Portraits and Landscapes in Family Narrative

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PORTRAITS AND LANDSCAPES IN FAMILY NARRATIVE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis works from my interest in how individual perspectives affect family narratives and constructions of family history. Narrative exists chiefly in story form, but it also exists in people's mind, helping them to understand material culture, customs, and other forms of folk expression. These folk ideas define us and bind us socially. The way we arrange things in our minds, make sense of life experiences and the narratives we about create these experiences, define our social ties, such as family. Before one can understand the collective or group perception of itself, one must understand how each component or person in that group look at it separately. These individual perceptions can be seen in the portraits and landscapes of people and places that each family member generates, receives from others, and gives status to within the family's collective concept of folklore and history.

While the meaning that people derive from family narratives and history is individualistic, the organization of these folkloristic forms is structurally consistent. Most people order and develop family narratives and history in much the same way. In my thesis, I address how family
narratives and perceptions of family history form from individual perspectives, but also look at how family members convey their point of view by using the same structural elements, which I call narrative and visual vignettes. These vignettes exist in all forms of expression and documentation, from short anecdotal stories to photographs. Each vignette is separate from the next, but if tied together in a sequence as a narrator or organizer deems appropriate, harmony or cohesion of family experience is created. As one looks at these vignettes and examines their connection to one another, one can see that the connections come from conscious ordering and editing. This limited recounting of past events generally provides only one perspective, making them more like opinions or editorials than complete chronicles of history.

For this study, I surveyed previous scholarly works associated with family folklore. Following that review comes a broad discussion of family folk groups, the use of folklore in those groups, the establishment of my own definition of family folklore, and an analysis of the dynamic of family and the organizing principle of family narratives. Then I turn specifically to family narratives and the construction of family history, examining this through my own immediate and extended family. I highlight how family history is constructed from varying types of vignettes and discuss the presence of these vignettes in
material forms (family heirlooms and pictures), written accounts (such as letters and manuscripts that my grandfather collected), and oral storytelling. Within these expressive forms, narrative works in two ways: as portraits of family members and as landscapes characterizing the environment or situations involving these members. As this study concludes, no substantial conclusion is made—only a discussion of how it can influence family folklore scholarship.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

In mid-August of 1996, I moved to Kentucky. For years I had toyed with the idea of going to graduate school, and now that idea was a day away from reality. The weekend before school started, my brother, Shelby Roberts, and I headed west down a rural Kentucky highway in search of our family's past. Our grandfather, Hayden Roberts, grew up in western Kentucky. Just south of Murray, Kentucky, in Weakley County, Tennessee, my brother began to recognize the landscape. We were looking for a place called Elm Tree (along the state line), once the site of a lumber mill, grist mill, country store, and a post office managed by my great-grandfather. Along this excursion, Shelby kept recalling bits and pieces of a family vacation I was too young to remember. He talked about a time when my mother and father piled us in the car alongside Granddad and headed across the South to see where my elders called home. As Shelby and I twisted around unmarked roads, I asked him how they had ever found this place originally. He replied that the landmarks—old houses, barns, and stores—used to be here. Now that some of these landmarks had vanished, I
wondered how we would find the same place a second time. But the landscape, he said, had not changed that much. Though he did not say explicitly, I think he felt confident enough that the old houses and rural cemeteries that remained could guide him to our destination.

As we made our way to Elm Tree, I asked Shelby to tell me what he remembered about Granddad. Thinking about the question awhile, he recalled one vivid moment from that family trip. Before the vacation turned to looking at Granddad’s past, my family spent a couple of days hunting down my other granddad’s home in the deeper South.

While we were in Mississippi we tried to find the farm where Hugh [my mother’s father] grew up. In Olive Branch we wandered up a country road and pulled up to a rural country store that looked the way Walker Evans saw the South. It was like something out of the 1930s, no place in America, [like another country]. In the 1970s, Mississippi looked like something else; now it looks like America. At this store, Mom got out and went inside. We followed. I was young, but I remember this clearly. I don't know how old I was but old enough that I was conscious about racism.

Mom thought that this store was the marker that defined the community where the farm was, but she was having difficulty remembering. Granddaddy Hayden asked her to just go outside and ask the black man on the porch. Mom said, How would he know? So Hayden walked outside on the porch, we were inside drinking Cokes, sat down next to this aged old black man— I remember their canes sitting next to each other— and asked him if he knew where the old Sandlin place was. He piped up and gave precise, exact directions. Knew exactly where it was.

That was such a distinct memory for me. Hayden talking to that man the way he did was on a level that none of us, Mom or Dad, could relate. To Hayden, it was like, of course the man knew where the Sandlin place was. He'd lived here all his life and from that generation no one left the
community from where they were born. Especially a black man who didn't have many options (1996).

To Shelby, this story solidifies certain impressions he carries about our grandfather, the world where he lived, and his negotiations within that world. While Shelby feels a bond to this story, his narration of this event bonds others to the experience as well, particularly myself. Although I do not remember the event, I identify with the characters in this story as part of my heritage. I recorded this story before I began my fieldwork for this project. As I sit composing these words, I find myself drawn to this narrative because it embodies certain aspects of folklore and family that have led me to write this thesis.

But my work with family heritage did not begin with my brother and me ambling down country roads. In the late 1940s, my grandfather began working on a family history. At first, his interest centered on creating a family tree. As he became more involved in documenting his heritage, he began to orchestrate a larger project focusing on his life and the stories his elders told about the family's past. Unfortunately, Granddad died in 1978 leaving stacks of photo albums, piles of letters, and a series of three-ring binders with typed pages full of scribbled notes and corrections. This incomplete manuscript sat in my dad's garage for fifteen years until I approached him with my interest in completing the project. For three years, I struggled with this manuscript trying to make sense of it, to understand
the mind behind it, and eventually to complete it. I conducted background research concerning the historic events Granddad recounted. I believed that I could finish it simply by providing a historic framework for his writings, but the more background information I collected, the more I realized that the book could not be completed in this manner and still retain Granddad's voice and message. To finish the project would force Granddad's original manuscript to serve only my opinions and perspectives. The book currently remains in its fragmented state as he left it. Perhaps someday it will be organized for presentation.

Though I have not completed his work, I have not forgotten it. Instead, I began to re-conceptualize the manuscript as a testament to his life, interests, and perspectives. I decided the manuscript should not be seen as a historic document. While it is historically significant, its existence as an artifact elevates its social and cultural importance. As an artifact, it signifies my grandfather. It stands as a record of a particular point of view or understanding, a testimony to the kind of man he was and how he saw the world. However, as a testimony, I have come to realize that it is incomplete, but this incompleteness is not due to a lack of research or documentation on his part. As a life history, no matter how much research or collection he would have completed, gaps in his work would still exist. Therefore, I
determined his manuscript to be a collection of short stories, vignettes, or "short literary sketches chiefly descriptive" (Webster 1966:2551), relating to his life and family heritage.

These vignettes exist in all forms of expression and documentation, from short anecdotal stories to photographs. Defining the elements of Granddad's manuscript as vignettes forced me to conceptualize them much like frames in a comic strip. Each vignette is separate from the next, but if tied together in a sequence as a narrator sees appropriate, harmony or cohesion is created within the narration of family history. As one looks at these vignettes and examines their connection to one another, one can see that the connections come from conscious ordering and editing. They are subject to change based on people's varying views, interests, and memories. There are always scenes, events, or aspects of events between each vignette that are missing. One never gets to see or know everything about the life of a family member. Some of these events are accidently forgotten and others are not recalled on purpose. Either way, this limited recounting of past events generally provides only one perspective, making them more like opinions or editorials than complete chronicles of history.

When I began my work on family folklore, I developed a genuine interest in understanding how an individual's perspective affects family narratives. My graduate studies
have taught me that ideas and concepts are the backbone of folklore. They constitute all the material that a person pulls together from one's surroundings and one's mind in order to understand and develop an attachment to a folk group. Most forms of folklore can help foster this group attachment, but narrative helps to vocalize that attachment and support what other forms of folklore can not express in words. Narratives exists chiefly in oral and written forms, but they also exists in thoughts and dialogues we carry internally with ourselves, helping us to rationalize and understand material culture, customs, and other forms of folk expression. In conjunction with narrative, I have realized that all of us maintain our own individual view on life. These perspectives define us. They also bind us socially. The way we arrange things in our minds, making sense of life experiences and the narratives we create about these experiences, define our social ties. One of the most common social ties is a person's sense of family. "Family is our first culture." (Stone 1988:7) Many folklorists studying the text that help form folk groups have looked at the formation of families through their collection of folklore. These scholars have analyzed family as a collective concept, but another facet of family is the way an individual orders and defines family. Before one can understand the collective or group perception of itself, one must understand how each component or person in that group
looks at it separately. Therefore, in my thesis I consider family narratives and the vignettes that they incorporate as distinct points of view of family by its members.

Folklorists have not fully explored the individual's influence on family folklore. Not taking this fully into account limits one's understanding of the connections between family folklore and family members on an intimate or personal level. My research relies upon individual perceptions of family and the use of expressive forms, such as pictures, oral storytelling, and written documents, to define and perpetuate that perception. Scholars must realize that individuals develop a unique relationship with each narrative, whether that person conveys the narrative to others or is the audience. Family folklore works toward creating portraits or landscapes of people or places. Through one person's descriptions, stories, or images, an audience member, particularly a person who shares the same family ties, makes sense of it by developing individual associations, opinions, and visualizations of the conveyed experience. While the meaning that people derive from family narratives and history is individualistic, the organization of these folkloristic forms is structurally consistent. Most people develop family narratives in much the same way. I look at how family narratives form from individual perspectives, but I also look at how family members rely on those perspective by using the same
structural elements, which I call narrative and visual vignettes.

This study begins by surveying previous scholarly works associated with family folklore. The stage will then be set for subsequent chapters and will arm the reader with information vital to understanding the focus of this analysis. Chapter three follows this review with a broad discussion of family folk groups and the use of folklore in those groups. In addition to establishing my own definition of family folklore, this chapter will discuss the dynamic of family and the organizing principle of family narratives. Chapters four and five will focus specifically on family narratives and constructions of family history, detailing this through varying types of narrative vignettes and discussing their presence in material forms (family heirlooms and pictures), written accounts (such as letters and manuscripts that my grandfather collected), and storytelling. Within these expressive forms, narrative works in two ways: as portraits of family members and as landscapes characterizing the environment or situations involving these members. Chapter six concludes this study with a discussion about what this analysis accomplishes in the area of family folklore.
CHAPTER TWO

PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

Family folklore scholarship has a limited history both in the infrequency of scholarly production and the short history of its acknowledged existence. It has been noted that the importance of family in folklore can be traced back to the Grimm Brothers who used family situations to collect their folktales (Zeitlin, Kotkin, Baker 1982:2). However, most folk scholars interested in this area date its study to Mody Boatright's 1958 essay, "The Family Saga as a Form of Folklore" (Clements 1986; Dargan 1978), but Boatright's look at family narratives as lively sources of oral fiction is the only such study during this time period. Other scholars began to see families as legitimate sources, for example June Jacobi Gillin (1953) and Herbert Halpert (1942), but they did not acknowledge that their collection of text had come from families. Although their material came directly from their own families, they highlight the actual source of their collection, such as a grandmother or grandfather, never registering how these tales were attached to the group from which they originated.

Boatright was the first to draw attention to the
formation of folklore in families. In his own essay, he finds that many family stories mirror folktales to such a degree that folklorists can identify specific tale-types from the Aarne-Thompson Index (1961). Although his essay lacks consideration of texture and context useful in current folklore scholarship, it does mark an important move toward an understanding of folk groups. Boatright's acknowledgment helped open the door to later scholarship which would see folklore as tied to specific cultural groups, such as Lynwood Montell's *Saga of Coe Ridge* (1970) and Barbara Myerhoff's *Number Our Days* (1978).

While Boatright's considerations were valued in other areas of folk analysis, like Montell and Myerhoff's studies of regional and ethnic personal experience narratives, respectfully, his work on families as narrative sources would influence other scholars. Through the 1960s and 70s, folklorists would not only collect family stories (Currin and Smetzer 1964; Holyoak 1971; Brandes 1975) but would also expand the study of folklore in the family taking into account other forms of expression, such as pictures (Kotkin 1978; Gutman 1979), songs (Lumpkin 1972; Mullen 1972), customs (Justice 1973), beliefs (Carbo 1968; Giusti 1975), home-movies (Chalfen 1975), and other expressive traditions (Fleischhauer and Jabbour 1973; Humphrey 1979).

