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Folk Custom as a Barometer of Social Change in a Tennessee Community

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Berry,

Chad

1988

FOLK CUSTOM AS A BAROMETER OF SOCIAL CHANGE
IN A TENNESSEE COMMUNITY

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Modern Languages

and Intercultural Studies

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Chad Berry

April 1988

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FOLK CUSTOM AS A BAROMETER OF SOCIAL CHANGE
IN A TENNESSEE COMMUNITY

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FOLK CUSTOM AS A BAROMETER OF SOCIAL CHANGE
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Chad Berry

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108 pages

Directed by: Lynwood Montell, Michael Ann Williams, and Barbara Allen

Department of Modern Languages
and Intercultural Studies

Western Kentucky University

Using the techniques of oral history, residents of the Cypress Creeks area of southwestern middle Tennessee were questioned about their perceptions of the social change since 1940. In that year, the National Park Service hired men in the area to help snake out logs for the Natchez Trace Parkway's right-of-way. For most men in the area, the temporary positions on the Trace were the first "public" jobs they ever had. After these positions were no longer needed, outmigration brought residents north to factory-cities; thus, the building of the parkway remains a watershed in residents' memories as the benchmark when change began. In this study I examined oral material concerning pre- and post-change periods, to see how social change is articulated in people's talk about changes in social folk custom. Moreover, it was found that residents today regret the sense of loss associated with the "good old days" and that this abstract loss is most easily expressed by talking about the concrete changes in the area's customs.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

People was lots different back then to what they are now. People seemed like they was friendlier than what they are now. Now, if you [are] making it, okay, and if not, okay, with them. Now that's the way it is now, but back then if you got out and down people'd come in and help you and especially if you was making a crop--they'd get in there and build that barn. Yes, I've went to lots of log rollings, they called it. That was always fun to me--to go to a log rolling. You know, the women folks would fix the dinner and the men done the log rolling. They used to roll them up and burn them; they didn't saw them up for the lumber. Great big logs--they don't grow now--they've cut all the big ones down. Oh, they might be one or two standing around, but not many like they used to be. After they got the logs rolled, by that time we'd have dinner ready and all eat dinner and talk and laugh . . . and they'd play the fiddle. [Those who] could dance--they'd dance. We'd just have a big time.

Altie Bowen

This study is about neither log rollings nor square dances, but rather about the larger ramifications of these memories. It concerns perceptions of the past compared to those about the present in the Cypress Creeks, a small community in southwestern middle Tennessee. There, I found that social change is best articulated through people's talk about changes in social folk custom, such as log rollings and square dances.

The definition of custom set forth by Jan Brunvand holds that it is a traditional practice--a mode of individual behavior or a habit of social life--that is transmitted by word of mouth or imitation, then ingrained by social pressure, common usage, and parental

or other authority.¹ While I subscribe to Brunvand's basic premise, I prefer to sharpen the concept of custom by hewing it down to social folk custom, which in this study includes religious practices, visiting practices, burial customs, school customs, and occupational customs.

The reason I use social folk custom in this study and not something else, such as architecture, for instance,² is because changes in custom are a regular topic for reminiscence by residents of the study area. In this study of the Cypress Creeks,³ people repeatedly talked about changes in social folk custom perhaps in the same way Gladys-Marie Fry's narrators spoke about night riding.⁴ Similarly, William Ivey showed how a 1913 disaster was the subject of talk about the past in a Michigan community,⁵ and as Barbara Allen has written, ". . . how people talk about their community's past--not only what they say but how they say it--reveals what they consider to be important in that past."⁶

In order to garner this talk about the past, I used oral history, which Edward D. Ives says is particularly effective at analyzing conceptions of past events and behavior.⁷ Because oral history has gained both respect and usage in research in recent years, it is not necessary to justify its use here. Larry Danielson's thought about the oral record seems to suffice for present purposes:

We may reach some agreement that the collective oral record and personal oral testimony can provide us data with which to construct a quasi-objective past as well as valuable insights into the way in which that past is perceived by the community members They [oral records] are a significant contribution to the understanding of the local past, historically, sociologically, even psychologically.⁸

Richard M. Dorson once wrote that in literate civilizations the

personal sense of history has all but vanished--save in the local community.⁹ The personal sense of history is quite strong among the elderly in the Tennessee community of the Cypress Creeks,¹⁰ because conversations about the past were going on all the time. The testimony that often I merely needed to record was based on the personal reminiscence: "the practice of repeatedly recounting or thinking about particular events and incidents in one's life."¹¹

What I have done in this study is to gather some of the talk about changes in folk custom and examine the social change that is articulated in it. In this way, folk custom becomes a barometer that measures the extent of social change. It is difficult for a narrator to articulate differences in social changes between the 1940s and today. It is easier for a narrator to tell you about the differences in visitation customs, for instance, which in turn reveal something about the extent of social change.

The Cypress Creeks area was the home of my paternal grandparents until they migrated northward first to Akron, Ohio, and then to South Bend, Indiana, in 1947. They left the Cypress Creeks traveling on the road that my grandfather helped construct: the new Natchez Trace National Parkway. In Indiana, they found jobs, a house with a back yard large enough to plant a garden, and other southerners who were there for similar reasons: everyone wanted a better opportunity to "make it" in life. Eventually, they found a new kind of good life--one based upon money and getting more money--a happiness very different from what they had been accustomed to back home.

While they would never again return to the Cypress Creeks permanently, they made it a practice to visit the area as often as possible, like pilgrims returning to Canterbury. I have been

brought along, I am told, since I was six months old -- thus is how I learned of Cypress Creeks. Even at a young age, I can remember sitting with the old men under the porch of Homer Darby's store at Cypress Inn, listening to them talk about how much and how quickly their lives had changed, or sitting in a kitchen licking a bowl of pound cake batter while women spoke similar thoughts.

I had made many trips to the Cypress Creeks before my first fieldwork visit in May 1985. Talk about the past was all around me on these trips.¹² But it was then, after becoming familiar with the techniques of oral history, that I decided to find out exactly why "the good old days" were always discussed, both by my grandparents whether they were in Tennessee or Indiana, and by the people who still lived in the Cypress Creeks area.

The first days of fieldwork were spent driving back into time with my grandfather along the dusty roads of Big Cypress Creek, his birthplace. I intended for these initial trips to orient me to the area; even though I was to encounter there much of twentieth-century America, and although I had been to the Cypress Creeks countless times, when viewed through researcher's eyes the area took a new and different look.

The first day my grandfather and I drove down to a cemetery on Thomas Holt's land, on the Big Cypress Road. What once was a graveyard of about an acre today only has eight or ten plots, some of which are unmarked. Rich creek-bottom land was too precious to be set aside for a cemetery and had gradually been plowed over.¹³ We drove farther, past old homesites that were venerable to my grandfather, past the place where his father had died of typhoid fever at the age of twenty-eight and his grandfather, "Pappe's," homeplace

that now lies between mile markers 345 and 346 on the Natchez Trace, and past one of the first places where my grandfather tended land--all on a stretch of gravel lane of about one mile.

The next stop was the Lawson Cemetery, where his great-grandparents were buried. The cemetery is small but still well-kept, and bounded by mammoth cedars along the edge of the road. Above the hill stands a vernacular architectural treasure: the home of Miss Delma Rich. The dogtrot house is large, with a half-story above. The dwelling is made to look even more imposing by its placement on top of the hill. Out on the long porch, Delma sat, perhaps from there able to see her grave site prematurely marked with a tombstone, but with the death date left blank. She has lived in the house all her life, until recently with her brother, Claude, who died in 1979. Neither was ever married, except, in a way perhaps, to each other. People say that she has never left her home since his death.

Thinking Delma's home to be the logical place to find out something of days gone by, we walked up to the house seeking an appointment for an interview. My grandfather had to remind her who he was. "We went up north in '47," he explained. Her deep, tired eyes brightened as she began talking about his father, Bob. "He was a good man," she remembered. "He would have done anything for anybody." She told about the time that her sister was sick in the room directly behind us and how Bob paced the floor, wanting to get the doctor. She reminded us that she and Bob had grown up together; he lived just down the road. Sadly, Delma recounted his tragic bout with the "fever." Just after he revived, she said, someone succumbed to his pleadings for food and gave him molasses. A few minutes later, just before his death, he muttered, "Whatever

you do, just don't give Alvin [my grandfather who had typhoid fever also] any molasses." My grandfather wiped away a tear.

While the two were catching up on the latest news, I gazed at the history-laden house; Delma said that she imagined it to be 150 years old. Under each step, the porch planks would bow, and Delma told us that recently a plank had broken under her, and she thought that her ankle had been broken. "Have you gone to the doctor?" I asked. "Well, no," she muttered. I looked out into the yard and saw an old wind ornament carved by her oldest brother, Henderson, also a bachelor. The decaying, grey propellor would turn now only with the strongest gust of wind. I felt disappointed that Delma did not trust me enough to allow me to photograph her or to return for an interview. Being rejected on the first occasion for an interview, we went down the road to a round log barn.

The difference in the two lives, those of my grandfather and Delma, set the tone for what I would encounter in my fieldwork. Delma has remained on the family homestead all her life, and knows little about the conveniences of modern American life, like VCRs, televisions, and microwaves. My grandfather, on the other hand, left the Cypress Creeks area in the 1940s to stake out a better lot in life, and now his more mainstream life is very different from Delma's sheltered environment. The important thing that ties these two different types of people together, however, is the lifestyle that they once enjoyed together: when people visited, went to all-day church services, walked to school, and plowed their own fields. Today, that customary lifestyle has changed, and I realized it after my first day of fieldwork.

I began interviewing the day after meeting Delma, although

quite unsure of my possibility of success. My grandfather, thinking that I was searching for was information about the "old days when we were growing up," at first began to recall people who both talkative (after all, he was keenly aware that I had a tape recorder) and adept at recollecting; this is how I chose my narrators. In turn, narrators would often suggest others whose "memory is even better than mine." After establishing rapport with a narrator, I began with the all-encompassing question of "Tell me what life was like when you were young."¹⁴

In almost every instance, people began answering this question with a phrase something like, "Well, it sure wasn't like it is today" Change in general and in folk custom in particular were always the major discussion topics in every interview. After this general question was exhausted, the narrator, my grandfather, and I moved on to other topics. If the narrator recalled school experiences, we talked about those memories; if someone wanted to talk about religion, I let him or her.¹⁵ An important part of the interview came at the end of my questioning when I would induce free conversation between my grandfather (and grandmother, if she were present) and the narrator. This dialogue made the tapes more complete, often covering new topics.

Throughout the fieldwork, I placed as few demands as possible upon the narrator. In addition to the open-ended questioning, I allowed the interview to take place wherever the narrator felt most comfortable--often on the front porch or out in a swing under a large maple. Unfortunately, perhaps, the finished, written product can in no way substitute, even minimally, for the experience of hearing Allen Barkley's guineas squawk at my unfamiliar presence,

or hearing the wind rustling through an overhead tree as captured on tape.

My position in the area was unique; I had the best of both worlds as an interviewer. As a northerner, I was definitely an outsider, but as the grandson of Alvin and Ruby Berry, I was also an insider, as long as I was in their presence. My grandfather accompanied me on every interview except one during the first fieldwork trip. Thus, I was able to see with the eyes of an outsider and still preserve the trust of my narrators.

Since that first month-long fieldwork trip in 1985, I have spent several more months in the Cypress Creeks area, interviewing, photographing, and observing. I have spoken with people who have moved away permanently, those who moved away, retired, and returned, and those, of course, who never left. Conversations with over forty people have given me a good understanding of the common perceptions of all regarding social and economic changes that have occurred within one generation.

Thus, the value of this study lies in coupling folk cultural data in the form of folk custom with historical information on social change. The result is a gauge of people's perception of change. The remainder of the study is divided as follows: Presented in Chapter Two is the historical background of the Cypress Creeks along with an examination of past customs, while in Chapter Three I examine the building of the Natchez Trace National Parkway and the resulting outmigration and disillusionment associated with it. In Chapter Four I look at remigration and at customs today. Chapter Five, in conclusion, contains analytical views of the focal points around which people's notions of change revolve.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER ONE

¹Jan Harold Brunvand, The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), pp. 224-45.

²See, for example, Charles E. Martin, Hollybush: Folk Building and Social Change in An Appalachian Community (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984).

³Residents of the community do not have one encompassing name to describe the area of the three Big, Middle, and Little Cypress Creeks; therefore, I have chosen to call the area "the Cypress Creeks."

⁴Gladys-Marie Fry, Night Riders in Black Folk History (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975).

⁵William Ivey, "The 1913 Disaster: Michigan Local Legend," Folklore Forum 3:4 (1970): 100-114.

⁶Barbara Allen, "Talking About the Past: A Folkloristic Study of Orally Communicated History" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1980) p. 13. Also see Homesteading the High Desert (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987).

⁷Larry Danielson, "The Folklorist, the Oral Historian, and Local History," Oral History Review 8 (1980): 64.

⁸Danielson, p. 72.

⁹Richard M. Dorson is quoted in Danielson, p. 72.

¹⁰Paul Thompson, in "History and the Community," in Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology, David Dunaway and Willa Baum, eds. (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1984), p. 38, notes the importance of interviewing the elderly: "Too often ignored, and economically emasculated, it can give back to them a dignity, a sense of purpose, in going back over their lives and handing on valuable information to a younger generation." Since all the narrators in this study were over sixty, Thompson's thoughts are especially applicable here.

¹¹John Neuenschwander, "Oral Historians and Long-Term Memory," in Dunaway and Baum, p. 328.

¹²See Allen, p. 2: "Talk about the past--orally communicated history--goes on all around us all the time. Its subject matter ranges from the most intimate details of an individual's personal life to historic events that have affected many people."

¹³Ironically, with the changes in agriculture today, most bottom lands go unused today.

¹⁴The age of twenty-four narrators in this first fieldwork trip ranged from the early sixties to one man who was 104. Thus, information recollected dated prior to 1940.

¹⁵This is significant because although I guided the interviews topically (such as religion, education, etc.), I allowed the narrator to talk about anything he or she saw fit to tell me about the topic. For implications of open-ended questioning, see Chapter Four of Allen, "Talking About the Past."

CHAPTER TWO

That Was Then

Everybody was in the same boat back then. One wasn't a bit classier than the other. We all worked in the fields, all had those [kerosene] lights, and nearly everybody had a big family.

Opal Martin

The intent in this chapter is two-fold. First, it is necessary to briefly describe the Cypress Creeks area physically, historically, and economically to provide a baseline of experience against which change can be measured. This "pre-change" period dates from about 1920 to 1940; the latter is the date when construction on the Natchez Trace Parkway began. Second, I move on to descriptions of social folk customs from the "pre-change" period which provide a background against which change can be measured in Chapters Four and Five.

Wayne County lies in the extreme southwestern corner of middle Tennessee. The county is bounded on the south by Lauderdale County, Alabama, on the north by Perry and Lewis counties, on the east by Lawrence County, and on the west by the Tennessee River and Hardin County.¹ [See figures I and II.]

A glance at a United States Geological Survey map quickly reveals the broken surface of the area. The number of creeks and valleys is very great, and the relatively high elevation of the county above the Tennessee River (800 feet) gives the creeks

