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# Like Manna From God: the American Chestnut Trade in Southwestern Virginia

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Chestnut Trees grow very tall and thick, mostly, however, in mountainous regions and high land. Its wood is very lasting, and its fruit exceptionally sweet.

—William Byrd (1737)<sup>1</sup>

THE YEAR 2004 marks the centennial of the arrival of the chestnut blight and the onset of the greatest ecological disaster to strike the forests of North America in historical times. In less than fifty years the blight wiped out a dominant tree of the eastern forest, the American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*). The disease killed an estimated 3.5 billion trees, the equivalent of over 9 million acres of pure chestnut stand.<sup>2</sup> The disappearance of the chestnut led to the collapse of wildlife populations that were dependent upon its nuts as a food source, including bear, squirrel, and turkey. The replacement of the chestnut by other tree species led to the restructuring of forest communities.

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The arrival of the chestnut blight was followed by other exotic diseases and insect infestations. The beetle-borne Dutch elm disease destroyed one of the nation's great shade trees. Today, flowering dogwood is under attack by anthracnose fungus, hemlocks by woolly adelgid insects, and oaks and other trees by gypsy moth. Other species are under similar stress as the Columbian exchange continues to introduce new organisms to the continent and internal threats also arise.<sup>3</sup> But the American chestnut blight has a special place in the history of American forests. Not only did it create a rapid and large-scale ecological disaster, it also created a social and economic disaster for mountain communities.

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The loss of the American chestnut was a tragedy for poor mountain residents in the southern Appalachian region. The nuts were a vital source of food for their families, autumn forage for their animals, and a commodity for barter and sale. Many people relied upon the seasonal crop of nuts and the natural abundance that they represented. As one mountaineer put it, "chestnuts were like the manna that God sent to feed the Israelites." A mountain woman remarked, "A grove of chestnuts is a better provider than a man—easier to have around, too."<sup>4</sup>

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A great deal is known about the biology of the blight and its ecological effects.<sup>5</sup> However, the social and economic roles of the chestnut and the effects of the blight on the people who depended upon the tree have received relatively little study. (Indeed, one of the most detailed studies to date was conducted by high school students and published in one of the *Foxfire* books.<sup>6</sup>) The people who participated in the trade and experienced the economic and social effects of the blight are now elderly and memory of these matters is passing with them. Local records of rural commerce are disappearing as they are lost or discarded. This is unfortunate, because the story of the chestnut trade is an important part of the history of the people and forests of the southern Appalachian mountains.

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What follows is an examination of the social and economic roles of the chestnuts in the southern Appalachians. This essay examines the nature and scale of the chestnut trade—including its growth and collapse in southwestern Virginia—and provides new insights into the chestnuts as a foraging

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commons, the poorly understood practice of managing forest stands of chestnuts as orchards, and the close of the commons in this region. Finally, it reveals the local diversity in the trade that can be discovered through small-scale and comparative studies.

The nuts were an abundant communal resource. Farmers' hogs and turkeys foraged the chestnut commons of mountain forests without regard to property lines. Farm families also foraged for nuts to eat themselves and, once the chestnut trade began, to sell or barter. With improvements in transportation this trade became particularly important to the poorest folks, because it was one of their few sources of cash and store credit. This trade was much larger than is generally realized. In some counties residents collected tens of thousands of pounds, sometimes well over 100,000 pounds for shipment to urban areas.

Exploitation of the chestnut commons boomed in the early twentieth century, only to go bust a few decades later. The boom-and-bust cycle is a well-known feature of resource commons: They are over-exploited, collapse, and (sometimes) recover. The bust of the chestnut trade had nothing to do with over-exploitation, however, nor was the closure of the commons associated with industrialization or class conflict. The tree was killed, the trade stopped, and the chestnut commons closed by a fungal disease.

Most accounts of the role of chestnuts in mountain culture and economy are quite general in nature and none use a comparative approach. As a result, they tell a story that implies a uniformity of experience and practice throughout the southern Appalachian region. This study, however, finds that the scale of the chestnut trade varied widely among neighboring counties in the Blue Ridge of southwestern Virginia, depending upon local transportation systems and economic circumstances. It demonstrates the importance of small-scale comparative studies to an understanding of the trade and the role chestnuts played in mountain culture and economy.<sup>7</sup>

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Map 1. The Southwestern Virginia Blue Ridge Counties.

Prepared by the author.

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This article focuses on the period of 1900–1930 and the five southwestern Virginia Blue Ridge counties that extend southwest of Roanoke: Franklin, Floyd, Patrick, Carroll, and Grayson. Floyd, Carroll, and Grayson counties are part of the core region of Appalachia as defined by John Alexander Williams.<sup>8</sup> The Blue Ridge portions of Franklin and Patrick counties are topographically and culturally similar to the other three. During that time, the economy of this region was based largely on agriculture, although Grayson County also was involved in a timber boom at the beginning of the century.

Information about the chestnut trade in these counties is limited largely to oral histories and memoirs. Quantitative data are difficult to find, but some country store records from this period help to confirm informants' memories and add greater depth to our understanding. Published material addressing the trade in the larger southern Appalachian region also help to flesh out this story. If this account sometimes offers more questions than answers, it nevertheless helps to bring new understanding to this important, largely overlooked thread in American environmental history.

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## The American Chestnut

AT THE BEGINNING of the twentieth century, the American chestnut ranged from southern Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont southward along the Appalachian Mountains to Georgia and Alabama. Westward, its range extended to Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, and the northeastern corner of Mississippi. In the southern Appalachians the tree often reached 120 feet in height and 7 feet in diameter and sometimes exceeded this size. Common at altitudes above 2,000 feet, chestnuts grew best in moist hollows above 3,000 feet.<sup>9</sup> Chestnuts commonly comprised up to 20 percent or more of the forest trees and locally they could account for 50 percent or more. A member of the beech family, the chestnut tree usually bore dark brown nuts enclosed two or three together within a two- to three-inch spherical burr protected by extraordinarily sharp spines. No one collected chestnuts barefoot.

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It is difficult to imagine the oak-chestnut forests before the ravages of the chestnut blight. One person described how the "light, cream-colored blossoms, and a big tree that grew up a hundred feet high would have a spread at the top of it a hundred feet wide, maybe. You could see them sticking up out of the woods, and it was just like big, potted flowers standing up all over the mountain. It was a sight to see." The nature writer Donald Peattie described the trees viewed from a mountaintop in the Great Smoky Mountains, "the great forest below waving with creamy white chestnut blossoms in the crowns of the ancient trees, so that it looks like a sea of white combers plowing across its surface." Another writer remembered the tree's "great domes of yellow, arched up above the lane, and lying like great piles of pollen here and there over the wooded hills. Its perfume is everywhere, not honey-sweet like the locust's, but with a saving tang of acrid, of a kind, but of a differing savor, with that of buckwheat. Is there ... another woods-tree with bloom so beautiful?"<sup>10</sup>

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Native Americans of the eastern woodlands used the nuts as a source of food, eaten raw, boiled, or ground into flour. They sometimes used chestnut bark to cover their shelters and chestnut wood to make canoes. Chestnuts were known to Europeans before they invaded North America. The European chestnut *Castanea sativa* was used as food from ancient times to the present. It was boiled, roasted, made into flour, and included in bread, cake, pudding, and porridge. Historically, it has been an important staple food of the poorest classes.<sup>11</sup> European settlers in America quickly discovered the value of the American chestnut. The nuts, which were much sweeter than those of the European chestnut, were valued highly. "There are also chestnuts here, like those of the Netherlands, which are spread over the woods," Adriaen van der Donck wrote in his account of the New Netherlands, in the present-day New York and New Jersey region, during a visit in the 1640s. "Chestnuts would be plentier if it were not for the Indians, who destroy the trees by stripping off the bark for covering for their houses. They, and the Netherlanders also, cut down the trees in the chestnut season, and cut off the limbs to gather the nuts, which also lessens the trees."<sup>12</sup> Other settlers found it more convenient simply to wait for the nuts to fall, which they often did in great quantity.

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American chestnut wood was light, strong, easily split and worked, and remarkably resistant to decay. These qualities led to its use in log houses and other structures, furniture, interior trim, musical instruments, coffins, and cooperage, and also for shingles, mine timbers, railroad ties, telephone poles, and fence posts and rails. The abundance of rail fences in the southern Appalachians attested to the ease with which the wood split. (As one mountaineer said, to make a fence rail, just "cut off what length your rails you wanted ... you could stick a wedge in it an' it'd jus' pop open.") The wood was used as a veneer and as the core upon which other wood veneers were applied. Once a method was developed to extract the tannin from the wood, chestnut also became important to the tanning

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industry. Virginia had nine chestnut extract plants in 1914. The leaves were used in folk medicine to treat whooping cough, burns, swelling, and snakebite.<sup>13</sup>

The nuts were important to people living in the southern Appalachian mountains and, as in Europe, they were especially important to the poorer residents. When the nuts matured and fell from the trees in September and October, the ground often was covered inches deep with them. People gathered them and either ate them immediately or stored them after setting the nuts in the sun to dry. When dry nuts were stored, steps had to be taken to prevent weevil damage, because their larvae commonly infested the nuts. The nuts might be heated in boiling water, or preserved with salt.<sup>14</sup> They were eaten fresh, boiled, roasted, baked, or ground into flour.<sup>15</sup> Partially dried nuts were particularly appreciated, because of their increased sweetness.

