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The Hensley Settlement: An Oral Folk History of Its Material Culture

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1975

THE HENSLEY SETTLEMENT: AN ORAL FOLK HISTORY OF
ITS MATERIAL CULTURE

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Center for Intercultural and Folk Studies

Western Kentucky University

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Michael Lynn Morse

May 1975

THE HENSLEY SETTLEMENT: AN ORAL FOLK HISTORY OF
ITS MATERIAL CULTURE

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Directed by: Lynwood Montell, Mary Clarke, and Kenneth Clarke

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A number of aspects of the life style and material culture of a mountain settlement in Eastern Kentucky are studied to provide a portrait of life in that region in the early part of this century.

The Hensley Settlement was established about 1903 when two families, the Hensleys and the Gibbonses, moved onto a 500 acre survey on top of Brush Mountain near Middlesboro, Kentucky. During the course of almost forty-eight years on the mountain, the settlers multiplied into a community of over eighty people and constructed in excess of 100 log buildings. They had their own school, gristmills, and blacksmith. Their economy was agricultural at a subsistence level as their only cash crop was illegal whiskey.

In later years the younger generation of Hensleys and Gibbonses became disenchanted with the rugged style of mountain life and were lured away by the regular paycheck and cash economy of the coal camps. As the younger generation left the mountain the older settlers were forced to move also. Advancing age made it impossible for them to carry on their farming activities without the help of their children. Finally about 1951 only Sherman Hensley, the first of the settlers to move up the mountain, remained. The land was bought by the National Park Service to be reconstructed and used as a living historical museum. The settlement history and genealogy is examined in detail as well as the buildings, food production and preservation methods, and the mountain culture.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Hensley Settlement, located on Brush Mountain near Cumberland Gap, Kentucky, offers a unique opportunity for the study of a number of aspects of the life style of a people living in the mountainous regions of Eastern Kentucky in the early 1900's. It provides a unique opportunity because not only was it a relatively compact unit of culture but also because a fairly complete record of the material culture and activities of the settlement exists.

The settlement was established about 1903 when a group of related Hensleys and Gibbonses moved to the mountain and settled on property inherited from an uncle, Burton Hensley, of Harlan County, Kentucky. During the course of almost forty-eight years the settlers multiplied into a community of seventy to eighty people and constructed as many as 100 log buildings. They had their own school, gristmills, and blacksmith. Their economy was agricultural, at a subsistence level. Their only cash crop was corn from which they made illegal whiskey which they sold in the mines that were so numerous in the region surrounding the mountain. In later years the younger generation of Hensleys and Gibbonses lost interest in the rugged style of mountain life. They were lured away by the regular pay and cash economy of the coal mines. As the younger generation left the mountain many of the older people were forced to move also. Advancing age made it impossible for them to carry on their farm work without the help of their children. Finally, about 1951, only Sherman Hensley, the first of the settlers to move onto the

mountain, remained. The property was purchased by the National Park Service for eventual use as a living historical museum.

An account of the folklife of this settlement will provide an accurate and succinct portrait of rural American life in the Southern Appalachian Region in the early part of this century. At first glance one is led to believe that because of its location this was an example of the isolated society. However, further study shows that this is not the case. In those days, living some distance from the nearest neighbor was more the rule than the exception and, some people in the Hensley Settlement actually had contact with the outside society about once per week. In fact, there appears to be very little that is unique about them. For this reason here is a unit of society that could be studied as a representative sample of the whole.

The Hensley Settlement deserves to be studied in its entirety, but limitations imposed by the scope of a master's thesis dictate that the focus be narrowed to a consideration of one segment of the colony's existence. The material culture of this mountain stronghold affords a manageable unit of study. Buildings and fences are still evident on the cultural landscape, and certain farming implements used across the years are available for study. Equally important, tape recorded oral traditions regarding the life of the inhabitants of the settlement help to elucidate the nature and function of the visual remains. The oral testimonies in their entirety provide a rather accurate description of the whole spectrum of the settlement's folklife. The term folklife is now employed by many folklorists to describe the nonverbal aspects of folklore.¹

¹Not all folklorists subscribe to this position. Some prefer to use folklore as a term that embodies both verbal and nonverbal aspects of folk culture. Richard M. Dorson, the recognized dean of American folklorists, makes his feelings clear in this matter in the title of

The great discourses and arguments that have been put forth over the past several years concerning the historical accuracy of oral traditions have been at least partly quieted by Professor Lynwood Montell's Saga of Coe Ridge.¹ It has paved the way for the acceptance of studies such as this.

The value of studies drawn from oral traditions is limited by what questions are asked by the interviewer and the memory and willingness of the source. This study is no exception. However, there are ways to verify information to some extent by asking the same question of several informants familiar with the subject and then comparing answers. To this extent the material in this thesis has been verified. The same questions were asked of all the informants, and often a single informant was asked more than once at different times. When conflicting answers were given they were compared with information contained in published works of the period to see what was likely to be correct. One pro-oral history facet of the interviews was evident. People of societies who do not use written records have an uncanny ability to recall detailed information concerning the past of themselves and their society.

Another problem of the oral history method becomes evident when members of a different generation are interviewed. In every society things change over a period of time, and it is often difficult to establish exactly when the change took place. If one informant says that hay was cut with a cradle and scythe and another remembers that

one of his recent books, Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972).

¹William Lynwood Montell, The Saga of Coe Ridge: A Study in Oral History (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1970). A persuasive article on the value and accuracy of oral history is George Evans, "Aspects of Oral Tradition," Folklife, VII (1969), 5-14.

a mowing machine was used, it must be established whether one informant is in error or whether the discrepancy is simply a product of change. This is particularly true if the study covers such a period of time that either answer could be correct. In fact, both answers could be correct. It should not be assumed that even a small unit of society is completely homogeneous and has no diversity. For example, in this study one informant said that oxen were used. Another said no oxen were used. Further investigation showed that oxen were used in the early days of the settlement but only by certain people. The second informant thought that the question concerned only his own family, and a third informant did not even know that oxen were used because they were not used after he was born. This is simply to say that oral history can be accurate, but its accuracy can be established only by the use of patience and logic, tempered with an investigative spirit, on the part of the researcher.

This thesis is based on eighty-seven oral history tapes made by the National Park Service at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, and a substantial number of records both written and photographic which I have gathered over the past year-and-one-half. The tapes are interviews with the living former residents of the Hensley Settlement.¹ The photographs are of the remnant as well as the restored portions of the settlement.

¹The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection was gathered by succeeding park historians at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park at Middlesboro, Kentucky, during the 1950's. A questionnaire form was used as a guide to glean information that would be helpful in reconstructing the settlement as a living historical museum. Park Superintendent Amos Hawkins, in the interest of protecting the information against loss and allowing scholarly research about the settlement to be carried out, agreed to allow Western Kentucky University to copy the eighty-seven tapes. A copy is now on deposit at the Western Kentucky University Folklore and Folklife Archives.

I have relied mainly on accounts given by the older members of the settlement since they are likely to have a better perspective on the entire history of the settlement. Footnotes are references to portions of the tapes where an account of the process or fact in question can be found as well as to published outside sources such as Foxfire that can be used to corroborate and authenticate the Hensley tapes.¹ The references in footnotes, however, should not be taken as exclusive. Almost any item is mentioned in a number of places in the tape collection. I have simply chosen for reference what I consider to be the best account.

¹Eliot Wigginton, ed., The Foxfire Book (New York: Doubleday, 1972), p. 309.

II. HISTORY

According to J. Emerson Miller, a local genealogist from Bell County, Kentucky, the first Hensley on record in Kentucky was Lewis Hensley who came to Knox County in 1782 just after the Wilderness Road was widened for wagon traffic. The family was of English and Scots-Irish descent and came to Kentucky from North Carolina.¹ Lewis married Nancy Hoard in 1803, and their eldest son, Samuel, was born in 1805. Washington, a second son, born in 1809, married Ruth Edwards and had eight children named Burton, Wilson, Mary, Washington, Henry, Nicey, James, and Josephua. From this generation came the main group of Hensleys who settled on Brush Mountain. James Hensley married Arena Helton. Among their fifteen children was Sherman, who would be the first of the mountain settlers and one of the two patriarchs of the settlement. His brother, Josephua, actually lived on the mountain for a short time earlier but moved down before the settlement proper was started. He had leased a portion of the land from R. M. Bales about 1901 and farmed there until 1903.²

The land itself was brought under Hensley ownership on May 4, 1903 when Sherman's uncle, Burton Hensley of Harlan County, Kentucky, purchased 508 acres on the mountain from Bales. This parcel of land was then known as the Bales Survey. The purchase was part of a 2,000 acre

¹Sherman Hensley, A personal interview at his home in Caylor, Virginia, November 1973.

²From a genealogy compiled by the National Park Service, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, Middlesboro, Kentucky.

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acquisition that Burton made at that time, all in Bell County, Kentucky.¹ The Bales Survey rests on the ridge of Brush Mountain which is part of the Cumberland Mountain chain. Middlesboro, Kentucky, is at one end while Cubage, Kentucky, and Caylors Gap, Virginia, are located to the north on either side at the base of the mountain. The survey land itself is a gently rolling plateau on the very top of Brush Mountain. In 1903 Burton Hensley sold off 100 acres of the Bales Survey to his son, Andrew Jackson, five acres to his son, Albert, and thirty-eight acres to Sherman. He then divided the remainder between his seventeen children, giving each an equal part or a little more than twenty-one acres apiece.

Sherman married his cousin Nicey Ann on March 21, 1901, and thus acquired her twenty-one acres for a total of fifty-nine acres (Plate I). They lived on Wallins Creek in Harlan County for two years, then moved up the mountain in 1903. He was about twenty-three years old. In addition to Josephua Hensley, several other families had leased land on the Bales Survey prior to its sale to Burton Hensley. They were John Nicols, Bill Satterfield, Frank Hunley, and Jim Nelson. They had been living there for about five years, constructing some buildings and clearing land. These leasors moved down when the land was sold; thus Sherman and Nicey acquired their first home when they moved into the house formerly occupied and built by Jim Nelson.²

The other family of the settlement, the Gibbonses, originated when Joseph Franklin Gibbons came from Ireland and married Rhoda Paris Giles from Spartanburg, South Carolina. Joseph met her in Cutter, Tennessee,

¹Sherman Hensley, A personal interview at his home in Caylor, Virginia, November 1973.

²Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," Bowling Green, Kentucky, Western Kentucky University Folklore and Folklife Archives, tape 23.

where they married, then moved to Rose Hill, Virginia. One of their children, Willie, born in the late 1800's, married Nancy Hensley, daughter of Andrew Jackson Hensley. Willie and Nancy moved to the mountain about a year after Sherman and Nicey, on Nancy's inherited twenty-one acres. Willie later purchased forty-two acres in 1908 from James and Lucy Gibbons and fifty acres from his father-in-law, Jack Hensley, the same year for a total of 113 acres.

Willie Gibbons and Sherman Hensley were the patriarchs of the settlement, as the other settlers often looked to them for advice and came to them with their problems.¹

Sherman remembers the move up the mountain this way. "I moved up in December of 1903. Al Hensley moved up in January of the next year-- 1904. Then Jack and Bert Hensley moved up about March and Willie Gibbons about May." The land had not been legally divided, but, as Sherman said, "Everyone knew what was what."² The first winter was a hard one for the settlers. They had a big snow, then rain which froze into a solid sheet of ice over the snow. They had to keep their stock in a barn for sixty-three days. The newcomers planted a garden and some crops the first year, using land that had been cleared by the leasors. However, most of their time was spent clearing land and repairing and constructing buildings in preparation for the next winter.³ Sherman remembers seven farms in the settlement in the early days. They belonged to Jack Hensley, Albert Hensley, Feelin Hensley, Bert Hensley, Sherman Hensley, Willie Gibbons, and Barney Thompson.⁴

¹Ibid., tape 27.

²Ibid., tape 23.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

III. BUILDINGS

The first big task of the new settlers was to erect buildings for themselves and their livestock. Sherman was the first to build a new home. Al Hensley was next and Jack and Burt Hensley built in the spring of 1904. Willie Gibbons built his house the second year after moving as did Feelin Hensley (Plate II).¹

Sherman did virtually all his own work except for building the chimney. It was common practice, however, to hold "workins" where a number of the settlement men would get together and help a neighbor erect a building or harvest a crop. This was particularly the case when a barn was to be built because the additional height of the building demanded additional labor to raise the logs into place, and the large volume of materials needed made it almost impossible for one man to perform the work alone. While the men erected the barn, the women made quilts and cooked a big meal to show the host's appreciation. After the job was finished, an all-night dance and merry-making often would take place and the visitors would not leave until time to milk the cows and start a new day's work.²

The building site was selected according to the use the building would have. If it were to be a dwelling house, the primary consideration

¹Ibid., tape 23.

²Ibid., tape 28. Also for a more complete description of "workins" see Eliot Wigginton, ed., *Foxfire 2* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), pp. 362-77 and Celia M. Benton, "Corn Shuckings in Sampson County," *North Carolina Folklore*, XXII (November, 1974), 131-41.

was the location of a spring because all drinking and cooking water had to be carried from it. Its chilly waters also served as the only source of refrigeration during the summer. Barns and other outbuildings were primarily located according to the location of the house. Some buildings, such as barns and smokehouses, were kept near the house for convenience. Other buildings, such as pig houses, were situated away from the house because of the odor.¹

The next step was to gather the necessary construction materials. Foundation rocks were brought from the surrounding rock outcroppings on mule-drawn sleds (Plate XVIII). Next the necessary logs were brought in. Trees, usually chestnut because of its easy workability, were cut down with a crosscut saw. They were then trimmed of branches and cut into the proper length. Grabs were fastened to the end of the log. Chains connected the grabs to a doubletree to which a team of mules were hitched. The process is called snaking out a log.²

Oak trees were cut for making shingles, or "shakes" as they were called. Oak was chosen for its durability. The oak trees were cut in the old of the moon because it was believed that if shingles were cut during a new moon they would "crook up" or warp, pulling the nails up and thus causing the roof to leak. Sherman Hensley remembers seeing the sun draw up the corners of shingles that were cut in the new moon.³ The shingles themselves were "rived out" with a maul and froe. The log was first squared by cutting off the sides and then cut into two and one-half

¹Lige Gibbons, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tapes 9 and 10.

²Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 27.

³Ibid.

to three foot sections. The froe was used to split out one-half inch thick boards from the log, and the boards were further trimmed to produce shingles that measured one-half inch by six inches by three feet.¹ The materials at hand, the work of erecting the building could begin. The tools used in construction consisted of a chopping axe, a broad axe, a crosscut saw, a square, a hand saw, a level, a chalkline, a hammer, and a plumb line.² Nails and wooden pegs were used to hold boards and shingles on while the logs were held together at the corners by notching. Several styles of notching were used. Half dovetail seems to be the type preferred in larger buildings (Plate III) while saddle notching (Plate IV) was used for smaller buildings.

The foundation was put down by stacking rocks around the perimeter of the site and leveling by building up any side that was lower than the others. Smaller buildings were sometimes set on the break of a hill and the rear set on rock legs (Plate V) or stacks of flat stones. The logs to be used for walls were prepared by scoring and hewing them square. They were first marked with a chalkline made by the women. The line was held against each end of the log and then lifted at the center and snapped against the log to put a line where wood was to be removed. The log was then put on blocks and fastened down with "dogs" to hold it still.³ It was scored by cutting notches at intervals along its length to the depth

¹Jessie Gibbons, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 62.

²Lige Gibbons, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 9.