CIRCA 1800

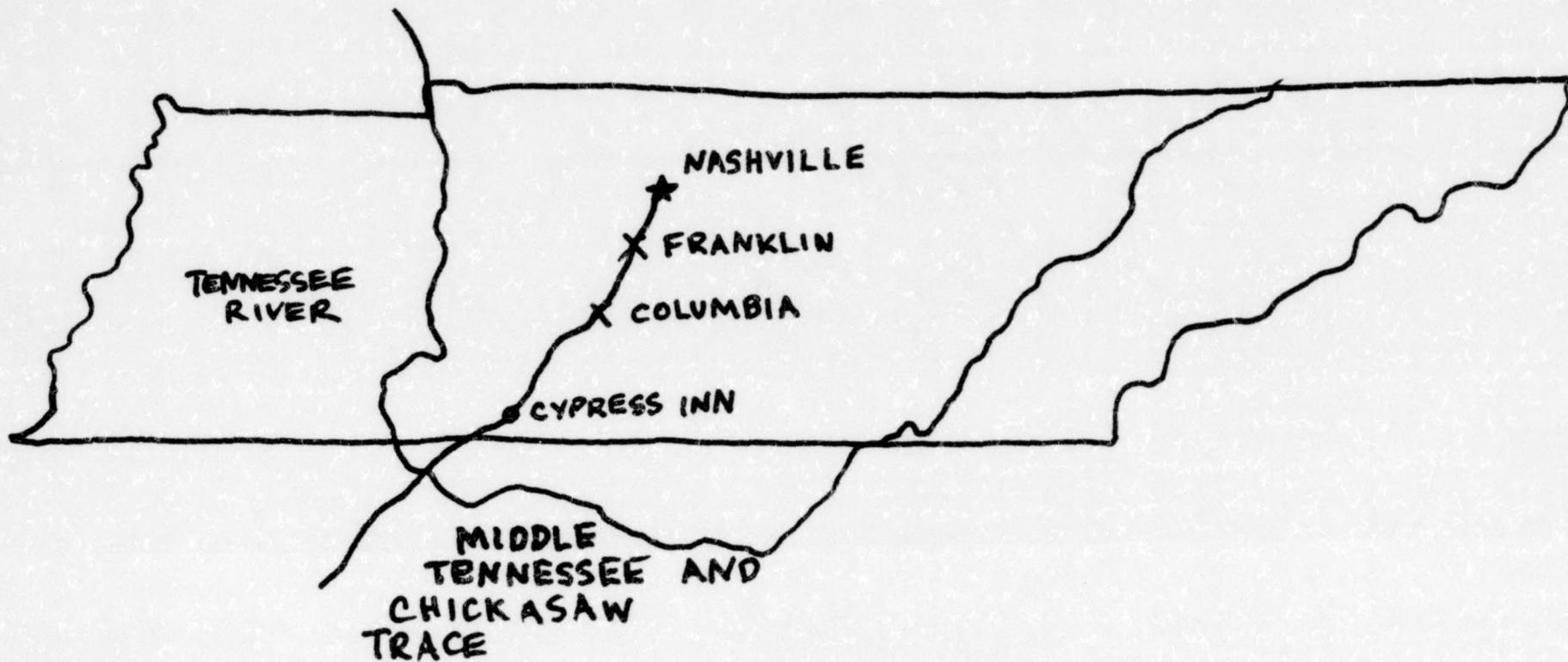


Figure I - EARLY SETTLEMENTS AND ROADS, STATE OF TENNESSEE

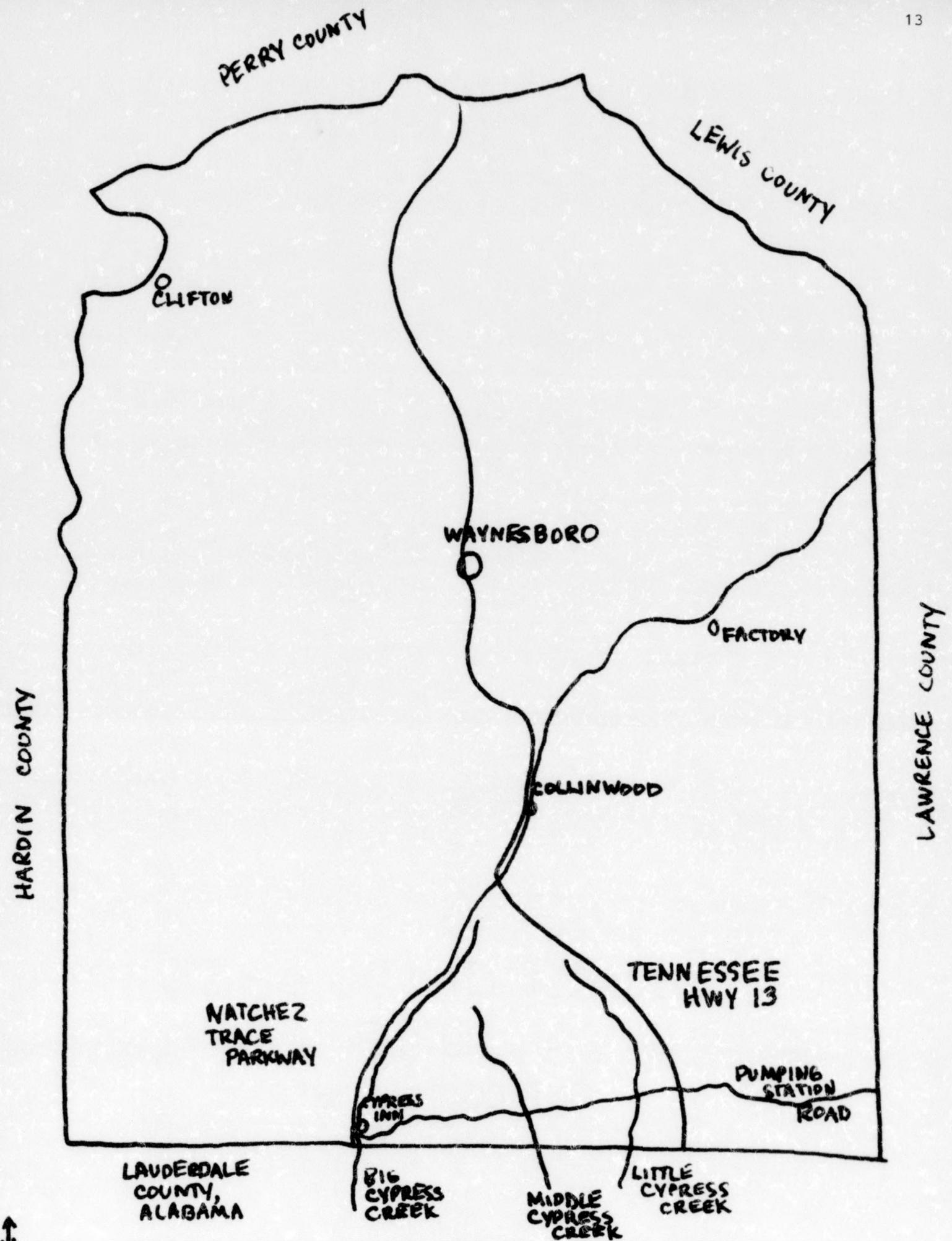


Figure II - WAYNE COUNTY AND THE CYPRESS CREEKS

a swift and rapid fall.² The principal streams are Indian Creek, Hardin Creek, Shoal Creek, Buffalo River, Bush Creek, and Second Creek. Butler Creek, Big, Middle, and Little Cypress creeks, and Factor Fork are all tributaries of Shoal Creek, which empties into the Tennessee River in Alabama before the river takes its northward turn toward Paducah, Kentucky.³

The fact that the county has so many creeks was important in its early white settlement. The streams are characterized by narrow valleys one hundred to three hundred feet deep and bordered by the steep slopes of the intervening ridges. Because most of the tillable land is located along the streams and because of the constant supply of water along them,⁴ early settlement took place largely on or near the creeks and rarely on the accompanying ridges.⁵ Many mill sites were placed on these creeks in pioneer times. Hence, most place names in the area denote either creeks or hollows; almost never are ridges named. The soils of the county are very rough and rocky; in the late nineteenth century only twenty to twenty-five percent of the area was cleared and cultivated,⁶ most of it along creek bottoms. Hill slopes were normally used for grazing.⁷

The county's immense forests were early locales for lumbering and sawmilling. It was reported by one early source that in the southern areas of the county large growths of yellow pine could be found, while elsewhere the ridges furnished oak, chestnut, and poplar, and the creek bottoms were covered by cedar.⁸ The area's large chestnut reserves were once prized by over a dozen noted tanneries within the county which produced more than 200,000 pounds of leather annually.⁹ After the Civil War, these manufacturers were reduced

to four.

Other notable resources that affected settlement were the county's large deposits of iron ore and limestone; of 700 square miles of land in Wayne County, 200 square miles were once mineral lands. A large blast furnace was constructed near Waynesboro in 1835 and expanded in 1868.¹⁰ It is important to remember that these resources did not affect county residents on a large scale; early county histories seemed to be insistent on focusing mainly on the county's potential, given these natural resources.

Before white settlement penetrated the area, Wayne County was Chickasaw Territory. When white settlement began in the early nineteenth century, it is reported that no Indians were living in the area. On April 21, 1806, the President, by act of Congress, was authorized to open a road from Nashville to Natchez along what was then known as the Middle Tennessee Chickasaw Trace, and thus the Natchez Trace was officially born, although it had been a common trail long before white settlement. Almost immediately, stands, or tavern-inns, emerged along the route in the county; these included Ruppertown, Factory, Victory, McGlamery Stand,¹¹ Whitten's Stand, and Cypress Inn.¹² Northern areas of the county are today laced with Indian burial mounds.¹³

The state legislature had to act twice to establish the county, for the first proposal in 1817 was illegal until the Treaty was signed the following year; officially, the county was formed in 1819. It was named for General Anthony ("Mad Anthony") Wayne of Revolutionary War fame. The Goodspeed History indicates that the first settlers in the county were mainly from older counties of middle Tennessee (notably Hickman and Williamson) and from

the Carolinas. Settlement was made, it is reported, on the basis of North Carolina military grants, occupants' claims, and warrants.¹⁴ This first wave of settlement began in the second decade of the nineteenth century, and greatly increased in the third decade with the passage of the Western District Treaty with the Chickasaws.

Examination of federal census data for Wayne County reveals two additional waves of settlement. The first took place from about 1828 to 1832 and the second after 1838. Both waves brought people from South Carolina in general, and from Newberry and Laurens counties in particular.¹⁵

Waynesboro, the largest town and county seat, was established in 1821. It lies near the geographic center of the county.¹⁶ Clifton, a river town in the northwest section of the county, was formed in 1840 and at one time was the most prominent port between Florence, Alabama, and Paducah, Kentucky.¹⁷ Collinwood, the third largest town, is situated thirteen miles south of Waynesboro and was created in 1914 by the Collinwood Land Company, part of the Tennessee Valley Iron and Railroad Company. It gained importance because of a railroad that served mining and lumbering interests. During World War I, it was home to a large chemical plant.¹⁸

There are several other small communities, but here our interest is directed at Cypress Inn, which lies on Big Cypress Creek, just west of Middle Cypress Creek and Little Cypress Creek. Cypress Inn is located close to the state line on the Natchez Trace. Little is known about the community, but conjecturally it likely began as a stand along the Trace. In the 1920s, according to oral sources, the community boasted a general store, a school, and a Chevrolet dealership.¹⁹

While settlers in the Cypress Creeks area encountered natural resources like woodlands and iron, few were able to effectively transform these reserves into a profitable living. Instead, the majority of people faced the terrain in its most difficult terms: the rocky and infertile soil, its alternating ridge and bottom landscape, and its many creeks. Residents contented themselves with an agricultural lifestyle that was successful as long as family mouths were fed. That way of life that began with initial settlement continued virtually unchanged until the second decade of the twentieth century. The 1920s are a benchmark of a sort from which change is measured by people today and, thus, is the logical place to begin discussion of what narrators remembered life to be like.

Opal Martin's comment that people were "in the same boat back then" implies that people on the Cypress Creeks largely lived in the same type of hand-crafted houses and worked the same kind of rocky land, an economic factor that influenced and fostered socializing and community spirit. Many people I spoke with emphasized the hard work of everyday life--work that took place for the most part in or around the homeplace. Edith Darby explained:

We had an average living. We didn't live in luxury, but we didn't want for nothing. [My daddy] raised all of our food; we had plenty of stuff to eat. Mother canned a lot--she made lots of jams and jellies and she . . . had dried beans and dried peas and she'd dry fruit and can fruit. We had a good living, but we all worked hard.²⁰

Edith's father was a minister, and could be assured of occasional gifts from his congregation--whether it be a fried chicken meal on Sunday or a bushel of corn for livestock. But others were

not quite so fortunate. Altie Bowen recalled the difficult life of sawmill workers even as late as 1942:

In '42, we moved to what we called the Dick Mac Hollow. That winter, it was sixteen below zero and you could see the sunlight through the tip of the house and the chickens under the floor. . . . We kept a big fire in the fireplace. I think we had a lot of billets [scraps of hickory used for wagon spokes]--it was hickory, you know--and David'd [her husband] fill the fireplace full of them things and get them good and hot, and he kept a fire all night We'd bring our water and set it on the hearth and I'd cover it over, and that bucket of water'd be froze. We'd have to thaw it out the next morning and go back to the spring for more. I thought there wasn't no use to bring it to the house and David said something might catch a fire and maybe we could maybe knock the ice out of it! [chuckles] So, our house wasn't too good That's the reason people are sick so much today--their house is too tight We lived just in sawmill shacks. Of course they didn't leak. I told David that was one good thing; I can make out with the cracks as long as it just don't rain on me. I liked to sleep when it was raining²¹

Much of the testimony I recorded was infused with humor, as Altie's was, and with emotions stemming from the personal experience of the past. Opal Martin, like other wives who had young children, recalled the loneliness that she experienced at home taking care of the children while her husband, Ed, worked in the fields:

I wouldn't see him until night It would be dark when he'd come home and he'd go to yodeling about a quarter of a mile before he got to the house, to let me know he was coming. And he was coming down this road right to the house and when I first heard him yodeling, I mean I hit that road--it was just as dark and it's a wonder that I didn't step on a snake. And I'd go until I met him--I don't care how far. (And anything could've got me in the woods, but I wasn't afraid.)

And one time Mr. Lacefield was boarding with us, and he was in front of Ed coming to the house but he wasn't yodeling. I was going for Ed because he was yodeling, and I saw him [Mr. Lacefield] and grabbed that man and he said, "Uh-oh, uh-oh." He said, "This is Mr. Lacefield; it ain't Ed."

That just about killed me and I went right on and met him and grabbed him [Ed], and I said, "Honey, I grabbed Mr. Lacefield and thought it was you!" [laughs] I couldn't look at that man for a long time. I just fixed breakfast and'd go away--I was so embarrassed.²²

Perhaps because people were all involved in the same experience, everyone I spoke with emphasized the friendliness, neighborliness, and communal spirit that typified life on the Cypress Creeks. "People was friendly and neighborly, and . . . everybody was everybody's neighbor," Edith Darby remembered. "Back at that time, if [Mother] had neighbors that didn't have milk, she'd divide her milk with them--give it to them."²³

Residents often remembered that Sunday afternoons were frequently spent visiting with family and friends. "Some of the neighbors would come home with us [from church] and the kids'd get out and play somewhere," Ethel Jackson recalled. "I really enjoyed it when neighbors would all visit each other."²⁴ My great-great aunt, Virgie Rich, told me that often on Saturday evenings, her mother and older sisters would begin getting out quilts to be used as "pallets," for along with the twelve people in her family, they could expect at least two other families (that normally had eight to ten children in each) to arrive about dusk, after all the animals had been fed, milked, and watered. Such evenings were festive ones, for one room of their dogtrot was transformed into a square dance hall, complete with shy young boys and girls and festive fiddle players. Young children busied themselves eating popcorn and roasted peanuts while the adults talked and danced. When bedtime came, the guests did not leave; the women unrolled the pallets for beds, and everyone--usually at least thirty--stayed all night to awake to a mammoth breakfast before church. Thelma Mae Dixon had fond memories of the Sunday afternoon

meals as well:

On Sunday . . . we had a special Sunday dinner--always. Older women always prepared their Sunday dinner on Saturdays--their pies and their cakes. Homemade bread--oh, I saw my mother have just rows of loaves out in the sun with a sheet spread over so it would rise. It would rise up there and brown so pretty when we put it in that oven.²⁵

Along with the dinners and visiting, Sunday worship was an integral part of residents' weekends. Sunday morning services gave a person not only an inspirational experience, perhaps, but also afforded a social experience as well, for it was one of the few times when people were brought together as a community. The social function of churchgoing is revealed in the fact that people did not necessarily attend only one church. When I asked Dick Fowler what church he attended when younger, he replied, "Oh, I went to Mt. Pleasant, Oak Grove, Crossroads, Scotts Chapel, Piney Grove, Railroad, Mt. Hope"; the list seemed endless.²⁶ Allen Barkley noted how crowded the church lots were outside and how noisy the sanctuaries were inside:

You used to go to church and the place would be covered up in wagons and mules (tied) and about twelve o'clock you'd hear mules braying all over the place, you know. They knowed it was about feeding time same as you did. I went to Little Bethel here whenever they'd all get to shouting and Miss Mary Henson would jump benches just like a goat, man, and shout and carry on there until wee hours of the morning. Piney Grove--they was bad to shout out there.²⁷

Repeatedly, people remembered the spiritual outbursts of "Amen!" and "Praise the Lord!" that once characterized religious gatherings. Thelma Mae Dixon recalled her younger experiences of churchgoing:

My first churchgoing was down here at the Railroad Methodist Church. We went there quite a few years.

But we had to walk and carry our shoes. We'd pull our shoes off and walk to about nearly there and then we'd always carry a wet rag along . . . and we'd have to wash our feet off and put our shoes back on. When we got back to that spot we took them back off and went on home. The [church] house would be crammed full. You'd come and stay all day long. Everybody brought dinner and everybody shouted from one end of the house to the other. These young women, Mary and Viola, oh, they'd just shout the house top off and you could hear them for a quarter of a mile, anyway you listened.²⁸

She concluded, "Back then they preached under the anointing of the Spirit."

Decoration Days, or Decorations as they are known locally, like church life, were remembered fondly by the people on the Cypress Creeks as well. A Decoration is similar to a Memorial Day observance elsewhere, except that each cemetery in the area has one particular Sunday designated as its Decoration Day. Dick Fowler explained that the origin of this custom locally dates to around 1908. He said that in May of that year there was a local Campbellite preacher who was holding a revival at Mount Hope Church of Christ in Cypress Inn. His wife had recently died and he was still mourning for her. At the beginning of the revival he explained to the congregation that on Sunday, the revival's Victory Day, he would like to have a meal eaten out on the grounds. It would be followed by singing, preaching, and decorating and marching around the graves. This was the area's first Decoration Day. Mount Hope's Decoration is still the second Sunday in May and it is the summer's first observance. Decorations continue throughout the summer, ending with one at McGlamery Cemetery on the first Sunday in September. There are sufficient graveyards in the area so that virtually every Sunday is a Decoration within

the Cypress Creeks area.

The Decorations, people recalled, were prepared for weeks in advance. Women were charged with making crepe paper flowers that would adorn each grave, whether it had a "tombrock" or not. "They made a lot of them [flowers] out of this tissue paper--crepe paper and tissue," Ethel Jackson explained. "You know, they got to buying tissue paper and making colored flowers look like carnations; most all the flowers were homemade."²⁹ On the day of the observance, women and children would go on wildflower hunts, looking for natural flowers to be used as well. The women also did the cooking and often began preparation for the meal days in advance. Among the most popular foods were roasted goat, chicken and dumplings, and fried pies. The food was then transported to the cemetery by wagon. My great-great aunt Virgie Rich, said she wondered why the food wasn't "slung to pieces" by the time they got to the cemetery. Once there, the delicacies were placed on quilts that had been spread on the ground for the occasion.

Men in the community also had Decoration Day duties to fulfill. Because the cemeteries were not always regularly mowed as they are now, the men of the congregation (or of the families with relatives buried in the cemeteries if there was no church) would "clean off the graves" the week before; this included raking leaves, cutting down tall grass, removing saplings, and mounding up dirt on the graves so that each plot looked freshly used. "They'd all gather maybe on Saturday afternoon and clean the cemetery off or go different days through the week and work a little," explained Ethel Jackson.³⁰

Once the tasks leading up to the special day were finished,

residents arrived by wagons, mules, and horses. "In the olden days, they all come [by] foot, horseback, buggies--any way they could get to it, and up here at Mt. Hope they always had big crowds," Ed Martin recalled.³¹ Edith Darby remembered that

at Decorations [at Mt. Pleasant] they'd line up and march through the cemetery and sing songs as they marched through . . . and then they'd gather around that big old tree at Mt. Pleasant (now this is my picture of it--I can remember it--that one that's about dead now), they'd gather under that tree and they'd have a service out in the cemetery; that's the way they used to do.³²

Compared with all other social events, Decorations were the most important, attracting virually every member of the community--whether "saved" or "unsaved." "Well, when I was growing up," Allen Barkley explained, "you'd go to a Decoration and you'd see five or six drunks, and mules and things (they wasn't no cars). Everybody liked to go and you'd walk for miles [to get there]. And then," he continued, "they was a big crowd at them places--everybody got there and they stayed there until the thing broke up in the evening."³³

Decorations were also an important place for young people to meet and possibly to court. People told me that by the afternoon of the Decoration, the young people would have a path worn to the nearest spring.