The next milestone in family folklore scholarship came with the completion of the Smithsonian's festival project on
family stories and the subsequent book that followed, *A Celebration of American Family Folklore* (Zeitlin, Kotkin, and Baker 1982). This book, written for both academic folklorists and the general public, encapsulates most of the previous scholarship on family folklore and marks the first definitive family folklore publication. It illustrates the major expressive forms and common themes of family folklore and attempts to define the area of study under one umbrella concept. The Smithsonian's book does not define family folklore. Instead, they refer to a listing of examples:

> Family stories, expressions, customs, and photographs are examples of folklore, the informal and expressive traditions of close groups. These traditions spring up whenever Americans gather their kinfolk together to talk, to celebrate, or to play. (Zeitlin, Kotkin, and Baker 1982:2)

The Smithsonian definition and understanding of family folklore has been widely accepted. Its definition does not pose any contradiction, but as scholars would later prove, the Smithsonian's work was too narrowly focused and with little analytical consideration.

Though *A Celebration of American Family Folklore* is still cited today, the study of families and their folklore has since turned in a more analytical direction. William Clements's essay "Some Dysfunctions of Family Folklore" (1986) was the first to challenge the Smithsonian's collection process and its analytical limitations, as well as the limitations of all previous family folklore scholarship. *A Celebration of American Family Folklore* is
based on stories collected from the 1970s family storytelling booths at the American Festival of Folklife in Washington, DC. Clements sees restrictions to the broad conclusions drawn in this book since the material originated from the same source. He also challenges the previous arguments that family folklore works as a positive gluing agent uniting the family (Garrett 1961; Allen 1982). Family narratives can just as easily push people apart as draw them together.

Clements's analysis changed family folklore. It signifies a cross disciplinary shift in the analysis and understanding of the family. Linguists and other communication scholars began to look at how language operates in families. Although few studies exist presently, there has been interesting analysis from these disciplines that suggest family stories exist as a mode of social control (Langellier and Peterson 1993). Other social scientists have worked on the social conceptualization of family. Sociologists and social historians, such as Stephanie Coontz (1992) and Steven Mintz (1988), published books attacking the mythic perception of the family. Coontz and Mintz analyze nostalgic perceptions of family life in the United States, illustrating inaccuracy in contemporary comparisons between families of the "good-old-days" and families today. They conclude that the family as an institution is no worse off now that it was in the past.
But by not looking at family from a folkloristic perspective, Coontz and Mintz unfortunately miss why nostalgic perceptions exist.

Folklorists have discussed reasons for the persistence of nostalgia in family. Barbara Allen has emphasized nostalgia's importance in solidifying memories, both for families (1982) and individuals (Allen and Schlereth 1990). These solidifications or crystallizations tend to characterize general qualities of family members. They also develop into a mythos about the family as a whole. This returns us to family folklore's function as a unifying agent. Despite Clements's efforts to expand family folklore studies, his insightful outlook fell on deaf ears. Few folklorists in the mid-eighties looked at family folklore analytically, only one comprehensive study was published and it did not come from a folklorist: Elizabeth Stone's *Black Sheep and Kissing Cousins* (1988). Her book expands the unifying function of family stories. Contrary to Clements, Stone finds that family narratives often articulate a family's mythos or collective identity in exemplary form. Though she found negative stories intermixed with positive ones in a family's collective repertoire and discusses how these negative stories affect the identity of the family, ultimately she says, family stories provide the family with esteem because they often show the family in an attractive light or define the family in a flattering way. They also give messages and instructions; they offer blueprints
and ideas; they issue warnings and prohibitions. (1988:5)

Even the stories of destitution and despair are flattering to the family because they turn tragedy into an example of family endurance and survival. Otherwise, Stone believes, "when they no longer serve [a unifying purpose], they disappear." (1988:5)

Since Stone, more scholars have begun looking at family folklore analytically. William Wilson's 1991 essay, "Personal Narrative: The Family Novel," moved scholars toward a re-examination of family narratives. In Boatright's day, family folklore was only considered to be fictional narratives, but by the seventies, Montell's work with oral history suggested that family narratives were localized truths. Wilson's re-examination situates family stories somewhere between Boatright's and Montell's conception. Wilson defines these stories as "family novels." They, like nonfiction novels, contain an air of truth but this truth takes second seat to the flow of the narrative. Therefore, certain aspects of truth are sometimes sacrificed in order to preserve the flow and the overall moral or theme of the story (1991:134).

At the same time as Wilson, further critical analysis came during the 1989 American Folklore Society meeting and the 1994 special issue of *Southern Folklore* that followed. Larry Danielson, panel organizer and guest editor of the journal, challenges the common definition of family, the
conventional genres of family folklore, and the positivist, functional interpretation that most folklorists had previously defended. Unfortunately, little folklore scholarship since has expounded on family folklore in a conscious and overt manner. Some studies that border this arena discuss the importance of home or a sense of place in the lives of individuals and their families (Allen and Schlereth 1990; Williams 1991; American Folklore Society Fellows panel on "Sense of Place" 1997; John Roberts 1998). But these studies concentrate more on the relationship between folklore and place than the family and its folklore. Other recent scholarship focuses on strategies for using family folklore as elementary and secondary teaching tools (American Folklore Society forum on "Folklore and Education" 1997). Basically, Danielson's work stands as the last critical look at family folklore. In the Encyclopedia of American Folklore (1996), his entry on family folklore makes a further attempt at expanding this area of study. He surveys the scholarship, notes its lack of critical analysis, and suggests areas where folklorists could expand the study.

As previously stated, family folklore scholarship has a relatively limited history in comparison to other areas of folklore. Up to now, this review of scholarship has highlighted those few studies. Although there are many existing works that relate to the family, they do not
analyze family folklore in an overt manner. These works include studies of non-English, ethnically rich groups and works on personal experience narratives. In the study of family folklore, one would think an obvious study would be the variation of family folklore between different social and economic groups. However, family folklore for the most part has been viewed by folklorists as a homogeneous whole, particularly the Smithsonian's research. As one begins to read *A Celebration of American Family Folklore*, one finds that the editors have not taken into account ethnic, cultural, and economic differences. They base their findings on stories collected from the family storytelling booths at the Smithsonian's festival, and present the material as a primer to what family folklore is or could be, but they never reveal the limits to their collection process. A certain type of person typically vacations in Washington, DC in the summer, and it takes a certain type of person to be interested in not only the festival but in recording family stories at a festival booth. The editors' collection of stories hardly represent a cross section of United States. As a profile, Dean McCannell defines such vacationers as part of a tourist class, a sub-class of white modern middle-class America (1989). Other economic classes, especially the lower economic strata, become lumped into this homogeneous group or go un-represented. In a society that has such a pronounced economic class structure as the
United States, economics is bound to influence what people convey in their family stories as well as through their customs.

The definition of family folklore seems to have been limited by folklorists to McCannell's specific group; a group that has traditionally been considered too difficult to study because of its proximity to the cultural background of most folklorists. To study this middle class would be like studying themselves. Since folklorists and anthropologists have been primarily interested in studying the "other" for most of this century, the middle class has generally been left out of scholarship. Not until the 1970s when a new wave of folklorists began taking an interest in the study of oneself and one's own culture did family folklore become an area of study. The irony is that once family folklore became an area of study, most folklorists interested in this aspect of folklore rarely ventured their work with family folklore outside of their own experiential understanding of family. Typically folklorists have classified and analyzed family folklore through their own family experiences. Since most folklorists are of European descent, few examples of family folklore from nonwhite groups exist. Katherine Morgan's compilation of family stories from her African-American heritage in *Children of Strangers* (1981) is one rare example. Other than this, the study of families of different ethnic, religious, and
economic backgrounds have typically been assimilated into broader community studies.

Many studies of this nature exist and are represented in such works as Alan Dundes’ anthology on African-Americans in *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel* (1973), Linda Dégh’s analysis of storytelling in a small Hungarian community in *Folktales in Society* (1969), and the anthology *Creative Ethnicity*, which looks at symbols and organizing principles in contemporary ethnic life (Stern and Cicala 1991). Similar works include studies on ethnicity and regional identity, such as *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States: The Performance of Group Identity* (Brown and Mussell 1984) and *A Sense of Place: American Regional Culture* (Allen and Schlereth 1990). These ethnic and regional studies unfortunately do not specifically address family folklore. However, it should be noted that many works discussing ethnic foodways do address issues of folklore in family contexts (Sherman 1988; Theophano 1991). Unfortunately, these works often go un-referenced in family folklore analyzes. But even these works are limited in their discussion of folklore outside scholars’ own concepts of family. Ultimately one must ask, why have scholars not examined family folklore in social/cultural groups other than their own? The answer is more complex than simply narrow-mindedness. The answer is in the difficulty researchers have accessing folklore in private areas of
society, such as families.

One area directly aligned with the study of family folklore is personal experience narrative. Much of the early scholarship on family folklore, in fact, involves the collection of personal experiences. Even A Celebration of American Family Folklore includes recorded personal experiences. Other studies on personal experience narrative, like Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's "Authoring Lives" (1989), look at the way forms of expression chronicle life events. Sandra Stahl's Literary Folkloristics and the Personal Narrative (1990) and Charlotte Linde's Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence (1993), grapple with the ordering of life through the cohesion of narratives. These analyzes of personal experience mirror the analysis of family folklore. The primary difference is that personal experience studies focus on an individual's experiences while family folklore studies look at the collective experience.

From this overview of previous scholarship, one can begin to see the wealth of possibilities in family folklore research. The studies noted have taken family folklore in various directions, but they have also left gaps that need to be filled with further research and analysis. How, for example, do the non-critical collections of family stories perceive family as a folk group? At what point do types of family folklore become classified as another type of
folklore? When I think of family, I envision several combinations of immediate and extended family members. But the difference between immediate and extended relatives has not been addressed by folklorists. All future studies of family folklore need to consider the implications of family folklore as a broad label used to lump certain forms of folklore together. The term "family folklore," and other similar classification terms, carries certain connotations. If one uses this term to characterize one's folklore findings, then one must be clear about how one understands and defines this term. Before dissecting my fieldwork, I will discuss my perception of family, its dynamics, and how folklore fits into those dynamics.
CHAPTER THREE

WHAT IS FAMILY FOLKLORE?

DEFINING FAMILY FOLKLORE

Since the discipline's conception, folklorists have struggled with various definitions of folklore. Now the discipline has reached a place where folklorists carry two definitions of folklore: a highly abstract definition such as Dan Ben-Amos's "artistic communication in small groups" (1972) and one more practical definition—commonly used to describe to non-folklorists what folklorists study, usually based on a shopping list of expressive forms, for example stories, customs, and rituals. For the most part, folklore scholars do not deviate from this generalization when dealing with definitions of family folklore. Re-examining the Smithsonian's definition of family folklore, one sees the incorporation of the shopping list style: "family stories, expressions, customs, and photographs are examples of folklore," with a more abstract concept, "the informal and expressive traditions of close groups." Despite the use of both concepts in their introduction, the shopping list approach prevails throughout the book. The bulk of the book gives numerous example of different types of family stories,
customs, and photographs. The book never deconstructs what is meant by "informal," "expressive," or the editors' understanding of a "close group." Danielson's entry in the *Encyclopedia of American Folklore* works toward a richer definition of family folklore:

> traditional behavior learned through oral transmission and/or customary example and shared among family members who may or may not consciously regard it as important or distinctive to their family life (1995:242).

However due to space constraints, he defers the elaboration of his definition to a list of expressive forms: "family stories, proverbial expressions, songs, nicknames, customs, rituals, foodways, and folk arts and craft."

I do not dispute these definitions of family folklore. I highlight them to draw attention to their construction and usefulness to future scholars interested in this subject. My critique of these definitions comes from a desire to see the concept of family folklore explored more in depth. Since most studies of this area concentrate on the process of collecting folklore variants, future scholarship needs to look less at the comparison of text and artifacts and more at what the texts and artifacts mean or how they are constructed in relation to their originating family or folk group. I extend a challenge to future scholars tackling any aspect of family folklore to spend a portion of their analysis on developing their own definition and applying that definition to their research findings. Folklorists
need to define how they see family folklore operating in context before they can deconstruct the text they have collected.