³A "dog" is a device made up of an iron bar with a sharp spike at each end set at right angles to the bar. The spike on one end is driven into the log while the other end is driven into the block, thus anchoring the log to the block. An illustration of two types of "dogs" can be found in Eric Sloane, A Museum of Early American Tools (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973), p. 16.

that was to be removed with a chopping axe. Hewing was accomplished using a broad axe to cut down the chalk line from notch to notch. The result was a squared log with at least two and sometimes four flat sides. The sill logs were laid on the rock foundation, and if a floor was to be used the sleepers were placed across the sills and notched in. Then logs were notched at the corners and stacked to make the walls. A large, heavier log called the plate log was placed at the top of the wall. If possible it would run the entire length of the wall, but, if not, two plates were connected by a lap joint (Plate VI) secured with a wooden peg. When the wall became higher than the logs could be lifted, they were pulled up runners or skids leaned against the building using a mule and chains.¹ Notching was done at the top to insure a close fit. Joists were notched into the plate log for a ceiling and poles were used to make rafters. Lathes were nailed across the rafters to provide a nailing surface for the shingles which were applied next.

As soon as the roof was laid the only remaining task was to chink the cracks between the logs. This was done by putting clay mud between the cracks and then nailing boards across them (Plate VII) to hold the chinking in and give further protection against wind.² If the building was a house, a chimney with a fireplace was added for heat and cooking. Rocks for the chimney were brought from a small quarry on the side of the mountain where they were cut out using a stone axe. A stone axe is actually the same as a broad axe but is used only for cutting rock. Some chimneys were built out of fieldstone roughly shaped to fit together.

¹Op. cit.

²Although the Hensley tapes do not reflect it, a common practice was to mix horse hair, hog hair, straw or some other fibrous material into the clay to bind it and prevent cracking. See Eliot Wigginton, ed., The Foxfire Book (New York: Doubleday, 1972), p. 111.

The largest member of the fireplace was the mantle stone which supported the rocks above the opening. It was about four inches thick and at least as long as the width of the fireplace. The entire process of building took two to three months in most cases.¹

The existent buildings of the Hensley settlement appear to be well made and durable. The remaining settlers themselves seem to shun the idea that they were more than functional; however, one cannot avoid noticing their handsome appearance. One intriguing point is the use of rived chestnut boards over the chinked cracks. Although this practice can be found elsewhere it is more common to leave the chinking bare. The boards have a functional purpose in helping to retain the chinking between the logs and further seal the buildings against the winter winds, but they also reflect a pride of craftsmanship and may indicate at least an unconscious artistic spirit among their makers.

The typical farm consisted of six to nine buildings. These were the house (Plate VIII), barn (Plate IX), henhouse (Plate X), outhouse (Plate XI), corn crib (Plate X), hog pen (Plate XII), woodshed (Plate XIII), spring house (Plate XIV), smokehouse (Plate XV), sheep barn, and granary (Plate III). The smaller buildings were often of the pole-barn style and had flat sloped roofs, while the larger ones had gabled roofs. Willie Gibbons was a skilled blacksmith (Plate XVI) and carpenter and fulfilled these roles in the settlement.

The houses were typically three to four rooms measuring overall about thirty feet by twenty feet. The basic unit was a living room and bedroom but some had kitchens added. None of the houses were over one-

¹For a complete description of constructing log buildings see Eliot Wigginton, ed., The Foxfire Book (New York: Doubleday, 1972), pp. 53-107.

story tall. The pattern was to build a double-pen cabin and add lean-to additions according to space requirements. Some cabins had as many as two lean-to additions while some had none. A notable exception to the rule was Willie Gibbons's house. Originally of the double-pen type, it was torn down and rebuilt as a saddlebag house sometime during the settlement's history.

The excellent workmanship of these buildings combined with the beautiful silver-gray appearance of the sun-bleached chestnut produce an impressive comment on the pride and skill of those who built them.

IV. FOOD PRODUCTION

Aside from shelter, the most important aspect of life to the occupants of the Hensley Settlement was food production for themselves and their livestock. The rhythm of the seasons produced a cyclic work schedule. Every season required a distinct set of tasks to be accomplished, and all were directed toward producing and storing food for the winter season.

Spring was a time of renewal when the effects of one winter were repaired and preparation for the next began. Around the first of March the once frozen, now barren soil was turned and broken to a consistency suitable for nurturing seed.¹ In the early days of the settlement the main implement used was the bulltongue plow, but as farm technology progressed other plows were added, such as a turning plow and a hillside plow. The hillside or swivel plow was first patented about 1827 by John Shepherd. It was constructed so that the mouldboard could be easily changed from one side to the other while the team was turning around. This feature made it useful in plowing on sharply sloped fields since the farmer was not forced to plow up and down the slope. The furrows were all turned downhill and parallel to the slope thus reducing erosion.² When the ground was turned the farmers then used an A-harrow (Plate XVII) to break up the clods of dirt and then smoothed the field

¹Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 24.

²Mitford Mathews, ed., *A Dictionary of Americanisms*, Vol. I (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 808.

off with a drag or roller. When the danger of frost was past, it was time to plant. This usually occurred around the first of May. The ground was laid off in rows with a plow and the seed was planted by hand. The seed was generally kept from year to year although rarely some was bought from a store off the mountain. The major field crops were corn, hay, sorghum, and oats.¹

A blue speckled variety of corn was planted in hills or rows about two-and-one-half feet apart. Three or four seeds were planted to a hill.² The settlers unanimously agreed that corn did not produce as well on the mountain as it did in the valleys around it.³ Sherman offers the explanation that because of the altitude the settlement had a shorter growing season. Another explanation offered is that fog on the mountain cut out much of the sunshine and tended to keep the soil too wet for corn. This explanation is reinforced by the observation that things grew better on the mountain in dry years.⁴

Hay was sowed by hand. The ground was plowed and the seed was sowed, then harrowed in. A drag or roller was then used to smooth the surface enough to get a mowing machine over it for harvesting. The variety of hay was either a mixture of fescue, red clover, and red top, or more generally timothy and orchard grass.⁵

¹Lige Gibbons, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 9.

²Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 25.

³Ibid., tape 29.

⁴Herbert Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 82.

⁵Ibid., tape 83.

While the field crops produced the bulk of feed for animals, the garden was the important source of food for human consumption. The plot usually consisted of about one-half acre which produced a great variety of vegetables. Potatoes were the mainstay of the settlement diet and both early and late crops were planted. Other garden crops were cabbage, beets, parsley, turnips, squash, pumpkins, beans, tomatoes, carrots, onions, radishes, cucumbers, muskmelons, rutabagas, peas, peppers, okra, lettuce, and watermelons. A small space was set aside for growing herbs for seasoning and medicinal use. Among these were sage, catnip, mint, pepper, and horehound.¹ The settlers all said that vegetables and other garden crops grew better on the mountain than any other place they had ever seen. For example, turnips the size of buckets were not uncommon, and everything seemed to produce an unusually high yield. The former residents of the settlement attribute this to the fog on the mountain supplying moisture throughout the growing season.²

Women were responsible for the garden work and preservation of the resulting food.³ The planting season extended from approximately the fifteenth of May through the first of July, depending on when the last frost of the season came. The plot was plowed with a turning plow and then worked to a smooth consistency with an A-harrow and hoe. Fertilizer consisted of animal litter from the barn. When the ground was ready to plant, rows were laid off about twenty-four inches apart with a plow. Plants, such as peppers, tomatoes, and cabbage, were nurtured in a plant bed ahead of

¹Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 26, and Stella Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 17.

²Herbert Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 82.

³Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 26.

time until ready to transplant as slips. Most of the garden was planted by hand. Potatoes were planted in a raised ridge or hill about ten to twelve inches high and one to two feet apart. The settlers believed this mound of dirt helped hold moisture for the growing potato plants during the dry season and indeed the potatoes did well, producing twenty-five to thirty bushels per bushel planted.¹ Children also helped with the garden and had the job of chopping out weeds during the growing season. The garden was hoed continuously to keep the weeds from stunting the growth of the garden plants. The only prevalent pests were potato bugs which the children picked off the plants by hand. Insecticides were not used. The settlers generally felt that the severe winters with several hard freezes helped keep insects from thriving on the mountain.²

Harvest time was the busiest season of all, since a great number of jobs had to be accomplished in a short period of time. Field crops had to be harvested and put up for winter. Corn was allowed to stand in the field until dry. About the middle of October the stalks were cut and put in shocks. In November the corn was stripped or pulled from the stalks and stored in the corn crib. The remaining fodder was stripped from the stalk and put in bundles for storage in the barn or in fodder piles around tall poles in the field. The fodder was used for animal feed during the winter.³ The corn itself was sometimes used as feed, but more often it was taken a little at a time to a nearby mill in Rose Hill, Kentucky, to be ground into corn meal for use in making bread. In later years the

¹Lige Gibbons, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 5.

²Herbert Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 82.

³Wallace Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 12.

settlers built their own gristmills on the mountain. This made it possible for them to avoid the long trip to mills located off the mountain, and also saved the customary toll taken by the miller for his services. The toll was one gallon of meal for each bushel ground.

Sherman Hensley gives an account of the settlement mills. The first mill was located on Martin's Fork Creek about one-half mile from Sherman's house. Later the settlers found that there was a better water supply in Shillalah Creek so they built one there too. The Shillalah Creek mill and the Martin's Fork mill were about the same distance from Sherman's house. The Shillalah Creek mill was closer to the rest of the farms of the settlement, so most people used it. The mills were designed and built by the settlers themselves without outside assistance. The mill house was built of logs set on a cut stone foundation and the machinery was almost entirely made of wood except for metal straps and fittings which Willie Gibbons made in his blacksmith shop. The millstones were bought from Bill Wilson of Bell County and a man named Fowler in Harlan County, Kentucky. The bottom millstone rested on a central pivot while the top rock, also known as the running rock, was fastened to the drive shaft and supplied power from the water wheel. The water wheel was also made of wood with iron bands holding it together. The millpond, where the kinetic energy to drive the wheel was stored, was produced by building a dam across the creek. Both dams were made of logs hewed on the water side and covered with boards over the cracks. The logs were about thirty-five feet long and the bottom log was set into the creek bed. Trenches in the creek bank at either end held the logs in place. The Martin's Fork dam backed up a pond of about fifty to sixty feet and about six feet deep while the Shillalah Creek dam had about the same depth but backed up only thirty to forty feet. The ponds ran dry

occasionally during late summer, but the settlers ground enough corn ahead to avoid running out of meal. Generally, however, they were able to grind corn year around, and everyone in the settlement used the mills toll free. The ponds were also used as swimming holes and as a baptismal pool.¹

Corn was not only of value as a staple food for people and animals on the mountain but also provided the settlers with their only cash crop. They made moonshine whiskey. Although theirs was not a cash economy, they were not entirely independent of the outside world for certain staple items they needed to work with and to eat. They bought certain supplies at nearby stores, such as salt, nails, harnesses, tools, furniture, and even some farm machinery such as a mowing machine and corn sheller. In this subsistence way of life the settlers produced as much as possible to satisfy their needs. They were not a backward people rejecting the improvements of technology and society. Therefore, they needed a certain amount of cash, and whiskey was a product in demand that could produce it. It was an illegal product, to be sure, but its illegality, measured against their needs, fought a losing battle.

There is evidence that practically all the male members of the settlement made whiskey at one time or another. Herbert Hensley made it for many years and perhaps his is the best account of the process for making corn whiskey.

A bushel of meal was put in a fifty-gallon barrel and enough boiling water was added to cover the meal. This mixture was then cooked and let set for about three days to sour. Meanwhile, some malt was sprouted

¹Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 32. Also, for an interesting account of gristmills see Marilyn Montell, "The Belcher Mill," Western Kentucky University Folklore and Folklife Archives, 1973-31.

by soaking a sack of corn in warm water overnight and then pouring warm water over it and burying it in hay to keep the warmth in. The corn was allowed to sprout until the sprouts were one to one-and-one-half inches long, and roots began to show. The sprouted malt was dried and ground into meal. One gallon of the malt was put into the soured mash and the barrel was filled with warm water in winter or cold water in summer and allowed to work until a one-half inch cap had formed on top and then sank. This took seven to eight days and the fermented mixture was then called beer. The beer was now ready to be run through the still. Stills on the mountain ranged from thirty to seventy gallons and were always made of sheet copper. They were round in shape and sat on a rock furnace. A cap went on top with a tapered arm coming out of the cap. A copper coil called the worm came out of the arm and went through a cooling barrel where the hot alcohol cooled and condensed. The beer was poured into the still and the cap and other connections were sealed with rye paste. Then the beer was heated. The whiskey came out of the still as steam and condensed in the worm which went through the flake barrel filled with cool water. The whiskey was then put into a container. After six or seven runs the whiskey was combined and measured about 200 proof. It was then cut back with water until a one-half pint bottle shaken three times would have only three beads of alcohol on top at the same time. This was the method used to determine when the alcohol was diluted to about 100 proof. The younger men added a thump barrel to the process and ran the original whiskey or singlings back through the still to get doublings.¹ The whiskey was sold primarily in area mines and brought a variable price. The usual price was ten dollars per gallon.

¹For another account of the moonshining process see Virginia Antonini, "Moonshine Whiskey," Western Kentucky University Folklore and Folklife Archives, 1972-109.

Herbert says they always used copper stills and were known for making a quality product. He remembers as many as five stills on the mountain at one time, including a seventy-gallon still he bought in Virginia and ran for three or four years. The younger men often made whiskey on contract and thus avoided the risk of selling it themselves. The settlement people were not heavy drinkers, according to their accounts, and used whiskey only occasionally and for medicinal purposes. Herbert was the only one arrested in connection with moonshining activities. Herbert recalls he was out hunting when he came upon a neighbor's still. Federal agents were waiting at the still for the owner to show up and, they took him to the neighbor's house to discuss the matter when he claimed innocence. While they were there, the law, as he calls them, started drinking the confiscated whiskey and got drunk. Nevertheless, they took him in and he received a one-year suspended sentence.¹

Hay was also harvested in the fall. In the early days of the settlement it was cut with a mowing blade; later the settlers bought a mowing machine. After cutting, the hay was left in the field for three or four days to dry. It was then picked up with wooden pitchforks made of witch hazel, and stored either in the barn loft or stacked around upright hay poles in the field. Oats and other grain crops were cut using a cradle and scythe so as not to loosen the grain from the stem prematurely. They were stored with the hay and not threshed unless the grain was needed.²

¹Herbert Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tapes 20 and 22. Also for an extensive description of moonshining see Eliot Wigginton, ed., The Foxfire Book (New York: Doubleday, 1972), pp. 301-45 and Esther Kellner, Moonshine (New York: Ballantine, 1971).

²Wallace Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 12.

Tobacco was raised only as a personal luxury and was chewed by most of the men in the settlement. Sherman raised hickory leaf and bullface. The plant bed was sowed in April and the slips transplanted in May by most people, but some believed in sowing between the two Christmases which were the twenty-fifth of December and the sixth of January. The Old Christmas or the Epiphany as it is more properly called occurs on the sixth of January and is still celebrated in many traditional cultures. It commemorates the moment when Jesus was glimpsed as not only the Messiah of the Jews but the Savior of all mankind. The symbolic moment occurred when the three wise men, all Gentiles, made their visit to the manger on the first day after the twelve days of Christmas.¹ The tobacco was cut in August and hung in the barn to cure. After it was cured it was graded.²

Sorghum cane was raised in small quantities and used to make sorghum molasses. When the cane was ripe in October, the fodder was stripped off and the cane cut. A cane mill was put up by setting a two-roller mill on a wooden base. A lever pole or "sweep" fifteen feet long was attached with a metal collar clamped to one of the metal rollers, and a smaller pole about seven feet long was put in a hole drilled in the longer pole. The smaller pole was a lead pole hooked to the mule's bridle, and he was harnessed to the "sweep" with a singletree. The mule walked around the mill turning the rollers and cane stalks were fed between the rollers thus squeezing the sap out. When an adequate amount of sap had collected it was put in a galvanized sheet metal pan thirty-six inches wide and six feet long with labyrinth dividers in it. The

¹Howard Harper, Days and Customs of All Faiths (New York: Fleet Publishing Co., 1957), p. 20.

²Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 29.

evaporator pan was on a furnace that supplied heat, and the sap was boiled. As the sap boiled the green foam was scooped off and when the foam disappeared the molasses were thick enough to be taken off and stored in jars and cans. The molasses were used for sweetening and as a treat.¹

Every family also had an orchard where a number of fruits were grown. The family orchard was generally cared for by the eldest man who pruned and occasionally replaced the trees. New trees were bought from Stark Brothers Nursery in Ewing, Virginia. Apples and peaches were the main fruit grown.²

Farm animals were kept for a dual purpose. They provided meat and were the only source of motive power used by the settlers. Because hogs thrived on the mountain and pork could be easily preserved, pork was the primary type of meat used by the settlers. Because there were no herd laws then, the hogs were free to forage on their own in the woods around the settlement.³ Hogs were identified with their owner by use of an earmark. Earmarks, handed down through a family from father to son, were usually distinctive. For example, Sherman Hensley's mark was the same as his father's: a swallow fork on the right ear and a smoothed and split left ear. The most popular breeds raised were black Berkshire, Poland China, and Duroc. Young hogs had to be found and earmarked before they were six months old because unmarked hogs over six months old were claimed by anyone who found them.⁴ The main source of food for the hogs was

¹Herbert Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 6.

²Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 26.

³Lige Gibbons, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 10.

⁴Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 24.

the mast, or nuts, of the chestnut tree which grew in abundance on the mountain in the early years of the settlement. The chestnut blight moved up and over the mountain in the early 1900's as it swept through the United States and within three or four years killed the trees and destroyed this valuable source of food.¹ The hogs then ate white oak acorns, hickory nuts, and whatever else they could find in the forest around the settlement. The settlers would round up their hog herds periodically. This required a considerable amount of time because the hogs covered a large area from month to month. One way to locate them more easily than just searching, according to Sherman, was to wait until a storm was coming up. The hogs would invariably go to the south side of the mountain.²

Hog cholera was a major threat to the herds several times during the settlement's history. Sherman Hensley recalls that one cholera outbreak almost wiped out his herd. They had no defense against the disease until later years when cholera vaccine became available. Sherman observed that the disease usually followed a year when the chestnut oak mast was unusually heavy and he felt that this had something to do with it. He tried putting coal oil and turpentine on the hog's feet, but it didn't work the next time. He finally concluded that the buzzards spread it. He says, "Some people thinks they [buzzards] have a nature about them to pack a disease to stock so they can eat it."³

A few hogs were kept up in pens every year in the summer and fall to fatten. They were killed around Christmas when the weather was cold

¹Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 34.

²Ibid., tape 82.

³Ibid., tape 34.

enough to prevent spoilage. The meat was preserved for use during the winter. The hog was shot through the head then immediately its throat was cut to let it bleed. A gambling stick was put through the leaders of both hind legs and it was hoisted upside down, by use of a block and tackle attached to a tree limb, into a barrel of boiling hot water. The water loosened the hair and removed dirt from the carcass so it could be scraped clean. The hog was then split down the abdomen and the entrails removed. The head was cut off, and the carcass was taken to the smoke-house and butchered, salted, and sometimes smoked.¹

While hogs were the primary source of meat, mules and horses were important as a source of motive power to the mountain people (Plate XIX). They were used to plow the earth, haul materials for building, provide the only method of transportation other than walking, and to run the various farm machines such as the sorghum mill and hay mowing machine.² Life would have indeed been harder without the help of these hardy animals. Mules were preferred for their durability and strength, but quarter horses also were used. Each family had at least two mules and two horses. These animals usually were obtained at mule days in the small towns off the mountain.³ To the settlement men, mule day was a social event where information was exchanged, business carried on, and acquaintances renewed. It was held on a prearranged day of the month when every-

¹Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 43 and Wallace Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 12. Also for a complete description of hog killing see Eliot Wigginton, ed., The Foxfire Book (New York: Doubleday, 1972), pp. 189-98 and Ruth Smallwood, "Hog Butchering," Western Kentucky University Folklore and Folklife Archives, 1971-37. Another descriptive article is Mary Ann Townsend, "Hog Killing on Queenfield Farm, Manquin, Virginia," North Carolina Folklore, XXI (April, 1973), 32-35.

²Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 25.

³Ibid., tape 84.

one would meet at a certain place. If a person had something he wanted to trade, sell, or buy, or if he just wanted to socialize, he was welcome. The settlement people were fond of this pastime and apparently did much trading on mule day at Cubage, Kentucky, where mule day was held the second Saturday of each month, and at Caylor, Virginia, where it was held on the third Saturday of each month. A group of men sometimes would get together and ride off the mountain on Friday night and camp that night near where the mule day was to be held. They were especially fond of trading mules and firearms. If a bad trade was made one time they would simply trade again the next mule day for something better. The element of chance and the art of trading apparently held their interest for many years.¹

Oxen were also used on the mountain as beasts of burden for a limited period of time. Willie Gibbons had a yoke of oxen in the early years of the settlement and used them, because of their superior strength, to clear new land.²

Cattle were kept for milk but were never an important source of meat to the settlers. Every family had a few milk cows to provide drinking milk, butter, and cream. Sherman remembers only one beef being butchered on the mountain and attributes its lack of popularity to its poor keeping qualities. Occasionally a calf would be bought or traded for, fattened, and sold off in the fall. Sherman says that beef remains

¹Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 25 and Herbert Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 20.

²Wallace Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 11 and Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 23.

a second-rate meat to the former residents of the mountain because they were so accustomed to pork, the beef still does not taste good.¹

A number of common farm animals were kept. At least two cats were kept in the barn to control mice, and dogs, usually feists and blue tick hounds, were kept for use in hunting and in rounding up stray stock. Chickens were used for meat and to produce eggs. A flock of thirty or more was maintained on most farms.²

Sheep were useful animals as they supplied both meat and wool. A herd of twenty to thirty was maintained on some farms, while Lige Gibbons kept as many as seventy-five.³ They were allowed to graze freely on the mountain and were sheared in September and in April. Shearing was carried out at a natural rock shelter on the side of the mountain and the wool was used by the women to make yarn or traded for coverlets and cloth to make clothing with.⁴

¹Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 25.

²Lige Gibbons, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 10.

³Ibid.

⁴Herbert Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 85. Also for a detailed description of sheep raising see Eliot Wigginton, ed., Foxfire 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1973), pp. 172-255.

V. FOOD PRESERVATION

When the harvest was in, the food had to be prepared in such a way that it would not spoil before winter was over. Field crops like hay and corn were relatively simple to keep, as they needed only to be dried and put up in the barn and corn crib. However, food from the garden and orchards required more preparation.

Fruit was plentiful on the mountain as there were several orchards and a wide variety of wild berries. It was preserved by canning, drying, or sulfurating. Fruit to be canned was washed well and cooked. The jars were scalded and then the cooked fruit was put into them and sealed in with wax. Some things such as preserves and apple butter required the addition of sugar and spices during the cooking process.¹ Fruits to be dried were apples and peaches. Apples, for instance, were sliced very thin and laid out in the sun on cheesecloth until most of the moisture was evaporated. Another method was to use a kiln furnace to dry them out.² Fruit also could be sulfurated. This was accomplished by placing the fruit in a closed container and burning sulfur in it. The fumes from the sulfur coated the fruit and made it resistant to rotting and insects.³

¹Stella Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 18.

²Wallace Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 11.

³Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 26. For a fuller description of fruit preservation see Eliot Wigginton, ed., The Foxfire Book (New York: Doubleday, 1972), pp. 181-84.

Fruits found on the mountain included apples, peaches, huckleberries, blackberries, strawberries, raspberries, and gooseberries.

Beans were canned, dried, or strung on strings while they were still in the hull and hung up to dry. These were called leatherbritches. Potatoes and apples were most often preserved in what was called a potato or apple hole. A hole was dug near the house in a well-drained area. Straw was placed in the bottom about two inches thick. Ten to twelve bushels of potatoes were put in and covered with straw about two inches thick. Dirt was put on top to form a hill and boards were placed around the sides to facilitate drainage and to prevent animals from digging into the hill. When potatoes or apples were needed a small hole was dug into the side of the hill and the amount needed removed. Such holes also were maintained under the floor of many houses.¹

Cabbages also were preserved by burying. A trench just big enough to fit the cabbage head into was dug and the cabbage was placed in it and covered with dirt with the root sticking up. Cabbage was preserved another way in the form of sauerkraut. The cabbage was cut up very fine and put in a clean earthen crock with alternating layers of salt until the container was almost full, then water was added. Some large cabbage leaves were placed on top with a clean cloth over them, and a rock was put on top of the container. When the process was complete the stone would rise.²

Meat had to be preserved also. The commonly used method was salting. The hog was killed when the weather was cold enough to prevent

¹Wallace Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 11.

²Ibid., also for a complete discussion of preserving vegetables see Eliot Wigginton, ed., The Foxfire Book (New York: Doubleday, 1972), pp. 174-80.

spoilage. When the meat had been cut into appropriate cuts, it was ready for salting. It was placed on a long salt covered bench in the smokehouse. Then salt was rubbed into the meat with particular attention to working it in around bones well. It was then covered with a pile of salt and allowed to set until the salt had permeated the meat. This process took several weeks and when finished the meat was said to be cured. It could be eaten at that stage or smoked to add more flavor. Smoking the meat was accomplished by hanging the cured meat in the smokehouse with a fire of green hickory wood. The green wood produced much smoke and the smoke penetrated the meat, giving it an agreeable flavor preferred by the settlers over that of salt-cured meat.¹ The rest of the hog also was used. Excess fat was rendered into lard by cooking it in iron kettles until the fat melted into an oil. The oil was placed in containers and allowed to cool into lard while the remains of the fat called "cracklins" were used to make a kind of bread called cracklin bread.² The hog's head was used to make souse. This was done by cooking it until tender then adding sage and other spices and mixing it all together into a fine consistency. Parts of the hog such as the backbone, feet, and internal organs were generally canned in fruit jars, while excess meat and fat were combined with spices and ground into sausage.³

A number of other tasks related to food production had to be completed throughout the year. Land had to be cleared during the early years to increase the amount of cultivatable acreage. This was done by

¹Wallace Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 13.

²Stella Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 15.

³Wallace Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 13.

killing the trees to be removed by girdling or cutting a ring through the bark around the trunk and thus cutting off the flow of sap to the tree. They were then cut down with a crosscut saw and cut into manageable lengths. These sections were stacked in a pile to dry for later burning or for use on the farm if needed. The stumps were dug out with a mattock and burned.¹

Rail fences (Plates XX and XXI) were built around cleared ground to keep livestock out of the crops. Chestnut logs were split into rails using a wooden maul, chopping axe, and gluts. The gluts, or wedges, were made of dogwood and were driven into the log until it split with the grain. The first rail laid was called a worm and was laid in the light of the moon because it was believed that it would sink if laid any other time. A rock was placed under each end varying in thickness to level the worm. The rails were eight to ten feet in length and were laid until the fence was eight rails high and then the joints were staked to hold them together.²

¹Herbert Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 82.

²Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 24, and Herbert Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 5.

VI. MOUNTAIN CULTURE

The home life of the people in the Hensley Settlement was simple, in keeping with the rugged life they led. The homes themselves were two or three rooms consisting of a bedroom, kitchen, and living room or sometimes a bedroom and a kitchen-living room combined into what was called a sitting room.

The sitting room was dominated by a large fireplace which in wintertime was the center of family activities. It provided both heat and light and was used for cooking in the early years before the iron step stove appeared on the mountain. The furnishings of this room were simple, consisting of a couple of straight-backed chairs or a bench, a rocker, possibly two iron beds if the family was large, a clock, a spinning wheel, one small table, a kitchen table, a radio if owned, a churn, and a sewing machine. Most of the furniture was bought and hauled up the mountain on sleds, but a few chairs were made for people in the settlement by Willie Gibbons who was a skilled carpenter and blacksmith. The inside walls of the house generally were exposed logs, but sometimes the walls were covered with a heavy paper. Floors were of the puncheon type.¹ Light was provided by oil or kerosene lamps. Lamps were used even during the day since the cabins rarely had more than one window per room. There were usually two cabinets, one for food storage and one for cooking utensils. Since no refrigeration was possible, perishable food

¹Jessie Gibbons, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 60.

was kept in the food locker in the winter and in the springhouse in the summer. Gun racks made of forked sticks were nailed over the doors for the family arsenal which consisted of one or two rifles and shotguns and a pistol.¹ Some tools also were kept in the house in winter such as a shoe repair tree, leather working tools and the corn sheller. In later years there was also a Victrola along with a collection of 78-r.p.m. records.

The bedroom was almost bare. It usually contained only two or three iron beds with straw ticking mattresses, a chest of drawers, and a storage trunk.

Most of the household items, such as cooking utensils and house cleaning items, were handmade. A fly swatter consisted of a stick with an old piece of a leather shoe nailed on the end. Brooms were handmade and kept in a corner of the sitting room. Storage boxes for meal and sugar often were made of hollowed sections of a log.²

The women ruled the house and food preparation activities and the children were their helpers. Besides raising the garden she was responsible for the essentials of everyday life. A typical day started for the woman of the house around 5 a.m. She would cook breakfast for the family and see that the children fed the stock and milked the cows. Once the men had gone and the children were off to school she had milk to churn into butter. She would let the milk clabber and then churn it in a stoneware churn until it became butter.³ If soap were needed, she made

¹Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 29.

²Mrs. Charles Muncey, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 63.

³Stella Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 18. Also see Judy Russell, "Churning and Molding Butter," Kentucky Folklore Record, XVIII (December, 1972), 106.

it. Ashes were put in a wooden V-shaped hopper on top of a layer of corn shucks. Water was poured over the ashes and when enough lye had built up it would eat through the corn shucks and drip out through the bottom of the hopper. It was tested for strength by seeing if it would dissolve a feather. If so, it was mixed with grease or any kind of fat and boiled into a thick consistency, then cooled in pans. The result was drip lye soap.¹ In later years the lye was secured at stores in the form of lye balls and the drip method was done away with.

The women also would clean up the dishes and fix the noon meal. After dinner, as it was usually called, she would clean the dishes and work in the garden until time to cook supper. After supper the stock was fed again, and she would spend the remaining part of the evening spinning wool and making clothing or preserving food.

Clothing was generally hand made. Wool from the sheep was carded and spun into yarn and knitted into socks and mittens. The women even dyed the material themselves using oak bark to produce a brown dye, walnut peels for a darker brown, and yellowroot to produce an orange dye.² Some had looms which were used to weave cloth, but more often the cloth was bought or traded for at woolen mills and then made into clothes. Bedding such as sheets and featherbed covers were made of unbleached muslin, and quilts were made from bits of cloth saved from other projects.³

¹Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 25. Also for a complete description of making lye soap see Eliot Wigginton, ed., The Foxfire Book (New York: Doubleday, 1972), pp. 151-58.

²For an excellent discussion of dyeing wool see Cathy Holbrook, "Textiles and Native Dyes," Bowling Green, Kentucky, Western Kentucky University Folklore and Folklife Archives, 1972-455. Also see Allen Eaton, Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), pp. 133-46.

³Mrs. Charles Muncey, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 66.

Men were up by 5 or 6 a.m. and after breakfast they went to the fields to work. A number of chores were accomplished even after the crops were laid by. Mules and horses had to be shod every one or two months. This was generally done by Willie Gibbons, the settlement's blacksmith, who had a small shop near his home. The hoof was dressed down with a knife and rasp until level. The shoe was put on and eight nails were driven through the shoe and outer rim of the hoof. The end of the nail sticking out of the hoof was then clinched with a clinching iron so that it would not pull out.¹ Willie also helped mend harnesses and repair farm machinery.

Other chores included repairing rail fences and buildings, bee keeping, rounding up stray cattle and controlling weeds.²

Hunting and trapping were pastimes that provided recreation and food for the table. Small game was plentiful on the mountain, and a few deer were present, but no fish were found in the streams. The settlers hunted rabbits, coons, ground hogs, wild turkeys, and squirrels. They also trapped in the winter months and caught foxes, raccoons, possums, and skunks. They sold the hides for anywhere between fifty cents to five dollars. A hide buyer named Charlie Warf came across the mountain in the spring and fall and picked up the hides.³

There was a school on Brush Mountain almost from the beginning of the settlement. The first school building was built in 1907, and about

¹Wallace Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 11 and Herbert Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 5.