The task of collecting the nuts was often a delight to children, who remembered it fondly in their elder years. A Grayson County, Virginia, woman remembered:

On a windy night, we'd fall asleep dreaming of the ground covered with chestnuts which wind-shaken trees had let go. The next morning, breakfast was gulped down as we hurriedly put on old coats, caps and everyday shoes, grabbed buckets or baskets and headed for the closest big chestnut trees, calling back to remind our father to be sure to write an excuse for tardiness at school. Many of the nuts had already fallen out of open burrs and were hiding under masses of brown frostbitten leaves. Some were still inside of very prickly outside burrs but partly open revealing the velvet inside lining. Sometimes we had to use a foot to squash a burr to give up its fruit.<sup>16</sup>

To get the nuts, people often had to compete with animals, including domestic animals. "There was another chore that had to be taken care of on the farm," wrote a Floyd County, Virginia, resident, "the picking up of chestnuts. You gathered the chestnuts, every one that you could get. If you didn't have turkeys, you could get a pretty good supply. But you had to beat the turkeys to the chestnut tree in the morning if you were to get very many." Another Blue Ridge resident recalled his impoverished childhood: "There was a time of year when we had food. That was in late fall after the gusty winds of a chestnut storm left the ground strewn with nuts. Pa and Ma would take us out by lantern light to beat the hogs to them."<sup>17</sup>

More affluent folks enjoyed nutting as recreation. One author recalled "certain city folk in whom the country heart is still alive and whom memories of boyhood drive to take the night trolleys to the country on blowing October dawns." One morning in rural Pennsylvania, for example, he met a gatherer who was "the proud possessor of a long stocking stuffed full, [who] told me that he must hurry back, as he had to be at his optician's bench in the city by eight o'clock." Urban and suburban families ventured to the countryside to gather chestnuts. Boys would go "clubbing," throwing sticks high into the trees to knock the nuts down. They would often weight the sticks with pieces of metal, sometimes with nuts removed from the bolts that joined sections of railroad track. In the autumn, railroad track-walkers carried extra metal nuts with them to replace those that were missing.<sup>18</sup>

For mountain folk, chestnuts were more than a source of food for themselves. The nuts also fattened their hogs, which foraged freely throughout the local forest. In addition, the chestnuts were a source of income. They were sold at the local general store, or exchanged for merchandise or store credit. Each autumn, many children exchanged nuts for shoes, clothes, and schoolbooks. "A small little kid could pick up chestnuts," recalled a Georgia man. "We'd get up before breakfast and go to these trees where a lot of chestnuts had fallen overnight, beat the hogs there, and pick them up. Take them to market, sell them, and get shoes, clothes, or other things with them." A woman recalled that when she was a girl, "I'd pick them up and get the money for 'em, and I was glad to get to pick 'em up 'cause I'd get the money for 'em. And I was stingy with 'em as I could be, I'll just tell you the truth! When I was little I thought *every* chestnut I picked up had to be sold."<sup>19</sup>

Another Georgia man recalled seeing folks come out of the mountains to trade chestnuts at the store:

We'd hardly ever see these people at all, except when they came out to go to the store, and in the fall we could see 'em coming, maybe the parents and three or four kids coming down the trail. The old man would have a big coffee sack full of chestnuts on his back, and the little fellers would have smaller sacks, and even

the mother would have a small sack of chestnuts caught up on her hip. They'd all trek to the store and they'd swap that for coffee and sugar and flour and things that they had to buy to live on through the winter. That's the way they made their living.<sup>20</sup>

What did the storekeeper do with all these the nuts? Trying to sell them to local customers was like bringing coals to New Castle. Chestnuts were abundant and free for the taking, so why would anyone pay money for them? Herein lies a tale. **21**

## The Chestnut Trade

IN THE SOUTHERN Appalachian mountains, chestnuts had little or no cash value until it was possible to ship them to areas outside the chestnut's range. The nuts acquired cash value as the transportation system improved. In the early 1860s, chestnuts from Sandy Valley of Appalachian Kentucky were shipped by steamboat. The later development of the road system allowed residents in the Cades Cove community in eastern Tennessee's Great Smoky Mountains to sell chestnuts in Maryville and Knoxville. Southwestern Virginia's Blue Ridge counties depended largely on the railroad to ship theirs, although some surely were shipped by wagons before the railroad arrived. With improvements in transportation, the trade in chestnuts grew. In 1910, a man visited a cabin in the Smokies with a "hundred bushels of chestnuts, piled up there, and about four men packing off, every day." It is no wonder that a 1902 U. S. Department of Agriculture study of the southern Appalachian forests reported that, "The collection of nuts forms an important industry."<sup>21</sup> **22**

Throughout the nineteenth century, the economy of Virginia's southwestern Blue Ridge communities was largely subsistence or semi-subsistence in nature. This continued into the twentieth century, although on a lesser scale. These were not classless communities. There was an economic elite that dealt largely in cash, as well as people of lesser means, many of whom had little access to cash and depended to varying degrees upon the fruits of their labor and barter. The country store, also called a general merchandise store or simply a general store, was at the center of this economy. It sold its merchandise for cash, bartered it for locally produced goods and services, or exchanged it for credit against the customer's store account. Much of what it received in trade was shipped for sale outside the region, which brought the owner a cash return. Each day a store owner might find any number of items crossing his counter in exchange for merchandise: from eggs, butter, and dried apples to hams, beef, and animal hides, from live cows, pigs and chickens, to a hay stack, firewood, and roof repairs.<sup>22</sup> What the owner could not sell locally had to be sold elsewhere. This was the case with chestnuts. **23**

People collected nuts in quantity and their surplus was sold or bartered. A Patrick County, Virginia, resident recalled gathering fifteen to twenty pounds at a time. Another recalled picking up nearly one hundred pounds in a day following a storm. Still another told of how his father would "take the wagon to Jones Mountain and come in loaded." Josie Thomas recalled that her family often gathered nuts. She remembered being a child sitting on a bag of chestnuts behind her father as they rode his horse to the store. They would deliver a bushel of nuts and by the time they returned the family had gathered another bushel. She recalled making three trips a day. Ezra Martin of Carroll County recalled that he could "pick up over a bushel of chestnuts from under a tree on almost any morning in the Fall of the year."<sup>23</sup> **24**

A 1914 Virginia Department of Agriculture publication stated that "The income from the commercial nut crop goes largely to the women and children in the mountainous sections of the state."<sup>24</sup> This may be true, particularly with small-scale gathering, but men and boys also collected and traded in nuts. This was especially the case in large-scale collecting for the trade, which often involved a family effort. Country store account books obscure this fact, because they most often list a family under the name of the head of the household, generally a man. Gender roles in the chestnut trade have not been studied, but it is interesting to note that it was Josie Thomas's father who took the nuts to the store while, presumably, his wife and the other children did the foraging. **25**

The price that people received for nuts was high when the season began and declined later in the autumn as nuts flooded the market. One Patrick County resident recalled that the stores initially paid ten cents a pound and the price decreased to two cents as the market filled with nuts. Another recalled the price began as five or six cents, declining to two or three cents. Still another recalled that chestnuts were worth as much by the bushel as corn. A 1909 store accounts book shows that customers received two or three cents per pound at the beginning of October.<sup>25</sup> **26**

Not all people traded their nuts at the local store. Some acted as dealers, hauling their nuts to a railroad station and shipping them to a wholesale house on their own. Others dealt with hucksters, peddlers who accepted chestnuts and other goods in exchange for merchandise. A Floyd Country resident recalled: **27**

The chestnuts sold from three to five cents a pound. We gathered lots and lots, but we didn't usually take them to the general store. The huckster came by and got them. Our huckster was Mr. Sam Vest, our neighbor, who usually came in the late afternoon on Wednesday, or early Thursday morning. He was driving his load to Roanoke to sell for the weekend. He would take all the odds and ends that we had to sell, the butter and eggs that you hadn't sent to the grocery store or as we knew it, the general merchandise store.<sup>26</sup>