I see family folklore less as a series of expressive forms and more as an exchange of ideas explicit and/or implicit to a family. These exchanges of ideas are found in various forms of expression but the ideas behind the expression are the unifying force that ties folklore to the family. Most folklorists believe that in order for something to be folk, it must have a tie to a particular community or folk group. Within the folk group, its attachment to the expressive form comes from an "emotional core" or "value center" in which the group's common interests and threads are formed (Toelken 1996:137; Wilson 1976:46). The folk group in this case is the family. Since the 1960s and the advent of more contextually based analysis in folklore studies, genres of folklore have been seen in relation to a group. But in family folklore studies, the analysis of the tie between folklore and a specific group becomes even more important. All classifications of folklore that are prefaced with the name of a specific type of folk group, such as occupational folklore and family folklore, need to establish their ties to the folk group first before genre or text analysis can occur.

The uniqueness of family folklore and other studies of folk groups comes from their group associations. Most other
types of folklore analysis do not lump broad forms of expression under a blanket association with a certain type of group. When studying specific narrative genres such as myth, fairy tales, and legends or material genres such as houses, sculptures, and assemblages, the association with a folk group is more narrowly tied to a very specific setting if such a distinction is made at all. Folk group studies, like family folklore and occupational folklore, work differently than genre analysis. Those studying folk groups broaden genre classifications to include several possible forms of expression under one heading. But in order to validate one's assertion that certain expressive forms belong to a particular folk group, one must know how those expressions work in context, thus making the study of family folklore more reliant upon contextual analysis than folklore studies that focus on one specific form of expression. Though limited in what it can accomplish, analysis based on a specific genre of expression can exist without contextual verification. Scholars for years studied folklore without taking into account this information. Folklorists today, however, know that all folklore studies rely upon context in order to understand and explain how specific folk texts operate, but family folklore cannot attempt any kind of classification without contextual material to support its association with a particular family folk group.

Ultimately, studying any kind of folklore through the
classification of forms becomes problematic. While the shopping list definitions of family folklore are useful in an abstract sense, putting too much time into classification breakdowns will yield little valuable results for the time it takes. More and more folklorists have begun to realize that placement of folk forms into specific genre types is subjective. In fact, most classifications that folklorists use work only in academic settings. Each person or group outside academia defines and classifies his/her folklore in different ways. But no matter how something is seen or defined by a person, it still performs a function. The most basic function common to all forms of folklore is the ability to convey ideas and information. By defining family folklore more as an exchange of ideas and less by the various forms that it embodies, I am able to focus more precisely on the relationship between folklore and family groups and individuals.

FAMILY AS A FOLK GROUP

In any study of a folk group, understanding the relationship between people and the boundaries of their group has particular importance. In the case of family folklore, the scholar must understand how family is defined by its members and consider who fits the criteria as a family member. Each of us has our own unique definition of family. Not all people related to one another will come up
with the same list of family members or carry the same list of folkloristic forms. Scholars cannot even agree upon an academic definition of family, as is apparent from the *Southern Folklore* issue on family (Danielson 1994). In this issue, Joseph Goodwin argues that family should not be limited to a group of people with blood ties. Some groups not merged by marriage or through common lineage develop a level of intimacy akin to a traditional family, such as homosexual partnerships. In contrast, Wilson, in the same issue, has a problem with labeling nontraditional partnerships "family."

While the heart of this debate likely involves personal value differences and cultural dynamics, it also marks certain issues centering on who can be considered a family member. Goodwin argues that this distinction should be made through an understanding of context. Edward Hall makes a distinction between high context groups and low context groups. High context groups, like families, have well developed networks of analogies and nuances only understood by those within the group (Toelken 1996:57). Goodwin sees gay families developing into a high context group over time. But Wilson needs either a binding legal commitment or proof of blood ties for a family to be a high context group. Wilson fears that by expanding the concept of family beyond what is traditionally thought of as family one runs the risk of diluting the word's meaning to the point that any group
to some degree could be defined as a family. But whether a group designated as a family is joined through birth, marriage, or a nontraditional commitment ceremony, family is always going to be a relative term based on how a people define their kinship to others whom they see standing within their definition of family boundaries.

Despite their disagreement, Goodwin and Wilson both share similar concerns with the contemporary understanding of family. Families are no longer seen as simply cohesive units. Scholars across the board now take into account both the binding elements of family and the elements that drive a family apart or disenchant its members. All these have relevance for the boundaries set up to determine who forms the nucleus of a family and who stands along the perimeter. Families tend to divide their members between those who are considered "immediate family" (typically mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, and grandparents) and those who are "extended family" (cousins, aunts, and uncles). In studying family folklore, it is critical to know who is privileged with an insider perspective and how one gains that privilege. Typically, though not exclusively, immediate families share enough in common to form a high context group. Spending long hours together under the same roof in close communication with one another, even the most dysfunctional immediate families have some level of intimacy that unites immediate family members into a distinct group.
full of nuances that only members recognize. Depending on circumstances, extended family and certain non-familial related individuals can also stand within this high context boundary. In any study of family, the researcher should be aware of how insider privileges can be blurred depending on family members and the relationships set up between those members. The effect of this is illustrated in divorced families and strained family relationships between relatives of common blood ties.

My parents are divorced. Five years ago they ended thirty-one years of marriage, and now my father has remarried. Therefore, I now have a whole new set of relatives that did not exist a year ago. Most scholars interested in traditional families have commented that the blood ties that are championed as so important to family unity ultimately begin from informal relationships. Unrelated people marry and have children to form a family. However, as these previously unrelated individuals go through life living together and sharing their experiences, they develop a highly intimate relationship. That intimacy or history then becomes the basis for distilling family heritage and tradition within the minds of their children. This intimacy is also what bonds two unrelated families together.

So what happens when this intimate relationship is broken by divorce or a spouse dies? The same heritage and
tradition that brought the couple together become sour reminders of something they chose to break or suddenly lose. In divorce families in particular, the folklore within the broken family becomes fractured. This is not to say that the folk ties are completely severed. Instead these ties become strained in most cases. For the most part, the children and their sense of family are the sole survivors of the once thriving folk group. The parents no longer hold to the folklore that brought them together with their former partner. They retain only the folklore they brought into the marriage and bits of what they chose to take away from it.

What happens, then, when a new spouse enters? In my case, my stepmother, who deeply loves my father, wants to establish intimacy through a new definition of family heritage and tradition. In trying to do this, she must deal with visible reminders, like my brother and me, and active customs, like Christmas dinners, left over from the previous marriage. She enters a fractured family situation, meaning the relationship between my father and his children without my mother, and begins building a high context group with elements from my family and from her own. Until enough history has been created between her family and ours, an awkward state exists in which my stepmother stands more on the perimeter to the nucleus of the family where my father, brother, and I interact. Similarly, my side of this newly
created family stands on the perimeter of her family, which includes her mother and a close cousin. Theoretically time will bind the two groups together as traditions, heritage, and customs begin to be defined.

However, where does my mother stand in this situation? She also retains her portion of the original family. She must grapple with preserving some remains of the original family through her relationship with her sons. She obviously holds to the folklore she brought to the original family, but now she must negotiate how much from her marriage to my father she wants to retain in her current life.

Another awkward negotiation of family occurs when family members accidentally lose touch or consciously decide not to communicate with one another. Disagreements erupt between people, distancing relatives for years. Other people find communicating with their relatives emotionally painful and choose not to continue their ties. What was once a high context group filled with not only historic connection but also social commonalities now slips into an awkward, low-context relationship. When these breaks happen, the possibility of reunification can become more difficult over time. If unification is attempted, family members must try to mend strife or move beyond what led to alienation in the first place. In studying my own family's folklore, I have had to reacquaint myself with certain
members of my extended family because of various circumstances that have separated us for many years. I reacquainted myself with these "distant" relatives at the same time I began my field research for this project. Time has fortunately healed many of the reasons for the break in the first place. By rebuilding family bridges, I have learned more about my heritage than I thought possible, and with my research and collection of family folklore, I have educated others about details relevant to their heritage. Now, I am creating a new relationship with these relatives using the heritage we share in common.

This discussion of fractured families and the building of new ones illustrates how complex and dynamic families are. It supports the assertion that it takes a family member to guide others not part of the family through the details and issues that make the family group complex. Without this guidance, the outsider is left making conclusions about the family that are speculative and inaccurate.

IMPORTANCE OF THE INSIDER PERSPECTIVE

Researching family legends, Boatright was aware of his outsider position and, like most folklorists of his time, preferred this relationship to his subject. But looking at his position from another standpoint one sees a split between two types of family oriented folklore scholarship.
Boatright was not studying family folklore. He was studying folklore in the family. It was not until later folklore scholarship, in the 1970s, focused on studying folklore in its context that folklorists defined this area of study as "family folklore." But is there a difference between studying folklore in the family and studying family folklore? And who decides what is part of a particular family's folklore repertoire?

Those interested in family folklore must realize that the folklore collected in a family setting can only be defined as family folklore if someone from that family is available to make the connection to the family group. Researchers alone cannot connect folklore to a folk group nor discuss how the folklore profoundly influences the group unless they are a part of that group. Group membership can vary depending on the folk group. Some groups, who are more public about their folklore and more open to membership or participation from outsiders, allow folklorists access easily, such as many occupational folk groups. But some folk groups are not as easy to access or gain membership because they are intensely personal and private, such as families. If folklorists collect folklore in private groups that they do not belong to, such as other people's families, then as outsider, they can only speculate about the significance of the group's folklore. Insiders in the family can provide more intimate knowledge, but they too
have their own limits. They can only discuss folklore in their family from their own perspective. These limitations to the understanding of folklore have confined family folklore scholarship. Folklorists find themselves discussing only folklore genres that they have intimately experienced. All other folklore collected in a family setting cannot be bound to a family simply because a folklorist says it is family folklore. In order for folklore to be designated as family folklore and not simply folklore in the family, a member of that family must make the connection by attesting to its importance as part of the whole family.

MY FAMILY AND ITS FOLK EXPRESSION

When working with any folk group, one must identify the group's forms of expression. As previous scholarship suggests, these forms can be oral storytelling, letters, songs, a holiday toast, foodways, or tree houses. The previous definitions of family folklore cite shopping lists of possible expressions, but not all families incorporate all types of expressive forms into their repertoire of folklore. My immediate family, for example, does not have any special songs nor do we create elaborate holiday assemblages. For some families, these forms of expression stand in high esteem (Shoupe 1994; Santino 1992). When working with a specific family and its folklore, one must be
familiar with the way family members express themselves through their folklore. One should learn how different family members identify with the various folklore forms. No form of expression is out of reach for a family, but how do these expressions ultimately define the family as a folk group?

A family exists as a folk group in many ways. The justification as a folk group changes depending on the situation and the family members involved. The way a family celebrates Thanksgiving through food, story, ceremony, place, and the guests who are present define the family as a folk group in that context. Other contexts bring forth other forms of expression. In defining them as family-related, these expressions exist as supports to the dynamics and inclusion of the family, but this inclusion is not a glue agent automatically pulling related people together. It is the conceptualizing of a structure that determines who can claim to be a member of the family.

As stated earlier, not all members of a family will come up with the same list of family members. Each person conceptualizes his family differently. This individual conceptualization becomes particularly important when looking at the boundaries of the family folk group. When analyzing the boundaries of immediate family, one must be conscious of family folklore as a negotiating tool between people of more distant family ties. Along the boundaries,
fewer threads link more distant relatives to one's own immediate family. Unless one has a regular social relationship with one's extended family, one does not share many forms of folklore in common with those relatives, such as holiday customs and rituals. What few ties extended family members share in common involve a sense of family history. These limited encounters between extended relatives tend to reinforce common heritage. These settings center around sharing stories or information of the family's past. As this study progresses, my interest will focus on the way this common heritage is conveyed. I will use narrative examples from my fieldwork and discuss how these examples form and perpetuate family heritage.

Three forms of expression are used by my extended family network to exchange their perspectives on family history: oral narration, photographs, and written documentation, such as letters and formalized accounts of important events in people's lives. Surveying other studies on family, oral storytelling stands out above all other forms of expression. The reason for oral narrative's pervasiveness is speculative. Perhaps folklorists have tended to privilege narrative in family over other forms. Whatever the reason, almost all families use oral communication to convey their folklore. "Storytelling is a primary way that families are produced, maintained, and perhaps transformed." (Langellier and Peterson 1993:50) My
own family is no different from other families. Oral storytelling is particularly strong in the way it relays information concerning family history. My family use this form to express opinion, characterize family members, and chronicle past events. Its pervasiveness comes from its typical informal settings rather than requiring the narrator to physically carry any props or materials. One simply opens one's mouth and begins to spout.