²Eliot Wigginton, ed., "Beekeeping," Foxfire 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1973), pp. 28-46.

³Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 24. Also for a complete description of traditional hunting and trapping activities see Eliot Wigginton, ed., The Foxfire Book (New York: Doubleday, 1973), pp. 249-88.

twenty-seven pupils were enrolled. It was located at the chimney rock, just outside the settlement. Two years later another school was built on the Chadwell's Gap side of the mountain nearer the settlement. After three years the Black Mountain Land Company bought the land on which the second school was located and a third school (Plate XXII) was erected in the settlement itself. This school was called the Brush Mountain Schoolhouse.¹ Enrollment ranged from twenty-four to around fifty-four in all grades taught. The building was a one-room log rectangular structure about forty by twenty-five feet in size. It was chinked with mud and covered inside and out with boards over the cracks just as the other buildings of the settlement were. The ceiling was of boards and the floor was of tongue and groove construction. There were four windows and one door. A large potbellied woodstove stood in the center of the room for heat. The modest furnishings consisted of about twenty-five school desks, a teacher's desk, a small table with the water bucket on it and a glass for each child. The teaching aids consisted of a globe, a paper blackboard, and a chart. The Bell County school board supplied the teacher, and some items for the school such as the school desks, the stove, lamp oil, and chalk. The parents were responsible for supplying books, pencils, and maintenance items as well as the school building. Willie Gibbons and Sherman Hensley, assisted by other residents of the settlement, built the schoolhouse.

Stella Hensley taught in the Brush Mountain School from 1926 to 1928. She was a Callahan and married Wallace Hensley after she started teaching. She remembers her experiences this way. The school ran from July 14 to January 15 and had about twenty-five pupils in grades one

¹Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 34.

through five. The subjects taught were arithmetic, English, history, geography, reading, writing, and religion. The teachers lived at Bert Hensley's house for which he was paid ten dollars per month by the teacher. The teacher went off the mountain about once each month to Pineville, Kentucky, to turn in a report to the school superintendent and to get paid. Stella had a high school diploma and was paid seventy-eight dollars per month. She says the children were always well behaved and she had very little trouble with them because they wanted to learn. Absentees were no problem because the parents wanted their children to be educated and saw to it that they attended regularly. Because paper was scarce most of the schoolwork was done orally and on the blackboard. Much of the paper that was available was scrap that already had been used on one side. Wood for the stove and water for drinking were brought in by the children who were paid a token sum for the work. School started at eight in the morning and broke for a one-hour lunch at eleven-thirty. There were two fifteen-minute recesses and the school day ended at four in the afternoon. The holidays observed included Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years, and Labor Day.¹

Most teachers who taught at the Brush Mountain School stayed only one or two years. Sherman Hensley was a trustee on the school board for a number of years and helped pick the teachers. The school was discontinued in 1946 when the enrollment became too small.

The schoolhouse had other functions besides education. It served as a community center where plays, meetings, and social occasions were held and it was the only place a Christmas tree was displayed in the settlement. Perhaps its biggest secondary use was as a church house.

¹Stella Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 15.

Itinerant preachers often came across the mountain and stopped to hold services. Some of the mountain residents like Tom Hensley were also preachers and occasionally held services. A typical service lasted from nine o'clock in the morning until two or three in the afternoon and everyone on the mountain attended. Sherman remembers that one spring Sunday a service was held at Sand Cave, a natural cave in the side of the mountain near the settlement, and more than 500 people attended. The preachers were usually of either the Primitive Baptist, Dunkard, Methodist or Holiness churches.¹ Herbert Hensley believes that "only three families had confessed salvation, Willie Gibbons, Lige Gibbons, and Stella Hensley. The rest were sinners but we got along with no trouble—we were just like a big family."²

Another major activity at the schoolhouse was on Decoration Day, generally about the second Sunday in June. Eight or nine preachers would preach and people would come from all over the area. Sometimes this would amount to 300 to 400 people. If the crowd became this large, the preaching was held outside under the trees. The services would last most of the day. Grown-ups listened to the preachers while the children played some distance away. After the services everyone would go across the road to the cemetery and decorate the graves with wild flowers such as honeysuckle, wild iris, and wild ivy. A large meal was prepared at each of the settlement houses and the crowd would divide up and go to eat and socialize at the homes. Decoration Day was the biggest social event of the year on the mountain and people remembered it from year to year so they could attend.³

¹Ibid., tape 17.

²Herbert Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 5.

³Jessie Gibbons, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 61.

Funerals were also held at the schoolhouse. When someone died, a preacher was sent for and Willie Gibbons would build a chestnut coffin which was painted and lined with cotton cloth. The body was dressed at the home where it was kept and a service was held that night. The next day another service was held at the school and the body was buried in the settlement cemetery, where there are thirty-five graves (Plate XXIII).¹

The former settlement residents agree that sickness was not prevalent in the settlement; however the usual health problems did exist. Herbs growing wild or cultivated provided the commonly used remedies for minor ailments. Red pepper and horehound tea were cures for a cold. Sage tea was used for thrash, while catnip, summer savior, poor John, Seneca snakeroot and pennyroyal provided all-purpose cures. A boil was treated with a poultice of boar's tusk, the root of a large fern. Redwood root was used in the form of a tea for diarrhea, and white horsemint was used to bring down a fever. Sassafras and life everlasting teas were used for general health improvement.²

Snakebites were a constant danger on the mountain as copperheads and rattlesnakes abounded. Treatment consisted of bleeding the bite and giving the bitten person whiskey. Lige Gibbons was bitten while he was hunting one day when he fell off a log onto a rattlesnake his dogs had cornered. He walked to Chattel's Gap to a man's house where he was given some whiskey. He then walked home, poured kerosene on the wound where he

¹Jessie Gibbons, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 61. Also for a description of old time burials see Eliot Wigginton, ed., Foxfire 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1973), pp. 304-23.

²Herbert Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 22 and Jessie Gibbons, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 61 and Mrs. Charles Muncey, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 63. Also for a complete discussion of folk medicine see Eliot Wigginton, ed., The Foxfire Book (New York: Doubleday, 1972), pp. 230-48.

had bled it, and became violently ill, hemorrhaging at the mouth. A doctor was never called and he survived.¹

Babies generally were delivered by midwives such as Aunt Beth Markham who lived on the mountain, but a doctor was called when a difficult delivery was anticipated.² The doctors usually came from the Virginia side of the mountain near Caylor or Ewing. Someone would ride off the mountain on a horse or mule and call a doctor from a store. The doctor would drive as far as possible then ride the mule the rest of the way up.

Pneumonia seems to have been one of the worst sicknesses. Herbert Hensley remembers that his mother as well as two infant sisters died of it.³ One of Jessie Gibbons' sisters had pneumonia nine different times. Herbert also had two sisters who died of tuberculosis soon after they had married.⁴

While work was the way of life for the people of the settlement there were times to play also. Decoration Day, trips to town and mule day were all times to be looked forward to. Herbert Hensley remembers that when he made his first trip to Middlesboro at the age of eighteen he thought it a wonderfully exciting place.⁵ The children passed their free time with traditional children's games like ball, fox on the ridge,

¹Herbert Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 22.

²Lige Gibbons, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 10. Also see "Midwives and Granny Women," Eliot Wigginton, ed., Foxfire 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1973), pp. 274-303.

³Herbert Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 21.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

hide and go seek, drop the handkerchief, and poison.¹ In the winter there was sleigh riding and sledding. Grown-ups played card games such as set-back and high-low jack-in-the-hole. They also were fond of horseshoes or "pitching quarts" as they called it.²

Occasionally a dance was held when a good fiddler came across the mountain. Some of the settlement men played the banjo, fiddle, or mandolin, and if a traveling musician was not available they would make their own music.³

¹Poison is a form of taboo game. It is played by forming a circle around a "poison stick" which is taboo. The players pull each other around the circle trying to force someone to touch the stick. The player who touches the stick must then try to touch the others with it thus making them "poison" also. When a player is caught he must help catch the rest. Sometimes a "safe" rule is added where a player stooping down or touching wood cannot be caught. See Frank C. Brown, North Carolina Folklore, Vol. I (Durham: Duke University Press, 1959), p. 71. This collection also contains numerous references and descriptions of other traditional children's games.

²This is an interesting example of folk etymology. The word is actually quoits but they pronounce it quarts. Quoits is a game where a ring of flattened iron or a ring of rope is thrown from a mark toward a pin in attempt to ring the pin or come as close to it as possible. See "Quoits," Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language College Edition, p. 1196.

³Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tapes 28 and 29.

VII. CONCLUSION

Despite the romantic-poetic sort of image that living close to the earth in a log cabin conjures up for modern men, a realistic assessment shows that, in fact, it was a harsh and sometimes brutal life.

The environment was hostile to a degree and natural events could turn into disaster. Wallace Hensley remembers one of the frequent forest fires that came up the side of the mountain in 1933. It burned his barn and several houses. The men of the community fought it day and night for two days, making safe lanes and starting backfires until it burned out.¹ In the winter hard freezes and waist-high snow often killed the pasture grass and made searching for wandering livestock a bone-chilling task. Spring would bring high winds and occasionally a tornado.

Sickness was a highly dangerous factor in life as witnessed by the number of graves in the cemetery. It took almost half a day for a doctor to come up the mountain, not counting the time it took to go down and call him. Thus, immediate treatment for an emergency condition such as snakebite or appendicitis was not possible. There is no record of anyone ever entering a hospital. If one had a critical sickness as was the case with several young children and infants, they simply died.

There was no law on the mountain to interfere with a man's freedom; however, there was also no protection. Occasionally outsiders would steal pigs or other wandering livestock and if the owner did not catch them

¹Wallace Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 11.

they went free. Sherman Hensley had a fight with an Indian who was stealing pigs and shot and killed him.¹

The lifestyle itself was that of long hours of hard manual labor. Only a few machines were in use; thus, almost every job had to be done by hand, and having a large family was the only way to secure enough labor.

On the other hand, the people of the settlement seemed content with their way of life. Sherman characterizes it as "a good time and a hard time," saying in effect that the life held a lot of satisfaction for the settlers even though it was hard.² Authors such as James Watt Raine in his book The Land of Saddlebags and Jack E. Weller in Yesterday's People have characterized the mountain folk as independent, freedom loving, individualistic, and proud.³ Perhaps this description explains the attraction mountain life held, particularly for the older generation at Hensley. The settlement was a peaceful community where the conflicts of organized society rarely reached, and the settlers enjoyed a freedom of life that can rarely be attained in today's society. Life was based on the work ethic, and survival was their goal, just as it was to their fathers. After all, it was much the same type of life they knew while they were growing up and tradition is one of the inherent traits of the mountaineer, according to Weller in Yesterday's People.⁴

¹Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 2.

²Ibid., tape 28.

³James Watt Raine, The Land of the Saddlebags (New York: Council of Women for Home Missions and Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1924), pp. 28-58 and Jack E. Weller, Yesterday's People (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), pp. 65-92.

⁴Weller, Ibid.

Another quality that seems to have bound the people to the settlement was the pride of self sufficiency. Herbert Hensley said, "We were about as high self supporting people as I knowed of. We had a habit of trying to grow and make what we used."¹ Indeed the economic ups and downs of that period of American history that had such profound effects on the lifestyle of urban Americans had little effect on the Hensley Settlement.

A spirit of cooperation and neighborly helpfulness existed in the settlement. Sherman exhibits this feeling when he talks about building a house. "I done most of the scoring and Old Man Gibbons did most of the hewing. He was better with a broad axe than I was and I was better with a chopping axe, and that's the way we worked it."² This spirit of cooperation among the Hensley settlers was, of course, partially a result of the fact that they were all related, but in a larger sense it was a form of mutual support that offered added security and a sense of belonging. It provided a unity against the harsh environment.³

Despite the hardships of the mountain life the settlers were able to secure the necessities of life as well as to be happy. They were always able to produce an abundant harvest and were never in want of

¹Herbert Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 5.

²Sherman Hensley, "The Hensley Oral History Tape Collection," tape 27.

³For an interesting discussion of the mountaineer's personal characteristics see E. J. Wilhelm, Jr., "Folk Settlement Types in the Blue Ridge Mountains," Keystone Folklore Quarterly, XII, (Fall 1967), 151-174. Wilhelm makes several points that seem valid for the Hensley Settlement. He notes that meadow-plateau type settlements were generally first established in the early 1900's, that they tended to be family settlements, and that isolation in mountain settlements was primarily cultural rather than physical. His evaluation of the personality traits of mountaineers is excellent incorporating the observations of Weller and Raine (see earlier note) with an extensive evaluation of his own.

food. In addition, they even managed to secure some luxuries such as radios and phonographs. Their style of living appears to have had a positive effect on their health. Sherman is still alive at the age of ninety-three, and several others have reached old age with a minimum of complications.

The demise of the settlement appears to be a result of different values on the part of the younger generation. The regular pay of the coal mines and the easier living of town and city life attracted them away. As Sherman puts it "the outhouse was too far in the winter and too close in the summer."¹

In the late 1940's and early 1950's the settlement was bought by the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park. In the summer of 1965 the Job Corps began a five-year restoration project that effected progress toward restoring to their original state the physical remains of the settlement that had been deserted for almost fifteen years. The Park Service believes the Hensley Settlement should be interpreted as a living historical farm that represents well a lifestyle--a mountain culture--which should be preserved and interpreted for future generations. Demonstrations such as moonshine whiskey making and crop harvesting will be presented on a continuing basis by interpretive guides living in the settlement. So far as is feasible they intend to restore and operate the major part of the settlement as it was during the period when it was inhabited so that future generations can study the past to prepare for the future.

¹Sherman Hensley, A personal interview at his home near Caylor, Virginia, November 1973.



