive from the relationship? Can folk craftsman in the city become successful only if they encourage such patronage?

Folk chairmaking has survived in this particular case. But now, the rocking chairs are more "popular" than "folk." The urban consumers are neither buying a traditional chair nor do they want one. They buy chairs which appeal to their urban concept of "traditional." Chester, as the chairmaker, is successful at making chairs the urbanites admire and purchase.

Copies

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Film

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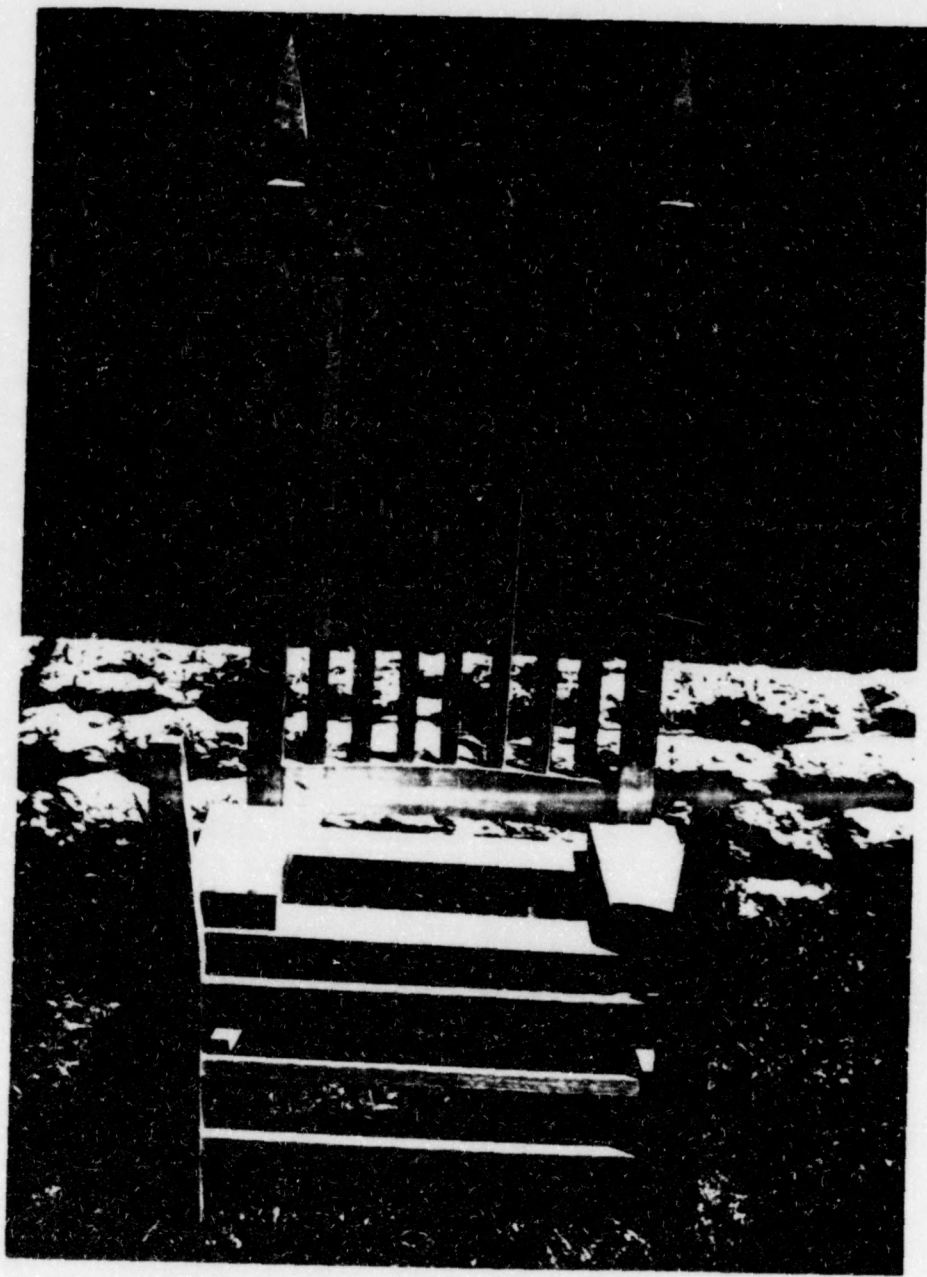