In southwestern Virginia and elsewhere, when people brought nuts to a store, they had three options for compensation. They could receive cash, exchange them for merchandise, or have the value of the nuts credited to their store account to pay off past or future debts. If they received cash, they were usually paid in cardboard or metal tokens called "due bills," or the amount received was written on a slip of paper called "scrip." These were good only for exchange at the issuing store, so customers actually received store credit, rather than cash. If a store owner has a good reputation for trustworthiness, the store's due bills and scrip might be exchanged in transactions among local people before they were eventually cashed in at the store. In effect, each country store minted its own money.<sup>27</sup> **28**

Store owners kept two different kinds of records. The first, called the day book, was a detailed running record of transactions with customers. This was recorded at the time of the exchange. Some of this information was later transferred to a customer accounts book. This book did not record even-exchange or paid-in-full transactions. The accounts book recorded debt and credit, with a page for each customer. The left column of the page was a record of the customer's debt, of merchandise taken without immediate or full payment. The right column was a record of credit, of payments in cash or barter made against the debt. Thus, the day books provide a full record of the chestnut trade at a country store. This is not true of the customer accounts books, but they provide a clearer understanding of who engaged in the trade and their economic standing. Those who paid off their debts in cash, those who were relatively well off economically, rarely offered nuts against their accounts. In the autumn, those who offered barter against their debt often offered chestnuts. (They sometimes also offered small quantities of chinquapin nuts and, rarely, walnuts.) Some customers, presumably the poorest, paid their debt entirely in chestnuts when they were in season. **29**

Once merchants received chestnuts, they had to ship them to a market outside their region. They bagged the nuts in cloth sacks and hauled them to the railroad station. This was not an easy trip. Although roads in the region had improved by the early twentieth century, they were still dirt roads and travel often was difficult. (Most Blue Ridge communities did not see a paved road until the arrival of the Blue Ridge Parkway in the 1930s, after the chestnut trade had died.) James D. Hopkins, a Patrick County store owner, would haul two thousand pounds of nuts at a time to the railroad station in his horse-drawn wagon. Alternatively, if a supplier brought goods to a store, the merchant might ship the nuts back to town in the supplier's otherwise empty wagon. People recalled wagon loads of nuts traveling daily from the Patrick County Blue Ridge communities of Vesta and Meadows of Dan to the railroad station in Stuart, the county seat. It took two days to make the round trip by wagon to Stuart, a total distance of about thirty-five miles. Murphy Thompson hauled nuts, often two wagon loads at a time, from Floyd County to the railroad station in Franklin County's town of Ferrum. Nuts from other parts of Floyd County and from Carroll County, which also had no railroad, might have been hauled to Radford or Pulaski.<sup>28</sup> **30**

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Figure 1. Railroad Depot in Stuart, Virginia, c. 1900.  
The narrow gauge "Dick & Willie" locomotive can be seen  
in the rear.

Courtesy of Clark Brothers Co. and Patrick County  
Historical Society. © Copyright by Clark Brothers Company,  
Inc.

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The scale of the chestnut trade is difficult to determine. Published accounts differ. The 1914 Virginia Department of Agriculture publication placed the statewide annual value of the nut crop at \$200,000. (At a return of ten cents a pound, this amounted to 2,000,000 pounds of nuts.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, a Virginia Writers Project history of Floyd County placed the value of that county's annual nut harvest alone at \$100,000 (1,000,000 pounds). A 1937 University of Virginia economic study of Patrick County stated that "Patrick's chestnut crop, at one time, was a greater source of revenue than cattle." The author did not mention a dollar value, but he did note that after a twenty-year decline in the size of the herd (a drop of 2,416 head), the "7,143 cattle reported in 1930 were valued at \$336,260. Dairy products sold totaled \$52,164." That was the equivalent of over 520,000 pounds of nuts.<sup>30</sup> The 1914 figure of \$200,000 for the annual statewide value of the chestnut harvest may be an underestimate, or more likely the trade grew significantly in the years following 1914.

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Country store record books provide much more accurate information, but they are difficult to find, especially day books. Records of hucksters' business and personal shipments are virtually nonexistent. There are, though, other clues. A set of Mayberry General Store shipping receipts from the Southern Express Company provide revealing details of the trade of one business. The store, which is located in the Patrick County Blue Ridge community of Mayberry, near the border of Floyd and Carroll counties, shipped its nuts through Stuart. As [Table 1](#) shows, the store shipped at least 9,156 pounds of nuts in 1914, and another 6,560 pounds in 1915, with a total estimated wholesale value of \$872, or about six cents per pound. (This store sometimes actually realized nine to eleven cents per pound.)<sup>31</sup> Although some nuts went to wholesalers in Richmond and Norfolk, Virginia, most went to Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York City. The local trade in chestnuts linked even the poorest folks, who seldom if ever used cash, to the national economy despite the often-encountered myth that these mountain people lived in isolation. The roasted chestnuts sold by vendors on the streets of New York, or stuffed into turkeys in urban and suburban areas throughout the northeast, may have been gathered by poor children and adults in the Blue Ridge of southwestern Virginia.

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Table 1. Chestnuts Shipped. Mayberry General Store, Patrick County, Virginia.

Year	Bags	Pounds	Est. Value	Destination (Number of Shipments)
1914	229	9,156	\$451	New York City (7), Baltimore (2), Richmond (2), Norfolk, Va. (1)
1915	138	6,560	\$421	New York City (4), Baltimore (3), Philadelphia (1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>15,716</b>	<b>\$872</b>	

Shipments from Stuart moved on the Danville & Western (D&W) railroad, which reached Patrick County, Virginia, in 1884. The narrow-gauge track began in Danville and extended westward to its terminus in Stuart, the county seat. Affectionately called the "Dick & Willie" by county residents, the D&W was upgraded to standard gauge by 1903. The arrival of the D&W expanded economic opportunities for the county and especially for the chestnut trade. The son of a station master recalled that the best money his father made was from shipping chestnuts. He also was an express agent and earned commissions on the shipments. The nuts were shipped at the higher rate for perishables. "His express commissions," his son recalled, "were just fantastic." His father told him that, "during the harvest time of chestnuts you could hardly find a place to put the bags of chestnuts down, because everyone was a chestnut dealer, just about. They harvested the chestnuts and brought them and shipped them to the big cities."<sup>32</sup> **33**

Some nuts shipped out of Stuart may have come from bordering North Carolina, but enormous quantities originated within Patrick County. In October 1915, the county newspaper reported, "About thirty wagon loads of chestnuts were brought to Stuart from the Meadows of Dan Saturday and Monday for shipment. The D. & W. Ry. has been taking away a car of chestnuts every day for some time." This was a lot of chestnuts, especially when we realize that the nuts arriving from Meadows of Dan and other Blue Ridge communities often were hauled in horse-drawn Conestoga wagons capable of carrying about two thousand pounds each. Even if the average wagon load was half that amount, this adds up to about 30,000 pounds of nuts shipped in two days.<sup>33</sup> **34**

Despite the romantic tales of children collecting chestnuts to buy new shoes for school, the chestnut trade was not necessarily small; in some areas it was a large industry. The U.S. Agricultural Census of 1910 shows that Patrick County, Virginia, accounted for nearly 160,000 pounds of nuts. This is a high figure, but it is not unique; a single railroad station in West Virginia shipped 155,000 pounds of wild nuts in autumn 1911.<sup>34</sup> These figures probably do not include all of the nuts harvested in these counties. For example, census figures account only for those reported, and the West Virginia figure does not account for nuts that may have been shipped by other means. The newspaper report of what was shipped from Stuart in a single weekend suggests the magnitude of the trade—at the peak of the season the train departed almost every day with a car laden with chestnuts. **35**

The U.S. Agriculture Census figures for 1910 show that Grayson, Carroll, Patrick, Floyd, and Franklin counties produced 360,384 pounds of nuts (Table 2). This amounted to 43 percent of the entire production of all nuts in Virginia that year. Patrick County produced more nuts than any other county in the state. Although the census figure is for "nuts," with no distinction regarding the kinds of nuts produced, nearly all of the nuts shipped in this region were chestnuts. (These figures may have included limited quantity of chinquapins and, perhaps, a few walnuts.) This conclusion is supported by the fact that twenty years later, after the ravages of the chestnut blight, these five counties together produced a mere 640 pounds of nuts, including only 170 pounds of chestnuts.<sup>35</sup> **36**

Table 2. Nut Production.

	Grayson Co.	Carroll Co.	Patrick Co.	Floyd Co.	Franklin Co.
<i><u>1900 Misc. Nuts</u></i>					
<b>Trees</b>	64	310	164	21	333
<b>Bushels</b>	224	305	153	16	216
<i><u>1910 All Nuts</u></i>					
<b>Trees</b>	128	5,578	15,423	2,061	13,032
<b>Pounds</b>	5,550	64,931	159,852	48,791	81,260
<i><u>1930 Nuts</u></i>					
<b>Bearing Age Trees</b>	Pecans 6	Pecans 3 Walnuts 1	Pecans 8	Chestnuts 35 Other Nuts 15	Pecans 11
<b>Pounds</b>	—	314	30	260*	—

\* Includes 170 pounds of chestnuts

U.S. Agriculture Census, Virginia (1900, Table 7. 1910, Table 4. 1930, Table 8.)