Well, we used to go to the Decorations and there was always a spring [a] pretty good piece from the [church] house, so a bunch of us'd get together and walk to the spring--we'd have to go to the spring several times, you know, just to get a drink or to see who was down there [or] to find a boyfriend and they'd walk back with you.³⁴

When I asked narrators how they met their spouses, half said that they had met at Decoration. This is how my grandparents met.

Earlene Barkley met her husband, Allen, "at the Crossroads Decoration,

in '46, then we got married in '47. I had seen him a time or two before," she explained, "and he was drunk [laughs]. Yeah, he was. That was in June, then we got married in December."³⁵

If people on the Cypress Creeks held the dead in reverence, they also expressed deep sympathy for the bereaved. Many people said that had a farmer died or fallen ill in the area, other men would "drop their hoes" in their own fields and go work out his, often producing a better crop than he could have himself. "When somebody died in the community," Allen Barkley explained, "everybody quit whatever they were doing right then and they didn't hit another lick. Any needs that they [the family] had coming, the community'd see that they got it--on 'til they got over this thing and could get back on their feet again."³⁶

Several people recalled that their fathers always kept a few choice planks out of the sawmill pile to be used for coffins, always made at no charge.³⁷ The fact that coffins were made locally in response to need was emphasized more than any other death custom, reflecting the pride, care, and time that Cypress Creeks residents had for their dead. As Sterlin Reeves said:

My grandfather . . . had lumber cut; he had his [own] farm when he first bought it. [It] had plenty of big, large timber, and he kept lumber cut and seasoned. [When] anybody . . . died in the community, they would dress that lumber by hand, with a hand plane, and they would make the casket. I've heard my mother say she would set up lots of nights working on a casket. He didn't even charge them for the lumber--he gave them the whole works.³⁸

"They'd set up all night building those caskets and maybe the women would make clothes for the one that had passed away to put on," Sterlin's wife, Nadean, added. "They dug their own graves, and the family wasn't left [without help]. They [neighbors] carried

food, they worked, and done whatever they could."³⁹

In talking about funerals, Annie Olive explained that people did the best they could with the resources that they had. "They was just plain funerals. They didn't have flowers to decorate with like they do now. If one passed away, [he or she] was carried back to his home and kept until funeral time."⁴⁰ Women told me that it was common for them to gather together the night before a funeral and sit by the wooden coffin and make paper flowers as they would for a Decoration. "When people died," Earlene Barkley recalled, "they would sit up all night. I remember them doing it at Grandma Whitten's . . . and they would make flowers to go on that grave."⁴¹

Because of the area's rocky soil, and since graves were dug by hand, cemeteries acquired the reputations of being either easy or difficult to dig. "Right over here at Mt. Pleasant's the hardest place ever I tried to dig a grave," Allen Barkley said. "You didn't hit a lick that the fire didn't fly out down there with a pick."⁴² Many who were buried in wooden coffins had graves marked with handmade tombstones, for the nearest monument makers were in Waynesboro and Lawrenceburg, thirty miles away. Some graves were even enclosed in gravehouses, which expressed the personal sentiment for a friend or relative.⁴³

Along with memories of Decorations, church life, and funerals, there were also recollections of school days on the Cypress Creeks. Narrators remembered everyday things like the walk to school in the morning with their lunch buckets and a game of baseball in the afternoon.

Once one's chores were finished (making beds, helping with breakfast, splitting wood, feeding stock), the walk to school began.

"We carried our lunch in a tin pail . . . everyday," Ethel Jackson remembered. "Ours was a great long coffee bucket . . . and [our mother would] pack our three lunches in it."⁴⁴ Many narrators had fond memories of the lunches that their "Mas" would pack them. Residents explained the specific packing techniques with me: putting hot foods on the bottom and cold on the top insured a fresh lunch by noontime. Several narrators told me that in the morning the spring near the schoolhouse would be filled with small bottles of fresh milk, anchored by strings to a rock or twig, and chilled by waters coming out of the earth. "We'd carry us a bottle of milk from home and tie it out in the summertime," Willie Daniel explained, "tie it out in the branch that went by the schoolhouse. Then when dinner time come we'd go and get our bottles and eat our dinners and drink our milk."⁴⁵

Among the more common foods were biscuits soaked in molasses, fried potatoes, warmed-over beans from supper the night before, and occasionally apples. "She'd boil us eggs sometimes," Ethel Jackson said, "and if she had any beans left from supper, she'd heat them over so they wouldn't sour and put them in our lunch, and taters and different things--she'd usually have an apple to put in, and we'd have biscuits everyday."⁴⁶

Children usually began the walk to school with brothers and sisters, and often with neighbors who lived up the road. The average walk each way was from one to three miles, for the Cypress Creeks were dotted with eight schools at one time. "We walked . . . a mile-and-a-half," Ethel Jackson said. "We walked everyday--rain or snow or sleet or whatever. We had quite a time at school down here at Scotts Chapel below the church."⁴⁷

Schoolhouses consisted of simple sheathed dwellings, about twenty by thirty feet, with windows on two sides, a door beneath the gabled front, and a stove pipe at the opposite end. "It was just a little one-room schoolhouse when we went, and the benches were made out of just plain plank. We didn't have any desks back then," Ethel remembered. "It wasn't a log schoolhouse; it was just weatherboarded."⁴⁸ A chalkboard took up half the wall bordering the stove.

Residents chuckled about the lack of grass to be found outside on the "playground." They easily remembered the games they played while on recess. "We'd play a little ball or dig up a stump or something," Leonard Dodd recalled. "We had a ball diamond and that stump was right in the way--a great big old stump. We'd just dig awhile on it and then take a pole and pry on it and we finally got that stump out."⁴⁹ Ethel remembered several of the games played at school:

It was all baseball then. That was the only kind of ball we had. [We also played] ant-me over--that was to throw the ball over the house; [chuckles] blindfold; drop the handkerchief--we'd make a big ring and somebody'd go around with a handkerchief and drop it and I don't remember now--it's been so long--just how it did turn out.⁵⁰

She also remembered jumping rope so much that her legs burned from irritation.

The school term in most schools lasted from July to March, with special breaks during cotton-picking time and other major harvesting events. Ethel remembered that "we'd come home at recess a lot of times and help during crop gathering time, too."⁵¹ The curriculum could best be described as basic, with instruction in reading, handwriting, arithmetic, history, and geography. Spelling was a popular subject with several narrators; Willie Daniel still had a certificate that

he had won in a competition. The school day's highlight was either a spelling bee or a math contest called a "cipher." Ethel Jackson explained the day's typical schedule:

They met at eight o'clock and I guess she taught until up around ten, and then they had a recess and played for about an hour . . . and then she took up books (of course she had a bell to ring), and I guess about eleven-thirty or twelve they turned out for dinner (about twelve I guess). Then we had another hour for recess. We took up books again and had another recess about the middle of the afternoon, and at four she turned out.⁵²

Eighty students, I was told, was the usual number for all eight grades in area schools--all the more remarkable when one remembers that there was only one teacher. Proctor Wilson nicely summarized his education:

I went to what [was] known as Crossroads School. It was about two miles from home and I had to walk that two miles. We only had four months of school, and sometimes in the fall it'd get cold and the teacher'd send some of us boys who were up to a pretty good size out around in the woods and gather up limbs to burn in the stove. There was about seventy-five kids in that school and all ages from just starting up to--some of them was up towards twenty-five years old, I guess, and they was just one room in the school house. And I remember I didn't have a tablet to write on until I was great big; there was a big blackboard that went across one whole side of the house and we'd have to put our arithmetic and everything on that board.⁵³

A few people told me that a child's own father sometimes would be in the same class, perhaps because he realized, at a later age, the value of education.

In addition to farming, church life, and school days, narrators also talked about transportation and occupation, although at somewhat less length. People told me how they saw each other and spoke to each other often. People talked with their neighbors each day, and mingled with the entire community on a regular basis at church

or at a general store like Homer Darby's.⁵⁴ Howard Wright said that his favorite day of the week was Sunday evening, because his father would let him take a mule and "go visiting."⁵⁵ It was common for people to walk three miles down the road to a neighbor's house to borrow a froe or turnplow. If the trip was timed correctly, the borrower was invited to stay for the noon meal. Residents enjoyed a trip to the store simply to catch up on the latest news around the community.

The point is that because of all of this visiting, an informal network of communication emerged within the community. Pearl Coffman explained that she always knew when my great-great-grandmother was about ready for delivery, for she could hear my grandfather singing and whistling by her family's home on his way to Aunt Jane Boyd's, the area's midwife.

Uncle Dora was just as jolly as he can be. After I got big enough to know what it was about . . . Uncle Dora'd come by here on the old white mule going over to Aunt Jane's hollering "Rach!--[short for Rachel; Pearl's mother and his wife's sister] be ready, I'm going after Jane!" When he got there she'd jump on up behind him and away they'd go! [laughs]⁵⁶

People told me that when there was a death in the community, everyone in the area would have heard about it by sunrise the next morning. And people said that the process worked similarly for sickness. My grandfather told me that the morning after he was bitten by a copperhead snake, there was a group of men and women working out in the field with my grandmother. This network had likely existed since the area was settled. It was a manually operated system that depended upon human speech, legs, and mules. Communication depended upon socializing, which was all the better for residents, because two very important needs, social contact and communication,

were fulfilled simultaneously.

Transportation, like communication, was also largely nontechnological. The Cypress Creeks had been a mule culture for a long time before roadsters appeared on the scene. Allen Barkley described Decorations being attended by a few drunks and a lot of mules; Howard Wright enjoyed visiting on his mule on Sunday evenings. These animals were highly valued pieces of property, whose owners took pride not only in the animals' performance but in their appearance as well. Men took care of their mules like teenage boys today who wax and shine their cars on Saturday afternoons. And, like cars, mules were often traded. Many men said the personal satisfaction of knowing that one had the all-around best team of mules in the community was one of the ultimate achievements in life.⁵⁷

If people preferred not to take mules when going somewhere, they walked. At least half of the interviewers mentioned that walking to a church revival or to a relative's house ten or twelve miles away was simply not questioned at all. "We walked from here out there to Piney Grove [Church--about twelve miles away] to a meeting," Allen Barkley said. "That wasn't any big problem."⁵⁸ My grandfather told me how he frequently walked from Little Cypress Creek over to his grandparents' house on Big Cypress Creek, some eight miles away, often at night.

Mules began to share the roads with automobiles in the 1920s. Leonard Dodd remembered his first car. "It was an A Model roadster [laughs]--I'd rode in them before I got mine, but you felt big when you got yourself a car and'd go driving around. I give thirty dollars, I think it was."⁵⁹ And Ethel Jackson recalled the early days of the new automobile:

I believe my brother Lon come through in one of the first ones, and it was so different from what they are now. It didn't have a steering wheel; it had a rod to steer it with. Me and my mother went to Florence with him in it and I thought that was the grandest thing that ever was!⁶⁰

Howard Wright remembered how difficult it was to court with a car:

Really the first [car] I ever owned was before I was married, what they called a little scooter. It was an old T Model stripped down--the body all off of it and had a little old seat just over the gas tank and that's what we rode on. You couldn't get a girl to ride in one hardly. They's afraid of them, afraid you'd throw them off of it.⁶¹

The roads on the Cypress Creeks were well-suited for travel by mule or foot. But the wagon and later the automobile called for improving the one-lane, clay gravel "paths" that fluctuated between two extremes--either very dusty or very muddy. Residents explained that riding down a Cypress Creeks road was similar to traveling over a washboard. My grandparents often told me that "this hill used to be so steep we'd have to brake the wagon the whole way down." Apart from the incline of the roads, mudslides were a nuisance, for the water would carve gullies that could cut directly through even the steepest gradient, and there was often no vegetation that could anchor the rocky, infertile clay soil. Edith Darby explained:

I went to my aunt's funeral one time, and the road was so muddy (my daddy at that time drove a Model-T car) and Daddy got out [and] with hands dug the mud out so we could get through and go to the funeral at Mt. Pleasant. Now that doesn't seem possible to you now, does it?⁶²

Allen Barkley also recalled the mudholes characteristic of clay roads:

Me and my brother bought an old A Model together and we was all out one weekend spreeing around. And over at the back of our field there was an old road with a mudhole [that] stood nearly full of water all the time. It was cold, man, I don't mean maybe, and me and Willie, Raymond Horton, and I believe Oker was along, and we got stalled

in that mudhole. And I had on a big mackinaw and I got out. I was going to push. I thought it was going to go backwards, and he came forwards and got me down and I just hung on that bumper and he drug me plum out the other end of that mudhole--and that mud just a gushling down my collar and it cold, Lord have mercy!⁶³

The large number of creeks and branches in the area also made transportation difficult, for the weak, corduroy bridges were easily and often washed out. For these reasons, many residents in the area preferred to walk whenever it was possible; it was simply much easier and many times quicker.

Narrators, then, remembered socializing and how they thought it once was. Socializing always was a foundation for what they told me. Hence, Decorations would logically be the most-remembered custom, because it was a social event. Similarly, more abstract topics like communication and transportation (although they had been most affected by change) were not as often discussed. This fact seems to have something to do with socializing, that riding in a Model-T was not the social event that staying up all night working on an oak casket was.

Next, I will examine the background and attitudes surrounding the construction of the Natchez Trace National Parkway, which today remains a watershed in the peoples' perceptions of their community's history.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER TWO

¹ See J. B. Killebrew, Introduction to the Resources of Tennessee (Nashville: Tavel, Eastman, and Howell, 1874), p. 971.

² Ibid.

³ History of Tennessee (Nashville: Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1886), p. 763.

⁴ Even during the dry summer months, streams still flow.

⁵ Killebrew, p. 972.

⁶ Killebrew, pp. 973-74.

⁷ Goodspeed, p. 763.

⁸ Goodspeed, pp. 763-64.

⁹ Killebrew, p. 977.

¹⁰ See Goodspeed, p. 763; Killebrew, pp. 976-77; and W. D. Thomas, "Clifton and Wayne County, Tennessee," Taylor-Trotwood Magazine (Nashville) IV:5 (1907): 560-62.

¹¹ McGlammery Stand's former site lies on mile marker 349 of the Natchez Trace Parkway.

¹² See William E. Meyer, "The Natchez Trace and the Middle Tennessee Chickasaw Trace," in Bureau of American Ethnology Annual Report No 42 (1928), p. 814.

¹³ See Goodspeed, p. 765.

¹⁴ Goodspeed, p. 764.

¹⁵ Personal conversation with Edgar D. Byler, III, Collinwood, Tennessee, 1 September 1987.

¹⁶ Goodspeed, p. 770.

¹⁷ See Thomas, p. 560.

¹⁸ The plant was remembered by many Collinwood residents.

¹⁹ Tape-recorded interview with Homer Darby, Cypress Inn, Tennessee, 18 May 1985.

²⁰ Tape-recorded interview with Edith Darby (unrelated), Iron City, Tennessee, 25 May 1985.

²¹Tape-recorded interview with Altie Bowen, Cypress Inn, Tennessee, 24 May 1985.

²²Tape-recorded interview with Opal Martin, Cypress Inn, Tennessee, 18 May 1985.

²³Edith Darby, 25 May 1985.

²⁴Tape-recorded interview with Ethel Jackson, Cypress Inn, Tennessee, 22 May 1985.

²⁵Tape-recorded interview with Thelma Mae Dixon, Iron City, Tennessee, 21 May 1985.

²⁶Tape-recorded interview with Dick Fowler, Waynesboro, Tennessee, 17 May 1985.

²⁷Tape-recorded interview with Allen Barkley, Iron City, Tennessee, 22 May 1985.

²⁸Thelma Mae Dixon, 21 May 1985.

²⁹Ethel Jackson, 22 May 1985.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Tape-recorded interview with Ed Martin, Cypress Inn, Tennessee, 18 May 1985.

³²Edith Darby, 25 May 1985.

³³Allen Barkley, 22 May 1985.

³⁴Tape-recorded interview with Earlene Barkley, Iron City, Tennessee, 22 May 1985.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Allen Barkley, 22 May 1985.

³⁷When the Hays Place, the birthplace of my grandmother and father, burned in 1982, there were still several planks stored on top of the rafters.

³⁸Tape-recorded interview with Sterlin Reeves, Iron City, Tennessee, 21 May 1985.

³⁹Tape-recorded interview with Nadean Reeves, Iron City, Tennessee, 21 May 1985.

⁴⁰Tape-recorded interview with Annie Olive, Iron City, Tennessee, 24 May 1985.

⁴¹Earlene Barkley, 22 May 1985.

⁴² Allen Barkley, 22 May 1985.

⁴³ See Chad Berry, "Personal Sentiment and the Gravehouse Tradition," paper read at Tennessee Folklore Society Meeting, 17 October 1987, Cookeville, Tennessee.

⁴⁴ Ethel Jackson, 22 May 1985.

⁴⁵ Tape-recorded interview with Willie Daniel, Collinwood, Tennessee, 20 May 1985.

⁴⁶ Ethel Jackson, 22 May 1985.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Tape-recorded interview with Leonard Dodd, Iron City, Tennessee, 23 May 1985.

⁵⁰ Ethel Jackson, 22 May 1985.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Tape-recorded interview with Proctor Wilson, Iron City, Tennessee, 23 May 1985.

⁵⁴ For a description of the general store, see Thomas D. Clark, "The County Store in American Social History," Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly 60 (1951): 126-144.

⁵⁵ Stories abound in the community about tricks that were played on Howard because he enjoyed talking so much; no one in the area has a greater reputation as the "biggest talker this side of Nashville" than does Howard.

⁵⁶ Tape-recorded interview with Pearl Spain Coffman, Iron City, Tennessee, 23 May 1985.

⁵⁷ Even today, my grandfather still prefers to plow garden with a pair of mules rather than his roto-tiller.

⁵⁸ Allen Barkley, 22 May 1985.

⁵⁹ Leonard Dodd, 23 May 1985.

⁶⁰ Ethel Jackson, 22 May 1985.

⁶¹ Tape-recorded interview with Howard Wright, Cypress Inn, Tennessee, 26 May 1985.

⁶² Edith Darby, 25 May 1985.

⁶³ Allen Barkley, 22 May 1985.

CHAPTER THREE

When the Trace Came Through

It began to change, I think, in the end of the '30s. The '30s was generally a bad time. Anytime after--I'd say the '40s--things went to picking up. This Trace helped the community right here.