Plate I. Sherman Hensley

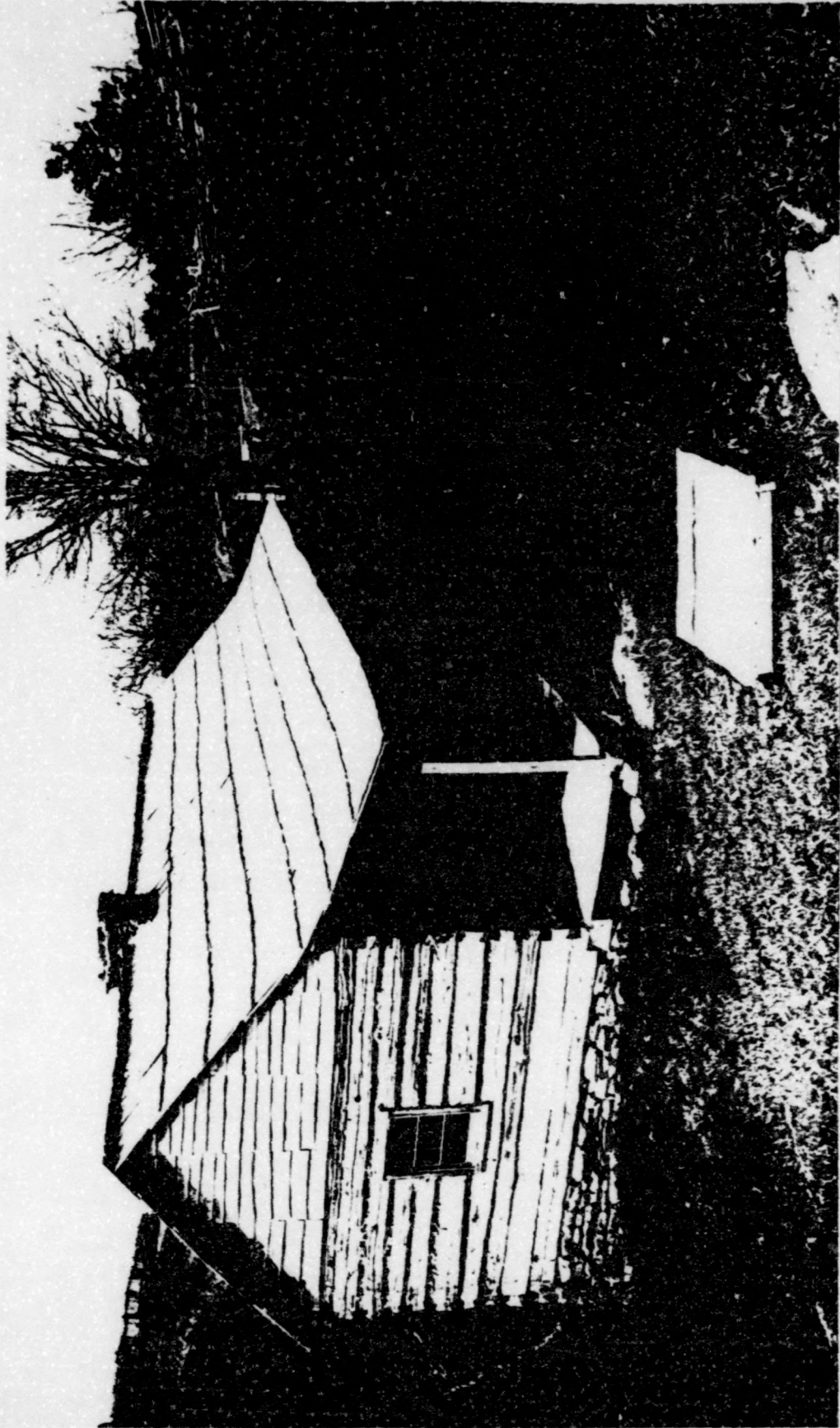


Plate II. The Willie Gibbons saddlebag house

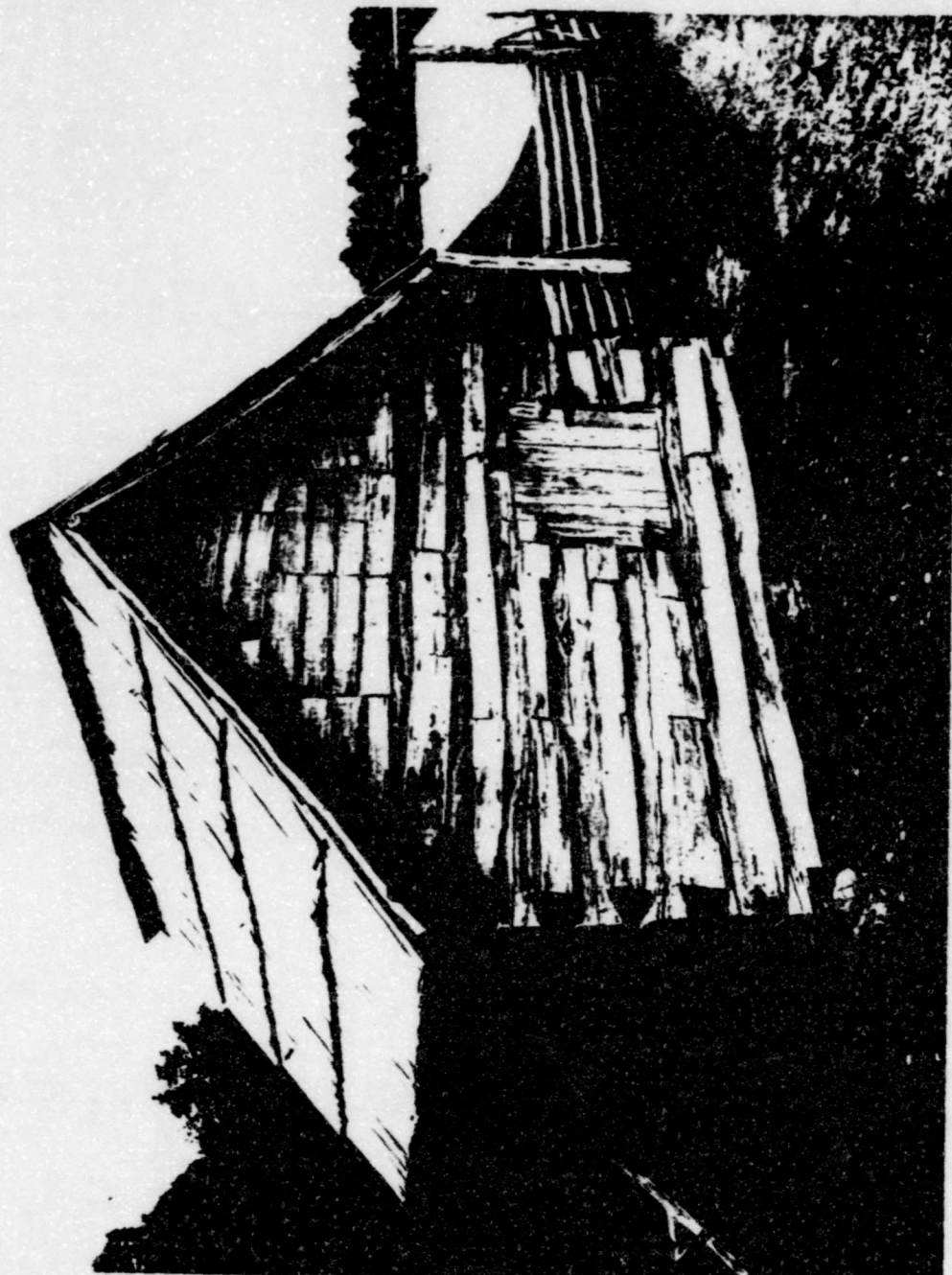


Plate III. The Willie Gibbons granary

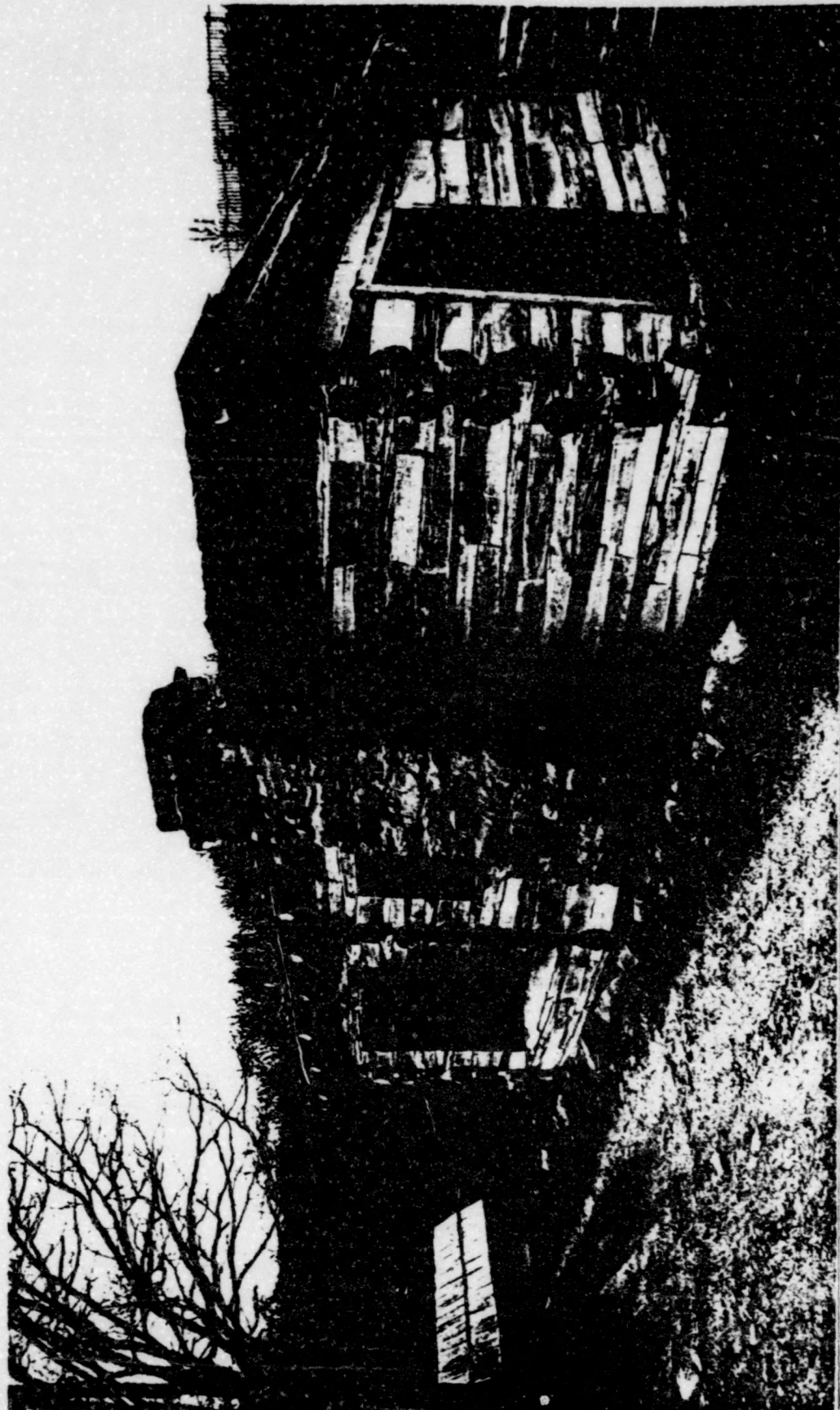


Plate IV. Exterior of the Willie Gibbons blacksmith shop



Plate V. Stone legs holding up a corner

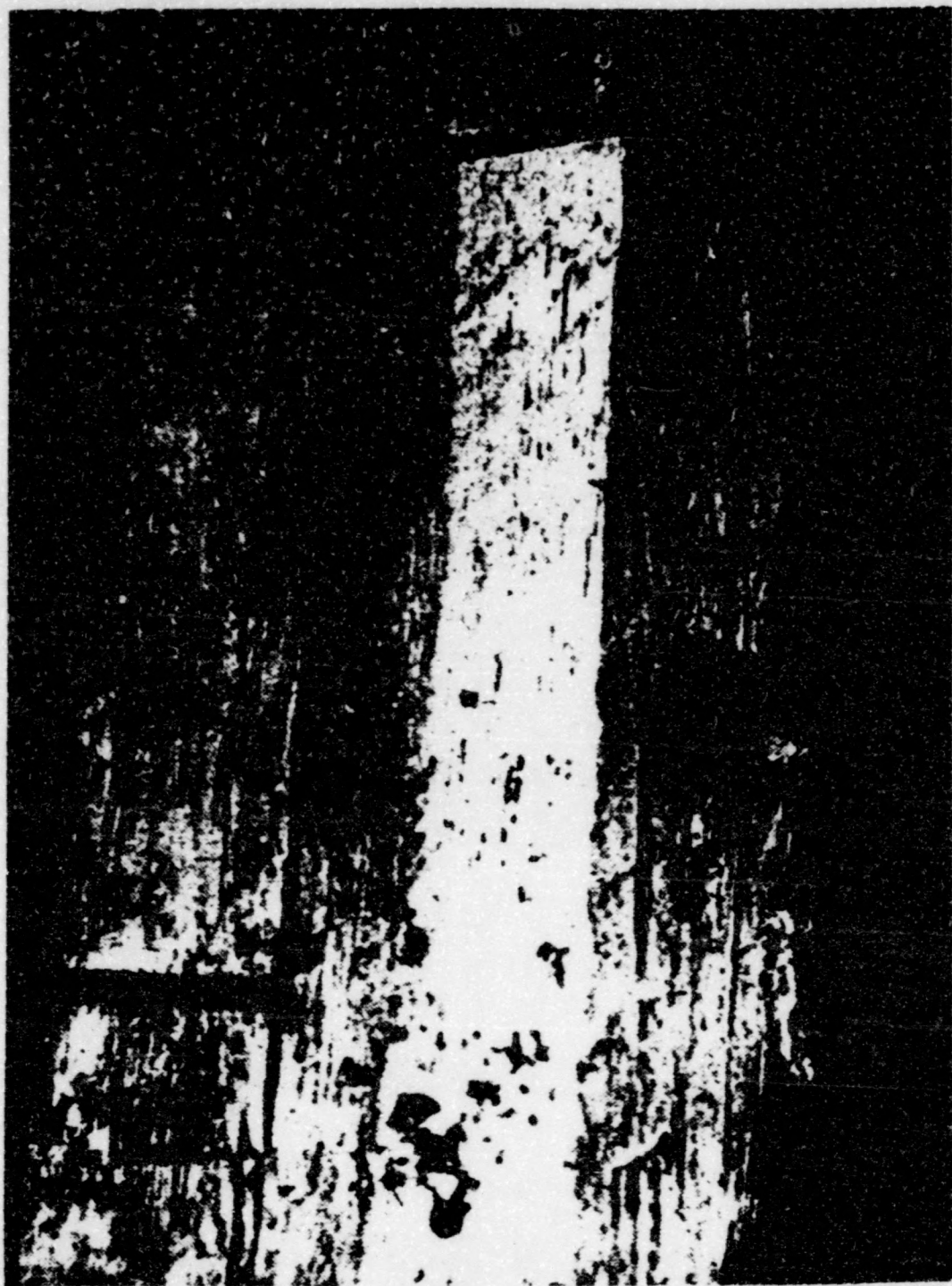


Plate VI. A plate log lap joint



Plate VII. A mountain stable on the Lige Gibbons farm



Plate VIII. The Finley Hensley house

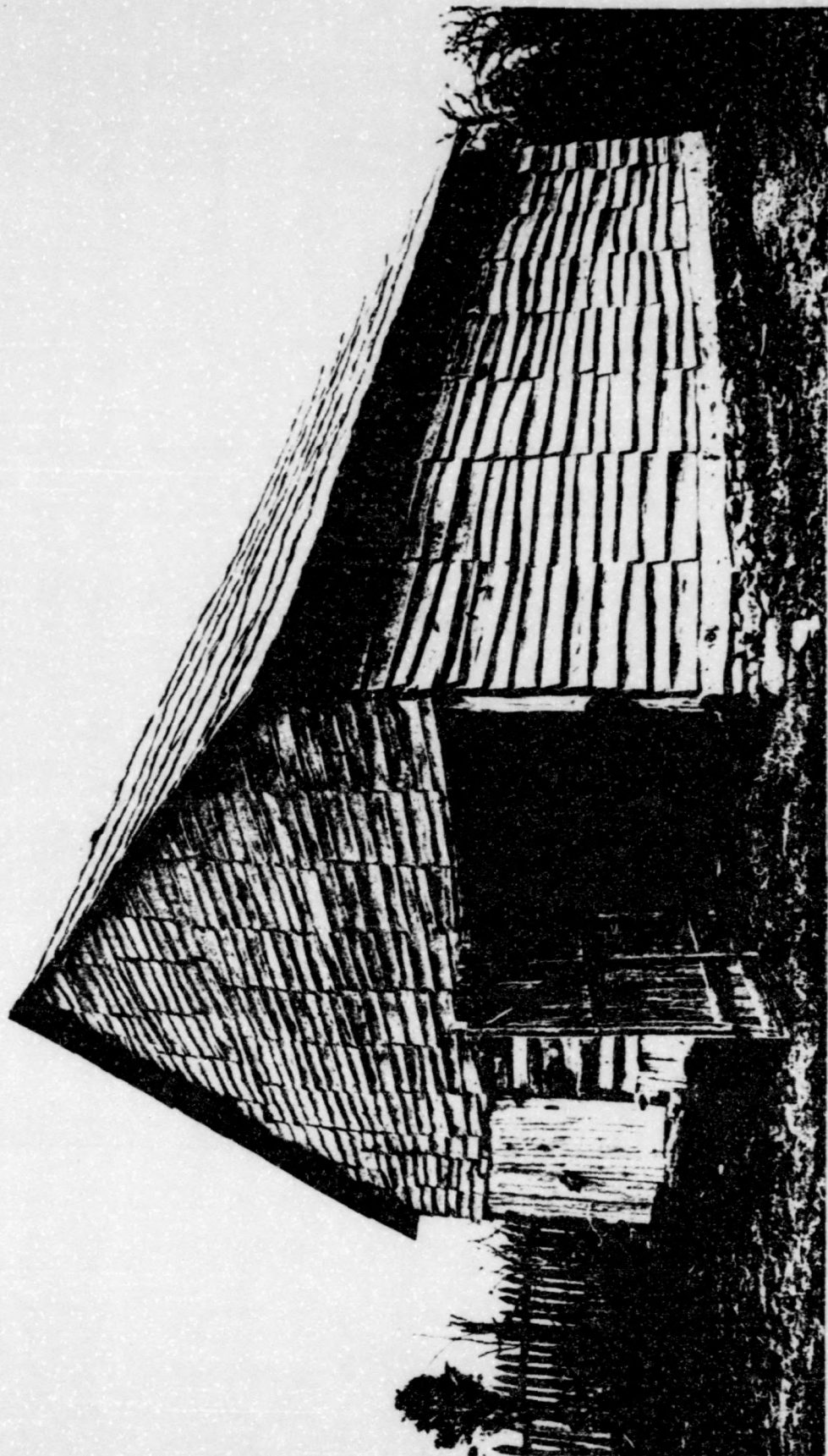