The second form of expression is photography. My family, like most American families, holds photographs in high regard, consistently referring to them when developing family narratives. The recognizable images in photographs give the narrator and the audience something to visually react to. Family heirlooms, such as Bibles, furniture, jewelry, even land, can also serve as visual references, but much of the heritage common to my extended family no longer exists in physical form. Photographs are one of the few relics that remain.

The third less common but equally important form of expression in my family include written documentation, particularly letters and formalized written accounts, autobiographical manuscripts about feelings and events. Much of my heritage is recorded in the letters children have saved from parents. Surprisingly, my relatives have also been driven to record important aspects of their lives through formalized memoirs, for example, my grandfather's
family history. To varying degrees, each of his siblings has also created similar manuscripts or has been approached by their children to record the life on video tape.

NARRATIVE AND VISUAL VIGNETTES

While a family's folklore can take on many forms, ultimately the information behind the form, the supporting material, is what makes it important. It is also what ties it to the family. Linde discusses how the ordering of these forms, specifically stories, creates meaning (1993), but the creation of meaning also comes from the information that supports its existence. Folklore varies in more ways than simply the way it is expressed. Folklorists accept that within the broader understanding of folklife, all forms of folklore exist in part to support other forms. In this supporting role, folklore can take on an abbreviated form. Just enough of these abbreviated forms are referenced to give texture and context to the folk form at hand. In narrative folklore, these abbreviated forms are like segments in a story. They are the units or building blocks of all folk stories. They take the form of descriptions, metaphors, analogies, facts, assertions, un-elaborated statements, topography, artifacts, and—in the case of family—genealogy. In a folklore sense, they are the reference points used by narrators to create perspectives for the audience. Linguistically, these are the structural
components of verbal and written narrative.

However, these story segments exist in support of oral narration but also as back-up when creating meaning through the viewing of photographs, family heirlooms, or the reading of old letters. When interacting with these family artifacts, we strive toward an understanding by pulling information from our collective knowledge and experience. We seek to understand the original context surrounding the creation of the form.

Since this supporting material goes beyond being mere fragments in a folktale, I devised broader terms called narrative and visual vignettes to refer to their existence. Narrative and visual vignettes are the building blocks used to create narrative and meaning within folklore and the minds of the folk group. They are the materials utilized in the conceptualizing and justifying of one's tie to a group. Narrative vignettes refer to oral and written elements that take on word form. Visual vignettes refer to artifacts, particularly photographs. In family folklore, these are fragments that people pull from their family's consciousness as they articulate their sense of family to other people. They are also the fragments people use to understand someone else's sense of family.

Vignettes manifest themselves in all forms of narrative folklore. In family contexts, they are especially useful in the creation and expression of family history. Visual
vignettes create and express family history as visual reminders, but narrative vignettes take on more varying forms. Looking at the narrative forms, vignettes can be segments within a constructed narrative. These are attached vignettes connected to other vignettes via the narrator's story-line, but other narrative vignettes stand alone as detached vignettes, complete thoughts or elaborations outside clearly pronounced narrative structures.

No matter how vignettes work structurally, they exist to support an individual's point of view and hopefully develop a common understanding between people. In family, the goal of vignettes is to present one facet of the family. That facet represents family under one light: the point of view of one family member, but that consideration can be interpreted and taken by others in many directions as each person develops their own point of view. Highlighting the exact differences between each person's point of view can be difficult. Though they may be use the same basic elements of language, each construction of a family perspectives is unique. As this study progresses, the way that I cite examples of family folklore unfortunately does not allow the reader an opportunity to make comparisons between one citation and another. It does not give one a chance to comparatively see how one perspective differs from another given the same situation. One does, however, get to see how vignettes can work in a variety of forms based on the
discretion and interest of an individual.

If family folklore is an exchange of ideas explicit to the family, how else can these ideas be exchanged except through the use of family related vignettes? As this exchange of ideas takes place, narrative and visual vignettes operate in two ways: as portraits of individuals and landscapes of situations. Each vignette to a degree operates simultaneously in both ways. However, some focus more on individuals but others on specific circumstances. Generally, the way a vignette becomes used in context affects whether it is primarily a portrait or a landscape. Structurally, some vignettes are elaborate, while others are simple, as subsequent analysis will show. However, none of these vignette forms deliver a holistic pictures of the family, its heritage, or the lives of its participants. These vignettes are purely subjective, created from the point of view of an individual and relay only information that the individual deems important.

In the following chapters, I will address the ways vignettes operate in more detail. As I further my discussion, I will call upon examples from my family. To cover the range that these vignettes embody, I will focus on the three ways my extended family exchanges information on our common heritage: oral stories, photographs, and written documents. In chapter four, I will analyze them as portraits of individuals. Most times when relatives tell
stories or pull out pictures and letters, they do so in order to characterize the type of person the conversation centers upon. Then in chapter five, I will look at similar folklore examples as landscapes. While many narrative vignettes involve characterizing a particular person, they also address the kind of circumstances that surround that person's life.
CHAPTER FOUR
FAMILY PORTRAITS

We could hear the water running and the sound of Momma loading the sink up with dishes, probably clean ones since she'd washed the dinner dishes and we'd yet to have supper. But that didn't matter to Momma; she just needed her hands in the suds. There's a window over Momma's sink that looks out into the spiny branches of an apricot tree and, beyond them, onto the tin roof of our carshed which is flaked with rust and shot through all over with holes, and whenever Momma washes dishes, she looks out into those limbs and onto that carshed roof like she's never seen them before. After we buried Grandma Yount, Momma came straight home to the kitchen and put an apron on over her funeral dress. She took a stack of plates out of the cabinet, ran the sink full of water, and scoured each dish until the drainer was piled high with them; then she dumped them back into the sink and started over. (Pearson 1985:15)

How we see, describe, and characterize our family, its members, and its heritage comes through in the stories, images, and artifacts that we collect and disseminate. This excerpt from T.R. Pearson's *A Short History of a Small Place* (1985) mirrors the kind of narrative vignettes that we create to describe our family. People use vignettes like this as a way to conceptualize family members and to explain their conceptualization, by example, to other people. The narrator in this book uses this literary vignette to characterize his mother's personality and explain how she
deals with remorse and stress. In studying my family, I have collected several vignettes similar to Pearson's. My relatives use vignettes to characterize how they see—and feel—about other relatives.

Most family generated narrative and visual vignettes relate to a particular person or group of people in the family. In order for something to be family folklore, it must reference or show attachment to a least one member of the family. So for example, a visual vignette such as a photograph of a crowd of unrelated people (see Figure 3.1) can only be family folklore related if a member of the family can be plucked out of the group. In addition to recognition, however, it also takes understanding the photo's context for a family's attachment to be fully realized. Family must have something invested in the expressed folklore. That investment comes as vignettes are exchanged between family members under various circumstances. As one relays these vignettes, the act of doing this is done to "paint" pictures of specific family members. These pictures develop a sense of family by creating emotional bonds and fostering intimate relationships between the past and present. They do this by pulling together various events, characterizations, and analogies related to family individuals. Vignettes take on many outward forms of expression, but they also exist uncommunicated in the thoughts and minds of family members.
Figure 3.1— Grand jury duty, the marked individual is Alman Browning Beale; [1890s], Calloway County, Kentucky [photographer unknown].
As vignettes thrive, they begin to form different types of portraits visualizing, characterizing and describing family members.

"Portraiture is the art of representing the likeness and character of an individual by means of a recognizable image." (Brilliant 1995:428) "It is a pictorial representation of a person, a sculptured figure, or a graphic portrayal in words." (Webster 1976:897) But a portrait constitutes more than just a description or representation of the physical likeness of an individual. "A portrait is [only] successful when it reveals not only the likeness of the sitter, but the sitter's personality as well." (Olsen 1963:7) All portraits are one-sided representations of a person by the portraitist. A portrait, in the folklore sense, incorporates a variety of information, abbreviated folk forms, into a particular understanding of the individual or individuals under discussion. The portraits these narrative and visual vignettes help create are completely subjective. They are based on the experiences people have with the individuals or groups involved. They are points of view, full of insight and opinion, but are limited by the narrator or creator's knowledge and experience.

Each vignette serves the same general purpose: to give value and meaning to family folklore. But they achieve this goal in varying ways. Many factors affect the way vignettes
take shape and develop their usefulness. Form of expression is one factor. Other factors include how close the narrator or presenter is to the actual event when it happened. One must consider, for example, whether the vignette is based on or defined through personal experience, third person retelling, or as legend or hearsay? What is being conveyed by the presenter and what does he want the audience to gain from the portrayal? The audience also has its own say in what it wants to gain. Many factors, such as these, affect every folk example. To understand how this works, one must look at how vignettes work in specific situations. One must consider the way portraits are formed as narrators or creators amass vignettes. Often these vignettes take on various forms of expression. As previously stated, the forms of expression shared among my immediate and extended family are oral narration, photography, and written documentation. As I focus on these forms, the reader will see that the kind of information conveyed between broad family ties relates primarily to family history. One of the few issues we share among our relatives outside of immediate family groups is history.

ORAL NARRATIVES

Oral narratives occur frequently in family settings. Aside from normal conversation based on various topics from the weather to politics or gossip about people outside the
family, conversational situations are the most common form of family folklore. We tend to gain our first acquaintance with family heritage through oral expression. This form of expression also supports and sets a context for most other forms of family folklore. In order to understand the importance of a picture in a photo album or what is happening in a eight-millimeter silent home movie, narration, usually oral, must be present. Conversations about the family also arise when family members gather, call each other on the telephone, or visit with one other in person. In some cases these conversations get recorded. In my family research, I uncovered two video tapes recording conversations between mother and daughter about family history. My own field recordings and interviews are also examples of such conversations and now they, too, are a part of my family's oral record.

Topics of conversation can vary and are generally guided by the knowledge and interests of the participants. In each conversation I had with relatives, I geared my questions toward understanding the personalities of deceased relatives and their environments— the area of my interest. In addition to my interests, my relatives added their own spin, providing information they felt pertinent about the subject at hand. In collecting family narratives, I find that questions guide conversations about family heritage as much as the memories of the participants answering the
questions.

Oral narration yields a variety of information about distinct individuals in the family. In any given conversation about an individual, several types of narrative vignettes arise in conjunction with that individual. Each vignette or comment that a narrator makes about a particular relative adds to the overall portrait that the narrator creates to explain how they see that relative.

In oral narration, both attached and detached narrative vignettes exist. The oral portraits I collected in my fieldwork came in the form of stories that characterize relatives in context and as specific assertions that comment upon the physique, personalities, and mannerisms of an individual. In the following excerpt, one sees several vignettes about various family members coming together as attached vignettes in story form. Mina Waters, my great-aunt, begins telling this story at the request of her daughter, who seems to have felt a bond to this particular story. It involves a couple of family members, but as a portrait, the story primarily portrays a view of my great-aunt, Mary Morris. Interestingly, this story is one of the few specifically about Aunt Mary that is still told among the relatives I know. As a rare characterization, it carries tremendous weight in regard to how her ancestors perceive her as a person. From this story, for example, I see her as a forceful woman who went to great lengths to
defy her father's authority to be with the man she loved.

When Aunt Mary and Uncle Clifford got married it was the fourth Monday in July. That was a big day in Murray. That was trade day. Uncle Clifford and Aunt Mary were in school here and they were going together. Granddad didn't like Uncle Clifford at the time. He lived down in Tennessee where my father and mother moved, down in Obion, Tennessee just across the line, the Tennessee and Kentucky line about five miles. So my father was at Grandfather's and Grandmother's, he had come to town and he was sitting in their family room with a fire place and the kitchen was next to the family room. There was stair steps [in the back of the house, and] stairs in the family room that went up into the [up stairs] rooms.

Aunt Betty was in the kitchen cooking dinner and there was a window by this door. She looked out and she said, "Oh, look there goes Mary and Clifford." Mary had gotten away from them. She had said she was sick that day. She had went on up stairs and was resting they thought. She had packed her red suitcase and came down the stairs the back way. Uncle Clifford had two pretty horses that were his uncle's horse and buggy. Aunt Betty went to the telephone to call the store and told that "Pappy [Alman Browning Beale], Aunt Mary and Uncle Clifford have run off to get married."