PLATE I. THE "MACHINE MADE" CHAIR

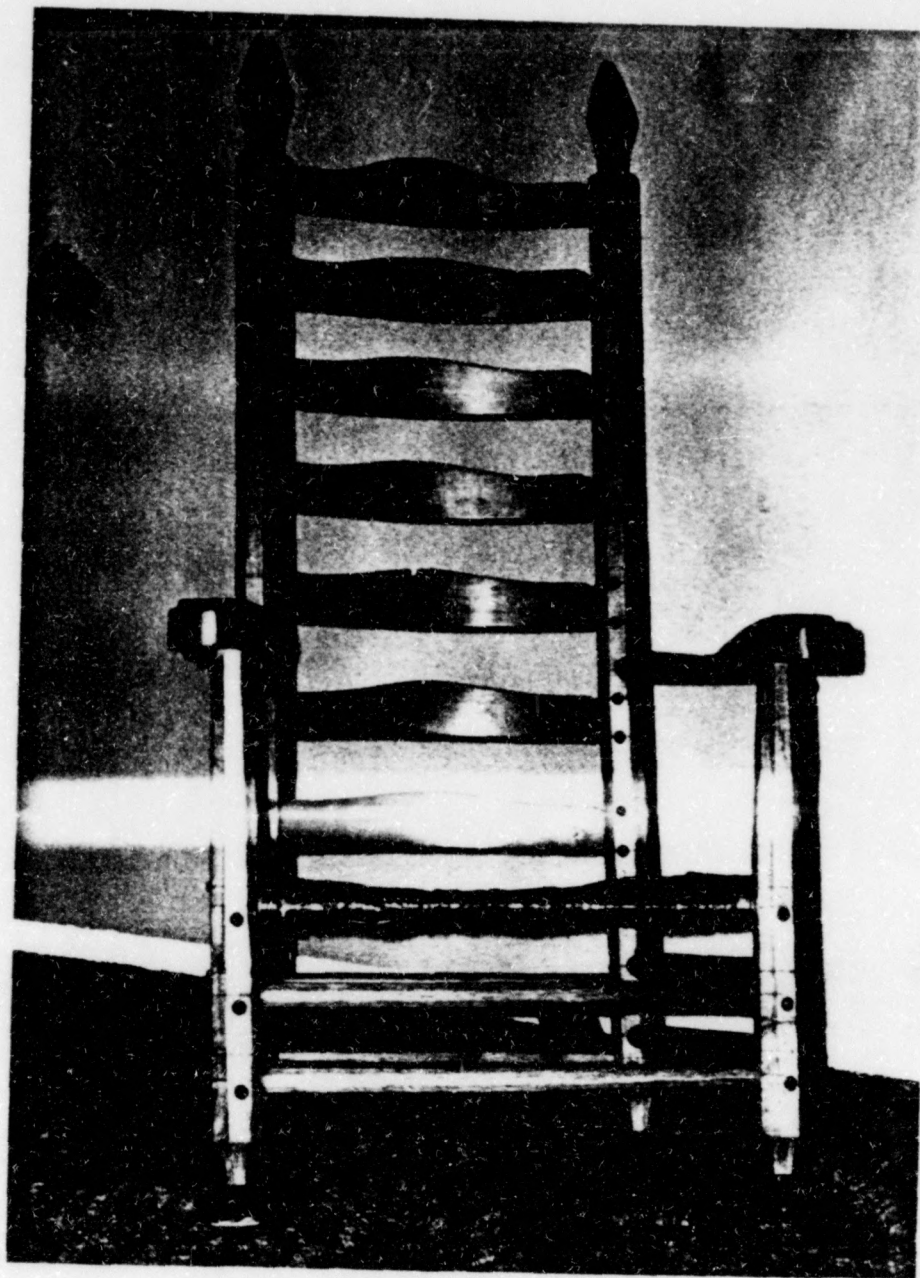


PLATE II. THE "PRESIDENT'S" ROCKING CHAIR



Official White House Photo

PLATE III. PRESIDENT NIXON'S ROCKING CHAIR

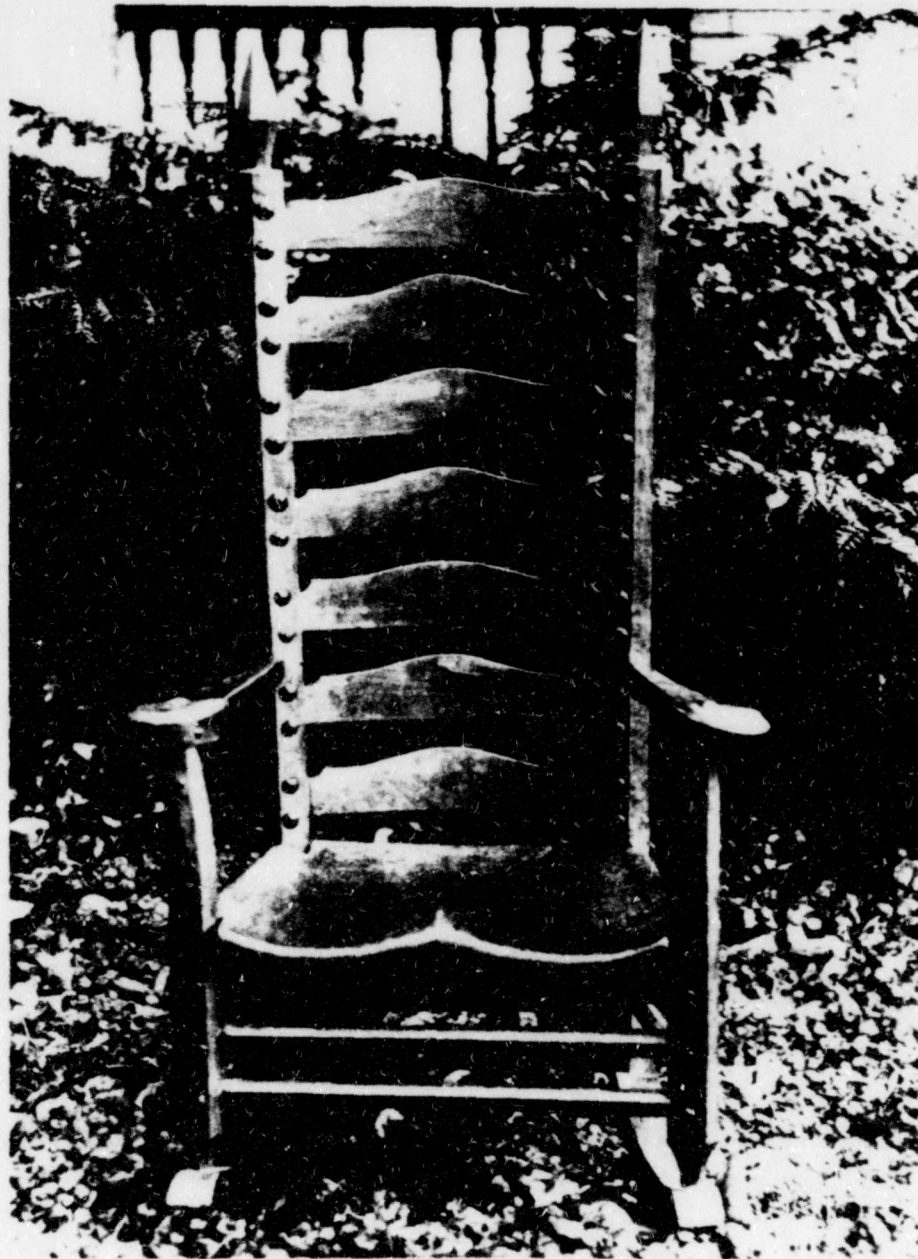


PLATE IV. JIM BENEDICT'S ROCKING CHAIR

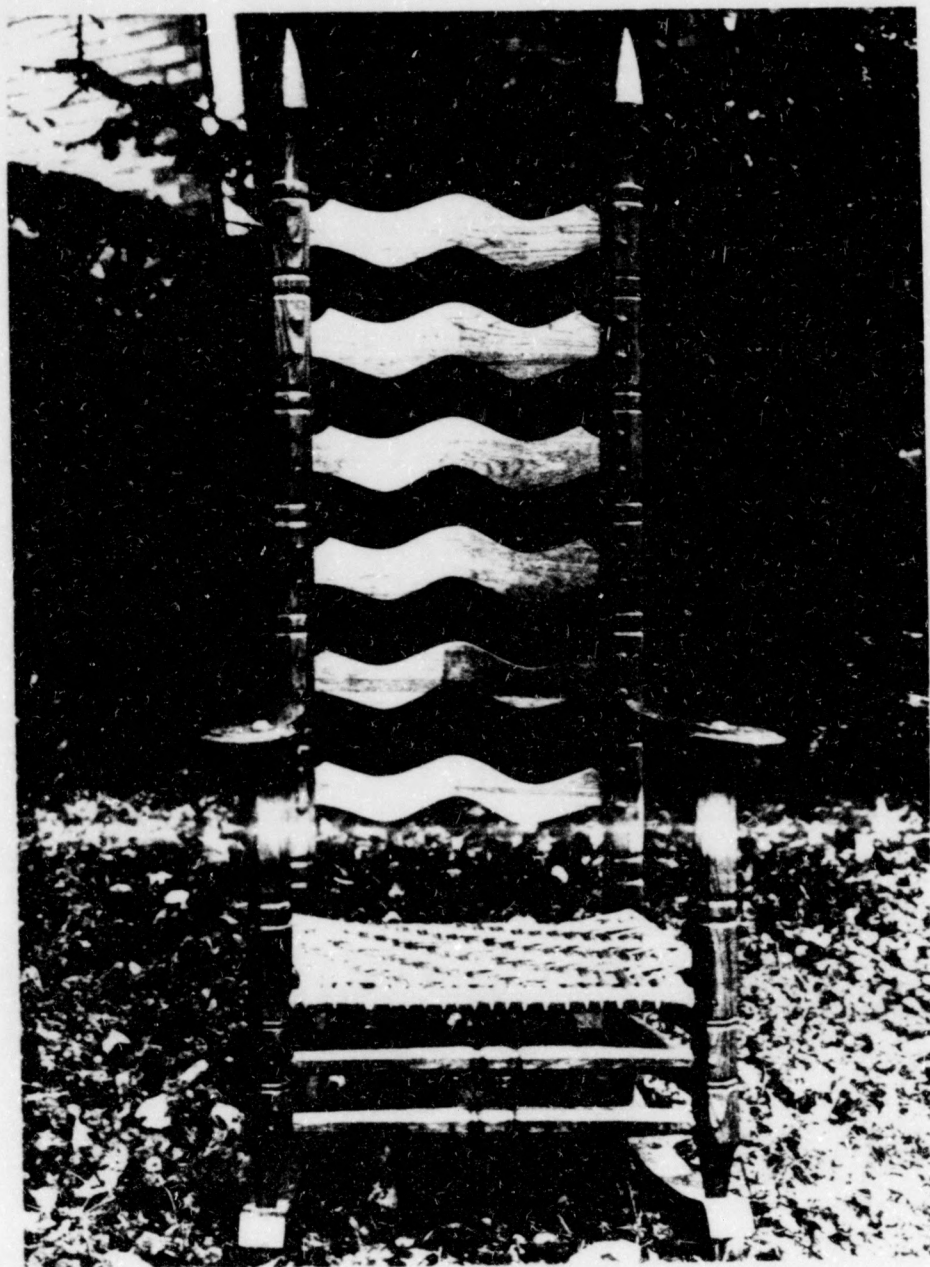


PLATE V. PAM BENEDICT'S ROCKING CHAIR



Chester Cornett Chairmaker



With an ax, draw knife and a wooden maul Chester Cornett carves and assembles his famous Cornett Rockers. Using no screws or nails, only hand carved wooden pegs, it takes about one month for him to make a chair. He prefers to work with unsawn lumber. Sassafras and hickory are his favorites. He also works cherry, walnut, maple, oak and mahogany. A customer selects and purchases his own wood. Although rocking chairs are his specialty, Mr. Cornett also makes cradles, children's rockers, tables, chairs and musical instruments.