Plate IX. A barn on the Willie Gibbons farm

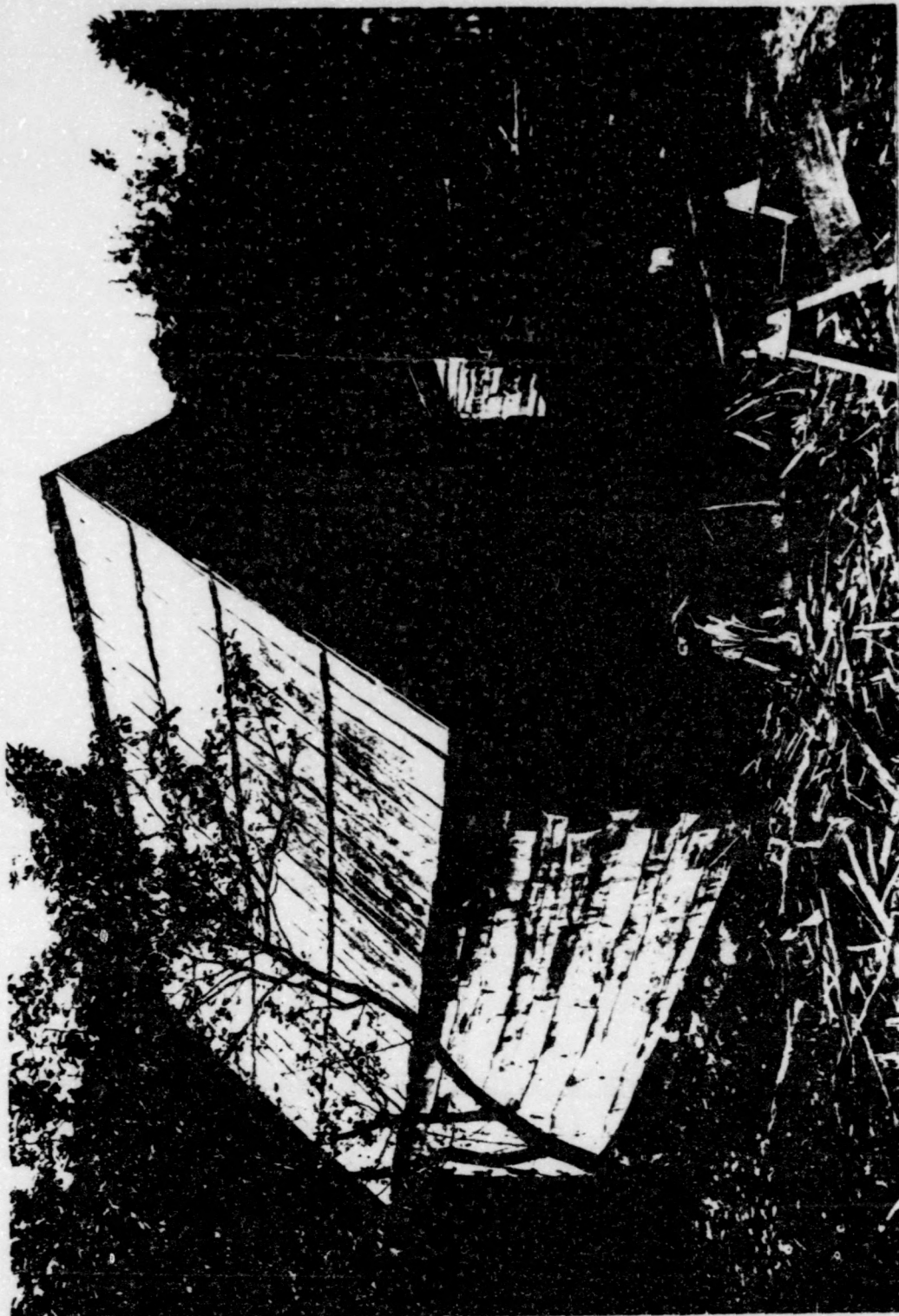


Plate X. A corncrib and hen house on the Lige Gibbons farm



Plate XI. The Willie Gibbons outhouse



Plate XII. A hog house on the Willie Gibbons farm



Plate XIII. The Willie Gibbons woodshed

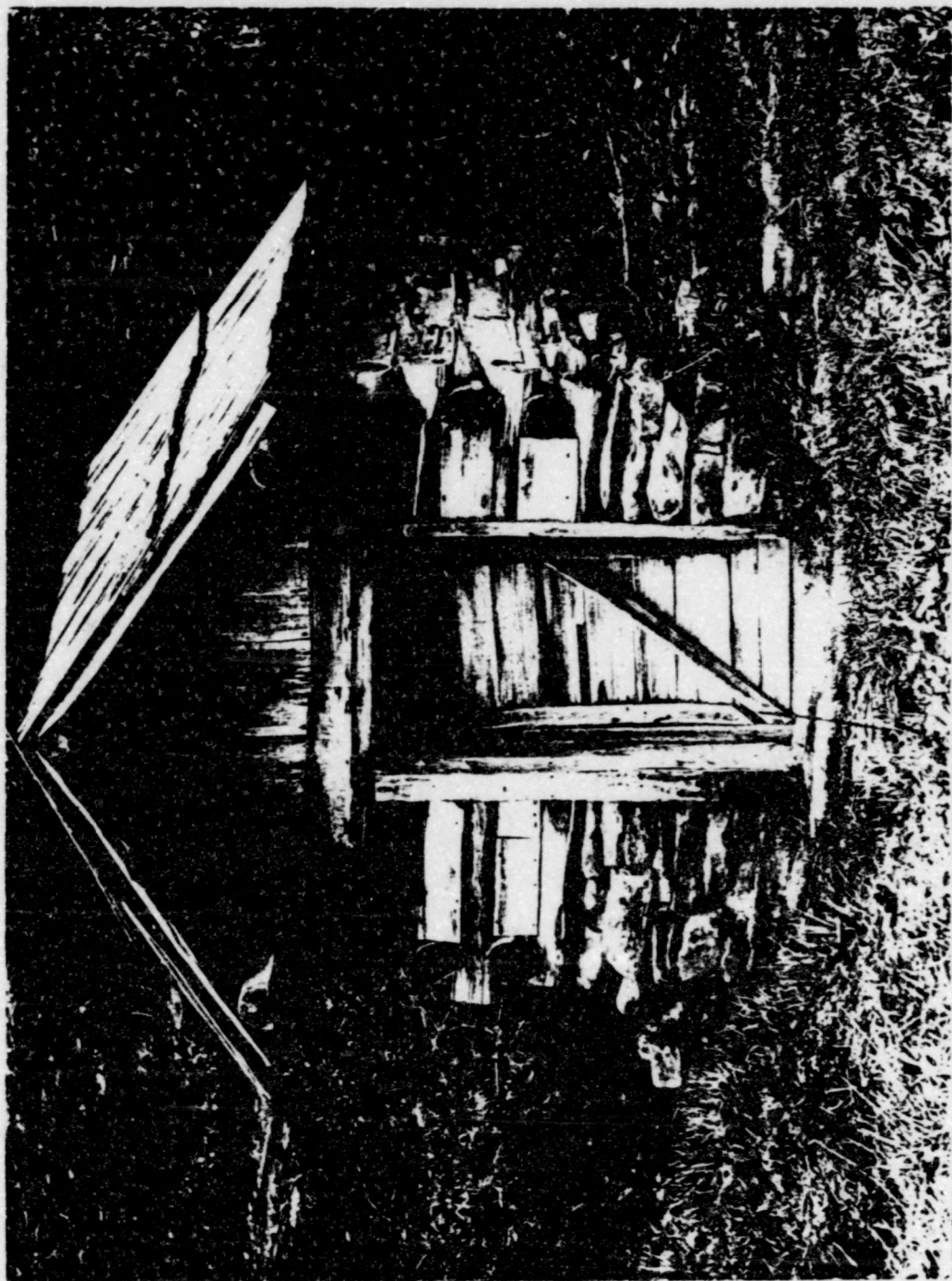


Plate XIV. The springhouse on the Willie Gibbons farm

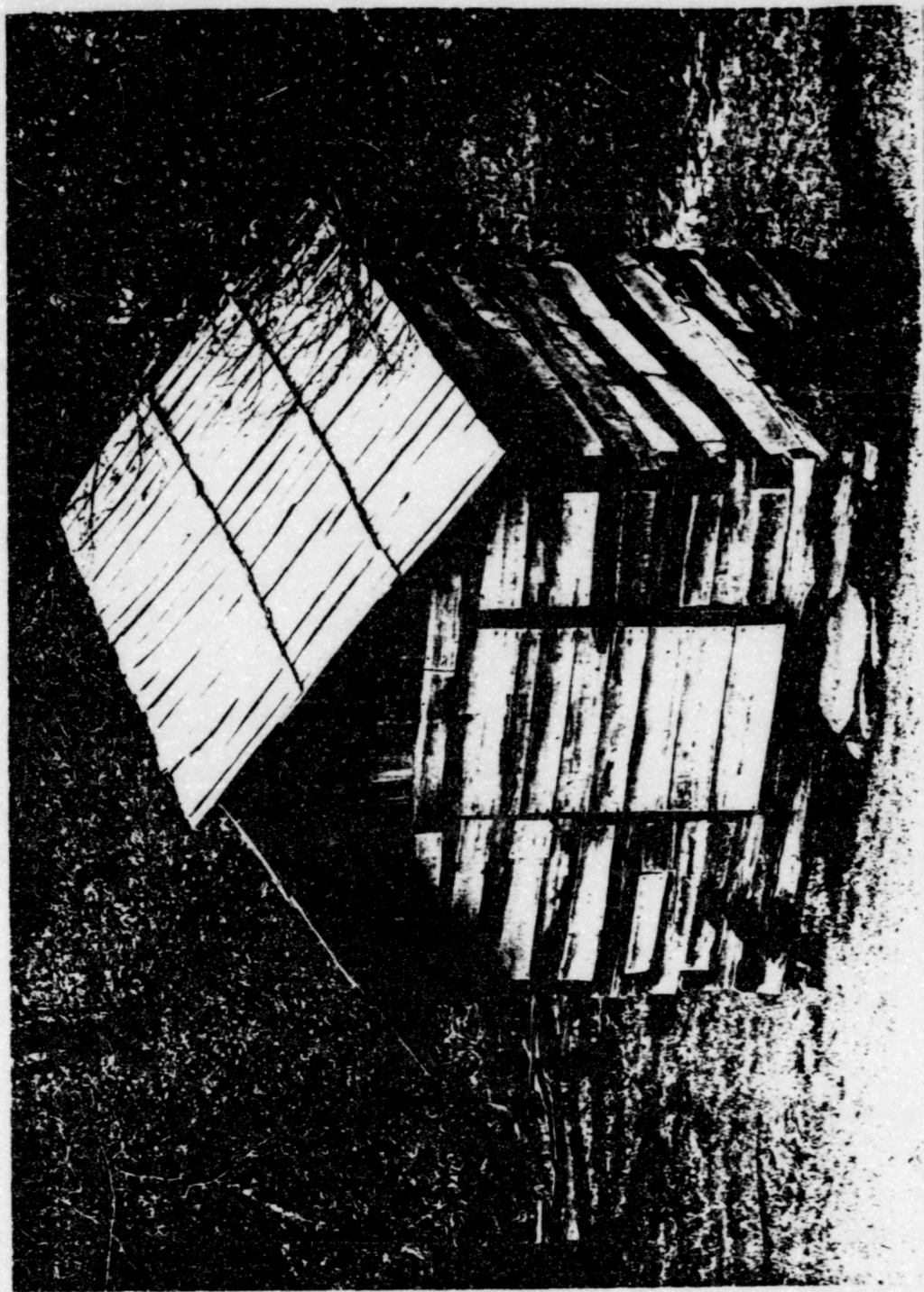


Plate XV. The Willie Gibbons smokehouse

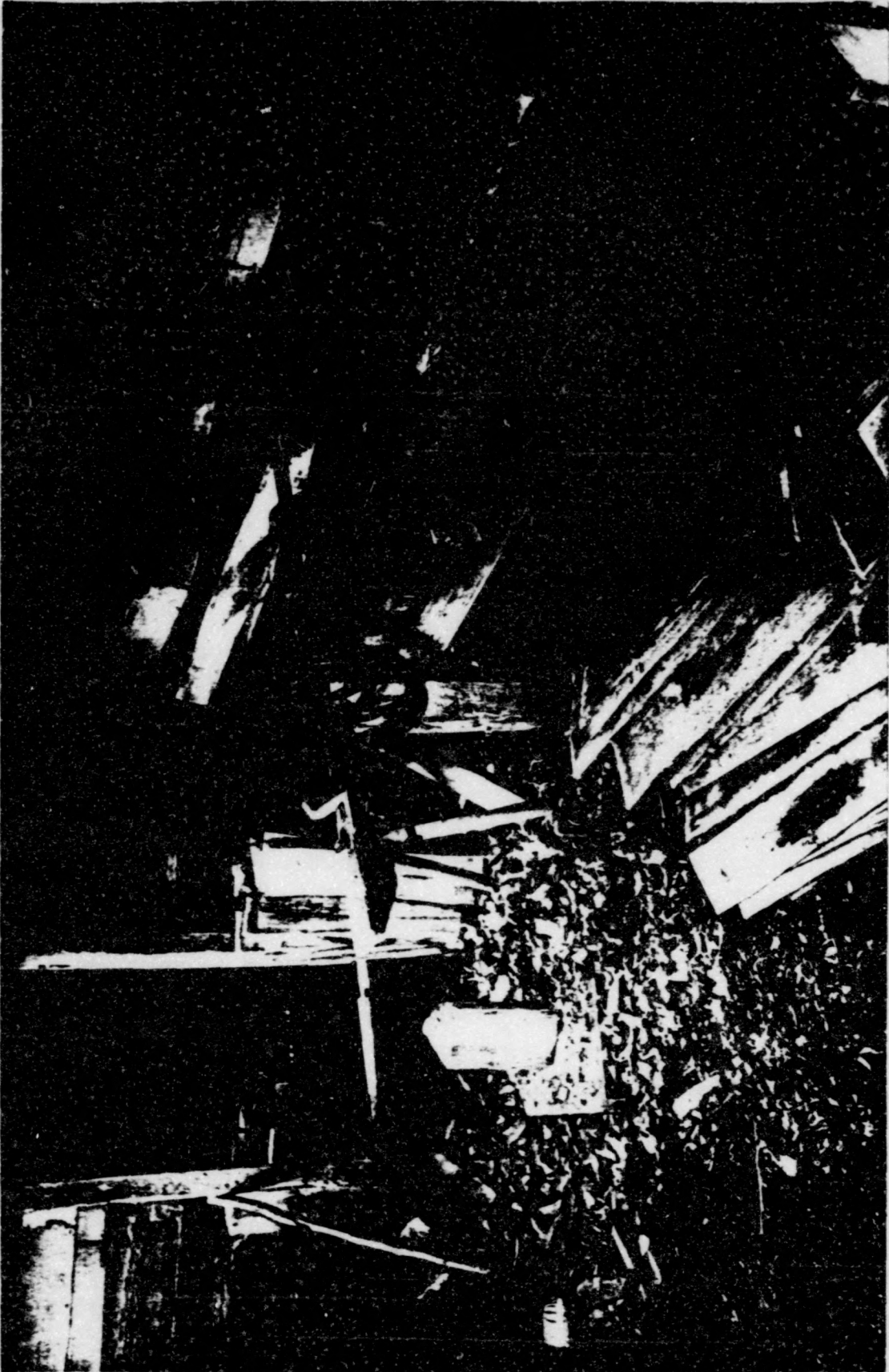