Ellie Williams

In this chapter I briefly examine the background of the Natchez Trace as Indian trail and more thoroughly look at its development as National Parkway. Next, I look at the effects the Trace had on Cypress Creeks residents; how 300 people signed up to work on the Parkway, and how perhaps as many began to look elsewhere for work after the temporary positions on the Trace had been terminated. Finally, narrators' perceptions of the Parkway are examined and found to be positive, even though many residents realize employment on the Trace, as the area's first public job opportunity, forced them to leave their community to look for further work.

Long before the Cypress Creeks were settled by whites, the Natchez Trace was a common trail for the aboriginal peoples who inhabited the area. Around 700 A.D., the Mississippian culture rose to prominence across the southeastern United States¹ as a culture that built massive earthen temple mounds (many of which are still visible in the northeastern sections of Wayne County), along with defensive stockades and watchtowers, and perfected the

production of pottery and other ceremonial objects. Agriculture was practiced on a large scale, and a fairly sophisticated network of trade, linking villages by hundreds of miles of trails, was established. By the sixteenth century, about the time that DeSoto began exploring the area, assimilation of the Mississippian peoples occurred with the Historic Indian Tribes: the Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Shawnees, and Natchez.² The Chickasaws in particular were restless hunters who disliked the farming and more settled village life of their counterparts, and thus were an important factor in the establishment and maintenance of the trail now known as the Natchez Trace.

Over two centuries later, communities in the Cumberland Valley in Tennessee and the settlements at Boonesborough and Harrodsburg in Kentucky were all expanding rapidly. With a sizable increase in commodities, these areas began searching for a marketplace for their produce. New Orleans and Natchez were natural choices, given the difficulty of transporting goods east through the Appalachians, or northeast up the Ohio River. With a flatboat, the farmer could transport his goods down the Mississippi to a profitable market. The natural route for the farmer to travel on the return home was the Natchez Trace.³ The great danger of the return trip was from Natchez to Nashville, which passed through 500 miles of wilderness. Pack horses and men were frequently loaded with nothing but coins,⁴ and if one was able to get past the Indians there was always the threat of bandits, like the well-known Harpe brothers.⁵

By 1798, American settlements in the Old Southwest needed communication links with the rest of the nation which led to the establishment of a mail route on the Natchez Trace officially linking

Nashville and Natchez. The route's poor condition, however, soon resulted in governmental assistance in its improvement.⁶ Official work was discontinued in 1803, after 264 miles of some 450 had been improved, because the government realized that the task was simply too large for the Army to effectively continue.⁷ The Natchez Trace, even with the slight improvements, had become a National Road, and now the flatboatmen, "Kaintucks," and outlaws were joined by travelers from many walks of life. Bandits became such a nuisance that army troops were stationed at the Tennessee and Duck rivers to offer protection to travelers.⁸ "Stands," or inns, like Cypress Inn and Whitten's Stand near the Cypress Creeks, were built at frequent intervals along the Trace. There, weary travelers could eat a hot meal and spend a night protected under a roof.

Another round of government appropriation for the Trace came in 1806, when regulations were passed that called for the widening of the trail to twelve feet, with no stumps higher than sixteen inches allowed. Additionally, the center four feet were to be cleared to the ground. The results were not totally achieved, however, and only \$22,000 were ever spent.⁹

The steamboat leveled a serious blow to the trail, for steamboat travel had no outlaws, snakes, wilderness, or heat associated with it. With this faster and more convenient way to travel between Nashville and Natchez, the Trace quickly became obsolete. Contributing to its demise was the completion in 1820 of Andrew Jackson's Military Road from Nashville to New Orleans.¹⁰ The Trace quickly reverted back to wilderness, except for deep, well-worn tracks. Often, it became a county road, as it did in the Cypress Creeks. Even during the Civil War, the Trace was never used to its capacity.

The memory of its past faded. Cypress Creek residents said they knew that the old road that passed through their community was called "the old Natchez Trace" and that it was once an Indian trail. No one I spoke to, however, could recall any of the outlaw stories or remember any of the stands that emerged along the trail.

In order to revive the Trace's history, several articles appeared in the early 1900s that popularized a nostalgic view of the Trace.¹¹ Along with these articles in popular journals, the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Daughters of the War of 1812 began a campaign to raise at least the regional consciousness of the trail and its past importance. This campaign became a movement in the 1920s and by the Great Depression, when the idea surfaced to make a Federal Works Project of restoring the Trace, the issue was a matter of life and death, particularly to those in Mississippi concerned about poverty there. Congressman Jeff Busby of Mississippi realized the importance of a public works project that could revitalize the region. Busby "perceived that a public works project which would catch the imagination and interest of the people," James Crutchfield has written, "could also be the salvation of the region in which it was situated by putting large numbers of unemployed people back to work for a prolonged period of time--or, at least until something better came along."¹² Congressman Russell Elzey of Mississippi said

First it is important . . . as it will expedite motor transportation from the Southwest and the South to Washington, and will facilitate the transportation of troops and raw materials of all kinds . . . [although commercial vehicles are today strictly forbidden on the parkway]. This project is a typical Public Works project of this administration. It would put many men to work on a worthwhile project.¹³

Busby introduced a bill in Congress which called for a survey

of the original Trace, and on May 21, 1934, Congress allocated \$50,000 to make the survey, with a view toward constructing a national road on the route to be known as the Natchez Trace Parkway. The Trace was to be surveyed throughout its entire length and as near to its original route as possible. Four-fifths of the allocation went to this purpose; the remainder was used by the Park Service to research the trail's history and to design the Parkway's construction.¹⁴

The 167-page manual spoke about the difference between Trace and Parkway:

From Middle Tennessee to Natchez, the Trace ran like a stream seeking the easiest passages fitted to its current of traffic, and sometimes it cut new channels. The Natchez Trace Parkway, designed for a different current of traffic than the Trace, requires, in several aspects, a different channel.¹⁵

The survey also noted that "sharp curvature as well as monotonous straightaways would be avoided, and the road in general fitted to the contours and scenic character of country traversed."¹⁶

Regarding the historic Trace, the survey's aims were twofold. First, plans called for preserving, marking, and making accessible the physical remains of the Trace in certain sections. Second, plans mentioned that "the restoration of abandoned sections of the actual Trace may be desirable as an outdoor museum presentation, and as a part of a recreational area."¹⁷ The survey acknowledged, however, the problem that sixty percent of the original trail was still in use as "neighborhood road or improved highway,"¹⁸ which is why the Parkway through the Cypress Creeks was diverted from a ridge down through the valley of Big Cypress Creek, where there were fewer residences. Finally, the survey estimated that a location survey would take two years to complete and cost \$500,000, and that actual construction would cost \$50,000 per mile, or \$25

million.¹⁹

Late in 1935, Congress appropriated over a million dollars to begin construction in Mississippi. In 1937, another 1.5 million was consigned to be divided among the three states of Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi.²⁰ From 1939 until 1941, over 3.5 million dollars were allocated for the Parkway's construction.²¹

It is interesting to examine the press coverage the Wayne County News gave the project. On July 21, 1939, the News, with a banner headline, reported that county magistrates had voted to provide the \$25,000 necessary for right-of-way funds. Twelve thousand dollars were to be used for construction from the state line north to Collinwood. The end of the article reported that "the construction of the Natchez Trace as planned, will bring into the County many hundreds of dollars in the way of money spent for labor, lands, food supplies, materials, and sums always spent by laborers brought here for living expenses as well as luxuries."²² On October 27, the News reported that the first work in Tennessee would begin in Wayne County at Cypress Inn and proceed northward to Collinwood. The article also noted that "the state will furnish right-of-way, but the entire cost of construction will be borne by the United States Government."²³ On January 26, 1940, the paper reported that deeds totaling twelve hundred acres for the eight hundred feet of right-of-way had been sent to Washington. "Of the rights-of-way," the article said, "881 acres were purchased outright, and easements obtained on 320 acres."²⁴ On February 9, in a small box, the paper reported the following:

The National Park Service, of Washington, has informed Congressman Wirt Courtney that it would start work on the Trace Parkway within the next sixty days. It was learned from a local source that the work

would begin at the Alabama line and that from 200 to 300 men would be employed.²⁵

"NATCHEZ TRACE OFFICE OPENED AT COLLINWOOD: FIRST WORK ON TRACE WILL BE 9-MILE STRETCH FROM CYPRESS INN, NORTH," read the headline from May 3. The article noted that day laborers had already begun arriving in Collinwood seeking a place to get "certified" by the state employment service.²⁶

In the mid-1930s, before employment on the Trace began, men in the Cypress Creeks who had jobs had been "contracting" themselves out to sawmills for short periods of time, usually in the winter months when pressing jobs on the farm were few. The work in the sawmills was hard, and the pay usually ranged from fifty cents to one dollar per day. When the Trace began soliciting men for work, they jumped at the chance.

Employment on the Natchez Trace gave men a taste of what it was like to earn real money. An unskilled laborer was paid thirty-five cents per hour. If a man was willing to bring his mules to the job site on Big Cypress Creek, the wage would be one dollar per hour--ten dollars a day. As might be expected in a mule culture, more than a few men took advantage of this opportunity and used their mules to snake out logs for the right-of-way. The 1000 percent increase in earnings had an extraordinary effect on the men and women in the community. One day, a person could have worked in a sawmill for ten cents an hour, and the next day, thanks to the communications network that told him of the job, could earn a dollar per hour. Several people said they earned more money in one day of work on the Trace than they had seen in their entire lives.

"They paid thirty-five cents an hour," Sterlin Reeves recalled.

And that morning when they opened that job I guess there was at least three hundred people there looking for work. I didn't go to work right then, but in a week or two I did go to work--grading out those holes where they put the culverts, and a lot of them was waist deep in water. You had to get down in there and move that mud and stuff and grade it out, and that was a little bit rougher than I liked, [so] I quit and went to the rock quarry and I worked that for, like, several weeks and then I got on with the right-of-way crew and stayed with it for the first ten miles. Thirty-five cents. It beat nothing. It was a job and people was really glad to get it. It give a lot of people work that didn't have work before.²⁷

Working for the Park Service was the first job for many men.

"The first job that I got paid for," James Linville explained,

"I was eighteen years old and I worked on the construction of the Natchez Trace Parkway--which is still under construction." He continued:

The construction of the Parkway began in 1936 and I was working on it in nineteen and forty-one as a laborer. My brother, Ralph Linville, got me the job that I had because he had a contract to haul rock which was used (and you can see them now on the Natchez Trace), limestone rock; they were carried out of a rock quarry on Butler Creek [near Collinwood] and on Wolfe Creek in Lawrence County. I worked on the Wolfe Creek Project in Lawrence County.²⁸

The work on the Trace for the unskilled men of Cypress Creeks lasted only a few months. Once the roadways were cleared, the engineers brought in their own men to grade, gravel, and apply a layer of calcium chloride to the surface (the Trace was not paved until the mid-1950s).

Only a year after construction began, with the entry of the U.S. into war, the News had sensed that the project was in trouble.

"CONSTRUCTION FUNDS NATCHEZ TRACE CUT," read the headline from January 9, 1942. The article explained that "park service

officials said they had expected the cut to be made and said that under the circumstances, calling for huge war expenditures, they could not press for more funds. All highway funds, except for strategic and defense roads, have been cut in the budget.²⁹ Construction was resumed in piecemeal fashion in the 1950s, and work continues today in Lewis County, Tennessee,³⁰ as James Linville described:

It still lacks about one hundred miles being completed today. It's being constructed from Natchez, Mississippi, to about thirty-five miles north of Collinwood, Tennessee. In other words, the Natchez Trace Parkway is set out to be built from Nashville to Natchez. They planned on the construction being totally completed in 1966, but due to the advent of World War II, it stopped construction of it. Then after World War II, we had the Korean Conflict and the Viet Nam disaster.³¹

Thanks to reports compiled by the Tennessee Agricultural Experiment Station, a fairly thorough economic picture can be painted of the life in the Cypress Creeks in the 1930s. In 1935, economic resource statistics speak clearly of the conditions in the area: of ninety-five counties in Tennessee, Wayne's true wealth was seventy-first; total income ranked eighty-first; value of land and buildings was the ninety-fourth lowest; the number of motor vehicles was seventy-fifth; net retail sales ranked sixty-seventh; net agricultural income was ninety-first; circulation of periodicals, eighty-third; and wages of farm labor, per day, ranked seventy-fourth.³² Even if the county had the resources necessary for growth and opportunity, the statistics noted that in 1930, sixty-eight percent of the farmers were located on unimproved dirt roads. Additionally, from the standpoint of accessibility and concentration of farm markets, the county ranked fourth from the lowest among the ninety-five in the state. Even in the number of miles of public roads per square mile it ranked tenth from the bottom. Of 12,134 people

in the county (1930 census), 2,583 people were on relief in 1935, and forty-five percent of these people were tenants and croppers.³³

It is easy, then, to understand why some 300 people were present the first day that public work began on the Natchez Trace. The difficulty involved with working on the Trace, however, was its temporary character. Just as many men quickly found a job on the Trace, they were also quickly without one. The first action that several men took after the Trace work had ended was to look within their community for work, but they found none--at least none that came close to matching the wages of the Trace. Work-hungry people then went outside the community, first to Collinwood. But by the early 1940s, Collinwood's economic boom due to lumbering and iron mining had already peaked, and the gradual descent to ghost-town status was underway. Next, men ventured to larger towns like Waynesboro and Lawrenceburg and Florence, Alabama. Bessie Smith pointed out that improved transportation assisted people in this migration:

I think when our transportation system [improved], we begin to have a lot of people going to Florence and Lawrenceburg to work in industrial plants. Florence had Ford Motor, had TVA, and Lawrenceburg had about three different industries up there, and that's when you begin to notice that people in the rural areas from Wayne County worked in those places. I guess you could say the 50s, when Wayne County picked up, because everybody got a job. But they didn't get it in Wayne County much; the lumber business was just about all there was. That's when the change affected us.³⁴

Ellie Williams sensed change was underway earlier, though, in the 1940s: "It began to change, I think," he remembered, "in the end of the '30s. The '30s was generally a bad time. Anytime after, I'd say the '40s, things went to picking up. This Trace helped the community right here."³⁵ Several of my great-uncles found jobs in and around Florence, working in mills and packing

houses and on the trolley in Sheffield. "If you got a job in the knitting mill," James Linville said, "you was sitting on top of the world--but very few people were able to get those--or at the cotton mill."³⁶ Proctor Wilson said that the Tennessee Valley Authority provided jobs east of Florence as well:

When the TVA came into being, I was along in the first of getting a job just on labor with TVA. I worked there a year. Back before I married, I worked at a brickyard in Florence for three or four months, and that was about the first job I guess I had away from home. And then when TVA come along, I got hired on TVA and worked a year on Wheeler Dam, just on labor. I only got two dollars and fifty some cents for a day.³⁷

But \$2.50 per day was then considered good money, even after the Trace's wages. Allen Barkley pointed out that "things picked up a little--you went to getting fifty cents an hour and seventy-five cents an hour and like that for work,"³⁸ but only for those lucky enough to find it.

Those who couldn't find jobs nearby were forced to places still farther outside the county, like Nashville and Huntsville. Many stayed there during the week and came home on the weekends to plant a field of corn or to shoe a mule or to dig a well. Gradually, men no longer came home to plant a field, for they were no longer farmers; they were now blue collar workers. They returned instead to see their families and perhaps hoe a row of beans in the garden (now planted purely for an occasional "mess" of beans, not out of necessity). While difficult for men, commuting was also hard on the women, who were forced to become the fathers and the mothers, the men of the homeplace and the ladies of the house. James Linville remembered Wayne County being a "bedroom" county during this time.

But gradually, by at least 1942, many men realized that the

opportunity which they so desperately sought did not lie near the Cypress Creeks; indeed it did not even exist in the South. Detroit, many men believed, was one place in America where money really did grow on trees; it was simply waiting to be picked like an August crop of apples.³⁹

In 1946, another Agricultural Experiment Station study showed the large decrease in the county's population in just five years: from 13,637 to 9,916 in 1945. The population of Cypress Inn alone fell from 277 in 1940 to 185 just five years later.⁴⁰ The study noted "the decrease in population is accounted for by the fact that many people have left the county to work on defense and other war time jobs."⁴¹

The decision to "sell out" and "go up North" was the hardest decision a Cypress Creeks family had to make; more than one told me so explicitly. Those who went up north were sometimes shunned by their parents or their siblings, as my grandparents were, particularly when an estate was divided. "Well, while you were up north making money, we were down here taking care of Ma and Pa," some migrants were stung with, articulating a sharp difference in priorities and values between those who left and those who remained.⁴² Thus, many migrants never received an equal or representative share of heirlooms, and some found that their parents and siblings were waiting to say "I told you so" when failure or homesickness, or both, forced them to return home.

Some families never did come home to stay. After working on the Trace and making several futile attempts at running a store and a farm, my grandfather left in 1945 and took a bus north to

Akron, Ohio, where he worked for several months in a mammoth Firestone plant. He returned only long enough to sell out, pack up his family, and go to South Bend, Indiana, leaving the agrarian life behind for good. In this northern Indiana city, Studebaker was in full swing, and many transplanted Cypress Creek residents were already living there, ready to help this Upland South migrant family to adjust to life up north.

For whatever reason, my grandparents did adjust to life in the north. Perhaps the fact that they were not alone helped them to adjust to their new life. My father says that when he was younger, his parents tried, as much as possible, to spend Sundays just as they were spent on Little Cypress, when several families would gather together for food, fun, and festivity. There were obviously many changes, of course, most apparent in the discussions of life "back home," but the significance is the continuity of the social gatherings.

The most important reason, though, for staying in the north was the fact that my grandparents had each other for support. As in most Cypress Creek marriages, the husband and wife worked so closely together that separation was never possible. My grandmother today proudly tells how she worked in the fields next to my grandfather in the early years of married life; she still recalls the hardest time in her life to be the months when her husband was hundreds of miles away in Akron. Thus, when the two came north looking for work, there was no reason to apply at different places for different jobs. They both happily tell today how they hired in on the same day, did the same job side-by-side, made the same amount of money, and retired the same day, twenty-four years later.

Another reason for the permanence is, paradoxically, the frequency of return visits made to the Cypress Creeks. My grandparents often left on Friday afternoons to make the twenty-hour trip (which now takes but ten hours) down U.S. 31 just for a funeral, returning by Monday morning in time for work. Vacation plans were never difficult to make; it was a given that the family would return to their ancestral home.