It is quite likely that the trade continued to grow rapidly between 1910 and 1920. With an estimated return of ten cents per pound to the merchants, the value of the 1910 crop in Patrick and Floyd counties was only \$15,985 and \$4,879, respectively.<sup>36</sup> The value of the trade in all five counties would be a mere \$36,038. This does not come close to the later estimated annual value of Patrick's crop as over \$52,164 ("a greater source of revenue than cattle"), or Floyd's crop as \$100,000. It even falls far short at double or triple of the price per pound. If the estimates are correct, the annual trade may have grown in the succeeding decade or more to something approaching 500,000 to 1,000,000 pounds a year in the most productive of these five counties.

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There was certainly a small chestnut trade in the late nineteenth century and Agriculture Census of 1900 showing only 914 bushels of nuts from 891 trees probably underreported the crop.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that the trade at the beginning of the century was modest. In 1910, however, the census reported total production in these counties to be 360,384 pounds from 36,222 trees. In just ten years the production of chestnuts skyrocketed, and it likely continued to grow in the following decade, only to plummet as the blight reached southwestern Virginia. It was a boom-and-bust trade that spanned the arrival of the railroad and the death of the trees.

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The wildly varying reported rates of production per tree (from 0.7 to 3.5 bushels in 1900 and from 6.2 to 43.4 lbs. in 1910) suggest that the census figures were based on rough estimates. After all, maintaining accurate counts when foraging in the wild is difficult, despite the federal government's demand for accuracy.

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Though much of the trade came from foraging, the image of people wandering through the forest to gather nuts only captures part of the story. Some people maintained what they called "chestnut orchards." Although some may have been planted, most of these orchards were conveniently located natural stands of chestnut trees.<sup>38</sup> Why plant orchards when there was an abundance of chestnut trees growing all by themselves? It appears that some of these groves were managed to encourage chestnut trees and make it easier to gather nuts.

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Why was there such variation in nut production from county to county? South of Roanoke, the Blue Ridge widens, changing from a range of mountains to a plateau that becomes nearly fifty miles wide at the border of Virginia and North Carolina. Grayson, Carroll, and Floyd counties are on this plateau. (Still farther southward, the Great Smoky Mountains rise from this plateau.) Most of the land area of Patrick and Franklin counties falls within the Piedmont lowlands, rather than the Blue Ridge.

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Since the American chestnut did not grow on the Piedmont in the twentieth century, it is surprising that Patrick and Franklin counties produced the majority of chestnuts, twice as many pounds of nuts as the other three counties combined. One reason was that railroads entered these counties, providing residents relatively easy access to transportation to ship their nuts. In addition, Patrick and Franklin counties, the largest producers, had the poorest farms of all Virginia counties measured by the value of all farm property per farm, \$1,526 and \$1,593 respectively. Grayson, Carroll, and Floyd county farms had values of \$3,183, \$2,192, and \$2,928 (Table 3). (The average value of all property per farm in Virginia was \$3,397.)<sup>39</sup> Poverty was a good motivation to gather and trade in chestnuts.

Table 3. Status of Farm Economy, 1910.

	Grayson Co.	Carroll Co.	Patrick Co.	Floyd Co.	Franklin Co.
Value of All Farm Property/Farm	\$3,183	\$2,192	\$1,526	\$2,928	\$1,593
Debt (Percent of Value of Land & Buildings)*	24%	18.2%	24.9%	18.9%	25.6%
Tenancy (Percent of All Farms)	9 3%	13.3%	31.7%	12.4%	31.5%

\*Owned farms

Agriculture Census Tables 1 and 2.

Grayson County, the lowest producer also had the highest farm property value and the lowest number of tenant farms. Its forests were heavily cut during the timber boom of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; virtually the entire county was cut over.<sup>40</sup> The timber industry provided a significant addition to local income during the boom. The industry did not place a high value on chestnut timber, so plenty of nuts were available and local residents gathered them for their own use. The county has some of the most mountainous terrain in the state, including Virginia's highest mountain peaks, which made transportation difficult. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century a railroad from Abingdon, Virginia, to North Carolina was established to serve the timber industry. The Virginia-Carolina (V&C) Railroad, popularly known as the "Virginia Creeper," passed through the western edge of Grayson County and a spur entered the county to haul lumber and supplies. Although the V&C also provided service to the general populace, the chestnut trade did not flourish. The brief prosperity that accompanied the timber economy provided little incentive to trade in nuts. By the time the timber boom ended and the railroad closed, the chestnuts were gone.<sup>41</sup>

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It is difficult to make simple generalizations based on the size of the trade in one county and expect them accurately to describe the trade in another.

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## Chestnut Commons and Chestnut Orchards

ANIMALS SUCH AS hogs, turkeys, and cattle were allowed to range freely in these Blue Ridge counties without regard to property lines until well into the twentieth century. They grazed, foraged, and watered wherever they wandered. The free-range agricultural tradition was widely practiced in the South from colonial times and was strongly supported in the mountains, where farmers often owned large tracts of unimproved land. This practice was particularly beneficial to slaves, small land holders, renters, share croppers, and the poor who did not own enough land to support their animals.<sup>42</sup> This open range tradition was upheld in 1900 by the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals, which declared that "the rule of the common law which requires the owner of animals to keep them on his own land or within enclosures is not in force in [Virginia] ... and the owner of animals, being under no

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obligation to restrain them, is not liable for damage done in consequence of their straying on the unenclosed lands of another, unless he drives them there."

If an animal damaged a neighbor's crops, there were few grounds for legal action unless that animal had broken through a fence. People were required to fence their neighbors' animals out, rather than fence their own animals in. A county board of supervisors had the local option to pass an ordinance requiring owners to keep their animals on their own land. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, only one Virginia county, Accomac, required residents to fence in their animals. The Blue Ridge counties of southwestern Virginia did not begin to require this until long after the blight wiped out the American chestnut.<sup>43</sup> **45**

Much of the unfenced rural landscape of this region thus was a grazing and foraging commons. The ubiquitous rail fences that surrounded household gardens and farm crops bore witness to this. Although individuals owned the land, their unimproved acreage was a communal resource open to everyone's animals. The owners of the animals gained the benefit from the grazing and forage, but the owners of the land bore their effects. Garrett Hardin argued that these circumstances inevitably lead to overexploitation and ecological collapse of the commons, because animal owners have no incentive to conserve the resource. This, he argued, was the "tragedy of the commons."<sup>44</sup> **46**

Natural resource commons and the social and ecological impacts associated with their loss have received a good deal of study by ecologists and resource managers. They also have been studied by environmental historians. Marine fisheries provide a good example of the ecological disaster that an unregulated or underregulated commons can experience. There are, though, other examples that are more directly related to the inland rural circumstances of the chestnut commons. Brian Donahue wrote about the loss of community grazing meadowlands when they were flooded by rising waters behind dams; John Cumbler studied the social conflicts leading to the loss of communal fisheries when dam construction blocked passage of migratory fishes; and Jennifer Price described the transformation of passenger pigeons into market commodities that were hunted to extinction.<sup>45</sup> In these examples, the traditional commons were closed in the nineteenth century when industry and economic elites coopted and gained control of a region's natural resources, or when the resource was overexploited and the commons collapsed. **47**

The seasonal abundance associated with the arrival of migratory fish and with the unpredictable appearance of barely imaginable numbers of pigeons in the sky became social and even celebratory events as rural residents reaped the natural bounty. The seasonal harvest of the chestnut crop was also of great social, as well as economic significance. But the collapse of the chestnut commons involves a different story. The abundance of the resource exceeded the demands placed upon it. There were plenty of chestnuts for animals and people alike. In addition, although the commons collapsed in a time of modernization and economic transition in the region, this was not the result of industrialization or competition for control of the resource. The chestnut commons collapsed because of the blight. The trees died and there were no nuts left to harvest. **48**

Despite Hardin's pessimistic assessment of the fate of commons, communities often find formal or informal ways to manage communal natural resources.<sup>46</sup> Did rural Appalachian residents find ways to regulate the chestnut commons? There is little information to help us answer this question. Given the abundance of the nuts, there may have been little incentive to regulate foraging. There were, though, efforts to assert property rights within the commons and, apparently, to remove some trees from the commons. **49**

Cattle, hogs, and domesticated turkeys foraged through unfenced pasture and forest. In the autumn, hogs and turkeys fattened on the bounty of acorns and chestnuts. Hogs were important because their meat could be salted and stored through the winter by people who lacked refrigeration. Although the animals foraged across property lines, there was great respect for ownership of the animals. Owners of hogs and cattle could be identified by unique patterns of notches and holes cut in the animals' ears. The marks were sometimes registered at the local court house. An unmarked young hog born in the woods, however, could be claimed by the first person to find it. Farmers who lived at a lower elevation or had few chestnuts nearby sometimes fattened their hogs by hauling or driving them to more desirable locations to forage on chestnuts. Abraham Helms recalled, for example, that **50**

his father would take his hogs to Patrick County's Jones Mountain to fatten them.<sup>47</sup>

Like their animals, people living in the Blue Ridge also were able to hunt and forage without regard to property lines. There is, though, little information about the mountain folks' chestnut foraging strategies, or the extent to which specific families or individuals may have laid claim to specific stands of trees. Would, for example, Helms' father have released his hogs on someone else's land without first receiving permission from the property owner? As the Virginia Supreme Court stated, he would be liable for damages caused by his hogs if he intentionally drove them onto another person's property without the owner's approval. While incidental collecting for personal use may have been free ranging, was this the case when nuts were gathered by the wagon load?