Plate XVI. Interior of the Willie Gibbons blacksmith shop

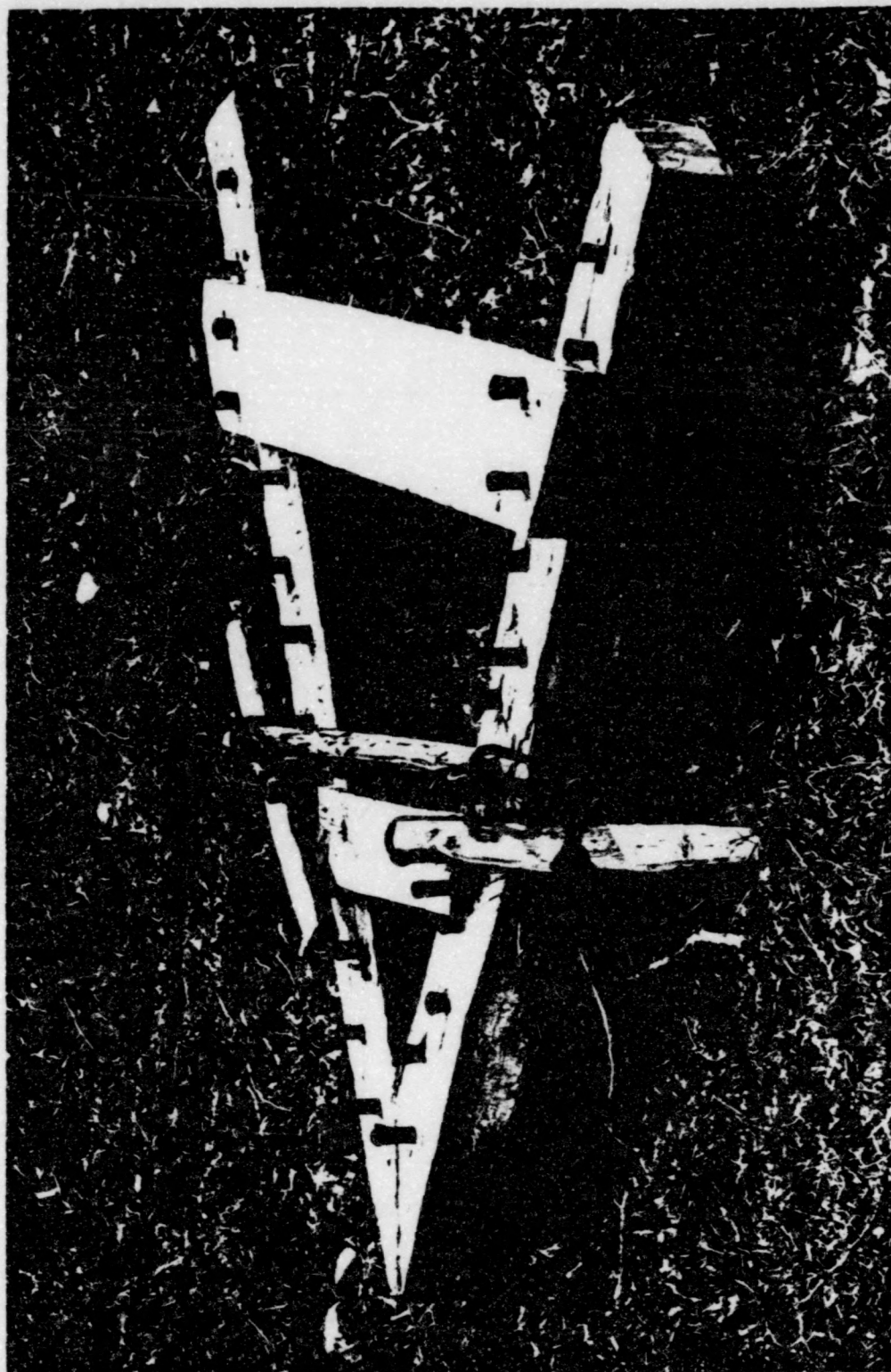


Plate XVII. An A-harrow

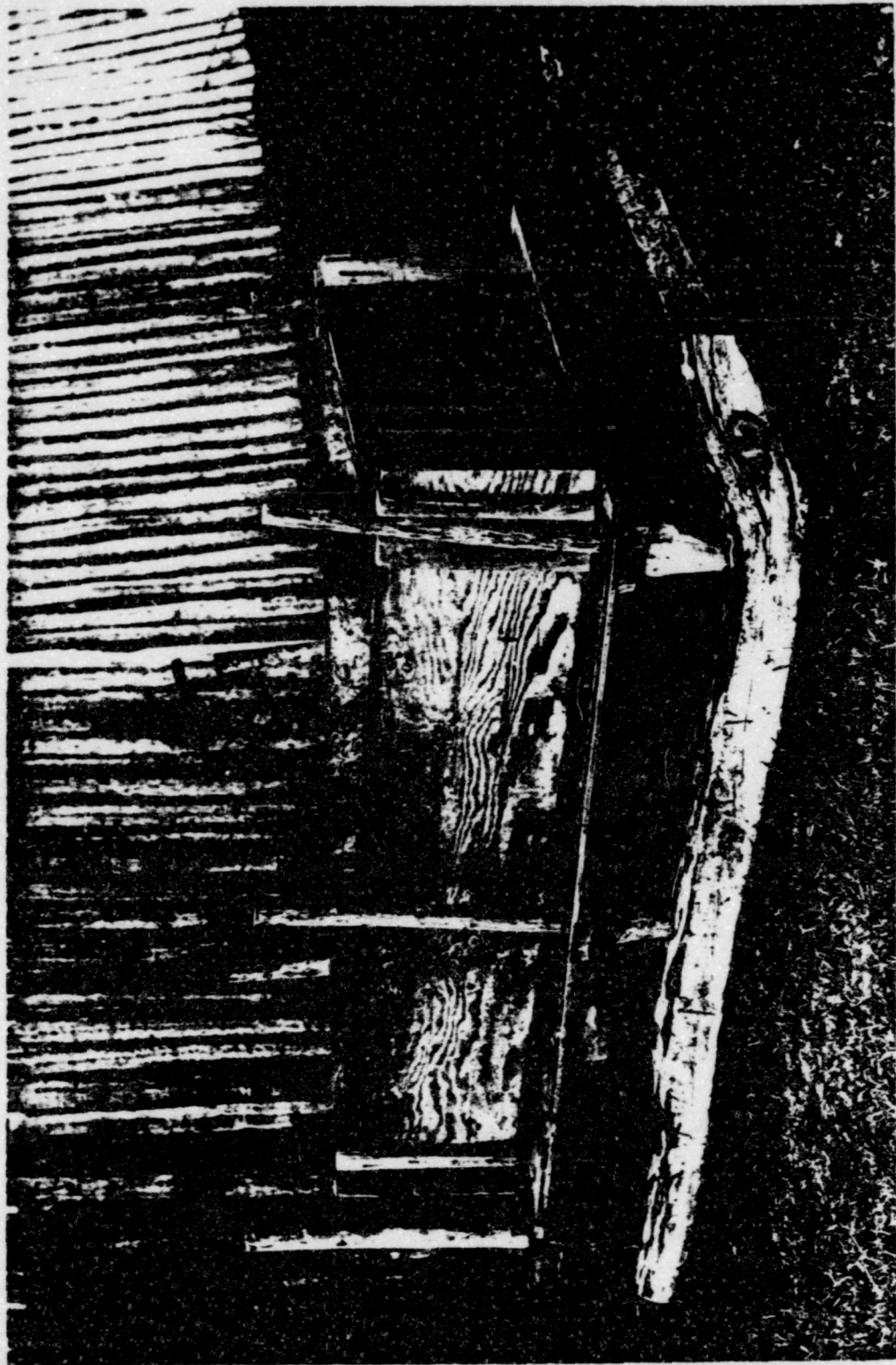


Plate XVIII. A sled for hauling rocks

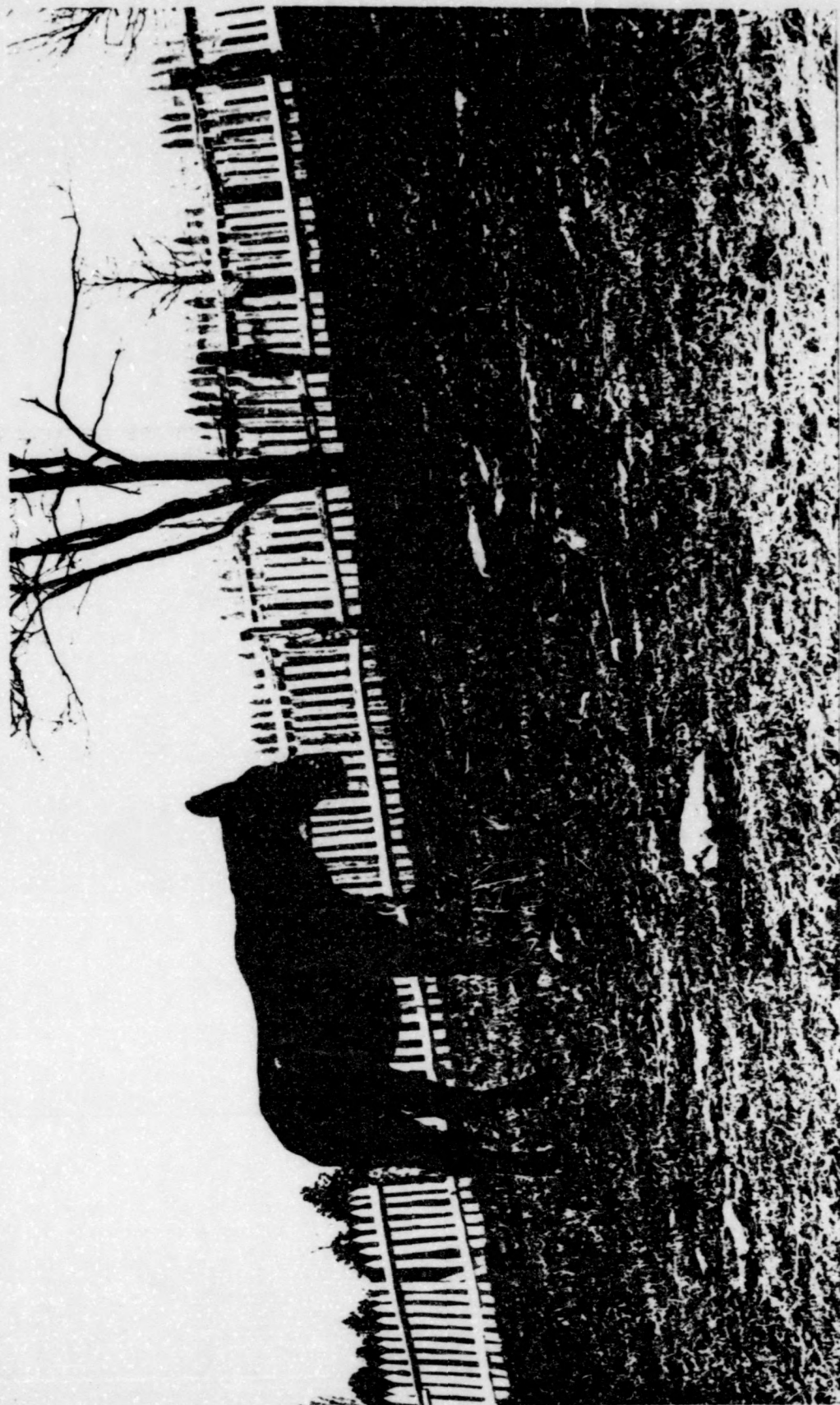


Plate XIX. A mule in a Hensley Settlement pasture

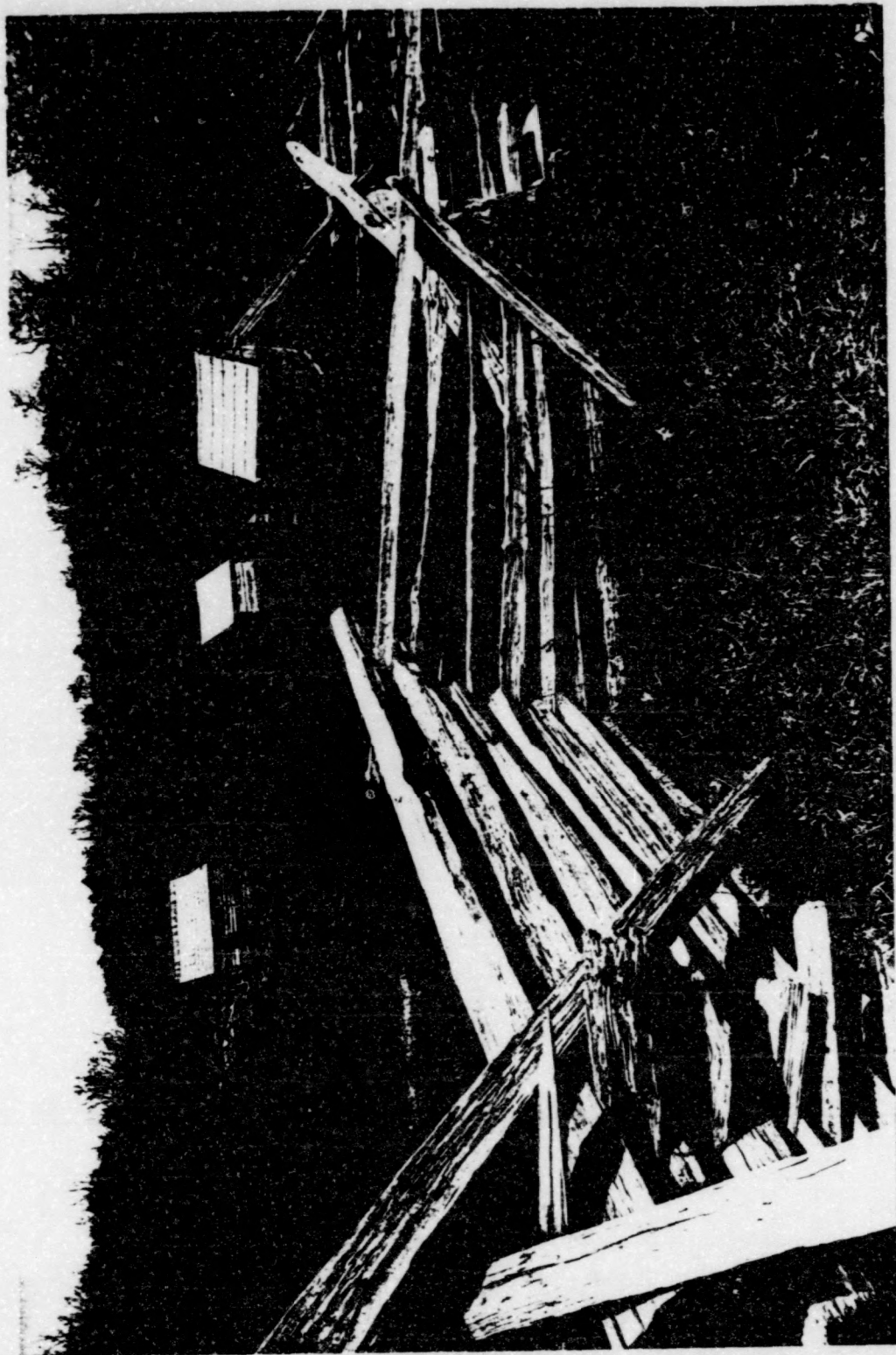


Plate XX. A view of the Lige Gibbons farm



Plate XXI. Split rail fences



Plate XXII. The Brush Mountain Schoolhouse

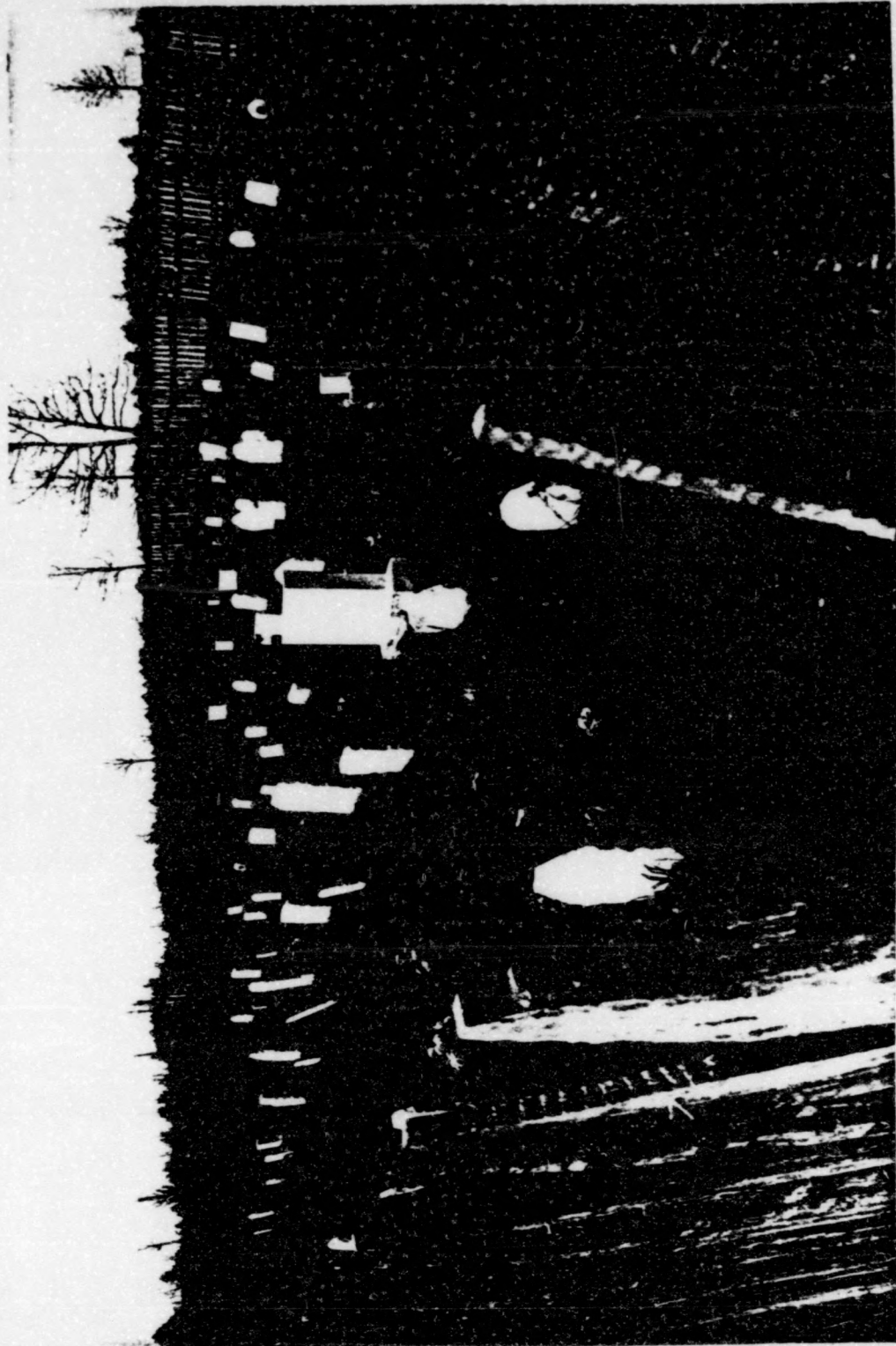


Plate XXIII. The Hensley Settlement cemetery