Chester was raised in the hills and hollows of Perry County, Kentucky where he learned chairmaking from his grandfathers and uncles. To help make ends meet, he left school when he was 10 to become apprenticed to his uncle, a furniture maker. Already Mr. Cornett has spent 50 years perfecting his craft, making chairs unique in design and quality. His creations are heirlooms which are sturdy enough to be enjoyed for generations to come.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

A Chronology of Contact with Informants

- May 5, 1974 Date I first saw Chester at the "Appalachian Festival '74," Cincinnati Convention Center. (I lived in Columbus, Ohio.)
- November 9, 1974 First visit with Chester in Cincinnati. First visit with the Benedicts. (I was then a resident of Bowling Green, Kentucky.)
- November 26, 1974 Second visit with the Benedicts, made decision to order cherry rocking chair.
- November 27, 1974 Unsuccessful attempt to purchase wood for my chair from Shiels Lumber Yard in Cincinnati. Wrote check to Chester for \$100 (deposit on chair). Harold H. promised to write me when the wood was available.
- December 2, 1974 Letter to Jim Benedict requesting assistance in studying Chester.
- December 13, 1974 Social visit with Pam and Jim Benedict.
- January 8, 1975 Letter from Jean and Lee Schilling discussing their contact with Chester.
- January 13, 1975 Visit with Chester; tape-recorded interview with Jim Benedict in Cincinnati.
- January 23, 1974 Letter to Jim Benedict inquiring about Chester's life in Cincinnati. No reply received.
- April 8, 1974 Letter received from a recent chair customer.
- April 14, 1975 Post card from Harold stating that cherry wood was available (6 to 8 pieces, size 10/4).
- April 17, 1975 Phone call to Jim Benedict asking him to purchase my wood for me, since I was still in Bowling Green, Kentucky.
- May 7, 1975 Phone call to Jim Benedict to verify the purchase of the wood and check the progress on my rocking chair.

- June 27-29, 1975 Field trip to Cincinnati to initiate the study. Observed a demonstration in Bethel, Ohio, on June 28.
- June 30, 1975 Letter to Michael Owen Jones. His reply was dated July 8.
- July 4, 1975 Letter to former President Richard M. Nixon. Reply by staff assistant dated July 11.
- July 10-13, 1975 Field trip to Cincinnati to see Harold, the Benedicts, Chester, and two chair customers. Interviews and photographs taken.
- July 24, 1975 Phone call to Jim Benedict to clarify details about President Nixon's rocking chair.
- July 28, 1975 Phone call to Jim Benedict to discuss Chester's song, and his FHA loan for power tools.
- July 31, 1975 Received xeroxed copy of Chester's hand-written song from Jim Benedict.
- August 7, 1975 Letter received from chair customer dated August 4. It was a reply to my letter of July 23.
- August 8, 1975 Letter received from the Cincinnati field office of Congressman Donald Clancy.
- September 9, 1975 Phone call to Jim Benedict to discuss the "President's" chair.