He tried to get them but they went to Kansas City and got married. Granddad said, well they'll never come back in my house again. They did come back and stayed all night at my mother's and father's; they lived north of town. They stayed all night, the first night. I don't know what they did the next day. So anyway, Grandfather took them in. There was a house; I don't know if he built it. They lived there for a while. (1989)

As exemplified above, narrators often pull several related vignettes together to create anecdotes about relatives, but as one sees from the following interview with my mother, vignettes can exist outside of the narrative structure in a detached state with no clear drive toward developing a story line. Over the course of an interview
with my mother, Dora Roberts, she created a portrait of her father-in-law, Hayden Roberts, through a series of detached vignettes. Each of these excerpts adds to the previous assertion creating a more in-depth view of my grandfather.

His nickname was Count, and that was given to him by the high school students at Chickasha, where he taught Chemistry. He was a single man at the time, didn't marry Elsie [Bowie] until he was in his thirties and that was when he was at Halliburton in Duncan.

He was dapper, not sophisticated, not urban, but dapper, you know, you just could almost see him in spats and a roller hat or something. He's meticulous in his personal habits, always well-dressed and well-groomed, and even, you know, in his later years, he was in his eighties when he died, he was still he didn't have any old man stuff about him.

In fact, he would go out and teach, since he was a Baptist, a hard-shell Baptist, he would go out and teach Baptist Sunday School at the nursing home, and his description of it is he would "go out there and teach those old people." A lot of those old people were as much as 20 years younger than he was! But he was right, he was teaching the old people, because Mr. Roberts wasn't old. (1996)

These excerpts show how my mother uses various types of narrative vignettes to build her portrait of my grandfather. Through this portrait we begin to see how she views him, but no matter how contrived or detailed her portrait is, the way she builds her portrait is uncalculated. Portraits like hers are created from fractured thoughts that come to mind as one begins to talk about someone. Vignettes in oral narration can take varying forms. In this case, she uses physical descriptions, discusses his mannerisms, talks about his background and history, and comments on his religious
beliefs. Despite all the details about Granddad that my mother brings forth, her portrait still seems incomplete. After talking with other relatives, I know of some details about Granddad that my mother has left out. The detached vignettes that she uses to convey her portrait of Granddad represent only one line of thought. Any collection of narrative vignettes, whether in detached or story form, will never yield a complete portrait of a person. Ultimately, memory will hinder someone's efforts to render a complete picture.

What one does get by listening to a person's description or characterization of another person is an understanding of how the narrator sees the other person. If one has collected several portraits about a person from different sources, that person can begin to build her own portrait based on judgment and conceptualization. In addition, upon reflection and understanding a narrator's thought patterns and point of view, these portraits communicate as much information about the subject they do about the narrator. In some cases, people will overtly reveal information about others that directly reflects upon themselves. In my family, I found that admiration for one's ancestors offered insight important in understanding the values and interests of my relatives. In one interview with a cousin, Browning Waters, I asked him whom he admires.

Oh, I think I identify a lot with Neva and Alman Browning. I always had that entrepreneurial
spirit that I think both of them carried. Alman Browning definitely, and you know from Neva, you know just--he had a gas station, had this, and that. He wasn't just the corporate man. . . . [Alman Browning Beale], you know I have studied that more probably than any of them. You know, as far as [Alman's] entrepreneurship. You know, he was just, guy could get into whatever and make it work. And he and Tremon just seem to be heck of a team. (1998)

This segment highlights one core values important to my cousin: the entrepreneurial spirit. This information explains much about why he became his own boss after years of working for a corporation. It also highlights what he sees as a recurrent family theme: a legacy of economic self motivation and control. Ultimately, the portraits one creates in turn create a portrait of ourselves to others. This second portrait can be seen as a kind of self-portrait.

WRITTEN DOCUMENTS

Much like oral storytelling, written documentation provides interesting perspectives of a family. These documents present their own family portraits in surprisingly varied fashions. Examples of written documentation include family Bibles, cookbooks or recipe boxes with notes, land deeds, wills, letters, diaries, and biographical and autobiographical manuscripts. Some historical documents, such family Bibles and land deeds, can be defined as narrative vignettes if background details relating to their significance are brought up in the course of conversation,
but generally these documents exist in family as sources that confirm what has been stated orally or in other written forms. Other written forms, such as letters and personal manuscripts, are more driven by narrative and provide characterizations relevant to the author of the written form and the subject of that form.

Few families have formalized written accounts of their heritage. Families mostly rely on oral communication to carry their history along from one family member to another and from one generation to the next. Increasingly, however, many people have taken their newly acquired video cameras and turned them on Grandmother or Grandfather asking them to recall important life events (Mina Waters 1989), but few people actually sit down and consciously record everything they know about the family, transcribe these informal video interviews, or compose whole manuscripts detailing important events in one's life. The most common written chronicle is a diary. Diaries tend to be the only relatively complete written life review. Unfortunately, none of the diaries from my ancestors survive today.

More unusual are biographical and autobiographical written narratives. I found that most of these tend to be specific, dealing with only one period in a person's life. Three manuscripts of this nature exist in my family. My grandmother recorded her family's move from Michigan to Louisiana in a Model-T. My great-uncle, Browning Roberts,
chronicled his short career working as an accountant in the eastern Kentucky coal mines, and my grandfather, prior to his more substantial manuscript, developed a text incorporating his memories from World War One with the letters he sent home to the family. Reading old diaries or these narrowly focused manuscripts, one does not find many portraits of family. These personal experience narratives are organized and address events that have relevance in a broader historic context. The portraits found in these writings are self-portraits that characterize the background and interests of the authors.

My grandfather's later manuscript dwarfs these other examples in size and range of subject matter. Reading Granddad's work, one obviously learns a little about him as a person through the choices he made in detailing certain events in his life and the lives of his ancestors. The broader array of issues covered in Granddad's manuscript yields more family portraits than any of the other written sources, for example:

Bill Roberts grew up and adapted himself to the social and economic conditions of Calloway County.

His childhood was similar to that of all the other children in the community. His educational training was limited. His moral training came from parents who were puritanical in their beliefs and conduct. They were fundamentalist Baptists. He grew up on a farm with his brothers. Their father demanded loyal and sincere efforts in helping to support the family.

Finally, Bill grew up to be a strapping, strong, young man. He was not very big. He was 5'6" tall. He was sturdy. He could hold his own
Tragedy
When I was six years old, my baby sister died. Her name was Helen. She was born on August 3, 1898. She was two years old when she became ill with bronchitis and died on August 31, 1900. She was a sweet, lovable child with brown eyes and dark hair. She had become ill the day before. Her fever ran very high. Home remedies were tried with no avail. Dr. Covington from Wadesboro [Kentucky] came in the early evening hours on August 30. He readily diagnosed the disease. (1977)

Reading these excerpts, the kind of information Granddad conveys about these two individuals is not unlike the portraits I collected that were constructed orally. Like oral portraits, Granddad describes these people through their personalities and physical attributes. These types of written portraits, though, are not limited to manuscripts of this nature. Family letters sometimes contain portraits of family members. The opening portion of a letter from Mary Chance to her Aunt Cappie Beale offers an interesting portrait of the recipient of the letter. Chance sent this letter as a gesture of thanks. She talks about how her Aunt Cappie influenced her life. This personal confession about Chance's spirituality obviously conveys information about the personalities of both individuals. In effect, the reader gains a short portraiture of both women.

Monday a.m. April 21

Dear Aunt Cappie:
The other night at our revival meeting we had Fellowship Night and after the sermon the visiting preacher asked that everyone go to those there who had meant much in their lives and shake their hand. It got me to thinking back over my life about those who had meant much to me and you stand out so prominently. I went to school to you in the sixth grade, then at the age of thirteen you were enough concerned about my soul to talk to me and pray for me— at that time during the revival I joined the church. Although later I felt I wasn't saved at the time and made a public profession a few years ago— yet I do appreciate what you did back there years ago. Then when I started teaching two different times, we taught together and lived together while in Florida. You were with me during my courtship with Russell, and just before Don's birth you visited us. The other Aunts have meant much to me, but all these personal contacts and interests stand out so vividly. I feel you have given me so much and since I can't see you to tell you so, I am taking this means of doing so. (1947)

All of these are examples of portraits constructed through a series of narrative vignettes. "His moral training came from parents who were puritanical in their beliefs and conduct," or "She was a sweet, lovable child with brown eyes and dark hair," are each examples of narrative vignettes formed from my grandfather's point of view. "The other Aunts have meant much to me, but all these personal contacts and interests stand out so vividly," is an example of a narrative vignette from my Aunt Mary's perspective. What these vignettes mean is clearly understood in their contexts, but how do they fit into this discussion of attached and detached vignettes? In the excerpts that mention these vignettes, one can not clearly determine whether they are part of a series of attached
vignettes brought together under a poorly developed narrative structure or if they are actually detached vignettes with a clear message and intent but no clear structure.

In determining whether a series of narrative vignettes operate in an attached or detached state, one needs to figure out the purpose of a narrative vignette. Narrative vignettes inside a story tend to perform a specific function in the development of reason and meaning. We see attached vignettes as components in a story that lead up to an end or conclusion. When vignettes exist outside a narrative structure their meaning is more immediate. Instead of leading up to a conclusion, they provide information the audience can conceptualize without having to wait until the completion of a story. Most narrative vignettes can be classified either way. Only context can determine whether they are attached or detached. The fact that narrative vignettes can exist simultaneously as narrative components within and outside an orchestrated story highlights their versatility. In Aunt Mary's letter, one sees the way in which vignettes structurally operate either way. Often in informal narration, the narrator does not strictly adhere to the formal conventions of storytelling, for example the presence of a beginning, middle, climax, resolution, and end. As one sees in this letter, Mary begins conveying information that seems as though it will develop into story
form focused on a kind of spiritual life review but the story is not completed, which turns this section of the letter into a series of detached vignettes.

Understanding whether narrative vignettes operate in an attached or detached state is, however, really only one side to this consideration of family narrative. This structural analysis provides a useful understanding of how a narrator organizes information in a way that emphasizes certain aspects of folk narrative over others. If a portrait is developed through a series of attached vignettes in a story, it is likely that the narrator wants that story and its overall message to stand out in the minds of his audience. The opposite can be said about detached vignettes. In this case, the narrator presents a series of descriptive details about a member of the family. The emphasis here is on the specific details about a person not the overall meaning of a story. Reading this section, one can see that the primary issue involved in looking at family narratives through narrative vignettes is not the way these vignettes structurally work inside or out of a story. The main point is understanding what a vignette means both to the narrator and the audience.

IMAGES

Sifting through a pile of family pictures, I came across several photographs shot by deceased relatives.
Peering at these black and white pictures, I tried to guess who these people were. Unfortunately, I could not satisfy my curiosity by asking my grandfather. But by reading his memoirs and pestering my father, I identified some people. Every time I learn more about my grandfather's life, I find myself searching back through family photos for people he talks about in his manuscript and that I recognize. I realized, looking at them, that I had a connection to these individuals. We both belonged to the same inescapable tradition. Not knowing these people first hand nor having any reason to resent them, looking at these people gave me a feeling of nostalgia.

Looking at a group of pictures I identify one recurrent figure. This figure appears sometimes in groups and other times alone, but always similar: a large man with a long white beard and usually with a wide brim hat (see Figures 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5). These are portrait of my great-great-grandfather, Alman Browning Beale. Gazing at these pictures, I reflect upon stories and anecdotes I know about Alman's life. My father recounts how Alman ruled over his siblings, their spouses, and their children obsessively (William Roberts 1998). My grandmother talks about how he impressed her upon first meeting him in 1933. 

Many years later, I had the privilege and pleasure of dining at the table of one of those grand Kentucky gentlemen. He was Alman Beale. He had a well shaped mustache that marked a man of his era. He had a great love of mankind in his heart. When it came time for me to leave his home, he asked
Figure 3.2—Alman Browning Beale; 1910, Murray, Kentucky (Hayden Roberts).

Figure 3.3—Alman Browning Beale and Mary Jane Beale; [1920-21], Murray, Kentucky [photographer unknown].