Plate XXIV. A bee gum



Plate XXV. Lige Gibbons at his home near Cubage, Kentucky



Plate XXVI. Lige Gibbons' wife Sovarna

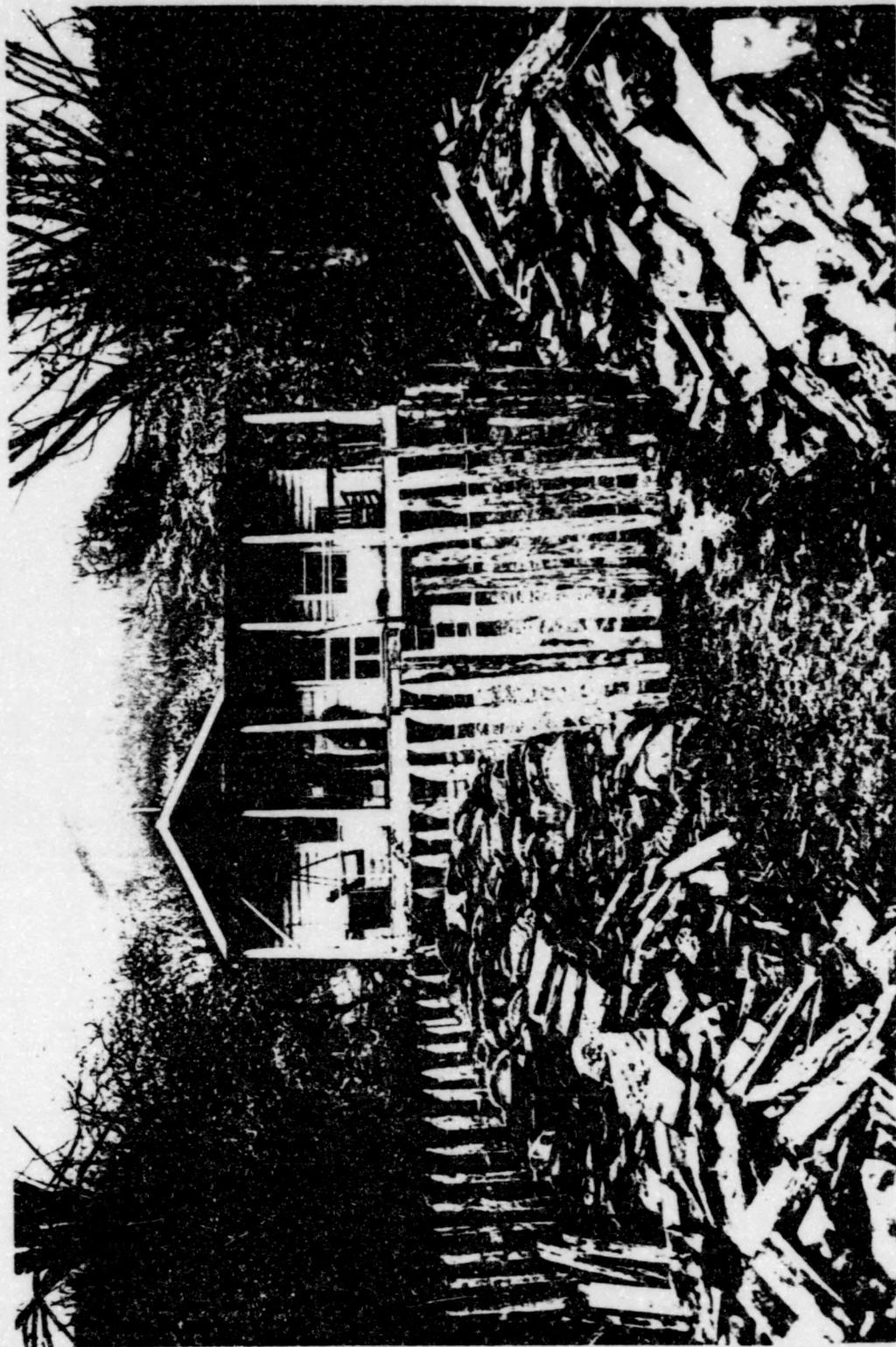


Plate XXVII. Sherman Hensley at his home near Caylor, Virginia

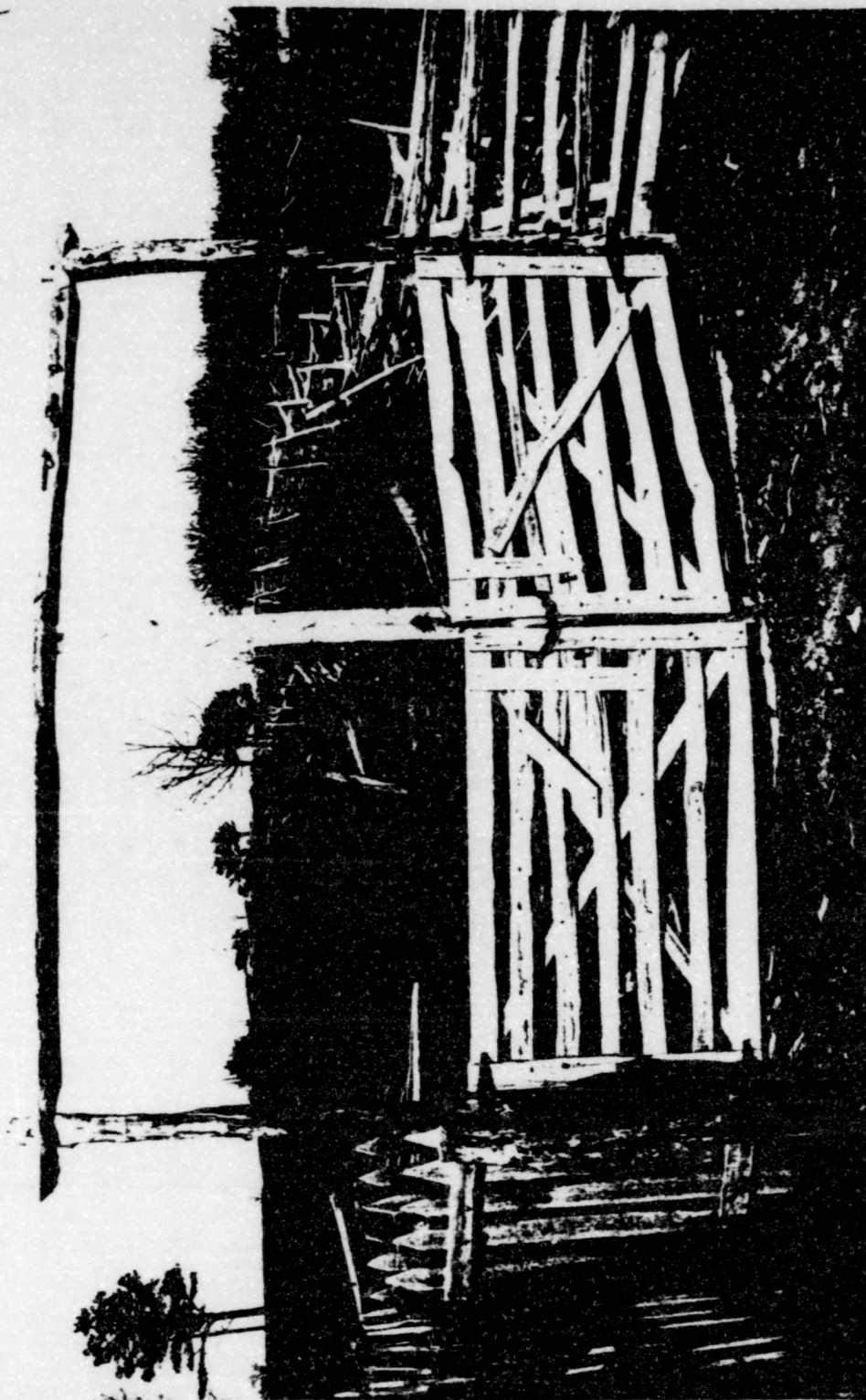
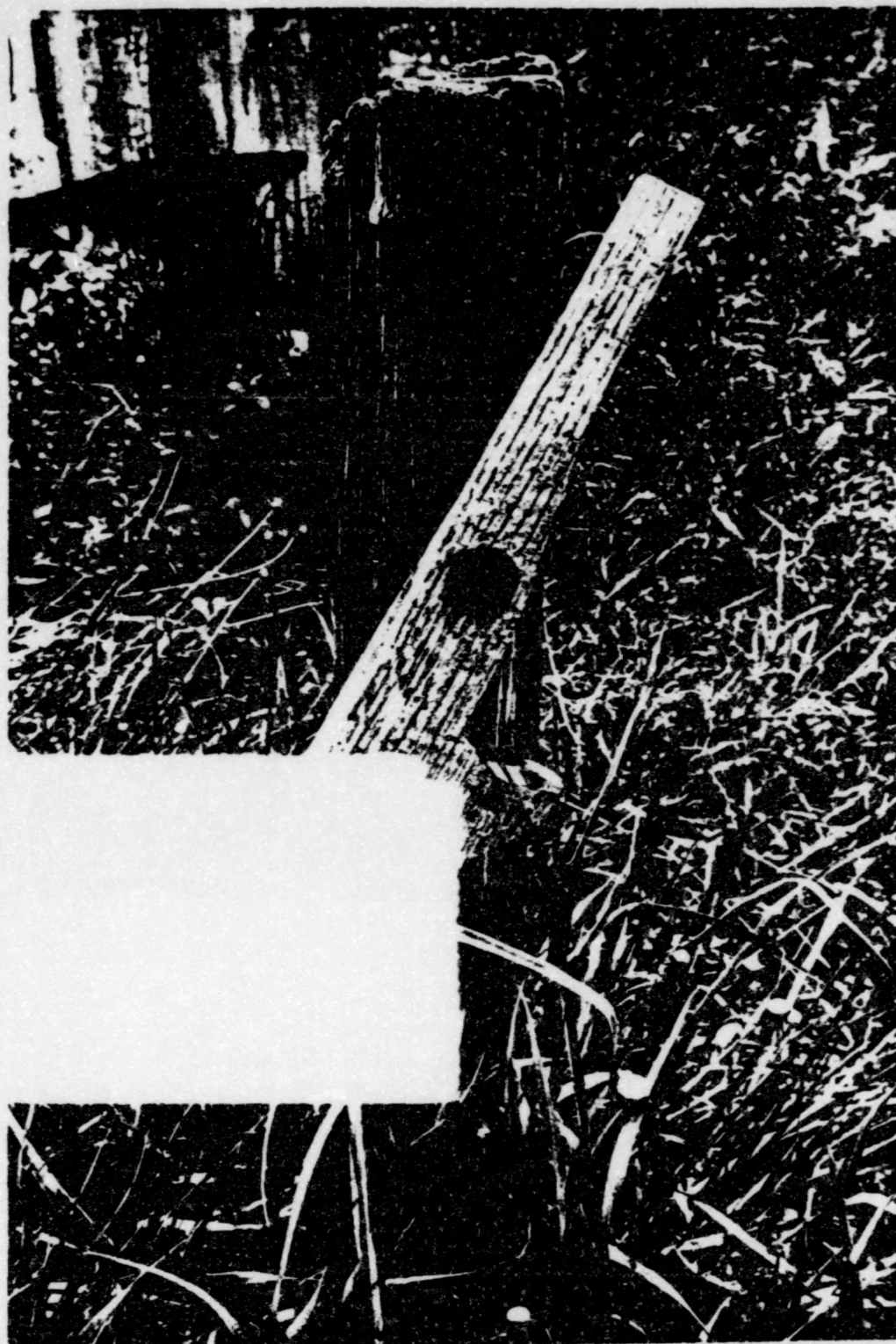


Plate XXVIII. A wooden gate in the Hensley Settlement



made gate keeper



Plate XXX. Arnold Wilder, an early teacher in the Brush Mountain school, and his wife.

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