APPENDIX II

A Comment on Chester's Speech

Each fieldworker in folklore must decide how to represent the speech (grammar, syntax, punctuation) of informants. As I noted in my statement on methodology, I chose to use standard English in all quotations because I do not wish to allow interjections, contraction punctuation, or imitative phonetic spelling to affect the meaning of the quoted materials. I am including this note on Chester Cornett's dialect to compensate for this usage. David Shores, in Contemporary English: Change and Variation, believes that students are led to believe that there is a "uniformly good way and a uniformly bad way of speaking and writing." I am trying to avoid promoting that attitude. Roger Shuy, in Discovering American Dialects, notes practical applications for these linguistic ideas:

We need more precise information about the dialects which set one social group apart from another. What specific changes must a person make when he moves from one group to another?

Chester's dialect is referred to by linguists as "South Midland." In A Word Geography of the Eastern United States, Hans Kurath identifies this speech community as the Appalachian and the Blue Ridge Mountains south of the James River. It so happens that Chester's regional dialect is an American "folk" dialect. His speech reflects the settlement history of this region. The survival of local types of folk speech such as his can be accredited to cultural homogeneity and a lack of formal education. It does not denote a lack of intelligence.

Several words in Chester's jargon confirm his English background. He once told me, "I've always been told the Cornetts was English." Kurath states the relationship between American and English speech: "If we undertake to trace the history of words, we shall follow a trail that leads through American folk speech to British dialects and to provincial variants of the British Standard." As Kurath expected, The Oxford English Dictionary contains information on some of Chester's dialectal terms: "betwixt" (for "between") is an adverb used in Middle English; "locke" (pronounced lockey or lockie) means "locking together" and traces to Old Saxon and Middle High German; "culled" is an adjective derived from the Middle English and Old French verb form meaning to "select;" "swag," meaning "depression," dates to 15th century England; "postes" is an English form of the Latin word "postis."

I have one correction to make regarding Jones's representation of Chester's dialect. He used the term "postees" (plural form of "post") many times in his text and quotations. This representation not only suggests a pronunciation the Appalachian folk do not use, but also contradicts the proper usage of "postes" (pronounced "post-ez") in Chaucerian England as noted by James Watt Raine, in The Land of Saddle-bags.

APPENDIX III

Chester's Song

This is Chester's personal song, entitled "My Old Kentucky Mountain Home." It was recorded by Michael Owen Jones, on August 21, 1965, in Chester's home an Engle Mill, Kentucky. Jones notes (Diss., 561) that he attempted to render the pronunciation as he heard it. This author does not approve of his scholarly attempt to report eye-dialect. However, the material is printed here just as it was published by Jones in his dissertation.

D'I were born and raised in old Kentucky mountain home.
Now I'm a soldier boyee, a long,
A long ways from my old Kentucky mount'n home.
Fer, oh, fer over the deep blue sea,
Whar the sun hardly ever shines,
I get to wundrin' about my old Kentucky mount'n home.

Whar the sun shines so brigh',
Whar the whippo'wills are so lonely and lonesome,
And I wonder if they ever think of me.

At night when I lie down a-lookin' up at heaven,
With a prayer in my heart,
Tow God I pray if they will,
Oh, ift thee go through this war,
So that I can go back to my old Kentucky mount'n home.

Whar the sun shines so brigh',
Whar the whippo'wills are so lonely and lonesome,
After the war is over.

Now the war is over, so I thank God in heaven
That I'm now on my way
Back to my ol' Kentucky mount'n home.

The place where the sun still shines so brigh',
And at night the whippo'wills are so lonely and lonesome.
Place whar I was born and raised.