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Chestnut orchards provide an interesting case that has not been studied. These orchards, sometimes called groves, were common and are often mentioned in interviews and memoirs. "The chestnut groves were about as valuable to us in those days as other orchards," wrote Pedro Sloan of Franklin County. One Great Smoky Mountains informant recalled that, "Just about every farm on Fines Creek and Crabtree had a chestnut orchard even though chestnut trees grew wild everywhere."<sup>48</sup> Yet little is known about the orchards. In many cases they were natural forest stands that were managed to favor chestnuts. Louise McNeill, who served as West Virginia's Poet Laureate, recalled one example: "We had always called Uncle Dan'l's trees 'the chestnut orchard,' just across our line fence on the flat knoll of his part of Old Tom's farm. Forty or fifty big American chestnut trees stood there together, as the old men had saved them from the first clearing back in the Indian times, and for generations they had been the neighborhood nutting ground."<sup>49</sup>

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One Patrick County resident explained that chestnut orchards were natural stands cleared of underbrush. Farmers kept the ground within the orchards clean to make it easier to find and gather the nuts. Early Hopkins, who lived in the county's Blue Ridge foothills, told an interviewer: "I believe there was more people on top of the mountain had the chestnut orchards, cleaned out all of the undergrowth, than they did down here. But some of them down here you know, they'd go through and cut all their undergrowth, and there was little fine grass come up under that, made it easy to get the chestnuts." Max Thomas, a respected Floyd County elder, local folklorist, and former biology teacher, reported that "[p]eople years ago had cleared the woods of everything except chestnut trees, which they lined up in rows about fifty feet apart."<sup>50</sup>

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These chestnut orchards began as natural forest stands. Other tree species were weeded out, which opened the grove's canopy and promoted chestnut growth. Hogs and other farm animals foraging in the woods also had a great impact upon the undergrowth and forest regeneration. Perhaps fire also was used to manage the undergrowth, though only one bit of evidence suggests that: A newspaper article, circa 1900, recorded that "Wilber Phipps, a farmer of Freeling, had his barn destroyed by catching fire from some burning leaves about his chestnut orchard."<sup>51</sup> Perhaps Phipps was burning the undergrowth in his orchard.

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If fire was used as a management tool, did European colonists learn this method from the natives? Native Americans used fire to manage vegetation near their villages, and some scholars speculate that they also managed forests to encourage nut bearing trees, including chestnut. Indirect evidence of this may be the occurrence of nearly pure stands of American chestnut in some forests: Early in the twentieth century, researchers found 82.5 percent chestnuts in a Nantahala National Forest plot in North Carolina; 84.6 percent at Mountain Lake, Virginia; and 81.2 percent in a Maryland plot.<sup>52</sup> Such concentrations of a single species suggest human management. However, these areas might have been abandoned chestnut orchards originally managed by European-American settlers.

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In any event, it appears that at least some chestnut orchards were natural stands of trees that, through the labor of individual farmers and their families, were culturally redefined as objects of agriculture. Given the effort that farmers must have devoted to maintaining the orchards, it is reasonable to assume that they tried to control access to them. If so, the chestnut orchards were removed, to some extent, from the foraging commons.

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The West Virginia chestnut orchard that Louise McNeill described was used by the neighborhood, 57 so it still was a communal resource to some extent. However, there is an intriguing tale from Cumberland County, Kentucky, that suggests that some people were very possessive of their orchards. According to folklorist William Lynwood Montell, the African American community of Coe Ridge had "a large chestnut orchard," which became contested ground: "Friction between the races was intensified by some of the white boys who made it a habit to go to the ridge and freely partake of the abundant chestnut supply. The Negro boys and girls, who picked up the chestnuts and sold them for cash, resented the intrusion on their personal property. On one occasion, a fight over chestnuts broke out between the races. 'That's what started all of the killing,' claimed Tim Coe."<sup>53</sup>

In this incident and the ensuing feud, issues of racial conflict overshadowed those related to the resource commons. Nevertheless, the incident raises questions about the right of access to the resource, individually and communally. It also introduces race as a framework within which the chestnut commons and trade need to be studied. 58

## Chestnut Blight and the Close of the Commons

THE AMERICAN chestnut was in trouble in its southern range long before the blight arrived. The U.S. Commissioner of Agriculture's 1878 *Report Upon Forestry* noted that the American chestnut was dying out in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. "The chestnut was formerly abundant in the Piedmont region down to the country between the Catawba and Yadkin Rivers," the North Carolina state geologist reported, "but within the last thirty years they have mostly perished." Chestnuts in Virginia experienced a similar fate. "Throughout the Piedmont section of Virginia, especially in the lower portions," reported one observer in 1914, "there has been for thirty years or more a gradual dying or recession of the chestnut toward the mountains." This was not the result of chestnut blight, he argued, but of "either unfavorable soil conditions or root-rot." It turned out that the problem was probably caused by a root fungus. The southern and southeastern range of the tree was already shrinking when the chestnut blight arrived.<sup>54</sup> 59

However, this disease had little or no impact upon the chestnut trade in the southern Appalachians. In the southwestern Virginia Blue Ridge, the trade grew and flourished well into the early twentieth century. The slow death of the chestnuts in the lower Piedmont regions was quickly surmounted by the rapid destruction of the tree throughout its range by the chestnut blight. 60

The chestnut blight, caused by the fungus *Cryphonectria parasitica* (formerly known as *Endothia parasitica*) was first noticed in the United States at the New York Zoological Park in 1904. The fungus probably was introduced with nursery stock from Asia. Through their long association with the fungus, oriental species of *Castanea* evolved a resistance to the disease. This was not true of North American and European species. Within a year the blight infected an estimated 98 percent of the American chestnuts in the Bronx, the New York borough in which the park was located.<sup>55</sup> The infection spread rapidly by airborne sexual spores, and by sticky asexual spores that adhered to, and were transported by, insects, birds, and other animals. By 1908, the blight had reached Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. By the 1940s, the pandemic had spread throughout the tree's natural range. The blight also infected chinquapins (also of the genus *Castanea*), and some species of oak, especially post oak, *Quercus stellata*. It has since spread to Europe. It reached Italy in 1938, infecting the European chestnut *Castanea sativa*, and subsequently reached England, Switzerland, Spain, France, Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, and elsewhere.<sup>56</sup> 61

Blight spores entered the tree through wounds and breaks in the bark and began to grow in the cambium, the thin layer of living tissue between the tree's bark and trunk wood. Eventually, the fungal tissue grew all the way around the tree, girdling it and killing the cambium above the fungal mass. As a result, the above-ground portion of the chestnut died, but not its roots. Over the years the roots kept putting up new shoots, which sometimes grew large enough to bear nuts for a short time. Eventually, though, the shoots were reinfected with blight and died, only to be replaced by new ones in a tragic cycle. This process has continued to the present. It is not uncommon to see living American chestnut 62

saplings growing amidst dead poles in varying stages of decay. The American chestnut did not really disappear from the eastern forests—it ceased to be a part of the forest canopy and is now a part of the shrub understory.