But that my grandparents remained in the north was not the norm. Many of the men I interviewed went north, stayed for ten to fifteen years--long enough to "make it"--and then returned to their home places on Cypress Creeks. "Well, a lot of people got to leaving here long about [the '40s], going north," Ellie Williams said, "and some of them saved money and came back and bought homes."⁴³ But most did not stay very long, some did not stay long enough to get their first paycheck. "The Trace was built after I was too old to work," Clifford Jackson explained. "I went up to Detroit after they had done begin to lay everything off. I just worked on the farm--that's all they was to do--we didn't have nothing but sawmills [and] timbercutting."⁴⁴ Those few men who resisted the temptation to leave the area for the north today see themselves as more virtuous than those who left. Leonard Dodd is one such person. He proudly told me that he never has had a factory job, that farming is the only thing he knows.

It is apparent how the Natchez Trace has affected the community. Once people began to see the possibilities and potentialities that good wages offered them, they began to seek them at practically all costs. It is interesting, though, to examine how the Cypress

Creeks residents regard the Trace today. No one that I spoke to held any animosity toward the Parkway for changing one's life. Although many realize that change began when the Trace was reestablished, residents hail the Parkway as a beneficent example of commerce that gave many people their start in life. Bessie Smith said it injected pride into the area:

To me, [the Trace] has affected us a lot because it has made us have a lot of pride It's of course a lot of pleasure . . . traveling--they don't let you have trucks and vans and all that sort of thing on there--it's just supposed to be a pleasure route, [a] scenic route. So to me it has given Wayne County a lot of pride, more than anything else, but it has also brought in people--tourists--into Wayne County. Collinwood is the only little town that is directly on it, so that makes us real proud . . . because it's the most beautiful area to get out and just drive for pleasure.⁴⁵

James Linville's comments also reflected this pride:

Its been advantageous to the county even until this day. It's the best . . . constructed highway or motor route there is in the county, it's well kept--a beautiful parkway. And it's used by tourists and also the local people when they're moving to and from work It was also cultural and socially benefitting to the county, too, because it gives you an oppourtunity to picnic and what-not on the Parkway, and then you have all these different people--and during the summer you have an awful lot of tourists coming in here--which contributes to the economy, too. And actually, the town that I live in now, which is Collinwood, Tennessee, is the only town or city (Collinwood is only a town) located on the Natchez Trace Parkway.⁴⁶

This transformation in work that began in the 1940s with the Natchez Trace has undergone an unusual twist. When General Motors announced in 1985 that it would build an assembly plant in Spring Hill, a small town seventy miles north of Collinwood, Cypress Creeks residents of all ages were thrilled over the news. No longer would they have to move themselves to the car plants; rather GM had decided to bring a six-billion dollar factory to them. Men and women in

the area began talking about applying for jobs and commuting each day to Spring Hill, as Bessie's comments reveal:

General Motors is having this plant to come to Spring Hill, which is not far from here . . . and it's a farm county. Well, I've listened real close to the people that they've interviewed and the young people are thrilled to death--and they're farmers. And still they say, "It's going to make progress in our area--be lots more business, we'll have lots more people here, and we'll just be lots more progressive" And then you can listen to the older people talk and they'll say, "We don't want to see our beautiful farmland destroyed because they'll have to have room to put all these buildings and there'll be old plants all over our beautiful farmland." But you see, I think they'll come to. Anybody hates to see that [farmland destroyed]--I hate to see that--but I also want to see the jobs come to Tennessee Now they say our children won't have to go to Michigan or they won't have to go to some congested area to get work.⁴⁷

The work on the Natchez Trace Parkway created three types of people: those who stayed behind on the Cypress Creeks, those who left and today have retired and returned to the area, and those, like my grandparents, who have remained away permanently. All of these people, however, lament that change has occurred. The good old days, they believe, have changed, and are now only in the memories of those old enough to have experienced them. An aged and tired Ed Martin nicely put change in perspective:

Me and Vernon Pigg talked about that [the good old days] awhile back. Back then when Vernon and me growed up, I lived on the creek here and we'd load up a load of cross ties or a load of lumber before daylight and hit the road on a cold, frosty morning, headed for Florence. And Vernon said, "You know, I'd like to try that again--but I wouldn't last long." And I said, "I would too, but I wouldn't last long at it now." And yet I said, "You know what? Them's the good old days." [pauses] And he dropped his head and said, "Yessir, you know them was the good old days, wasn't they? Everybody was happy, nobody was in a hurry, and had the time to stop and talk with you anywhere they met you." Now, it ain't that way no more.⁴⁸

In Chapter Four, I bring the discussion of change to a contemporary perspective. We have seen what life was once like, according to narrators, and have examined the role of the Trace. Now we will discuss narrators' perceptions of life today on the Cypress Creeks.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE

¹ James Crutchfield, The Natchez Trace: A Pictorial History (Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 1985), p. 33.

² Ibid., p. 34.

³ See Ibid., pp. 83-86, and Robert Green Hall, "The Natchez Trace: A Study in Transportation and Travel Between the Early West and Southwest" (M. A. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1914), pp. 8-17.

⁴ Hall, p. 17.

⁵ Crutchfield, p. 85; also see Robert M. Coates, The Outlaw Years: The History of the Land Pirates of the Natchez Trace (New York: The Macauley Company, 1930).

⁶ Hall, pp. 20-22; Crutchfield, pp. 99-100.

⁷ Natchez Trace Parkway Survey (Washington, D. C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1941), p. 143; Crutchfield, p. 101.

⁸ Crutchfield, pp. 101-2.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 123-24.

¹¹ See John Swain, "The Natchez Trace" Everybody's Magazine 13 (1905): 45-57; also significant is Hall's thesis.

¹² Crutchfield, p. 137.

¹³ "Mississippi Daughters of the American Revolution Discover the Natchez Trace," unpub. MS., Tupelo, Mississippi.

¹⁴ Crutchfield, p. 138.

¹⁵ Natchez Trace Parkway Survey, p. 150.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 151; Natchez Trace Parkway Bulletin 1:1 (September 1940): 1-2.

¹⁷ Natchez Trace Parkway Survey, p. 151.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 149.

²⁰ On May 18, 1938, the Parkway, though barely just begun, was designated as an official unit of the National Park Service.

²¹ Crutchfield, pp. 138-39.

- ²² "Court Votes Trace Appropriation," Wayne County News, 21 July 1939, p. 1.
- ²³ "Construction of Natchez Trace Parkway in State to Start in Wayne County," Wayne County News, 29 October 1939, p. 1.
- ²⁴ "Natchez Trace Rights-of-Way Are Dispatched To Washington; Way to Construction Cleared," Wayne County News, 26 January 1940, p. 1.
- ²⁵ "Natchez Trace," Wayne County News, 9 February 1940, p. 1.
- ²⁶ "Natchez Trace Office Opened At Collinwood," Wayne County News, 3 May 1940, p. 1.
- ²⁷ Tape-recorded interview with Sterlin Reeves, Iron City, Tennessee, 21 May 1985.
- ²⁸ Tape-recorded interview with James Linville, Collinwood, Tennessee, 20 May 1985.
- ²⁹ "Construction Funds Natchez Trace Cut," Wayne County News, 9 January 1942.
- ³⁰ See Richard Lane, "The Natchez Trace," The Commercial Appeal (Memphis), 3 August 1958, sec. 4, p. 1; "Lewis Tracts Sought For Natchez Trace Parkway," The Nashville Banner, 16 August 1952, p. 5; and "First National Highway," The Nashville Tennessean Magazine, 13 May 1951, pp. 6-17, 14, for updates on the parkway's construction.
- ³¹ James Linville, 20 May 1985.
- ³² Charles E. Allred and Benjamin H. Luebke, "Rural Relief and Rehabilitation Possibilities in Wayne County, Tennessee," Knoxville: Tennessee Agricultural Experiment Station, 1938, p. 3 (Mimeographed.)
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Tape-recorded interview with Bessie Smith, Collinwood, Tennessee, 2 August 1985.
- ³⁵ Tape-recorded interview with Ellie Williams, Cypress Inn, Tennessee, 18 May 1985.
- ³⁶ James Linville, 20 May 1985.
- ³⁷ Tape-recorded interview with Proctor Wilson, Iron City, Tennessee, 22 May 1985.
- ³⁸ Tape-recorded interview with Allen Barkley, Iron City, Tennessee, 22 May 1985.
- ³⁹ Sterlin Reeves suggested this analogy.
- ⁴⁰ Glenn S. Gallien, "Natural Neighborhoods and Communities of Wayne County, Tennessee," Knoxville: Tennessee Agricultural Experiment Station, 1946, p. 1. (Mimeographed.)

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴² This was suggested several times in informal conversation with my grandparents.

⁴³ Ellie Williams, 18 May 1985.

⁴⁴ Tape-recorded interview with Clifford Jackson, Cypress Inn, Tennessee, 21 May 1985.

⁴⁵ Bessie Smith, 2 August 1985.

⁴⁶ James Linville, 20 May 1985.

⁴⁷ Bessie Smith, 2 August 1985.

⁴⁸ Tape-recorded interview with Ed Martin, Cypress Inn, Tennessee, 18 May 1985.

CHAPTER FOUR

This is Now

I'd take my old life back. I had a wonderful home, wonderful parents. We worked hard, but I'd like to grow up just like I was.

Edith Darby

The building of the Natchez Trace had not only an economic but a social and cultural impact as well, as reflected in social folk customs. Here, I examine the residents' perceptions of life today on the Cypress Creeks, as contrasted with their memories of life before the Trace presented in Chapter Two, and as reflected in changes in social folk customs, beginning with socializing, which has changed least, and ending with occupation, which has changed most.

Everyone I talked to bemoaned the fact that people do not "visit" each other like they used to, and that people in the area are not as "friendly" as they used to be. But change has merely altered (and not destroyed, as some would maintain) relationships within the community. People today relate to each other differently than they did fifty years ago, but the point is that people still relate to each other; visiting is the custom that has changed the least.

A good example of the altered relationships can be found at Homer Darby's general store in Cypress Inn. For many years the

store has been an arena for social interaction where visiting and other social activities took place. One afternoon, I walked into the store, which is simply a long room, built in 1924 by Homer's father, Ben. I noticed quickly that I was the only customer in the store and later found out that I was indeed the first customer of the day. I looked at the shelves against the wall holding the canned goods. Dust covered the tops of the cans so that the expiration dates, if there were any, would have been all but impossible to decipher. It was obvious that some of those cans had not been moved in years; there simply was not enough business to produce stock turnover.

The store, however, had once been a busy and popular place. Edith Darby recalled that the Fourth of July picnic was the social event of the summer:

Mr. Ben Darby [Homer's father]--he had a store in Cypress Inn and . . . he'd have a picnic on the Fourth of July and he'd have big stands put up and he'd sell chicken stew and he'd have ice cream and . . . things like that, and people'd buy them--of course he made money off of them--but people'd enjoy things like that. And that was one thing we always looked forward to--to get us some ice cream. Of course, Mother always made chicken stew, but we loved that ice cream.¹

Although Homer's store is not nearly as busy as it once was, it is still a popular place to buy a soft drink and sit out on the porch and visit. After looking around inside, I followed Homer out onto the front porch, with a Coke in hand. Before long two people walking near the road with a large plastic bag reached the steps of the store. They were collecting aluminum cans, and Homer's store was the end of their collection route. The morning sun was hot; and the pair, an older lady in her handmade bonnet and accompanied by her grandson, obviously were there to buy a "pop."

Soon a man drove up with a flat tire in his trunk; he had come

to Homer's to patch it. A few minutes later two other cars had stopped in front of Homer's because the drivers had seen my grandfather out on the porch and wanted to visit with him. In earlier days, the gravel area in front of the store would have been covered with wagons whose owners were there perhaps to barter some eggs or buy a new turnplow. Now the area contained several late-model cars and pick-up trucks and people with soft drinks in hand, talking. No one buys anything of great value at Homer's anymore, but a sizable number of people around Cypress Inn still find it hard to resist a "pop" and a "visit" with each other. As Homer himself said:

It's changed right smart--oh, yeah--from what it used to be. They'd come in mules and wagons then, come to mill and they'd be the biggest crowd Well, we was about the only one [mill] close. Now they go to Florence--supermarkets--and all that; they ain't too much business going on People go to these supermarkets now.²

"How much longer are you going to run your store?" I asked him.

"I don't know."

"Long time, maybe?"

"Don't know how long I'm going to live."

"You'll run it as long as you can?"

"Yeah, I guess I will."

"You like it?"

"Yeah, I've been in it so long, I wouldn't be satisfied. I wouldn't know no other way. I like to set around, talk to people--a lot of times, somebody [is] in."

The supermarkets, as Homer mentioned, are another place where socializing takes place, although obviously in a different, more modern context. Perhaps the modern supermarkets do not have the "days gone by" qualities about them that the general stores do.

Therefore, people in the area fail to see that talking with friends they encounter at the supermarkets is a substitute for the visiting that used to take place in the general store. For example, my aunt and grandmother sent my grandfather and me to buy a canned ham that would be suitable to take to a family reunion. We didn't go to Homer's; we went instead north into Collinwood and stopped at the "Big Star," a supermarket that is part of a regional chain. Once inside, my grandfather ran into seven different long-time friends. After talking to them, we found our ham, paid for it, and walked outside to the car. But several other people saw him and stopped him in the parking lot. Before we knew it, we had spent some thirty minutes talking to people underneath the plastic Big Star sign--a modern counterpart to visiting around Homer's rusty Coca-Cola porch thermometer. While residents spent much time telling me that people no longer visit or that people are not as friendly as in former times, they do not realize this visiting custom continues today, although often in more modern contexts. Again, residents seemed to associate a custom only in its "old-fashioned" setting.

Another context in which socializing has changed is the two volunteer fire stations in the area, one on Big Cypress and another on Little Cypress; they sponsor a dance every Saturday night to raise money for the stations' mortgage. The events are attended regularly by younger residents but seldom by older ones, for the latter's moral view does not permit dancing, although these older folk would have no qualms about square dancing at a log rolling. Thus, because of their refusal to participate in these social events in modern contexts, the older residents miss out on a main socializing occasion in the community.

While socializing, even though altered, still persists, other practices have disappeared. Altie Bowen remembered how strong neighborliness once was. Today, she finds a difference in the "natures" of people yesterday and today. "They just don't love one another now like they use to," she said, although once in a while, "you'll find some good people that really thinks enough of you to do something for you when you need it."³

Many residents expressed similar sentiments. "People was friendly and neighborly, and everybody was everybody's neighbor," Edith Darby said. "Back at that time, if [Mother] had neighbors that didn't have milk, she'd divide her milk with them--give it to them--but nowadays people don't even have a cow, and if they did they wouldn't give you a drop of milk."⁴

A second arena in which residents perceived change was religion. Clemeth Dixon explained that because there were once a few social opportunities around the area, people took advantage of Sunday worship. "Them was the good old days," he said.

People are not happy back like they was then and don't enjoy life like they did back then. They just couldn't get about and go places and they wasn't a lot of amusement places for you, no way. You just went to church and Sunday School and that was it--and you walked to them. I walked three and four miles to go to church and Sunday School [on] Sunday mornings. We was glad when Sunday morning come You can't get people out now--you even offer to haul them to church and they still don't want to go.⁵

Clemeth's remark partially explains why the importance of religion has diminished in the community. Sunday services were once as important socially as they were spiritually.

Just as people told me about "shouting" in church services, more still reminded me of the custom's disappearance. "Why, people

would shout all over the place," Ethel Jackson said, "and now you never hear that anymore."⁶ Many told me how the services today are not as "spiritual" as they once were. "We used to have good services when we went to church," Annie Olive said. "People was alive . . . spiritually, and nowadays you go and they're as dead as they can be. I don't know why [it is different], they just lost the Spirit, I reckon."⁷

I asked several narrators why people didn't shout today and the consensus was that members just don't have anything to shout about. "I don't know," Allen Barkley answered, "they must have lost their religion--people took it different then than they do now."⁸ Many attributed this phenomenon to the preachers, an occupation that is not looked upon as favorably today as it once was. Edith Darby said that the style of preachers today is like a minister's--more refined and reserved than a country preacher.⁹ Thelma Mae Dixon offered this explanation:

A lot of people went to church then. Back then they preached under the anointing of the Spirit; a lot of them [preachers] couldn't even read their text--they had to have somebody else to read their text for them. Old Brother Caperton used to preach down here at Cedar Grove and he had another preacher to come along . . . and read the Bible for him, and he'd preach from that. He had to have had the anointing of the Spirit or he wouldn't been able to done it . . . and he couldn't read It was just a different atmosphere to what it is now.¹⁰

Preaching styles had changed, I was told, because the preachers today go off for "schooling"; in the past they were spiritually "called to service"--no education was deemed necessary. "In most churches now," Thelma Mae said, "if you don't have a college education or been sent off to some seminary, then you don't preach in that

[church]."¹¹ "He was a preacher--not a preacherette," Edith Darby flatly explained. "He preached a good sermon and the choirs would sing and everybody would sing and it was great. You don't see churches like that anymore, compared to the old time church--that's what I was raised up in," she concluded, "the old time church."¹² Preachers' concern for money was also mentioned by narrators when changes in religion were discussed. Allen Barkley said long ago, a preacher would be content with a fried chicken dinner on Sunday, but that today, preachers want money for their services. And as Ed Martin pointed out, "Old Uncle Sammy Scott set that church [Scotts Chapel Freewill Baptist Church] up and he rode an old gray mule, and when he come every Sunday to preach they'd take up an offering [for him] and he wouldn't have it--he told them to take it and put it on the church. Today," he explained, "if the preacher don't get paid, he don't come."¹³

Residents also recalled that people did not necessarily attend just one church, as Dick Fowler earlier remarked. Edith Darby explained that "We had churchhouses filled with people then--it's not like it is now--there's so many church houses now and so many people that thinks that they can't go but to that one church But now I don't look at life like that; I think that if you're going to church you can go anywhere to church. I can go to all of them--and I do."¹⁴ Her answer is ironic; improved transportation has opened up more choices of churches. There really is no sizable difference in the number of churches on the Cypress Creeks. People then seemed to enjoy going to different churches, if nothing else, just to socialize with as many people as possible. Several interviewers told me that walking ten to twelve miles to another church was

never questioned. But as Clemeth Dixon said, today when you offer to drive them, they don't want to go.