Figure 3.4 (cropped)—(Left to right) Alman Browning Beale, Sidney Johnston Roberts, and William Bowie Roberts; 1936, Calloway County, Kentucky (Hayden Roberts).
to sit on his knee. It had been love at first sight, him in his eighties and me a bride. I would never see him again, but I fondly remember a gallant man, a good man, who touched something fine in me. As I sat there, looking in his face, I knew he did not have much time ahead, to share his love and warmth with a young girl far from home. Folks standing about asked why I was crying and he said, 'Let her cry. It shows she has heart.' He knew it was my way of saying goodbye. (Bowie 1967)

Newly married to Granddad, she reminisces about Alman's charm and how even after a short visit, leaving him brought her to tears. I also think about the time Alman put up the money to send Granddad to Vanderbilt University Medical School at sixteen. In his memoirs, Granddad talks about receiving his first high school diploma as a favor to Alman by the superintendent of the Calloway County, Kentucky, schools to satisfy Vanderbilt's requirements. But after four months of medical school, Granddad dropped out, feeling, in his own words, to be too "immature" for college. He then transferred to state boarding school to finish high school properly. Unfortunately when Granddad was mature enough to go, Alman was so upset by the first experience he refused to front the money a second time (Hayden Roberts 1977).

It is not unusual for a picture, particular a family one, to spark memories and stories. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett discusses how pictures, family heirlooms, and other souvenirs and mementos are "memory objects" kept around to remind one of those special moments from one's past
(1989:331). These kinds of detailed reflections are what family pictures are all about. They visualize family members, tales, and lore. Family portraits symbolize the past in present form. They are the lasting testimony of images representing time past. Family photos act as material reinforcements of our desire for greater family unity or the continuation of our family's legacy.

These pictures, especially family photos as portraits, commemorate beloved members in an idealized vision of the past. It is difficult to take the image of Alman sitting in a chair and equate any malice he might have done throughout his life because the picture presents him in tranquil surroundings, but through storytelling and the conveyance of other information the nostalgia one feels looking at Alman's picture can be diminished.

Family photos promote the recollection of family narratives. Any kind of family narrative can arise from the viewing of photographs. They spur people to relay narrative vignettes about a family's history and its members. As discussed, narrative vignettes works in conjunction with one another. Photos as individual vignettes also work in this capacity. Opening up a family photo album, one can begin to understand and eventually appreciate one's own family heritage through the countless images collected over the years.

Unlike other vignettes, family photos rely upon
vignettes of other expressive forms, such as oral and written testimonies, to cement their tie to the family. Julie Hirsch comments that family photos do not overtly show "blood ties" (1981:3), unlike oral narration or written documentation, which inherently reinforces its ties to the family every time it is conveyed. The first time I saw Alman's picture portrait, on the other hand, I had no idea who he was. Unable to identify him as a relative, until I was told, any bond I could have had with the picture as part of my heritage could not be felt. Without knowing how it related to me, I could not relate to the image as a folk object from my family folk group. Folklore can only be folklore "to the extent that it arises in, and functions for, a definable folk group." (Adler 1985:104) It is difficult to know how something fully works in this capacity unless one comes from the group where the folk object originally belongs. Before I knew Alman was a relative, the photo was simply an old picture of a man sitting in a chair. It had historic significance to me in a broad sense, but it did not become a folk object to me until I understood my relationship to the picture. Photographs need narrative vignettes in order for the members of a folk group to recognize them as part of the group's visual record. Initially, a relative will point out past members of the family folk group that viewers cannot recognize. Aside from the recognition of the picture, narrative vignettes in other
form of expression provide meaning and context to these visual portraits.

Family photographs are an interesting folkloristic form because outside their folk context, i.e., to people not part of the family, the forms do not stand as recognizable folk forms. The folk meaning for most folk objects is nonexistent outside their family context, but some items we allow to superficially maintain their folkloristic status even if we do not have or cannot appreciate the communal ties the object retains. The same is true of quilting, for example. Although one might not know the history behind a particular quilt, the craft of quilting embodies so much of what people generally define as "traditional" folk art that most quilts automatically gain folk status. However, family photos need their family orientation to maintain their folkloristic status. As part of technology and scientific advancement, photography does not gain that automatic folk status in the same way that quilts do. Someone from the family must be around to make the connection between the image and the group for it to be folklore. A family member must be able to identify the people and recall the narrative vignettes that support the image's folk group significance, like the anecdote that explains why Alman and Granddad had a strained relationship. Aside from the family's appreciation or understanding of the image, one might recognize the image as looking like what one considers to be a family
photograph, but other than this limited recognition all connotative meaning encoded by the family inside it is locked up. Lacking a deeper appreciation for the photograph to those outside the family, the photograph operates contextually as an abstract form. The presence of narrative vignettes is that which transforms an image from its abstract state to something of profound meaning to the family and its members.

Family images and narratives primarily work toward portraying family members. The association one makes with family comes through the memories, experiences, and knowledge that culminate in the narrative and visual vignettes that people use to create, justify, or conceptualize their own family. But aside from creating portraits of relatives, family narrative can be much more. If one steps back from the portraiture aspect of family narrative, one begins to see a broader side to these narratives. In order to get a clear picture, both the foreground and background must be taken into consideration. Events taking place in the background, surrounding the family, have a profound effect upon the decisions people make and how they view the world. The broader side of family narrative calls attention to the emotions, relationships, community and regional histories, and topography surrounding the family portraits. This second facet of family narrative I call landscape. As chapter four
will explore, the use the term landscape has many connotations, and vignettes operate in several different types of landscape.
CHAPTER FIVE
FAMILY LANDSCAPES

Most family narratives involve actions or characterizations of at least one member of the family. As discussed in the previous chapter, family histories and the vignettes that comprise them work as portraits of family members. The presence of family in narrative can occur in many ways. The most obvious example is a story whose protagonist is a deceased relative, but the family connection to a narrative or narrative vignette can be more subtle. For example in a video-taped interview with my Aunt Mina, she begins by recalling vignettes related to growing up on a farm (1989). She talks about daily routines and ways to preserve food. Nowhere in the first fifteen minutes does she relate these vignettes to specific family members, but because she is recounting personal experiences, her attachment to that experience gives it status within the family's heritage. The same can be said for personal experience narratives associated with war stories. Both my grandfather and his nephew, A.B. Waters, recall their experiences during World War One and Two to their children (William Roberts 1997; Browning Waters 1998). Family must
always be present in narrative for something to be called family folklore. That presence is made known either by the subject of the narrative or the relationship the narrators or creators and their experiences to the audience. Without that presence, narratives cannot be classified as family folklore.

While family members are the participants of the actions and events taking place in family history, these actions occur in a particular setting. All complete narratives, detached narrative vignettes, and visual vignettes exist within a certain context. That context provides placement within a larger presentation of folk history or a family's repertoire. What unites vignettes to a person's repertoire of family narratives are their ability to convey certain aspects of the family in specific settings. Such settings form what I see as the family landscape. Art historian Janet Parks defines landscape as "an image whose chief subject is a view of the natural world characterized according to space, atmosphere, or vegetation." While Parks discuss landscape in terms of painting, her understanding of landscape works well as a metaphor for describing how family narratives work toward conveying contextual information.

Parks goes on to highlight general characteristics associated with the artist's understanding of landscape:

It may be a broad panorama or a small corner of nature. It may be painted directly from nature or
from memory. . . . A landscape can depict a real location recorded with extreme objectivity or transformed by idealism. . . . Cityscapes and seascapes can be considered special types of landscapes. . . . Human figures may appear as subordinate elements or as dramatic focus. (1995:707)

Parks also says that ultimately "the artist's own experience greatly influences his choice of subject." (1995:707) Most academy-trained artists do not paint what they see, but what they feel. It is the reordering of elements in nature under the structure of a composition that makes a painting successful. It also gives the artist the ability to emphasize emotions and feelings that are carried inside by maneuvering the painted landscape according to how the artist feels. This makes all art unique to its creator; it also gives art the ability to express the distinctiveness of the individual. This discussion of the subjective nature of the painted landscape, of course, fits well with my assertion that all narrative forms are based on an individual's perspective. Family narratives as portraits are completely subjective. This subjectivity also carries over in the way they operate as landscapes.

To compound what Parks says, one must consider what is created with landscape. Richard Turner, also an art historian, shows how landscape articulates an understanding of environment:

Cultural landscapes, marked by the effects of human activities, is the only landscape most of us
know. It bears the traces of past human deeds. Beyond being a mere visual record of this cultural landscape, a painted landscape inevitably is a commentary on human presence in relation to nature. (1997:294)

Turner's comment that all landscapes are culturally based has particular importance to my use of the term in this chapter. Too often landscape is assumed to be a picture of nature in its purest form, but all landscapes are cultural constructions. These constructions are influenced not only by the artist's individual perspective but also by the broader social concept of the world. Society's point of view and ordering of its environment defines landscape in all its forms. Landscapes are inventions based on perceptions and ways of seeing.

Landscapes take on many forms within family narratives. Aside from the expressive variations, landscapes as series of narrative vignettes convey various facets of family and the background that surrounds it. There are essentially three ways landscape can manifest itself in family narratives: topography, historic landscape, and emotional landscape. Topography addresses the shape of the land, the layout of a town, or the construction of a building. Historic landscape concerns elements in family narrative that place that narrative in a broader, historical context. Emotional landscape deals with family dynamics and the politics involved in the relationships with family members.
TOPOGRAPHY

In many narrative situations, unless someone has intimate experience with the places being discussed, the narrator must provide some description of the areas involved in the events. This description gives the uninformed audience a layout of the landscape or a topography of the space. In Aunt Mina's story about her Aunt Mary and Uncle Clifford eloping, she explains the event by describing her grandfather's house, the location of the event, and how Aunt Mary was able to leave undetected.

My father was at Grandfather's and Grandmother's. He had come to town and he was sitting in their family room with a fire place and the kitchen was next to the family room. There were stair steps [in the back of the house, and] stairs in the family room that went up into the rooms. . . .

Aunt Betty was in the kitchen cooking dinner and there was a window by this door. She looked out and she said, "Oh, look there goes Mary and Clifford." Mary had gotten away from them. She had said she was sick that day. She had went on up stairs and was resting they thought. She had packed her red suitcase and came down the stairs the back way. . . . (1989)

The description of this house is critical to this story, particularly since the house is no longer standing. Interestingly, in my field research, I collected several description of this house. As Michael Ann Williams has pointed out, descriptions of past home places is often important to family identity, relationship to the past, and understanding the events in other folk narratives (1991). For many of my relatives, this house stood out in their
minds as significant. Each story I collected that took place in this structure at some point includes a layout of the place. Consider this second description of the house from Mary Jane Kennedy.

He was sitting in the front, it was a bedroom. The house had a living room on one side, you know you come in on the porch, there was a living room on one side, a parlor where they entertained and had their social gatherings. And behind there was a huge live--I mean a huge dining room. And the hall down the middle. So, that you could enter the dining room from the hall, and the kitchen was behind and on the other side. And then on the left side there was this huge room that was Pappy [Alman], it was Pappy and Mammy's [Mary Jane] bedroom. But everybody sat there. And that particularly after he died. But that wouldn't have been the case that day. (1998)

Listening to these descriptions given of this house, I have wondered why the house collects so much attention. Thinking about who lived in it, particularly its original owner, I began to understand its significance. The house was built around the turn of the century by Alman. His control over the family, especially his children and their families, elevated the significance of the house, making it the center of family life. With Alman at the center or nucleus of family activities—basically the king of the family—the house represented his castle. Alman has been characterized in family narrative as someone who needed to be in control. Whenever he disapproved of something, conflict was bound to arise. Many narrative vignettes exist about Alman, and most of those involve some discussion of conflict. Often times the conflict occurs in his home.
Understanding the layout of the home helps explain why certain events occur, such as Aunt Mary's escape, and how the certain situations are played out via the way the house is constructed. Topography in narrative vignettes comes alive because it tends to explain as well as heighten the drama of family events. As topography sets the stage for the drama, the dynamics of this drama are understood through the emotional landscape.

Topographical description in narratives does not stop at single structures. In my grandfather's manuscript, he describes the layout of Williams Mill, a lumber mill, grist mill, farm, and country store that his father operated around the turn of the century in an area called Elm Tree, Weakley County, Tennessee. Like the descriptions of Alman's house, Williams Mill is a place that no longer exists except in Granddad's manuscript and in family photos he took from this time period (see Figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5). His descriptions are divided between giving a detailed layout of the space and talking about how he fit within that space.

**Lumber Mill**

A millrace was dug to direct the water flow to the mill site. Two water wheels were motivated by the water flow. These provided the power to operate a saw mill, planing mill, and grist mill. The mill house was built on a slope. The saw mill and grist mill were on the first level and planing mill on the second. . . .