Virginia experienced an outbreak of cicadas in 1911 and millions of these insects opened avenues for blight infection by piercing tree bark with their mouthparts. This hastened the spread of the disease. The blight reached Virginia around 1912 and by 1914 it was found in eighteen counties. It spread at breakneck speed, with the infection rate increasing at a reported rate of 600 percent per year in areas that had experienced the cicada outbreak. By 1914, one hundred infected trees were found in Bedford County, located just northeast of Franklin County. This was an isolated outbreak ahead of the main infestation. The Bedford trees were destroyed and the advance of the infection halted in the county, but this was a temporary reprieve. Nearly all American chestnut trees throughout Virginia were infected by 1920.<sup>57</sup> **63**

Memories of how quickly the trees died vary. Chester and Erma McKenzie of Patrick County recalled that they died gradually, but Abraham and Eula Helms recalled that the trees died quickly. In any event, they died out in Virginia's southwestern Blue Ridge by the end of the 1920s. Sam and Sally Slate recalled that Patrick County's chestnuts finally died out in 1926, the year they were married. The blight continued to spread, reaching the southern end of the Blue Ridge in the 1930s. Ninety-nine percent of Great Smoky Mountains trees were infected by 1929 and nearly 85 percent of them were dead when the park was dedicated in 1940. By the mid-1930s, the blight also was found in California, Washington, and British Columbia, killing groves of chestnut trees planted by settlers who had carried the cherished nuts with them on their westward journey.<sup>58</sup> **64**

The death of the chestnut was a terrible blow to the Appalachian forests. In Georgia, at the southern end of the Blue Ridge, one man remarked that, "After the blight hit, the bark went to falling off of 'em. Two or three years after that the trunks began to [weaken] and a windstorm'd come up and it'd be awful hearing them trees 'a fallin' in the chestnut belt." Another man described the devastation in 1926 at Fishers Gap in the Blue Ridge of central Virginia: **65**

I passed through a scene impressive in its aspect of desolation, and almost a tribute to the destructive power of the chestnut blight. This section must at one time have been entirely a pure chestnut grove. Now every tree was dead. All the trees had been uprooted and lay on the ground. The rains and the snow had washed away the dead bark and bleached the trunks a grayish white. No underbrush of any sort grew there. The area was as free from tree growth as are some of the western plains. These chestnuts were of tremendous size—a foot or two or three feet in diameter. Now it is a graveyard of giant trees. ... The area was easily two square miles.

It is no wonder that a man who experienced the blight said, "I thought the whole world was going to die."<sup>59</sup>

The forests went through a period of great ecological change as other tree species filled the enormous gaps left by the chestnut. In the southern Blue Ridge, the chestnut was replaced largely by oaks and hickories, and also by yellow-poplar, maple, hemlock, and other species, depending on local conditions. These vegetative changes also brought changes in understory vegetation and animal populations.<sup>60</sup> **66**

Salvage logging by individuals and timber companies became a major enterprise in an effort to recover some economic value from the dead trees. Cutting still-living trees may have hastened the end the chestnut trade in some areas, but its days were numbered in any event. The dead chestnuts needed to be cut within a few years of their death if they were to be used for lumber. Otherwise, insects, decay, and checking (cracking as the wood dried) destroyed their value. Much of the chestnut timber from the southwestern Virginia Blue Ridge was sold to furniture companies for use as core stock in veneers. The companies wanted high quality wood and refused to accept lumber with worm holes. A lot of wormy chestnut was left to rot in the forest or fed into wood stoves to heat homes before it became a prized wood. Chipped chestnut wood and bark also were used as a source of tannin for the leather industry. For a while, this became the major source of tannin in the United States.<sup>61</sup> **67**

For urban and suburban residents in the northeast and other areas outside the Appalachians, the loss of the chestnut meant little more than the loss of a seasonal treat. They neither witnessed the **68**

dying forest, nor depended on the chestnuts for their livelihood.<sup>62</sup> For many mountain people, however, the loss of the tree brought economic hardship or devastation. The tree and its nuts failed just as the Great Depression arrived, which compounded their economic problems. The loss of the nuts was a double blow. The best sources of cash for the poorest in the southwestern Blue Ridge counties were chestnuts, hogs, moonshine, and, perhaps, dried apples. The blight ended the chestnut trade and the loss of the nuts brought an end to the hogs. Allowing hogs to forage for chestnuts was both the best and cheapest way to fatten them for slaughter. Acorns were not sufficient and most farmers could not afford to raise or purchase hog feed.

The closure of the commons in southwestern Virginia Blue Ridge counties, and perhaps in other Appalachian mountain counties, followed a very different path from that of much of the South. Following the Civil War, many interests worked to close the commons. People who wanted to constrain the liberties of formerly enslaved African Americans, large landowners who wanted to protect their property rights, mercantile interests, and even railroads companies concerned about liability when trains killed livestock tried to pass laws requiring farmers to fence in their livestock. They encountered considerable resistance on the part of small farmers and others, particular in mountain communities. However, through persistence, political skill, and skullduggery they often succeeded.<sup>63</sup> **69**

They did not succeed in southwestern Virginia. Fence-in ordinances were not passed until late in the twentieth century, if at all. Floyd County, Virginia, did not pass an ordinance requiring owners to fence their animals until 1975. Patrick County did not pass a similar ordinance until 1977. Franklin passed an ordinance requiring people to fence in their livestock in 1997.<sup>64</sup> According to local folklore, Grayson County had two of its four districts governed by fence-in laws and the two by fence-out laws, but there is no documentation to confirm this. The county established a committee to examine the matter, and in 2004 it recommended adopting a countywide fence-out ordinance, which would preserve the open range. Carroll County has yet to pass a fence ordinance, so it has been and continues to be a fence-out county.<sup>65</sup> But, these are now only issues of legal liability, since the practice of free-range grazing was abandoned long ago. Although the commons was not legally closed earlier in the century, it informally passed out of use after the chestnuts died. Farmers simply stopped free ranging their animals. After the loss of the chestnuts there was not enough forage to fatten hogs, and free ranging other animals ended as new agricultural practices were adopted. **70**

The loss of the nuts ended a way of life and brought economic hardship to many. "The blight was hard on people," Max Thomas wrote, "for chestnuts were used as money at the stores." He continued: **71**

Many people started to move to the cotton mills at Fieldale, Spray, and Draper. People will tell you that these people moved because the [Prohibition] law got too tough but that was not right. Making liquor worked a family to death raising corn, and if there was any profit, the man drank it up. It was the chestnuts that kept the family going. Any way you looked at it, liquor was a drawback. Where there had been three cabins on a branch [creek], there were none now. The population decreased to less than half.<sup>66</sup>

Thomas was not alone in his belief that the death of the chestnuts helped to destroy a semi-subsistence economy and forced many mountain residents to find wage labor. Others shared his perception.

While many people did leave, census figures for the region ([Table 4](#)) provide a much more complex picture. Floyd County's population already was dropping before the chestnut blight arrived. Between 1910 and 1920, it dropped by 7 percent. It dropped another 11 percent during the decade of the blight, 1920 to 1930. During the same decades, Patrick County also suffered population declines of 2 percent and 6 percent, respectively. Franklin County's population displayed virtually no decline between 1910 and 1920, but dropped by 8 percent in the following decade. During the same periods, the population in Grayson and Carroll counties actually increased by small amounts. Population increases during the depression years of the 1930 included in-migration of former residents who left the economic trials of urban areas and returned to their agricultural roots. **72**

Table 4. U.S. Population Census, Virginia.

	Grayson Co.	Carroll Co.	Patrick Co.	Floyd Co.	Franklin Co.
<b>1940</b>	21,916	25,904	16,613	11,967	25,864
<b>1930</b>	20,017	22,141	15,787	11,698	24,237
<b>1920</b>	19,816	21,383	16,850	13,115	26,283
<b>1910</b>	19,856	21,116	17,195	14,092	26,480
<b>1900</b>	16,823	19,303	15,403	15,388	25,953

In the first decades of the twentieth century, many Blue Ridge residents left to find jobs in Piedmont mills in nearby Fieldale and Danville (Virginia), Spray and Draper (North Carolina), and elsewhere. The timber and coal industries attracted others. Jobs in cities in Ohio and other urban areas also attracted Appalachian residents. As available Blue Ridge land became scarce and good agricultural land still scarcer, some families left to find better farming opportunities. Enough Patrick countians moved to Amelia County, located southwest of Richmond, to establish the "Little Patrick" community. One descendant recalled "trying to raise a family by share cropping on hilly red land. All the land that was tenable was taken by former generations and not for sale. When they heard of this land now Little Patrick, in Amelia for sale that was much more level, they too, decided to take the plunge." Other Little Patrick residents tell a similar family story.<sup>67</sup> 73

The population decline in Patrick, Floyd, and Franklin counties accelerated during the blight years of the 1920s. It is likely that out-migration in response to the loss of the chestnut was a significant contributing factor. Some residents recall a greater population decline than the census figures show and this may well be the case. Of course, it also may be that people's memories conflated the earlier out-migration and that associated with the blight. Nevertheless, a number of factors mask the true scale of movements in and out of the region. For example, births within the counties replaced many who left. In addition, it was not uncommon for people to leave for temporary employment between growing seasons. Others left for longer periods, but later returned. The Patrick and Franklin county figures are confounded by the fact that only a portion of their land areas are in the Blue Ridge. Population figures for their Piedmont areas may obscure more severe drops in their Blue Ridge regions. 74

Memories of the chestnut loom large for many elderly residents of southern Appalachia. They remember it fondly and mourn its loss.<sup>68</sup> These feelings of loss also may encompass the loss of a way of life that the chestnut has come to symbolize. The first decades of the twentieth century marked a period of enormous social and economic change in the region. Within a few decades, the region experienced the timber boom, the upheaval of World War I, industrialization, the shift from a barter to a cash economy, the chestnut blight and loss of the chestnut trade and hogs, out-migration and the loss of friends and loved ones, the Great Depression, and the construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway and the arrival of tourism. It may be that the gut-wrenching experience of the death of the American chestnut stands in memory for an entire framework of social and economic change. 75

For generations, the extraordinary abundance of chestnuts provided food for natives and settlers alike, but this seasonal wealth did not gain economic value until the arrival of better transportation. The region's trade exploded in the early twentieth century, growing from a trickle of nuts in the first years to a torrent at the end of the first decade that provided a new source of income for the region, especially the poorest of its residents. The tree and its nuts acquired a new cultural significance. It was transformed from a forest tree to an agricultural crop, from food to an export commodity. With the death of the trees and the bust of the chestnut trade in the late 1920s, the nuts became a memory recalled with a fondness that belies the great labor involved in collecting them and hauling them to the railroad. It is, though, a memory of abundance—of manna that dropped from the forest canopy. 76

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Richmond Croom Beatty and William J. Mulloy, eds., *William Byrd's Natural History of Virginia, or The Newly Discovered Eden* (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1940), 31.