I went to Whittens' Crossroads Methodist Church twice in May 1985; the average attendance was eighteen and the offering one Sunday was \$89.90. People told me tht they once used to leave home early just so they could find empty seats on the benches. The congregation still used fifty-year-old hymnbooks with bindings that gave testimony to their heavy use through the years. They sang six old-time hymns, and then the minister preached. There was no real liturgy at all; simplicity was the key characteristic. Reverend Hollaway left promptly after the service, for he serves a dual pastورشip shared with the Railroad Church several miles to the south, and he was obviously pressed for time.

Sunday School followed the worship service, and the four children present went with their teacher to the back room. The adult lesson for the week was on "Johah and the Whale"; the leader was very humble and could read only slightly better than his adult students who had difficulty with words like "vehement" and "gourd." But it didn't matter, for everyone helped out and offered phonetic suggestions to the word in question. The session was closed with a prayer for rain and the hymn, "Just As I Am." An elderly man turned off the six light bulbs and the two ceiling fans, and the building was locked until Wednesday evening's Bible Study group would open the doors.

Like changes in church life, residents also told me of the differences in Decorations. Although there have been several changes, Decorations are still important to the community and resemble past practices in some ways. There still is a massive quantity of food,

now spread out on tables fashioned out of concrete and cement blocks, usually about forty to fifty feet long; every cemetery has them and every table is filled with food on its Decoration Day. Also, people who have moved outside the community usually make an earnest attempt to return for a homecoming, particularly if they are older. Seldom does a Decoration at a family cemetery go by that my grandparents don't attend. Because each family's Decoration date is a month apart, my grandparents have of late decided to alternate visits each year as the fairest way to attend both an equal number of times.

But, as witnessed in interviews and observations, changes are evident. The change I heard people talk about most often was that people do not come and stay all day like they used to. "Now they just come . . . for a few minutes and they're gone somewhere else," Altie Bowen said. "They don't stay like they used to--I reckon they're more pressed for time or something."¹⁵ Another difference that I often heard expressed is that people now over decorate the graves and try to out-do each other with plastic flower arrangements. As Ed Martin recalled, "Back then they'd maybe have one little bunch of grown flowers to put on the grave." Today, he said, "they buy their flowers and the cemeteries are covered up in them."¹⁶ Residents believe that it was more noble either to make one's own flowers or to pick them in the woods. Women no longer stay up at night in order to finish the crepe paper flowers in time; instead they go to discount stores and buy factory-made flowers of plastic and silk. Indeed, many women in the area shop for bargains on flowers; discount stores display several long rows of artificial flowers and arrangements during the summer months

so as to offer the best selection. Each year it seems that my grandfather complains more and more about the increase in Kentucky Fried Chicken and the decrease in homemade fried pies at Decoration dinners. And young people no longer go down the "beaten path" to the nearest spring; few young people even bother to go to Decorations unless they are forced to attend by their parents.

Death customs and funerals have changed more than Decorations. Perhaps the biggest change in the funerals is residents' use of a funeral home, Shackleford, near Collinwood, that was built in the mid 1970s. Outside this funeral home is an old burying ground known as McGlamery, named for an old stand on the Natchez Trace. This graveyard is full of decaying marble and hand-crafted cement tombstones marking the resting places of early Wayne County settlers.

When the Shackleford Funeral Home Corporation moved in, it established its own cemetery, which borders the old McGlamery graveyard and even uses its name. But this is where the similarities between old and new cease. The new cemetery is already filling with graves, but the markers are flat pieces of bronze, each with a lift-up vase to put real or artificial flowers in (there is a hole in the bottom of each vase designed to drain water.) These "tombstones" make it easier for the mowing crews to keep the lawns manicured. The new cemetery has life-like statues of Christ scattered throughout; each statue signifies a different thematic section.

Residents no longer make caskets or death garments for the dead; instead, these are all purchased. They no longer hold funeral services in the churches; the funeral home has its own chapel. Caskets are no longer taken to the cemetery by horse and wagon;

they are driven in a Cadillac limousine. Men no longer toil in the cemetery to dig a grave and then fill it in; digging is arranged well ahead of time by the funeral home. Whether people like these changes or not, this is the new mode in which all deaths are handled today on the Cypress Creeks.

Like other aspects of life in the area, education was destined to change, and the change it would see would be greater than that of Homer Darby's store, more sweeping than what churchgoers experienced.

In Wayne County in 1946, there were forty-nine one-teacher schools that enrolled 1,305 students.¹⁷ But in 1948, the Wayne County Board of Education implemented a county-wide school consolidation program that marked the beginning of the end for the numerous built-by-hand schoolhouses across the county. One by one, each school closed its doors to students, while grass and saplings began to grow in the yards. Schoolbuses entered the Cypress Creeks for the first time in the late 1940s. Students were taken to Collinwood, where a new grade school and high school building had been erected. Cypress Creek pupils no longer had to carry slates or lunches in tin pails, for the modern facilities were designed to supply the students with everything they needed--from notebook paper to school lunches.¹⁸

The life of Mrs. Bessie Smith illustrates the changes between "old" education and the "new." She began her teaching career without a degree at age twenty-seven at the Crossroads School, after she had "raised her family." Gradually, she earned her degree through correspondence at the University of North Alabama in Florence.

I was twenty-seven years old when I started teaching
See, when I went, it was a one-room school. We
had one teacher--all eight grades--and I can remember

my first year: I sat on a long bench and watched the older ones do . . . spelling and 'ciphering'--the math But I can tell you that I learned to read and to write and to spell and to do my math from sitting on that long bench back there watching the upper grades do theirs And then when I started teaching [at Crossroads], it had really improved--we had two rooms then--and they had the . . . four higher grades in one room and the four primary grades in the other. And I taught in the primary I don't know how the teacher did it when it was just all in one room because they was just constantly . . . having classes.¹⁹

She illustrated this description with the following story:

I remember my own daughter went with me when she was four and I didn't ask her to do work at all . . . and when I would have my first grade group, I always put this big fish pond on the board and put first letters in it . . . and as they progressed through the year, you'd erase those out and put the word in And all of the sudden I noticed this little voice . . . chirping up you know, and I begin to look around and my Peggy that was four years old was telling them right with the others because she had listened--that's the way she learned to read and write--just like I did when I was sitting back on that bench.²⁰

She continued to tell how she was "recruited" to come to Collinwood to teach:

My first year was Crossroads . . . and the third year I taught . . . the principal from Collinwood High School . . . came and asked me if I would come over . . . and teach, because when I first started I didn't have a degree and you were not allowed in a consolidated school until you had that degree, so in the meantime, I had gotten my degree and he came over and asked me if I would teach in the school . . . and of course I was thrilled to death--I didn't have to go out in the country. I went over and he first asked me to teach high school and I said "no . . .," so they let me teach in the primary grades the first year. I liked it, but schools were consolidating at that time--when rural schools began to come to the city-- . . . about '45 they begin to consolidate. My primary grade increased until I had about forty-five students, and I couldn't handle it So he gave me sixth grade and I stayed in for seventeen years.²¹

For the students, consolidation and the ensuing adjustment must have caused culture shock. They had gone from one-room schools to a multi-roomed structure. The strange new school had electricity, indoor plumbing, factory-made desks, and teachers with diplomas. Students now attended class with children only of their own age, and later, the curriculum was departmentalized, so that each classroom was associated with a different subject.

Bessie recalled the new high school being built in Collinwood, the same one in use today.

So after seventeen years, we got a new high school building, and my principal came back again and asked me if I would go to high school So I said okay, and you know it was just so nice out there--that beautiful building, cafeteria, all the space in the world, new library and everything--I never did ask to go back. So the rest of my thirty-nine years . . . I taught sophomore grammar and literature.²²

When one thinks about the changes that the new building brought, the impact seems great. Students left the traditional home environment in the morning and went to the updated, modern school during the day, only to return home to do their evening chores. Bessie remembered how even in the 1950s, many of her students still didn't have electricity at home.

In the cafeteria students were served hot lunches (not "dinners") that contained all four food groups. The high school also had a gymnasium, with several regulation-size basketball courts and a large assortment of sports equipment. The playground equipment must have been an astonishment to the children who were used to playing with a stick or a handkerchief.

Other narrators described the change differently than Bessie did. They did not address the consolidation system specifically; many expressed concern about the materialism of Cypress Creeks,

which ultimately affects the schools. Cypress Creeks children today, they said, are simply given too much. They stressed that their own education was built upon basics, while their children's learning has been founded upon options. As Madgie Daniel said:

They all catch busses now and we footed it whenever we was going--we walked. Well, for me to look at it [schooling today] the way we went to school and all, the most of it looks just like play to me today--the way they teach school today. We had to dig ours out of the book and now they've got it all in little books that ask you the question and you put the answer down there--now that's a lot of difference in it.²³

Many people I spoke to, including two schoolteachers and a former superintendant of schools, said that children learn better in the one-room setting. As Bessie realized, though, "I don't think it [the one-room system] could happen today. There's too many students and there's too many distractions--and I don't think it would work today but it did back then in a rural area. We've just come a long way since then," she said. "But I was just as happy as I could be back then--didn't know anything else."²⁴

Finally, Bessie expressed concern not just over students of today, but also the parents:

The average person'll tell you that students are a lot more of a problem now--I don't think [they are]; I think parents are more of a problem--they don't demand as much of their children at home as they did when I was growing up--my parents made us do homework. [Near the end of my career] both parents were working and most students went home to an empty house, and students didn't do as much work I think it was parents that just let go of their children.²⁵

I began the discussion of change with Homer Darby's general store in Cypress Inn and have moved on to successively greater levels of change in the community: from religious life, through Decorations and funerals, to education. However, the greatest

change that has occurred in the community life has taken place in the areas of transportation and communication.

Speed and convenience in transportation have changed dramatically. Howard Wright to this day still enjoys his reputation as the area's biggest talker, but he no longer hops on a mule and rides over to his neighbor's house. Instead, he gets into his pick-up truck and drives there. We have already seen in Chapter Two that residents were eager to purchase automobiles early on. And with improved means of transportation, residents wanted improved roads.

Today, the state highway has gone through major changes particularly evident to those who grew up with the poor road conditions of earlier times. Most of the county roads in the area are still rocky clay gravel. Indeed, even the Natchez Trace was not paved until the mid-1950s. In the Cypress Creeks area today, two roads are paved: Tennessee Highway 13 (known as the Chisholm Road or simply the Highway) and the Pumping Station Road. The Chisholm Road is a narrow two-lane route that was paved about 1947, while the latter, in bad need of repair, was paved in July 1987. The first half of the Pumping Station Road's paving was paid for by the Tenneco Corporation in 1970, making it the only blacktopped non-state-maintained road in the area.

The unpaved county roads today are regularly graded by the County to remove the gullies that still form during wet weather. Also, tons of gravel have been dumped on them to improve drainage, and ditches are regularly dug on either side to allow water to run off. All of these "modern" forms of road maintenance are supported by a county-wide tax. As Bessie Smith explained, "The road system has improved. When these people all started work, they demanded

[better roads] and we got a wheel tax and now we're fixing to get another \$15 tax, but we need it."²⁶ As Howard Wright summarized,

There's quite a few things different--in the work, in the transportation, in everything. Of course we've got tractors to farm with now where we [once] done it with mules; trucks to haul with when it was all mules back in them days.²⁷

As for communications, the informal network I spoke of in Chapter Two has changed; indeed it has all but vanished except in the minds of those residents old enough to remember and romanticize it. Three developments in technology have imparted sweeping change in communication on Cypress Creeks: television, radio, and the telephone.²⁸

Radio began the effect that television would continue and carry out, that is, bringing the news of the outside world in. But radio, according to people in the community, was never used by the residents as an informational device; rather, it was used for entertainment. My grandparents told me that people would come to their house on Saturday evenings and gather around the radio to hear Grandpa Jones and the Grand Ole Opry. I also discovered that radio, and as we will see, television and the telephone, fill the need for socializing. While doing field work, I spent time at my great-great aunt's home. She has been a widow since 1960 and lives in a lonely hollow on Little Cypress. While there, she never turned on a radio, or for that matter, a television. (The small black-and-white television she received from her children sits in an obscure corner of the living room with the cord draped over the top.) One day after my grandparents and I had left her house to stay with another aunt, my grandfather and I unexpectedly returned to bring her a kitten we had gotten for her in Cypress

Inn. I walked in the kitchen and she had her radio on as she was making blackberry jelly. It seems as if the radio gives her company when no one else is there to talk with her. To her, the radio would be a nuisance while guests were present.

Television, like radio, has had a similar influence in fostering change. Television brings the news of the outside world into the community, something that people once had no interest in, and like the radio, it acts as a substitute for visiting someone simply to overcome loneliness. Moreover, the younger population pays closer attention to the television than the older folk do; indeed, the Cypress Creek countryside is increasingly cluttered with satellite dishes conspicuously placed in the front yard so that passers-by may see the visible sign of the money spent for the dish. (This is reminiscent of washing machines or freezers similarly placed on the front porch in an earlier day.) Thus, the Cypress Creeks are no longer isolated from the outside world, for people now have satellite access to a range of events--from a soccer game in Argentina to Congressional proceedings in Washington.²⁹

The telephone, however, has had the most far-reaching impact on the community. The telephone provides the clearest example of communicative technology used in lieu of visiting. For instance, two of my great-great aunts moved to Florence early in life and today live two miles from each other. In the summer of 1985 I visited both of them, and my aunt Buelah told me that before they had telephones, she would walk over to Mae's house, or her sister would visit her. I asked Buelah when she had last seen her sister, and she said it had been about a year and a half, although she added that they call one another every night before going to bed.

The telephone has taken the immediate social contact out of communication.

The intent of this chapter has been to show the validity of this study's main argument: that social change is articulated, both implicitly and explicitly, through people's talk about changes in social folk custom. The differences in the social fabric of the community are expressed both when people talk about the past (as shown in Chapter Two), and when they speak of the present, as in this chapter, for past and present are obviously always compared with each other. Thus, social folk custom becomes a barometer when one is concerned with measuring social change as perceived by the insider. So far, I have used explicit comments from residents regarding folk custom and social change. In Chapter Five I analytically deal with more implicit thoughts and feelings of people on the Cypress Creeks about the changes they have experienced.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER FOUR

¹ Tape-recorded interview with Edith Darby, Iron City, Tennessee, 25 May 1985.

² Tape-recorded interview with Homer Darby, Cypress Inn, Tennessee, 18 May 1985.

³ Tape-recorded interview with Altie Bowen, Cypress Inn, Tennessee, 24 May 1985.

⁴ Edith Darby, 25 May 1985.

⁵ Tape-recorded interview with Clemeth Dixon, Iron City, Tennessee, 21 May 1985; for a discussion of the disappearance of neighborhood churches, see John H. Kolb, Emerging Rural Communities (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959), p. 131. Kolb maintains that while the open country church survives, it is no longer exclusively a neighborhood institution.

⁶ Tape-recorded interview with Ethel Jackson, Cypress Inn, Tennessee, 22 May 1985.

⁷ Tape-recorded interview with Annie Olive, Iron City, Tennessee, 22 May 1985.

⁸ Tape-recorded interview with Allen Barkley, Iron City, Tennessee, 22 May 1985.

⁹ Edith Darby, 25 May 1985.

¹⁰ Tape-recorded interview with Thelma Mae Dixon, Iron City, Tennessee, 21 May 1985.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Edith Darby, 25 May 1985.

¹³ Tape-recorded interview with Ed Martin, Cypress Inn, Tennessee, 18 May 1985.

¹⁴ Edith Darby, 25 May 1985.

¹⁵ Altie Bowen, 24 May 1985.

¹⁶ Ed Martin, 18 May 1985.

¹⁷ Glenn S. Gallien, "Natural Neighborhoods and Communities of Wayne County, Tennessee." Knoxville, Tennessee Agricultural Experiment Station, 1946, p. 2. (Mimeographed.)

¹⁸ This consolidation reflected nationwide changes in education. In 1930, there were 148,000 one-teacher schools, while in 1948, the figure dropped to 75,000, and down to 26,000 in 1958. See M. C. S.

Noble, Jr., and Howard A. Dawson, Handbook On Rural Education (Washington, D. C.: Department of Rural Education of the National Education Association of the United States, 1961), p. 64.

¹⁹Tape-recorded interview with Bessie Smith, Collinwood, Tennessee, 2 August 1985.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Tape-recorded interview with Madgie Daniel, Collinwood, Tennessee, 20 May 1985.

²⁴Bessie Smith, 2 August 1985.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Bessie Smith, 2 August 1985.

²⁷Tape-recorded interview with Howard Wright, Cypress Inn, Tennessee, 26 May 1985.

²⁸Glenn V. Fugitt, in "The City and Countryside," Rural Sociology 28:3 (September 1963): 246-261, discusses increased interdependence between the city and the countryside. Transformation is traced in terms of changes in transportation and communication; trade, institutional and social relationships; occupational structure; and population.

²⁹See U. S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1961), p. 516. The document notes the declining percentage of rural television sets.

CHAPTER FIVE

Paradise Lost

In a lot of ways they're more money greedy. There are lots of them going after the money now. They had the time to come in and sit down and talk to you for awhile and visit for awhile of a night. They ain't nobody hardly that visits of a night--or no other time. They just going in a hurry all the time; after the money. You take a lot of the people around here, they've gone for the money.

Howard Wright

In Chapter Three, I indicated that I had talked to three types of people in the Cypress Creeks area--those who had never left, those who had left and have now returned for retirement, and those who had left permanently. I had anticipated that there would be conflicts, or at least differences, among their commentaries. But, surprisingly, there is not. All those I talked to--whether it was Clifford and Ethel Jackson, who have always lived in the area, or the late Orbie Berry, who went north as early as the 1920s, or my grandparents, who left permanently in the 1940s--shared with me similar thoughts about their past lives on the Cypress Creeks. They emphasized the friendliness, community spirit, and piety of life before the 1940s. Were one to read an anonymous transcript of an interview, one would not be able to pinpoint the person as a member of any one of the three groups, and I believe this fact is significant because it shows how different people's descriptions of change corroborate one another. This fact further demonstrates

how people who once shared a common history articulate changes in this history through their talk about changes in social folk custom.

The only difference between these three types of people comes in the way those who have remained in the area see themselves and are seen by those who have returned. Those who have kept the Cypress Creeks as their lifelong home are somehow more virtuous for doing so, both in their eyes and in those of people who have returned.