**The General Merchandise Store**

In addition to the mill, there was the general merchandising store. In it was sold clothing, farming supplies, and food used by farm folk. The trade area covered a radius of about
Figure 4.1— (Right to left) Country store and Roberts house.

Figure 4.2— Front porch of Roberts family house, people unknown.

Figure 4.3— Lumber mill.

Figure 4.4— Lumber mill (interior), figure unknown.

Figure 4.5— Mill race, people unknown.

All these pictures were taken around 1910 of Elm Tree, Weakley County, Tennessee. (Hayden Roberts)
The Farm

There were a hundred acres in tillable land. The land was cultivated by a tenant farmer most of the time. Corn and tobacco were the main crops. Some of the land was grassland. The operation of the farm was secondary. It was operated mainly to grow pasture and forage for the livestock. The livestock consisted of horses, milch cows, hogs, beef cattle, and the oxen used for hauling timber logs from the river bottom. . . .

My First Day at Elm Tree

I woke up at six o'clock and heard a bell ringing. Father was ringing the bell. It had been a tradition for many years for the 'boss' at the big house to ring the bell. It woke up the mill and farm hands who lived in houses along the mill race. The men were to be ready for work at seven o'clock.

I hurried to get dressed and eat breakfast. There was so much to see and learn about the saw mill. I was attracted to the saw mill first. I heard the loud, high pitched whining sound of the whirling circular saw. I smelled the pungent, fragrant odor of the new-sawed lumber and the fresh, wet sawdust. I stood wide eyed as the carriage, carrying the log, whizzed past the whirling saw. Each time the carriage passed the saw, a plank was flaked from the log. The planks were carried from the mill shed on hand trucks and stacked in the mill yard to dry and season. (1977)

In the description and documentation of Elm Tree, my grandfather uses topography in two different manners. On one level, he presents a clear description of the area or space as he remembered it. On a second level, topography works toward conveying a sense of place. He recalls details from his childhood living in Elm Tree. The details highlight topography of the area, but in addition, Granddad adds his own interpretation and feelings about the area. In
the introduction to Allen and Thomas Schlereth's *Sense of Place*, Allen talks about how topography is vital to Montell's perception of his home in Monroe County, Kentucky (1990). The way people order and describe landscape helps to make landscape and space more of a personalized place. What people remember and how they dwell on those memories reinforce a person's attachment to a place. Nowhere else in Granddad's manuscript does he devote as many pages to lengthy description as in this section on Elm Tree. By calling attention to the details of Elm Tree, Granddad elevates the status of this landscape. He confirms the power of this place as something that profoundly influenced him during his upbringing.

**BROAD, HISTORIC LANDSCAPES**

Addressing vignettes as landscapes often reflects a broader concept of history than simply the family's collective heritage. Family vignettes operate in support of the deeds of its members. They recall or reference what a person believes important about family heritage, but they also can involve information or situations that have relevance in the broader arena of American history. Toward the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned how in her interview Aunt Mina recounts several narrative vignettes related to the inner-workings of her parent's farm. Her descriptions of early-twentieth century farm life have
relevance to scholars interested in rural cultural or agricultural history. The stories my grandfather would tell about World War One or even the above excerpts about Elm Tree have importance outside the family as well.

In my grandfather's manuscript, he works with broad, historic landscapes in an overt manner. Reading most sections, one finds that wherever he talks about family, he relates family history to overall American history. For example, at the beginning of sections one and two of his manuscript, he talks about the migration of my ancestors into western Kentucky. In relating what he knows or has learned about this migration, he adds information about the overall social and political climate of the early nineteenth century.

Legally, the Jackson Purchase was created in 1818 when Andrew Jackson and Isaac Shelby, governor of Kentucky, bought the territory from the Chickasaw Indians. Then the land was opened for settlers. All my research leads me to believe that large numbers of North Carolina people came into Calloway County. Favorable information filtered back to North Carolina. Groups of families got together and shared their resources and made the trip into the new pioneer region.

[Andrew Jackson Beale] was born in 1815 in Northampton County, North Carolina. There he grew up to young manhood. In the same neighborhood, Willis W. Bonner lived with a large family. It included six sons and six daughters, one of whom was Mary Jane. Andy Beale fell in love with Mary Jane and when he turned 23 years of age, he asked her to marry. But her father was planning to move the family to Kentucky. And in the summer of 1839, they set out for Calloway County, with Andy, now Mary Jane's fiancé, accompanying them. They were married on March 26, 1840, with her father's consent. The 1840 U.S. Census of Calloway County shows that Andrew Jackson Beale was the head of a
household with only one wife and no children. (1977)

In a few paragraphs, Granddad has set Andrew Jackson Beale and the Bonner family into a larger canon of history. Instead of this being a simple vignette recounting how my ancestors met and moved to Kentucky, it becomes a discussion of the American historic landscape, rather than a vague discussion of that landscape and the American migration West, it deals with people related to me. The ubiquitous migration in this country becomes, thereby, more meaningful on a personal level.

Similarly, Granddad constructed a tie between his Grandfather, William Roberts, and the Civil War battle at Shiloh, Tennessee. In the midst of talking about how William Roberts joined the Confederate Army, he pulls excerpts from widely published books on the Civil War, such as Bruce Catton's *Grant Moves South* (1960). Between family vignettes about the Battle of Shiloh and passages from Catton's book, Granddad builds a complete narrative about William Roberts. At one point family vignettes and "official" history even cross paths. During the battle, William Roberts was caught in a fight across an open field commonly known as the "Hornet's Nest." Granddad writes:

Bill Roberts was among the troops taking fire from the Hornet's Nest. Here's an interesting footnote. In his book *Grant Moves South*, Catton describes the following incident: "A soldier saw a comrade hit by a spent bullet that did not even break the skin, fall to the ground and writhe in
wild agony, grasping at leaves and sticks with frantic hands." In the summer of 1976, 97-year-old Dillard Roberts, youngest son of Bill, related, "Pappy was hit in the ankle by a spent bullet in the charge on the Hornet's Nest—didn't even break the skin, just crushed the bone." (1977)

Another instance where Granddad connects family members to the larger historic arena or landscape is in his discussion of family names.

General Packenham, the British commander was killed and his body sent home pickled in a rum barrel. The American commander, Andrew Jackson, became a hero. For several years, many male babies were given his name. Andrew Jackson Beale was one of them.

[William Henry Roberts and Catherine Wells Roberts'] first child was a son. He was born September 8, 1863. He was named Sidney Johnston Roberts, after Bill's hero, General Albert Sidney Johnston who died at the Battle of Shiloh. (1977)

Landscape also occurs in family heirlooms and pictures. Though not many heirlooms in my immediate family from my grandfather's side of the family relate to issues of landscape, one such heirloom, a colonial blanket chest, has some significance in this capacity. The chest, which is passed down from previous generations to the first born child, represents one of the only remaining pieces of furniture that was brought across the Cumberland Gap when the family migrated to Kentucky. Many pictures, on the other hand, because they depict recognizable scenes, have significance in the broad historical landscape. As photos become older and more rare, they become significant in a
broader context. Any older image has some significance to history, but family photos in which relatives can still identify the people and settings are particularly important. Remembering the narrative vignettes that give a photo context elevate its general importance in America's cultural history.

EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPES

In the previous section addressing the issue of topography, I talked about the emotional circumstances surrounding Alman and how those circumstances elevated the significance of his home. The situations that family members find themselves in have importance not only in the way they define members and their personalities, but they also become important in understanding the context and dynamics of those situations. In this regard, family narratives also give a person an understanding of the emotional landscape. One begins to understand how relatives interact with one another and how that interaction yields certain consequences. When it comes to talking about Alman, often the emotional landscape reveals feelings of anxiety. For example, in Kennedy's description of Alman's house, she relays a story about Alman not wanting to go to his daughter Lois's house for Christmas. In this scene, even outsiders to the family can appreciate Alman's stubborn and controlling nature. Aside from the narrator highlighting
Alman's alleged drinking problem (though elders in my family seem to have been more prone to drink alcohol earlier in the day than is acceptable in contemporary society), one sees that Alman's stance is stronger than the desires of anyone else around him. (MK represents Mary Jane Kennedy and HR denotes my responses.)

MK: I can remember a Christmas, and I was small. Everybody, I was over at the, over on north Seventh Street in the white house. I guess it was Christmas day. Aunt Cappie and Aunt Betty, I don't know where Aunt Desiree was. She was probably there too. But I specifically remember Aunt Cappie and Betty tip-toeing around Alman because they want to go out to Lois's for Christmas. They had looked forward to going out there. It was their sister and it was Christmas. Pappy was in a tirade, he was not to be bothered with it at all. And they were tip-toeing around him.

I'm not sure they ever got to go. He was, I'm not sure he had too much of his Christmas booze or what--

HR: You mean he always drank at Christmas--

MK: Oh, yes he had a drink every morning--

HR: Oh, he did.

MK: Yes, and Betty use to fix him a tottie every morning before breakfast--

HR: Wow.

MK: And I know that because I watched it. You know, I watched it. And uh, so I, the thing I remember most about it was not whether they got there or not but that Sister [Lois] was going to be disappointed they didn't come. And they were going to be disappointed if they didn't get to go. And he was just sitting in there like a big bear and they were all down, they would run down the hall, [chuckles] they would go into his bedroom. And I guess they had all their gifts prepared to take. And uh, I don't really remember if they got to go or not. Probably they did, maybe. . . .
Because nobody wanted to disturb Pappy. Maybe he'd change his mind. Maybe they'd get to go, and probably they did. I don't remember. ... They would have stayed there with him or they all would have gone. (1998)

Almost all family narratives reveal some part of the emotional landscape of the family. Vignettes do not always convey this information by themselves, but once they are combined inside a narrative structure or are put next to other detached narrative vignettes, one begins to sense some of the emotions that family members felt at the time. Many of my relatives are aware of the emotions involved in family dynamics. I collected several instances where my relatives volunteered information about how certain relatives felt about others and about the kinds of experiences that influenced many personalities. Browning Waters, for example, is well aware of how his father's upbringing affected his attitudes.

I think Dad was that because he saw the hardships. I think the Depression made a intense impression on him. Because I remember him telling on it. You know he threw papers during the Depression and stuff to make ends-meet at the house and stuff. And uh, it was tough times. Real tough times, and always his focus from then on was accumulating and saving. And did all the strange little things like rubber bands, always saved rubber bands and string. And he would--Dad was a box freak. 'There's always a use for that box.' But you'd never see it again. (1998)

In this text, one sees how Browning attributes his father's emotions concerning economics to growing up during the Great Depression. This vignette addresses the landscape that
explains his father's quirkiness, but ultimately the vignette also works toward a definition of his father's personality as a kind of portrait.

Landscapes work in conjunction with portraits. They represent two sides to family narrative and history. Landscape provides context and meaning to the portraits people create. In family, portraits bring landscapes together, giving them relevance to the family folk group. It is the interplay between landscapes and portraits in the family narrative tradition that forms a family's collective heritage.
THE DEATH OF NARRATIVE VIGNETTES

Surveying the texts I collected from my family, I am struck by lack of information relating to my Roberts's roots. Most relatives said that the Roberts family seems to come second to the Beale family. Dominant figures, such as Alman Browning Beale, outweighed anyone the Roberts could put up against him. Alman has been described as the ruling patriarch who controlled not only the lives of his children, grandchildren, and their spouses but also a large part of the economic structure of the community surrounding Murray, Kentucky. In my grandfather's manuscript, several stories involving Alman exist, but stories about his own father, Sidney Johnston Roberts, are lacking. Sidney is not absent from Granddad's life, but where events involving him exist, he rarely takes the role of active participant. Sidney's shadowy presence never struck me as odd or significant when I began my research, but in one interview, a cousin said that all she remembers about Sidney was his sitting in an overstuffed chair in the corner of his living room, hands cupped behind his ears straining to hear what was being said
among other relatives engaged in conversation across the room. Though he had an interest in what was going on, he was always quiet and never asked anyone to speak up or to move closer (Akridge 1998). He was a man who seemed to fall into the shadows of his wife and father-in-law's family, always present but rarely in control.