<sup>2</sup> "Chestnut Blight and Resistant Chestnuts," U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farmer's Bulletin No. 2068, 1, 2. An argument can be made, of course, that the greatest forest disaster accompanied the arrival of Europeans with their metal axes and saws. Martha K. Roane, Gary J. Griffin, and John Rush Elkins, *Chestnut Blight, Other Endothia Diseases, and the Genus Endothia* (St. Paul, Minn.: APS Press, 1986), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas J. Campanella, *Republic of Shade: New England and the American Elm* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Charles E. Little, *The Dying of the Trees: The Pandemic in America's Forests* (New York: Viking, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Richard C. Davis, *The Man Who Moved a Mountain* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 17, 5.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Herman S. Forest, Richard J. Cook, and Charles N. Bebee, *The American Chestnut: A Bibliography, Bibliographies and Literature of Agriculture* No. 103 (Beltsville, Md.: National Agricultural Library, 1990); William L. MacDonald, et al., eds., *Proceedings of the American Chestnut Symposium* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Books), 1978; and Roane, *Chestnut Blight*.

<sup>6</sup> "Memories of the American Chestnut," in *Foxfire 6*, ed., Eliot Wigginton (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1980), 397–421. See also, Robert L. Youngs, "'A Right Smart Little Jolt': The Loss of the Chestnut and a Way of Life," *Journal of Forestry* 98 (February 2000): 17–21. High school students in Rabun County, Georgia, who participated in the Foxfire program, conducted interviews with elderly residents and published accounts of the folk culture and history of their region at the southern end of the Blue Ridge. In 1973, folklorist Richard M. Dorson published a critique of the enormously popular *Foxfire* publications. He argued that professional folklorists were not involved in the program, that the students' work was not informed by a knowledge of the literature and theory of the field, and that the publications promoted romantic stereotypes of mountain culture. He challenged the program to follow a higher standard in folklore scholarship. (Eliot Wigginton, director of the program, viewed its activities more as exercises in journalism than in folklore.) This initiated a lively exchange between Dorson and Wigginton. The two finally reached an accommodation and one of the *Foxfire* books included a friendly but cautionary afterword by Dorson. Throughout this debate, however, the Foxfire program was not criticized for the accuracy of the specific information that it published. See the following pieces, all published in *North Carolina Folklore Journal*: Dorson, "The Lesson of 'Foxfire,'" 21 (November 1973): 157–59; Wigginton, "A Reply to 'The Lessons of Foxfire,'" 22 (May 1974): 35–41; Dorson and Inta Gale Carpenter, "Can Folklorists and Educators Work Together?" 26 (May 1978): 3–13; Wigginton, "Comment," *Ibid.*: 14–17. See also, Dorson, "Afterword," in *Foxfire 4*, ed., Wigginton (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1977), 482–85; Carlos Drake, "The Foxfire Book," *Western Folklore* 35 (October 1976): 281–87.

<sup>7</sup> This is in keeping with the results of small community studies by Appalachian studies scholars that revealed the social and economic diversity within the region. See Dwight Billings, Mary Beth Pudup, and Altina Waller, "Taking Exception with Exceptionalism: The Emergence and Transformation of Historical Studies in Appalachia," in *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Pudup, Billings, and Waller (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 10–14.

<sup>8</sup> John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 8–14. In 2003, Patrick County, Virginia, applied to become a member of the Appalachian Regional Commission.

<sup>9</sup> Emily W. B. Russell, "Pre-blight Distribution of *Castanea dentata* (March) Borkh," *Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club*

114 (1987): 183–90. See range map on 184; also, see map on p. 1 of Roane, *Chestnut Blight. Message from the President of the United States, Transmitting a Report of the Secretary of Agriculture in Relation to the Forests, Rivers, and Mountains of the Southern Appalachian Region* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1902), 97.

<sup>10</sup> Wigginton, *Foxfire* 6, 403; Donald Peattie, *A Natural History of Trees of Eastern and Central North America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Bonanza Books, 1966), 189; Cornelius Weygandt, *A Passing America: Considerations of Things of Yesterday Fast Fading from Our World* (New York: Henry Holt, 1932), 184.

<sup>11</sup> Howard S. Russell, *Indian New England Before the Mayflower* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1980), 77, 78, 53, 197–198; U. P. Hedrick, ed., *Sturtevant's Edible Plants of the World* (1919; reprint, New York: Dover, 1972), 153; Kenneth F. Kiple and Kriemhild Conee Ornelas, "Chestnuts," *Cambridge World History of Food*, <http://www.cup.org/books/kiple/chestnuts.htm> (accessed 25 January 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Andriaen van der Donck, *A Description of the New Netherlands* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1968), 22.

<sup>13</sup> P. L. Buttrick, "Commercial Uses of Chestnut," *American Forestry* 21 (October 1915): 960–67; Albert F. Hill, *Economic Botany*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1952), 70–74, 99, 121; Interview of Jim Dillon by Jim Gale, 19 July 1975, "Oral History Transcripts for Rock Castle Gorge, 1975–1977" (hereafter cited as "RCG"), National Park Service, Blue Ridge Parkway Archives, Asheville, N.C., J22 (a set of these transcripts also is located at the NPS Blue Ridge Parkway Rocky Knob Office, Plateau District, Floyd, Va.); Filippo Gravatt, "The Chestnut Blight in Virginia," Virginia Department of Agriculture and Immigration (1 January 1914), 13. Medicinal uses: Eliot Wigginton, ed., *The Foxfire Book* (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1972), 232; Wigginton, *Foxfire* 6, 406; Wigginton, *Foxfire* 9 (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1986), 71; Kay K. Moss, *Southern Folk Medicine, 1750–1820* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 127, 178. See also the description of chestnut and its uses in George B. Emerson, *Report on the Trees and Shrubs Growing Naturally in the Forests of Massachusetts* (Boston: Dutton & Wentworth, 1846), 166–70.

<sup>14</sup> Wigginton, *Foxfire* 6, 402, 401–2; Zetta Barker Hamby, *Memoirs of Grassy Creek: Growing Up in the Mountains on the Virginia-North Carolina Line* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1998), 194.

<sup>15</sup> Robert L. Blue, Sr., *Little Boy Blue: The Childhood and Teenage Years of Robert L. Blue Sr., in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia* (Privately printed, 1999), 83; transcript of interview with Earley and Beulah Hopkins, 1 December 1980, 69, Patrick County Project, Special Collection, Newman Library, Virginia Polytechnical Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Va. (hereafter cited as "PCP"). The Patrick County Project conducted an extensive series of interviews of residents of Patrick County, Va., recording over fourteen shelf feet of audio cassettes. A large number of the audio tapes have been transcribed. Both tapes and transcripts have been indexed. A duplicate set of the tapes and transcriptions, and a partial index, also are located at the Blue Ridge Regional Library, Patrick Branch, Stuart, Va.

<sup>16</sup> Hamby, *Memoirs of Grassy Creek*, 194.

<sup>17</sup> Effie King Brown, "A Farm Year in Floyd County: Early 1900s, Locust Grove," *Journal of the New River Historical Society* 7 (1994): 3; Davis, *The Man Who Moved a Mountain*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Weygandt, *A Passing America*, 179–82. See his lyrical reminiscences of, and memorial to, the American chestnut in the chapter "The Doom of the Chestnut Tree," 175–92. Stupka mentioned that city boys would go to the Great Smoky Mountains to collect chestnuts. Arthur Stupka, *Great Smoky Mountains National Park*, Nation Park Service, Natural History Handbook Series No. 5 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960), 24.