In examining the oral material that I gathered, it became apparent that I could group blocks of material into three piles: time, money, and innocence. It seems that people have categorized change or, more importantly, the way they have perceived social change, in these three terms. This is the focus of this chapter; that is, they spoke of the time that no one has, the money that everyone has, and the innocence only a few have.

As Ed Martin said, "Nobody was in a hurry, and had the time to stop and talk to you anywhere they met you." Today, time is no longer an unlimited resource on Cypress Creeks. People do not have the time, narrators told me, to visit an old and lonely widow living by herself on what is left of the family homestead, or to go to a Decoration on a warm summer Sunday, or to attend a revival meeting on a Thursday evening. Most residents no longer have the time to stop by Homer Darby's store for a "Co-cola"; they offer instead a substituted wave as they drive by. Gone are the days when entire families would pack up and go to a relative's house and stay all night. As Mary Dial said, life on Cypress Creeks is too fast. "They had time back then--more so than people does this day and time. They went to see one another back then, and

this day and time people ain't got the time to speak to you, let alone go see you. People," she said, "are living too fast."¹ How did this loss of time on Cypress Creeks occur and why did it happen?

The telling of time on the Cypress Creeks used to be governed by natural forces. If a husband and wife were working together hoeing cotton and were hungry, they would simply quit and go to the house and eat their dinner. If a man was hired by someone to do some sawmill work, he could just about tell how far away dinnertime was by looking at the sun. "I didn't work hours," Dick Fowler said of his early wagon hauling days, "they didn't keep the hours: we got up and started at daylight and came in at dark."² Frolicking school children knew when dinner was because it came right after recess, just about the time the poplars' shadows were the shortest.

Time on the Cypress Creeks was also measured by seasons and events. When the ground softened up and dried out enough to plant potatoes spring was right around the corner. When the Decoration came at Mt. Hope Church of Christ on the second Sunday in May, summer had arrived. When the Decoration at McGlamery graveyard came on the first Sunday in September, hot humid nights and roaring katydids would soon disappear. About the time the second crop of potatoes was stored away in the cellar under the frontroom, the "fall of the year" had come. When those potatoes in storage had begun to sprout, residents knew that winter had come.

The potato and Decoration seasons are particularly interesting markers of time today because the community's views toward them have changed significantly. Few people, I observed, have the time

today to plant the two crops of "taters" necessary to get their family through the winter months. They can just as easily afford to buy them at Collinwood's Big Star whenever they need another ten pounds. Edith Darby said that her father often had to give away the potatoes he received on trade to anyone who would take them; everyone grew plenty for themselves. Any potato plants one might find in a garden today are merely token ones; the grower does not expect to have to live on them through the winter. And fewer people still, I was reminded, have the time they once did to come to a Decoration early in the morning and stay all day long--eating, talking, worshipping, visiting--right up until the mosquitoes began to bite. If people come at all, they do not have the time to kill the fattest goat and prepare it the way my great-grandmother is remembered to have done; instead, they drive to Florence and pick up a bucket of chicken from the Colonel. Today, I was told, people usually do not spend any longer at a Decoration than it takes them to put their store-bought artificial flowers on the grave.

Instead of measuring time naturally--by sun, seasons, and events--time today is measured in shifts. People in the area now live in a regimented world of timeclocks and twenty-minute lunch breaks; no longer is "dinner-time" signalled by the pealing of a dinner bell. The agrarian ideal has been overtaken by an economic counterforce that has led people to believe that the only time that matters is that which is recorded on their timecards.

Women no longer have time to stay up all night making paper carnations to adorn a grave, and men are too short of time to make a homemade casket. Even if the demand for these two things returned, people in the area would not spend the time required to make them.

And as Allen Barkley said, "They got to where they didn't have time for one another. If somebody died in the community, they might take off work long enough to go to the funeral and they might not--according to whether it was worth it."³ People today, I was reminded, don't even have time to spend an hour or two on a Sunday morning at the church which their ancestors struggled to build. Residents no longer have time to visit their neighbors on a Saturday evening as they once did. Annie Olive said:

They had love for one another--had time to visit, [to] sit down and talk to them. And now if they come by they say "Howdy" and they're gone. They had more time then--I don't know what's the reason--but they're not as content as they was then; they've got to go somewhere else. There's more things for them to go see, I reckon, than used to be then; then [there] wasn't nothing to go see. Like here to Collinwood or Florence--that was a long ways and we didn't go there very often.⁴

Ed Martin echoed her thoughts. "Everybody's got a job and they're always in a run," he said, "and half the time they don't know where they're going--[they're in such] a hurry."⁵ Saturdays have become the day to stay home and recover from the difficult work week just ended; they are not days to go visiting. And Sundays are now meant to be spent at home to rest up for the demanding week that lies ahead. How can one be ready for the work week if one goes visiting or wastes time at church or at a Decoration or at a neighbor's house?

These excuses may seem reasonable, until one realizes that the work that was once done in the area was much more physically demanding. What occupation today could equal clearing out ten acres of land quickly, so that it could be ready for spring planting? Narrators reminded me that many people markedly shortened their lives by the amount of hard work they did. No one had the same

thing to say about today's occupations, except, perhaps, about the stress involved. Ethel Jackson humorously remembered:

Crosscut saws--yes I've sawed with them things 'til my eyes would almost bug out. I cut firewood and stovewood. Then we had to cook on a wood stove [which she still chooses to do] all the time, so we had to cut firewood and stovewood, so it kept people pretty busy then keeping wood to go through the winter on. I don't see why there was ever a crosscut saw made [laughs].⁶

And Dick Fowler said that when he was in Detroit in 1942, employees complained about hard work: "That wasn't hard work--people'd talk about 'hard work, hard work.' I worked three years and I worked the time they said and come out with a white card, with no marks on it, and I never worked what I call a full day all put together."⁷

Curiously, though, these same people who worked so hard apparently felt that they had all the time in the world. Hardin Rich told me how my great-grandmother, Fronie, often warned her husband, Bob, not to sneak off from the field and go fishing with young Hardin; yet tempting Bob away from the corn field was an easy thing to do, Hardin told me:

Bob, he was making a little crop, and the crop grass was higher than his corn and cotton. Me and Irvin [Bob's brother] come by there with our fishing poles, going fishing. He just laid down his hoe and said, "I'm going with you." Well, his wife, she commenced, "Bob, you ought to be working that garden and things." And he said, "No, I'm going a-fishing." Well, we went a-fishing--stayed all day.⁸

If a man's crop had to be planted and his neighbor just died, he would drop his seed and help the neighboring family through the difficult time. "If it couldn't be done tomorrow," the consensus was, "then it was not worth doing." Helping others--and having the time to do so--seemed to make life worthwhile to residents of Cypress Creeks.

If people do not work as hard as they did, then why don't they perceive themselves as having as much, or more, time than their parents and grandparents did? The answer is that time does not mean the same thing or perform the same function that it did fifty years ago. The folk perception of time, and how it should be spent, has shifted. Today, one does not need to visit others on the weekends to release the tensions from the week before. The person wants to be left alone in his or her own house, away from the crowded and fast-paced world of the workplace. Ideal time today means sitting comfortably in one's favorite chair, relaxing in front of the television, far from the timeclock and the hourly production quotas of the assembly line. Ideal time no longer means visiting and talking and socializing; these just do not hold the same importance that they once did because they all can be obtained at work.

When a man worked in his field planting, hoeing, or harvesting, the only other people with him would have been his wife and, if old enough, his children. Visiting was important because the family wanted to see others in the community. Today, a person often works with hundreds of people. Lunch breaks give that worker a chance to see even more people around the plant. When a weekend comes, the worker no longer feels it so necessary to see people from the community, because he or she has been around many of them the entire week. This is particularly true at the Collinwood Manufacturing Company, which employs about three hundred people, mostly women, from around the area. I heard several women make remarks like, "Oh, I haven't seen Mary--she's been on vacation all week from the plant." Also significant is the fact that the people who are

considered to be the "biggest visitors in the community," both then and now, are those who are still farming at home, or those who have retired or are unemployed--clearly those who do not get out into the larger world everyday.

This is not to say that people have changed their socializing habits simply due to their occupations. It is more than that. Most workers in the area would say that the quality of socializing was much higher when people worked on their own farms and were more isolated from their neighbors. But their attitude seems to be that this is the way it is now, and that hence, they are going to "go with the flow," even if they are not quite sure of just what this flow is or even more importantly, what caused it. However, residents continue to bemoan the irony that today, when people only work forty hours per week, they have less time than they did when they worked at home sixteen hours per day. All of these people who "do not have time" to visit actually choose not to do so because of their work schedules. "People don't care for each other like we should," Nadean Reeves explained. "We ain't got the time--[you] can't stay off from your job--you've got to go."⁹

Ethel Jackson summed up the situation this way:

I don't think people loves their neighbor like they did back then--they're not as close to each other as they were back then. No, they don't visit, and if one of the neighbors'd get sick [back then] they'd help them and just go and take over like it was their own stuff--work their crop out and do everything that was needed, but people don't do that much--once in a while they will. But it's quite different. I believe people has just grown apart and [there is] so much other things for them to occupy themselves with they just don't take the time. They're missing out on the best part of life.¹⁰

Howard Wright agreed, and said that the people do not have time

because they are concerned with getting more and more money.

If time is something people on Cypress Creeks find they have less of than they did in the past, then money is something that few will deny that they have more of today. Once people in the area had plenty of time and no money, and that did not seem to bother them. "We didn't know any different," narrators told me over and over again. Today, they have relatively less time and relatively more money, and they cannot seem to adjust to this difference. As Bessie Smith said, "Just like all places, I think sometimes that money causes people to lose their basic values."¹¹ One might say that residents know differently now, but can do nothing about it. Attitudes toward money have changed because the economy has changed; what was once an area where self-sufficient family farming thrived has now become an area where a cash economy prevails, as Bessie Smith pointed out:

I can remember hearing the . . . old men sitting around and talking about, "What do you need with money?" And I was going to high school at that time and I thought, "Heck, you've got to have a little money." But they didn't really think you did--you could live off the land, and you could sell your corn and get your coal oil for your lamp and your flour for your biscuits--and that was all you needed, plus you had your buggy and your horses to go to church But it's changed now; everybody wants their family to have a nice home, a nice method of transportation and the things in the home. I think the standard of living and the way they look₁₂ at it is different--they do want progress

While in the Cypress Creeks area, I could not help but notice the influence of money. Everywhere, I saw signs of people either trying to make a "fast buck" or to save one. One day, I took my grandmother and two great-great aunts across the Alabama state line to a village known as Zip City. My two aunts had heard of a store there that had very inexpensive shoes for sale. We walked up to the entrance

of the old, plank-constructed building where the owner was sitting out on the porch (even stores have porches), fanning herself and drinking a Mello-Yello. "Y'all c'mon in," she told us, apparently happy to have some customers. Inside, there were several hundred pairs of shoes that were all obviously worn. Although the used nature of the shoes was distressing to my grandmother, my aunts overlooked this fact because the extremely low prices allowed them to save some precious money.

I found an even clearer example of the importance of money when I visited the Hays Place, the site where my father, my grandmother, and several other ancestors were born and raised. The 150-year-old dogtrot had burned in 1982 (although curiously there was no lightning that day nor any electricity in the house).¹³ I went to what was left of the homeplace with several distant cousins of mine and was shocked to learn that the person to whom the forty-acre site had been willed from his father was opening up a path near the barn for logging. Apparently, this was the quickest and cheapest way to get trucks and equipment back to the vast reserves of poplar and oak; presumably, the path would have gone right through the yard had the foundation and extant outbuildings not been in the way. Like an increasing number of Cypress Creek people today, this person pays more respect and attention to earning money than he does to preserving the past. I was filled with despair when I saw the great path along which the trucks and skidders were emptying out the forests from behind the Hays Place--the once-proud and imposing two-level dogtrot house on Middle Cypress. The site today is so upsetting to my grandmother that she refuses to even drive by what's left of the homestead.

Money has also become a substitute for time. At every Decoration, there is a donation box for the upkeep of the cemetery. In the past, no money was needed, for men in the community worked together clearing off the graveyard. Today, people would rather give twenty dollars to hire someone to mow the grass. Ed Martin told me that when he came back to Big Cypress from Indiana, he found Mt. Hope's cemetery all grown up with saplings "as big as a shovel handle." He and several other men cleared the area, and afterwards one of the men suggested that donations be sought to set up a cemetery fund. Ed said that within two weeks over \$15,000 had been donated to the cemetery, showing both the amount of money in the area and how people substituted it for personal attention--they would rather pay someone to do the work than take the time to do it themselves.

The best way to see the present significance of money, however, is to look at those people who are admired by the community. The type of hero that the community looks up to has changed; today one is admired not for the worth of his or her character, but rather for the value of one's bank account. People I talked to often recalled memories of earlier residents, describing their attributes: "You never went to Joe Berry's house and left without eating," or "Dora Whitten would have done anything in the world for you," or "Annie Montgomery could pray the prettiest prayer I've ever heard." Clearly, these qualities were representative of those that the community valued: generosity, altruism, virtue. The point is that I did not hear anyone say, "Joe left behind a lot of land," or "Dora often earned money by cutting cross ties," or "Annie saved pennies in a canning jar in the kitchen." Several people in the area still hold on to these more traditional values

of generosity, altruism, and virtue; those who do are the ones who have not adjusted to the modern life that exists today on the Cypress Creeks. Those who have adjusted to life in the 1980s now admire a new type of person. This change has occurred because of the increased awareness and presence of money in the area.

Numerous times while I was in the area I was reminded of the success of Willie Banks.¹⁴ Nearly everyone admires Willie, perhaps even envies him for the money he has acquired. His life story is now the typical pattern for success on Cypress Creeks. He went north early in life and worked in Detroit, and while there, saved every penny he earned. Because of this frugality, he was able to return to the Cypress Creeks while still relatively young--in his late thirties. He then proceeded to buy up all of the land that his savings could afford him, as well as to persuade his father to divide between himself and his siblings the land that his father worked so hard to get.

When Willie got the land that he wanted, he needed something to put onto it. As we have already seen, farming was out of the question--it was too much work for the busy modern man. He turned instead to the things that my grandfather says "make money for you while you sleep." Today the hills and pastures that Willie owns are filled with cattle, waiting until their market price rises sufficiently to merit their sale. If that price does not rise high enough or quickly enough, that's fine with Willie; he has enough money to wait it out, and at least he will be assured of having plenty of beef for his table. Many claim that Willie is a millionaire. They highly respect him and admire him for his great success. Willie Banks has come to represent the quintessential

person who is admired today on Cypress Creeks. His money is his sole qualification for this admiration.

It has already been shown that Willie's money is his qualification for admiration. What has not been shown is that his life is not all a bed of roses, a fact that many people mentioned. Many had sharp words of criticism over his package liquor store in Cypress Inn. Almost everyone alluded to his love/hate relationship with the whiskey bottle; they told me that he has often been found in his pick-up truck drunk crying over some worry. They told me of his lack of regard for the houses that are unlucky enough to lie on the homesteads that he acquires; to make more room for pasture land, he bulldozes them over, including the ancestral home and birthplace of his own father, showing again his general disregard for the past and his love for moeny. The majority of those people who judged his quality of life did so because they saw themselves as more virtuous than he, for they had stayed behind in their homeland and did the best they could, resisting the temptation of money.

While Willie today is the archetypal person that people admire, he is not the first self-made man in the community; many agree the Robert Whitten was the prototype.¹⁵

Ironically, Robert Whitten lived in a modern institution that charged money for his admission--the Wayne County Nursing Home in Waynesboro. While the elderly once stayed with their children and were taken care of in the home, today they are taken to nursing homes like this one (the only one in the county). I first visited the home to interview Dick Fowler, a man who was full of energy and memories; he seemed to almost enjoy his semi-private room.

Just before I was leaving, someone mentioned to my grandfather that Robert was a resident in the nursing home, so I decided to go down and talk to him.

If these modern days are relatively good ones for "Pa Dick" Fowler, they were lonely ones for Robert. His money could afford to buy him a fully private room, unlike Dick's semi-private one. But Robert's room did not have the personal things that family and friends had given Dick, like flowers and trinkets and pictures. Robert's room consisted of a small bed, a chest, and a vinyl chair. It was a cold, sterile, institutional room. Throughout the interview, he talked about money--of his whiskey runs (he once delivered 500 gallons at five dollars each) and his land deals and his general store on Little Cypress. He told me how he went north in the 1920s and delivered ice. He hated it, he said, but stuck it out long enough to save sufficient capital to return home and later open up a store.

I worked in Michigan . . . two months or three [and then] I went on over to Illinois--walked over there. I just delivered ice; I got four dollars and eighty cents a day for hauling ice. I had two big horses and an ice wagon. I'd set up in there like one big one! I went to work after I come back, by George, for a dollar and a quarter a day. That was pretty hard to lose that much but I wouldn't a been displeased up there for ten dollars a day 16

The interview became his manual of how to "make it big" on Cypress Creeks. I could barely persuade him to talk about anything else but the lack of money in the area back then and the ways he managed to make money:

We didn't have the money, by God, to spare to go nowhere, much. I remember we'd have to take some of . . . [the kids'] money to have a mule shod, we had four mules. We took the kids' gift money

and had the mules shod. We didn't have no other money to do it with--we couldn't get a hold of no money even . . . God, they [blacksmiths] was high back then. You could get a good pair [shod] for three or three-fifty. I sold one pair for \$1100, I guess that was about in '31 or '32--somewhere along in there. One of them had gotten to where it was windbroken or something, I didn't like it, it was a big, fine mule. I rode it from Collinwood to Columbia [about seventy-five miles northeast]. I rode it up there one morning and sold it the next day.¹⁷

At the time, I was disappointed with the interview, for I felt as if I came away with little usable information. But now I realize the Robert was simply representative of the new Cypress Creeks' self-made man. Often I passed what is left of his store on the Chisholm Highway. Across the road is his house, now empty, that my grandfather says was the first brick house in the area. Although by today's standards it is relatively small, "we used to think that that house was a mansion," he told me.

Ed Martin realized how tragic Robert's life was in the end, even with all of his money:

Then there's Robert Whitten with all kinds of money, a bunch of kids, and up there in the nursing home. Now that's another difference. Used to, if one of your parents got disabled--sick--the kids took him out and took care of him. Nowadays they don't do that no more . . . Robert has got plenty of money, he could have hired anyone to have cared for him and he's got all kinds of land, and he worked hard and done all kinds of scheming to get that money and now he's up there.¹⁸

Robert, Ed told me, was just like everyone else; how much money one has or does not have makes no difference.