Considering the difference between Alman and Sidney, I have realized that family folklore has a bit of Darwinism to it: aggressive individuals will always survive. As one's family heritage evolves, family narratives are constantly in danger of being dissolved or forgotten by the family. Sidney seems to have been a passive character during his life or at least subsequent generations see him in this way, and because of this collective view, he is on the verge of losing all his character and identity for subsequent generations. As time separates one's ancestors from the present, stories become transformed as they move from personal experience narrative to legend, and narrative vignettes about particular individuals or events are lost. As parts of one's family history move into legend, the vignettes that remain define past relatives in an even narrower light. Many details about distant ancestors are lost and in some cases all details relating to person are lost forever.

In order for an ancestor to survive the transformation from personal experience to a third-person account to
legend, a relative must have done something extraordinary, outrageous, or endearing to be remembered. My generation knows only one story relating to Sidney, a story my grandfather recorded in his manuscript and would tell often during family gatherings.

The Roberts household awoke as usual on Christmas morning. After breakfast, Sidney went to visit a neighbor while Lois was dressing the children to go to Grandpa's house. Sidney's return was delayed. Lois and the children were dressed and ready to go. They waited impatiently. Finally Sidney came home. On his return Lois sensed that he was not feeling quite right. She put him to bed. The children were told that their father was ill. Finally noon came and went. It was afternoon before the family got away to Grandpa's house. The neighbor's Christmas eggnog had been too potent for Sidney's health. (1977)

This story yields little about Sidney's personality, but as long as it stands, Sidney still has some character left. Unfortunately, Granddad's manuscript lacks information about Sidney's work, childhood, and interests other than material directly related to Granddad's life growing up. These details concerning Sidney's life are lost. In fact, if I fail to remember this story or if other family members lose interest in it, Sidney will become merely a name in the genealogical chart while the distinctiveness of Alman and his exploits persist because the family still finds those stories fascinating. But such loss is not unusual. Most relatives lose their character and distinctive personalities over time, eventually becoming just a name important to one's lineage. We are all bound to be lost in the minds of
others as narrative vignettes are transformed or forgotten
or visual vignettes lose their meaning or are destroyed.

The fact that stories about Alman still thrive in my
family's lore brings up one last point about family
narratives. That point is the issue of distance.
Collecting family narratives and perspectives on family
history has taught me that time affects what people will
tell you and how they will tell it. The greater the
distance between events and the deaths of family members,
the more open and candid people seem to be with their family
portraits and discussions of the family's emotional
landscape. There are certain things that are not discussed
freely among relatives. Only through time and people's
ability to work through problems, tragedy, and conflict do
certain vignettes surface. Without citing examples of this
fact that are still volatile subjects—revealing to many
skeletons in my family's closets— one can see this notion
operating in some of the examples I have given throughout
this paper. Mary Jane Kennedy's description of the
Christmas that Alman refused to leave home is an excellent
example. Discussions about Alman and his need be in control
of all situations is something not openly discussed prior to
the death of his youngest daughter, Desiree Hasick, in 1995.

CONCLUSION

As I began writing this thesis, I had difficulty
figuring out exactly what facet family folklore I wanted to write about. Prior to writing this thesis, I presented a paper at Indiana State University criticizing past family folklore scholarship. Criticizing other scholarly works is easy. It is easy to be critical of other scholarship, highlighting the faults in these work. After presenting this paper I realized that the real challenge is in applying my criticisms to an actual study of family. In my analysis of scholarship I addressed many issues. I knew that I could not discuss all these issues in my thesis. The question was which issue should I address?

I felt my first in-depth folkloristic study needed to be personal. So I asked myself: What is it that attracts me to family folklore? I knew the answer to that question. It is the same answer that attracted me to folklore in the first place. My interest in folklore began during my struggles with rewriting my grandfather's manuscript. His manuscript led me to question the academic foundation I was about to receive as an undergraduate. While working on his project, I was taking philosophy and semiology classes. Without fully knowing that folklore was the discipline I would ultimately study in graduate school, my primary interest in Granddad's work centered on understanding how folk groups reinforce their common ties through varying forms of communication. I considered Granddad's manuscript one form of communication in my family folklore. I knew
another more obvious form was oral communication and storytelling.

In addition to my philosophy and semiology classes, I was also taking history courses. History has always fascinated me. I enjoyed learning about past events, but I discovered that the ordering of past events, what historians create, is not absolute fact. Historians create truth based on research and conclusions. Truth is different than fact. Fact implies that something is unshakably accurate, but accuracy, as I learned from reading Ludwig Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*, is a relative term (1969:6e). The world contains few facts outside of the Cartesian concept of self (Descartes 1989). For the most part, truth is based on each person's unique point of view and ability to make judgments about what people are told and what they see and experience around them. We constantly re-evaluate our collection of knowledge in relation to our surroundings.

If truth is as subjective as Wittgenstein suggests, then does that makes an historian's view of history better than any other? Certainly all the research an historian conducts makes him more informed than the average person, but when we talk about history as experienced by an individual, then that individual's perception of history is no less than the perception an historian has on the same events in hindsight. This realization started me thinking about history as it is created in family. I realized that
Granddad's manuscript as well as all the other narratives and information about family history that I collected over the years were not merely artifacts waiting for scholars to study. The opinions that my relatives have are just as valid as scholarly opinions.

Once I had justified the importance of these family history texts in my mind, I began to figure out how these histories operate in context. Family history, unlike academic histories, is not meant for everyone. Family history exists for a specific audience, namely the family. The subject and people discussed in these histories serve only the interests of family members, but how do the issues discussed in family history serve its members? I knew that these histories work on two levels. They exist for the family as a whole, and they exist separately for each individual.

Reviewing past scholarship on family folklore, I learned that scholars were mostly interested in the way family history works for the whole. Further exploration into the ordering of family history on an individual level was necessary. By listening to my relatives, reading their letters and manuscripts, and reviewing old pictures, I began to understand how they function structurally. This understanding led me to conceptualize them as portraits and landscapes. As I looked more in deeply into the construction of these portraits and landscapes, I realized
that not all family history is based on a series of complete narratives. Some family information is conveyed in ways other than narrative. This realization opened the door to seeing family history as series of attached and detached narrative vignettes. Some family history comes in the form of family stories comprised of short vignettes attached to one another in narrative form. Other vignettes of information exist outside of story structures. These detached vignettes appear as descriptions and assertions that people make in the course of conversation.

But what do these family-based narrative and visual vignettes mean? It is a difficult task to look at family history and try to understand what it means to each family member. There is no way I could ever learn the full extent of such meaning. Meaning is subjective and highly personal. Even with my insider status, all I can conclude about meaning is the result of what I am able to infer from the information that my relatives provide. Since I am limited in the conclusions I can draw concerning meaning, the only point that separates my finding from those that might be drawn from an outsider is my personal attachment to this folk group. At least my analysis is based in part on the group's perspective, but the group's perspective is not a unified perspective. It is based on what each person deems important and what he or she take in and process according to his or her own unique point of view. Folk groups and
cultures are based on each individual's own negotiation within that setting. Leonard Primiano conceptualizes this negotiation as an individual's unique "uniculture." (1995:49)

As a folklorist, I have developed an interest in understanding uniculture or an individual's point of view in family narratives. My graduate studies have taught me that the point of view and ideas of individuals are important parts of folklore. It constitutes all material that a person pulls together in order to understand and develop an attachment to one's family folk group. Narrative exists chiefly in story form, but it also exists in one's mind, helping him to understand images, customs, and other forms of folk expression. In conjunction with narrative, I realized that we all maintain our own individual perspective on life. These perspectives define us. They also bind us socially. The way we arrange things in our minds, make sense of life experiences, and the narratives we create about these experiences, affect our social ties particular in family. In the end, all we have to connect us to others are perceptions of our experiences and the experiences of others. As our social ties thrive and our unique sense of family grows we must always ask ourselves: what is it that connects us to our family and how do we go about fostering those connections?
APPENDIX ONE

METHODOLOGY AND USE OF PRIMARY SOURCES

My analysis is based on several sources I collected over a four-year period. I began my research studying my grandfather's work on family history. For thirty years, he collected information from family members and compiled it in manuscript form. He started by conducting genealogy research. Working from cemetery records, libraries, and what other relatives could remember, Granddad constructed an annotated family tree dating back to the 1760s. As Granddad got older, he expanded his work to include more narrative information. Recalling the stories his father and grandfather told and complimenting them with stories other relatives remembered, Granddad reconstructed the past. He augmented this information with academic citations relating to the cultural and social history of western Kentucky and with family photographs. Most photographs are either neatly placed in one of two photo albums with a complete caption containing information about the people, place, and year under each one or the photographs are separated into envelopes with information about their subject printed on the outside.

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In addition to stories about his ancestors, Granddad included his own personal experiences in several sections of his manuscript. Whole chapters of his manuscript are devoted to specific times in his life, such as growing up in Elm Tree, Tennessee, the year he spent fighting in France during World War One, moving to Oklahoma, and setting up the chemistry lab at Halliburton Cementing Company. Adding to his personal experiences, Granddad created sections in his manuscript devoted to the personal experiences of other family members. These chapters are based on shorter manuscripts created by his brother, Paul Browning Roberts, and his ex-wife, Elsie Madeline Bowie. In addition to several three ring binders that constitute the rough draft copy of his manuscript and files relating to his genealogical search, Granddad's collection of material includes school yearbooks, newspaper articles, tax records, and notebooks itemizing all the money he spent in a given year.

Working from Granddad's records, I expanded his files as I began researching my thesis. In the fall of 1996, I started making contact with relatives on my grandfather's side of the family. For years, there had been little or no connection between my immediate family and these extended relatives. Many of these relatives I had not seen in over twenty years. Most of them I was too young to remember. The falling out between these relatives and my immediate
family was not due so much to hard feelings as to mutual laziness. My father in particular, who shares a direct relationship with these people, never took an interest in cultivating family ties after my grandfather's death. Since there were no hard feelings to work through, the only obstacle in rekindling these ties was overcoming the awkwardness that had developed over the time that had elapsed. Once that awkwardness was overcome, my relatives seemed open to my project.

Explaining my project was easy. I introduced my work as an extension of my grandfather's research. Relatives were all aware of his drive to create a comprehensive family history in written form and welcomed my efforts to expand what he created and hopefully complete the project. I told each relative about my graduate work in Folk Studies at Western Kentucky University. I let them know that whatever information they could provide would become part of my thesis. Unfortunately, I did not inform them about how the material would ultimately be utilized. At the time of my research, I had not formulated my ideas on narrative vignettes nor had I fully conceived of looking at family narratives as portraits and landscapes.

Aside from my grandfather's materials, I conducted most of my research through formal and informal interviews. The formal interviews were recorded on audio tape. The informal interviews were recorded through note-taking. Despite my
distinction between the two, all information was acquired and used with the consent of the interviewee. The choice to record the interview formally or informally for the most part was due to the circumstances at hand. In some cases the interview setting was too noisy to use a recording device. In other instances the interviewee was not conveying family information in a formal manner. Therefore to record the entire conversation would have been a laborious task. Only one relative specifically requested that I not record her. However, even though she made this request, she encouraged me to take as many notes as I could.

Overall, I conducted seven interviews. Each interview lasted from an hour and half to a full day. These sources include Cecila Akridge (cousin), Mary Jane Kennedy (cousin), Mary Helen O’Keefe (cousin), Dora Sandlin Roberts (mother), William Bowie Roberts (father), Shelby Roberts (brother), and Browning Waters (cousin). Presently, only one interview is fully transcribed, Dora Sandlin Roberts. The rest of the interviews are either indexed, if recorded, or the notes from the interviews have been typed. I transcribed the excerpts cited in this thesis. All citations from audio recorded interviews are transcribed verbatim minus false starts and excessive uses of "and" at the beginning of sentences. Citations from interviews recorded by note-taking are paraphrased. In some cases portions of these interviews are cited as if they were verbatim word
transcription, namely the Shelby Roberts text that opens this study. In those cases, the interviewee has been consulted and has approved the use of this practice in place of the words they used at the time of the interview.
APPENDIX TWO

GENEALOGY OF THE BEALE/ROBERTS FAMILY

To help the reader understand how my relatives relate to one another, I have included the following genealogy. Please note that it is an abbreviated genealogy of my family. For one, it includes only information about one fourth of my family, those deceased traced through my grandfather on my father's side. In addition, I limited the genealogy to include only relatives that are cited as sources, are referenced in my analysis, or people who help complete the lineage from one generation to the next, such as listing the parents of my sources or those who are referenced.

I have omitted some of my ancestors and living relative's spouses and children to conserve space. In some cases, I have included spouses if a member of the family has changed name in order to show where certain last names originate in the family tree.
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