APPENDIX IV

Chester's Poem

This is Chester's song, although the song is now performed as a poem as a result of faded guitar-playing skills. Chester still refers to it as his song; the difference between the nomenclature is strictly academic. This text differs from Jones's text. The lines presented below were typed from a three-page manuscript hand-written by Chester. Jones's text was taken from a song performance. This fact might account for some of the variation. Chester's writing is faithfully reproduced not to illustrate his phonetic spelling as much as to promote accuracy of the true meaning of the poem. Chester's poem has stanzas that did not exist at the date of the Jones recording; therein lies the significance of the song.

now I. wer Borin and I.
were Raized in an old
Kentucky mountin Home
wher in the Erley mornin
the Sun Shines Brit and
at nit the whiproles cales
are so loney and lonsm

Now I. ame a Long Long
wayes from my old
Kentucky mountin Home
I ame a soldget Boy fere
a fere over the deap see
Where the Sun Hardley
Ever does get throe to shin

at times I. get to Wondrin
about mie old Kentucky
Mountin Home it the sun
still shines Brite ine the
mornin and the Whiprles
stiles Holers at nite

at nite Whin I. Lie down
a Lookin up at Hevens
With a prair in my Hart
O Lord I Pray if there
is a way Let me go throe
this Ware so I can Return
go Back to mie old Kentucky
Mountin Home Where the sun shines

now the Ware is over now
I thank the good Lord
that .I. ane one the Way
Back across the deap Blue
se an one Way Back to
my old Kentucky mountin
Home wher in the mornin Ie
Hoape the the Sun still
Shies Brite and the Whipriles
Still Holers for ther mates

now Hit Bin a Long time
Since the ware I got me
a famley I ame now a
famley mane in old Kentucky
Mountain Home

now not Long ago they came
and tuck my famley away
where I dont no to this day
now I ame ale alone no one
no one to talk to But God
So I turned to the Lord
a Pray Ever day that thay
will Bring Back my famlie

one nite not Long ago
there were a storm Hit such
my old Kentucky mountin
Home But I sleped one
whin I woke Hit were day
Lite and the House and Home
Sill shuk went to the
windo about Everything
were gone with the wind

APPENDIX V

Selected Postulates from the Jones Dissertation

The following postulates are taken from the set of 491 presented by Michael Owen Jones in his dissertation:

- 5c3f. Culture contact, instability, and change, then, may stimulate artistic creation in folk society investing it with a new vitality to suit the changing needs of the times, for
- 5c3f1. Culture not only restricts and conditions the artist but also serves as an expression of human freedom for creativity,
- 5c3f2. and art promotes the interests of a social group, so
- 5c3f1a. the artist objectifies those values and ideas of the group to which he appeals,
- 5c3f1b. and may be sensitive to cultural drift or urbanization thereby creating objects congenial with the values of a new consumer public.
- 5c3f2. As a result of these changes,
- 5c3f2a. the number of artists may diminish, but the level of excellence increase,
- 5c3f2b. or the number of producers may multiply but the quality of the products decline.
- 5c3f3. In Appalachian folk society, urbanization and industrialization have brought about several alterations in the utilitarian art tradition:
- 5c3f3a. Industrialization, with the alteration in tools and techniques, has resulted in
- 5c3f3a1. the reduction of physical labor in craft work,
- 5c3f3a2. the introduction of a degree of standardization (welcomed by the folk craftsman, disregarded by the folk layman, and disparaged by the urbanite),
- 5c3f3a3. the expansion of the variety of things produced, and
- 5c3f3a4. the satiation of growing urbanite consumer demands.
- 5c3f3b. Urbanization has created a new consumer public with values requiring fulfillment which has resulted in the
- 5c3f3b1. creation of a greater variety of products,
- 5c3f3b2. encouragement of innovation,
- 5c3f3b3. generation of new objects, designs, stylistic traits,
- 5c3f3b4. and stimulated the production of utilitarian objects generally that, owing to the effects of industrialization, might otherwise have disappeared.

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