Ed also explained a very interesting paradox (which almost everyone afterward either articulated or agreed to) that, in its larger scope, is an underlying theme of this study. Very simply, he told me that the more money people got, the less happy they became.

James Linville articulated the same idea:

There's much more money available now than there was then, but I don't believe that your people are as happy. You're better off financially, but I don't think you're better off . . . as far as happiness is concerned. You're better off with regard to being able to purchase some [things]; of course you'd be unhappy now if you had to accommodate yourself like we did back then. I'm not saying that it's too awful [now]--I've got a new Cadillac sitting out there in the yard It'd be bad to have to go back from a Cadillac to something else.¹⁹

The day that I left Ed and Opal's simple mobile home (a fire had destroyed all of their non-insured belongings several years before), I realized that the history of social change on the Cypress Creeks has to do with the end of innocence; paradise had been lost.

People on Cypress Creeks now sense that somewhere along the way, they made a wrong turn. One might visualize change in terms of the following metaphor.²⁰ Life in the area back in the 1910s, '20s, and early '30s could be described as a clay gravel trail, with residents traveling along it at a leisurely pace. Along this path were scattered dwellings and farms, where travelers would take time to stop in for a visit. There was time enough along the way to grow corn or cotton or tobacco, as well as a garden to keep a family stocked with vegetables through the summer. There was time enough to cook large dinners for Decorations as well as make crepe paper flowers for every grave. Life on this trail was simple yet rewarding.

Gradually, general stores began to pop up along this path, whose owners were trying to "get a little ahead" by running their own businesses. As these store owners began to acquire a little money, others on the path also decided to build stores, hoping

to earn some money like their fellow community members. For many in the area, life began to center around the general store; men sat out on the porch and talked, women traded eggs for calico, children dreamed about the penny candy in jars.

But the store business was not for everybody; few successfully made the transformation from husbandman to businessman. Many went broke in their undertakings and had to find work on a neighbor's plot clearing land or in a nearby sawmill to pay off the debt to the wholesale houses in Florence and Nashville. In the summer of 1939, word spread among the travelers of this trail that the government was offering men work further down the path on something called a national parkway--the Natchez Trace. Many men along the way jumped at the chance to do the Trace's dirty work: snaking logs, shoveling dirt, quarrying limestone. They were glad to get the unprecedented wages ranging from thirty-five cents to a dollar per hour.

Suddenly, travelers on this path found that they were moving much faster than their ancestors had. They discovered that they were beginning to be enslaved to making "good time" down the path. A few journeyers even traveled in automobiles, purchased with their earnings from the Trace. Others went down the path at the same traditional speed that their grandparents traveled; they still planted, hoed, harvested, worshipped, visited. But the Trace had prepared everyone for what lay ahead.

One day the travelers encountered a fork in the path. Eventually, many people had realized that they had reached the boundaries of the Cypress Creeks, the edge of the Garden. To the right, the trail continued and circled back around through the area

where travelers were born and raised. This familiar path on the right continued with dusty yet tranquil meanderings through life.

But on the left was a road that was paved with what looked like gold. Along this road were shiny, multi-colored automobiles and flashing neon signs and tall skyscrapers and large factories with "Help Wanted" signs. This road also had men at its entrance dressed in suits finer than a Sunday preacher's who were smiling and waving handfuls of money and motioning for people to come and choose this route for the remainder of their life. Everything looked so new and shiny, so colorful and promising that many people just couldn't resist; they eagerly sold their animals and their farming tools and most of their housekeeping supplies and took this route.

While the majority from the community quickly turned left and went down this golden road, a few people from the Cypress Creeks were leery. All of those attractive things were simply too good to be true. Besides, they reasoned, their parents would never have accepted something like that. No matter how difficult it was to resist this enticing fork in the trail, they held out and stayed to the right of the path.

I interviewed several people who stayed on the dusty, worn path to the right. These people have been looked upon by the people who left as old-fashioned, eccentric, and narrow-minded. They are the folk who took the path that led back into the Cypress Creeks, where they lived out a life of hard work and, oftentimes, hard luck. Many of the people who labeled them as old-fashioned never saw that these lives were anything more than redundantly circling around the Cypress Creeks on the path of life.

Leonard and Ora Dodd are a perfect example of those who took this path. Down in a valley, their lonely house sits near the head of Middle Cypress Creek. When I arrived for an interview at about five o'clock one afternoon, Leonard was not there; his wife told me that since rain was predicted in the morning, he had decided to "make hay while the sun shines." I went on to another interview and returned to the Dodds' at dusk. Leonard was still not home. While waiting to hear the sound of his 1955 Farm-all Cub tractor penetrate the heavy evening air, I walked around the land that the Dodds have worked so hard to acquire. Many say that Leonard has the best farm land in the area. Eventually, I heard the pattering tractor approach. Leonard washed his hands in the creek and invited me into the front room.

During the interview, it became clear to me that the Dodds were different from others that I had talked to; I soon realized that they had taken the path to the right. "Did you ever go up north to work?" I asked Leonard.

"No, I stayed back here and farmed like my daddy did."

"Were you ever in the service?"

"No."

"What's the farthest place away from home you've ever been?"

"Nashville, I reckon."²¹

I began to sense that the Dodds felt as if I was thinking that they had done the wrong thing in life, but near the end of the interview, I realized that they were proud of the route they had chosen.

Several others I interviewed are like Leonard and Ora Dodd. Delma Rich certainly is; indeed, she is the archetypal Cypress

Creek resident whose character displayed the innocence and virtue that were strong enough to resist the modern changes that swept through her beloved community--and many of her fellow friends and neighbors have scorned her because of this decision. Ethel Jackson is another example of the decision to remain on the familiar path. She has lived in the same dogtrot house for seventy-seven years. Clemeth Dixon proudly told me how he never went north to work, but faithfully maintained a general store, a farm, and a family. My great-great aunts Virgie Rich and Myrtle Wilson have chosen a similar route in life. Aunt Virgie refuses to lock her doors and windows, simply because she will not admit that life in the 1980s necessitates it; her parents never knew what a door lock was, so why should she use one? Jewell Stults would agree:

In all my growing up, hardly ever our door was latched, they'd push it to in the wintertime, and me and [my mother and sister] has stayed by ourselves a many a night, and she'd say, "Well, if a dog happens to jump in, I'll hear it." And I'd say, "Mom, it might come up a cloud," and she'd say, "Well, if it does, I'll hear it, and I'll get up and shut the door," and we'd sleep there all night, just us two kids and her--and two or three miles off to the closest house! Not a screen door--just an old-fashioned door, [with a piece of wood] . . . with a nail drove through it for a latch.²²

Regretfully, Ellie Williams realized today's need to lock one's home:

Back then, you could just go off anywhere you got the notion to, if you wanted to shut your doors, all right; if you didn't, they wasn't wanting nothing. You generally shut them on account to keep the dogs out maybe. But you never thought nothing about coming home and something being gone. And now you don't know when you leave whether you'll have anything or not when you get back.²³

Ellie Williams and Hardin Rich appear to be the last representatives of life before the Trace was paved. In Ellie's kitchen, added on to the rear of his dogtrot, were two washbuckets; they were

the extent of his "indoor plumbing," while the great outdoors was his bathroom. Perhaps his largest acquiescence to modern life was his blue 1979 Chevy pick-up truck with 59,000 miles on the odometer and a rattlesnake tail with twelve rattles hanging on the rear-view mirror. Of the temptation to go north for work, Ellie said:

I just never did have the notion about going.
I never did think about going. I never was what
you call--I call them money crazy. I had a family,
they was growing up when their mother was dead
and gone.²⁴

Just as in his younger days when he was growing up on Big Cypress Creek and hunting and fishing with my great-grandfather, Hardin Rich told me he still enjoys trading knives and guns with the local boys.

Pearl Coffman is another person who resisted the route to the outside. She told me how the only "public" job she ever had was as the 1930 census taker for Cypress Creeks. Today, she lives quietly in the house her father built, on land that has been in the family for generations. Like everyone I talked to, she missed the days gone by:

Everybody was friendlier . . . than they are nowadays, and, well, they didn't see as many people and they was glad to see you. I was treated like somebody everywhere I went People was more friendlier in them days than they are now, but [pause] I guess we've all changed. We had more pleasure. Yeah, we had lots more pleasure. On Sundays there was always a big crowd around, or you'd go somewhere, and now you run to church and right back home, that's about it.²⁵

Interestingly, Matt Moore had resisted the change for ninety-five years, until his daughter would not tolerate his way of living any longer. Mr. Moore and his wife lived in a typical log house like many

other Cypress Creek families. The house had no water, no electricity, no telephone. Their daughter, a retired career soldier, discovered a government program that would subsidize the building of a new home for her parents. The new home today sits across the road from the old house. It is carpeted, air-conditioned, and equipped with all other modern conveniences. The daughter takes care of Matt and his ailing wife. Clearly, the new brick house could never replace nor satisfy him like the old home across the way did.

I also found many, like Mr. Moore's daughter, who had opted for the shiny, golden road to the left. These were the people who talked about the past as if it were a thousand years ago, instead of just a few decades gone by. They were the ones who themselves sorrowfully admitted that they probably did take the wrong turn when they saw that golden road, the road they found to be merely gilt.

This route carried them away from the Cypress Creeks, away from Wayne County, even away from Tennessee. It took them north, to a place they were not prepared to deal with. There, they found themselves in a "dog-eat-dog" world where money was all that mattered, not visiting your neighbor on a Sunday afternoon. It was a society, they explained, of locked front doors, a place where crime filled the front page of the newspaper. Dewey Stults, however, felt it necessary to defend, or at least explain, his decision to take the road to the left:

That's how come there are so many southern people in Indiana and Michigan. We was hunting work 'cause we didn't have it; we had to go somewhere and find work. I went to Detroit once and worked six months and I don't want no part of Detroit. They ain't no reason at all that I would like it I couldn't think of one thing I liked about it--not nothing--it's just an old town that I didn't like. [But] South Bend and Mishawaka--them's nice towns.

The reason I left [is] I just wanted to come home. This is still home, and was home all the time I was up there. You don't know the nature of a hog; we raised hogs in here in the wild woods; they run outside. You take an old sow off someplace, and she's not satisfied, and if you bring her back home she starts rooting and hunting for food. They's a bee man up in Lawrence County that raises wild bees. And I asked him once, I said, "How far will a bee go to get food?" He said, "They're just like a man--they'd go just the distance it takes to get it; if they've got food close to their hive, that's where they'll get it." Yeah, he said, "A man with ambition . . . will go 'til he finds food." And that's how come with me [to live] in South Bend, 'cause I was hunting something to raise my family on, and I would've went years earlier, way back, you know, a long time ago, but I found a job, and worked at it until I come home.²⁶

Like Dewey, many of those who took this gilded road managed to find a route back home; a large number returned to the Cypress Creeks via the thing that many say prompted them to leave--the Natchez Trace. They found that life on Big, Middle, and Little Cypress, however, was not the same. It was not the same because they changed it by their return. Those who came back began to work for electrification in the area, for wheel taxes that would improve the rutted roads, for educational consolidation; all of the things they had experienced along the golden road. Along with these "progressive" changes, adults brought different habits back to the area, like isolation and individualism. I often heard how people up north were not as friendly as people at home and looked out for themselves.

Hence, I found that both those who stayed and those who returned together bemoan the passing of the good life that they believe once existed on the Cypress Creeks: the people who stayed behind resent the modern changes, while those who left expected to return to the former way of life. The virtuous folk who stayed behind

along the familiar path could not protect their paradise when the homesick, albeit wealthy, prodigal sons returned home. Again, however, it is important to remember that regardless of whether or not the people left, they still gave me similar types of commentary; both groups find it difficult to adjust to the new lifestyle today in the area, as James Linville said:

They're not as well adjusted to their particular situations, their lifestyle has changed, and I don't believe they are as happy as they were when we had less money, but had more intimate relationships with our neighbors and our families. And you have a real rash of broken families now whereas before, it was considered a disgrace to get a divorce--it's almost considered necessity at the present time.²⁷

Today, people are not as happy as they once were; every person I talked with told me this. Even Bessie Smith, who was all for progress and reluctant to criticize her community, admitted this hesitatingly, reflecting on her own sense of loss of innocence:

So far as being happier now than I was then, [pause] I was probably happier then. I knew nothing about the modern days--I think it's because we didn't know, though I think once we got educated to the fact that there were better things we wanted those things. But I think we're too competitive now; I think the whole world is too competitive.²⁸

Many others remarked about their innocent pasts, too--that time in their lives when all people said they knew were farming and visiting and caring for each other, when people worked hard for survival, and had little material results to show for this hard work, as Dewey Stults remembered:

We had a heating stove out of an old oil tank--it was homemade. That was the heatingest thing, though, you ever saw. You could pile it full of wood. Of course, sometimes you could throw a cat through the wall [laughs], but we enjoyed it. That was life, that was all we knewed. We had it. That's all we had and that's all we ever expected.²⁹

I heard "that's all we ever knowed" over and over again while on the Cypress Creeks. I was continually reminded that people never knew what money really was, like Ed Martin explained:

People were happier then. You could get up in the morning when I lived on the creek and hear them old steel-tired wagons a-rattling all up and down this creek. People a-hollering doo-wackey and whistling, and they were people that was just as happy as they could be. They didn't have a dollar in their pockets.³⁰

While people sorely missed these "doo-wackey" days of innocence, they also mourned the loss of friendliness and community spirit in the days when people took the time to look out for one another, as Ellie Williams said:

That's when people cared for one another, visit one another. If you thought the neighbor needed some help, you'd go see if he did. You didn't have nothing to help him with, only your hands, you might say, and you'd cut him a load of wood, something like that, you know, or if it was crop time, and he got sick, they'd gang up in there and work his crop out. Of course, they don't do that now. Well, they don't have to; everybody's looking out for themself.³¹

Dewey Stults echoed Ellie's comments:

People was more neighborly then, I'll say, and they shared with each other to live; they had to You just wasn't bothered with everything as you are in this age. If your cow went dry, why, your neighbor had some extras--just get one of his cows and bring her over and milk her; all he wanted was the calf took good care of, you know.³²

Irene Berry, like Dewey, was distressed with the disorientation of modern life: "They just wasn't so much confusion and turmoil and trouble going on like they are now--everybody was friendly. We worked hard and had a pretty good time, and I guess we was happy."³³

"I didn't pay no attention [to the difficult life]," her late husband Orbie, Sr., once said of those innocent days, "I thought I was having a good time, I had plenty to eat--nothing to worry

about."³⁴

Finally, several people spoke of the disorientation that Irene Berry addressed, yet they realized the adjustments that must be made in order to cope with modern life. Bessie Smith said that education helped one make this realignment:

My dad back then wanted all of us to get an education, but he didn't think that education was going to be exactly what made your living; you was just going to have to do hard work to make your living. Nowadays they want you to get your education so you don't have to work as hard to get better positions.³⁵

James Linville explained how he understands the reality of today, and how helpless some people are against coping with their loss of innocence. He was proud because he felt he had adjusted to modern life better than most people had, although in the end he, too, missed the "good old days":

See, I keep the tradition going, but I'm still all for today. I'm not for turning back the clock--it can't be done. You don't stand still; if you stand still, you die. You just fold up and die. You always adjust; you go forward or backward, but you don't want to go backward. These things we're talking about are great and I love it. It's nostalgia. [long pause] But I think it was great--times back then.³⁶

James, like other Cypress Creek residents, regrets the sense of loss of the good old days. This abstract loss is most easily expressed by talking about the concrete changes in the area's customs.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER FIVE

¹Tape-recorded interview with Mary Dial, Cloverdale, Alabama, 27 May 1985.

²Tape-recorded interview with Dick Fowler, Waynesboro, Tennessee, 17 May 1985.

³Tape-recorded interview with Allen Barkley, Iron City, Tennessee, 22 May 1985.

⁴Tape-recorded interview with Annie Olive, Iron City, Tennessee, 24 May 1985.

⁵Tape-recorded interview with Ed Martin, Cypress Inn, Tennessee, 18 May 1985.

⁶Tape-recorded interview with Ethel Jackson, Cypress Inn, Tennessee, 22 May 1985.

⁷Dick Fowler, 17 May 1985.

⁸Tape-recorded interview with Hardin Rich, Iron City, Tennessee, 21 May 1985.

⁹Tape-recorded interview with Nadean Reeves, Iron City, Tennessee, 21 May 1985.

¹⁰Ethel Jackson, 22 May 1985.

¹¹Tape-recorded interview with Bessie Smith, Collinwood, Tennessee, 2 August 1985.

¹²Ibid.

¹³For further information on the Hays Place, see the author.

¹⁴Willie Banks is a pseudonym.

¹⁵Robert Whitten died in 1987.

¹⁶Tape-recorded interview with Robert Whitten, Collinwood, Tennessee, 17 May 1985.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ed Martin, 18 May 1985.

¹⁹Tape-recorded interview with James Linville, Collinwood, Tennessee, 20 May 1985.

²⁰Articulated in part by Bessie Smith.

²¹ Tape-recorded interview with Leonard Dodd, Iron City, Tennessee, 23 May 1985.

²² Tape-recorded interview with Jewell Stults, Collinwood, Tennessee, 20 May 1985.

²³ Tape-recorded interview with Ellie Williams, Cypress Inn, Tennessee, 18 May 1985.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Tape-recorded interview with Pearl Spain Coffman, Iron City, Tennessee, 23 May 1985.

²⁶ Tape-recorded interview with Dewey Stults, Collinwood, Tennessee, 20 May 1985.

²⁷ James Linville, 20 May 1985.

²⁸ Bessie Smith, 2 August 1985.

²⁹ Dewey Stults, 20 May 1985.

³⁰ Ed Martin, 18 May 1985.

³¹ Ellie Williams, 18 May 1985.

³² Dewey Stults, 20 May 1985.

³³ Tape-recorded interview with Ilene Berry, Collinwood, Tennessee, 22 May 1985.

³⁴ Tape-recorded interview with Orbie C. Berry, Sr., Collinwood, Tennessee, 22 May 1985. Orbie Berry died in 1987.

³⁵ Bessie Smith, 2 August 1985.

³⁶ James Linville, 20 May 1985.

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