<sup>19</sup> Wigginton, *Foxfire* 6, 401, 407. Memoirs often give the impression that the nuts were gathered primarily by children. Keep in mind, though, these are the recorded chestnut memories of people who were children at that time and that they tend to give us a child's perception of the trade.

<sup>20</sup> Wigginton, *Foxfire* 6, 403–4.

<sup>21</sup> Mary Beth Pedup, "Town and Country in the Transformation of Appalachian Kentucky," in *Appalachia in the Making*, 280; Durwood Dunn, *Cades Cover: The Life and Death of A Southern Appalachian Community, 1818–1937* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 26 (see pp. 63–97 for a discussion of the development of roads and the market economy in that region); Donald Edward Davis, *Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 195; *Message from the President*, 97.

<sup>22</sup> In 1909, the following items were accepted in barter by a general store in the Blue Ridge community of Vesta (Patrick County), Va.: eggs, live chickens, cows, hogs, rabbits, sheep, butter, corn, wheat, rye, oats, millet, beans, hams, bacon, beef, fresh apples, dried apples, chestnuts, chinquapins, yarn, hides (cow, raccoon, opossum), onions, potatoes, a hay stack, fodder, strawberries, honey, firewood, ginseng, lumber, sacks, boxes, a buggy, a watch, 5 days work roofing, mowing, buggy repairs,

and general "work." The most frequently accepted service was "hauling," which may have been used to get much of this stuff to the railroad station. Larkin G. Cockram Store (Vesta, Va.) accounts book, 1903–1912, Patrick County Historical Society Museum, Stuart, Va. (hereafter cited as "Cockram Store Accounts Book"). For a useful examination of farming in a North Carolina Blue Ridge county in the early twentieth century, see Elvin Hatch, "Delivering the Goods: Cash, Subsistence Farms, and Identity in a Blue Ridge County in the 1930s," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 9 (Spring 2003): 6–48.

<sup>23</sup> Maron Allen Edwards interview, PCP, Tape 1, Side 1, 324/260; Interview with Elder [Oscar] and Mrs. Oscar A. Harris, PCP, Tape 1, Side 2, 200; Abraham and Eula Helms interview, PCP, Tape 1, Side 2, 196/163; Josie G. Thomas interview, PCP, Tape 1, Side 2, 154/191. When two tape location numbers are shown, the first indicates the location as shown in the PCP index. The second number, on the right, indicates where I found it using my tape recorder. Tommy Largen, "Sawmilling in Carroll County, Virginia as Recalled by Ezra Martin," photocopied typescript, Carroll County Public Library, Hillsville, Va., 12.

<sup>24</sup> Gravatt, "The Chestnut Blight in Virginia," 13.

<sup>25</sup> Josie G. Thomas interview, PCP, Tape 1, Side 2, 154/91; Helms interview, -/175; Robert Samuel and Sally Slate interview, PCP, Tape 3, Side 1, 200/166. Cockram Store Accounts Book: 30 lbs accepted for \$0.90 credit, Sept. 30, 1909; 64 lbs accepted for \$1.28 credit, 2 October 1909.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, "A Farm Year in Floyd County," 4.

<sup>27</sup> See Joseph E. Morse, *Virginia's Country Stores: A Quiet Passing* (Manassas, Va.: E. M. Press, 1996), 13–25, photo of due bills on 14. See Eliot Wigginton and Margie Bennett, eds., "The General Store," *Foxfire* 9 (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1986), 83–206.

<sup>28</sup> Earley and Beulah Hopkins interview, PCP, Tape 1, Side 1, -/202; Gino Williams, Floyd County, personal communication, 19 May 2004; Elder and Mrs. Oscar A. Harris interview, PCP, Tape 1, Side 2, -/162.

<sup>29</sup> Ten cents per pound is a rough estimate of the resale value of the nuts to the general store owner before the costs of shipping and the wholesaler's commission are deducted. (See note 31 for the source of this figure.) My intention is to use a somewhat high resale value to generate a conservative estimate of the quantity of nuts traded.

<sup>30</sup> Gravatt, "The Chestnut Blight in Virginia," 13; Gertrude Blair, "Brief History of Floyd County," Virginia Writer's Project, typescript, Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library, Floyd, Va., 5; Maynard Calvin Conner and William K. Bing, *An Economic and Social Survey of Patrick County*, University of Virginia Record Extension Series, 11 (January 1937): 69, 66. Butter accounted for most of the dairy products sold.

<sup>31</sup> Southern Express Company shipping receipts (bills of lading) for chestnuts from Mayberry General Store, courtesy of Coy Lee Yeatts and Dale Yeatts, Meadows of Dan, Va. These records recently were transferred to the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va. The Yeatts operate the Mayberry Trading Post, Patrick County, Va., successor of Mayberry General Store. Note that these are loose receipts found in a drawer and the gaps in shipping dates suggest that this may be an incomplete record of shipments. The value shown on the receipts represent the estimated resale income to the store. Statements from a New York wholesaler, Parker & Allison, indicate that eight bags sold for a total of \$36.16 and nine bags for \$34.50. With an average weight per bag in 1914 and 1915 (see [Table 1](#)) of 42.8 lbs., the merchant received about \$0.11 and \$0.09 per pound, respectively. (After the expense of shipping and commissions were deducted, Mayberry General Store received \$27.92 and \$21.83, or \$0.08 and \$0.06 per lb. for these shipments.) Statements from Park & Allison Wholesale Commission Merchants dated 9 October and 28 October, Mayberry General Store, courtesy of Coy Lee and Dale Yeatts, Meadows of Dan, Va. No year was noted, but these lots correspond with the store's shipments of 20 September and 21 October 1915. A 1907 letter from a Philadelphia wholesaler to a resident of Pennick, Va., complained of the failing crop in the northeast and promises \$11.00–\$15.00 per bushel of chestnuts. E. R. Redfield & Co. to J. S. Elliott, 30 September 1907, Bedford County Historical Society Museum.

<sup>32</sup> *History of Patrick County, Virginia* (Stuart, Va.: Patrick County Historical Society, 1999), 359 (note the photo of the wagons at the railroad station on the same page); "Railroads in Patrick County," in *Patrick County, Virginia, Heritage Book, Vol. 1: 1791–1999* (Patrick County Heritage Book Committee, n.d.), 4–6. Store customer accounts books from the late nineteenth century, including one from Mayberry General Store, do not indicate the presence of a trade in chestnuts. W. Curtis Carter interview, PCP, Tape 1, Side 1, 436/329; Carter, statement made at Reynold Homestead Continuing Education Center, Patrick Co., 13 May 2003.

<sup>33</sup> "Personal Mention," *The Enterprise* (Stuart, Va.), 7 October 1915, 1; Hopkins interview, PCP, Tape 1, Side 1, 218/164. If the records represented in [Table 1](#) are complete, 1915 was a slow chestnut year, at least for one trader who experienced a decline of 30 percent compared to 1914.

- <sup>34.</sup> U. S. Census of Agriculture, 1910, Virginia, [Table 4](#); N. J. Giddings, [West Virginia Report], *The Conference Called by the Governor of Pennsylvania to Consider Ways and Means for Preventing the Spread of the Chestnut Tree Bark Disease* (Harrisburg: Aughinbaugh, 1912), 26. See the explanation of the Patrick County figure later in this essay.
- <sup>35.</sup> U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1910, Virginia, [Table 4](#); U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1930, Virginia, Table 8. Census reporting of nuts is not consistent from decade to decade. The 1900 census listed major orchard trees and then lumped all other nuts, including chestnut, under "Miscellaneous." The 1910 census lumped all nuts within a single figure. The 1920 census lumped nuts and fruits together, which makes the figure useless for this study, because these counties also produced apples and peaches. The 1930 census provided figures broken down by kind of nut, including chestnut.
- <sup>36.</sup> See note 29.
- <sup>37.</sup> U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1900, Virginia, Table 7, F. Census figures should be read with caution, given the traditional suspicion of the government held by mountain residents. It is likely that these figures underreport the trade.
- <sup>38.</sup> For a description of a commercial chestnut orchard in Pennsylvania, see Nelson F. Davis, "Chestnut Culture," in *The Conference*, 83–99.
- <sup>39.</sup> U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1910, Virginia, [Table 1](#). The high level of tenant farming shown for Patrick and Franklin counties reflects, in part, that they include Piedmont lowlands.
- <sup>40.</sup> See the Land Classification Map, Plate 37, in H. B. Ayers and W. W. Ashe, *The Southern Appalachian Forests*, U. S. G. S. Professional Paper No. 37 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1905).
- <sup>41.</sup> Ronald D. Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880–1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 96–99; Edward H. Davis and Edward B. Morgan, *The Virginia Creeper Trail Companion: Nature and History along Southwest Virginia's National Recreation Trail* (Johnson City, Tenn.: Overmountain Press, 1997), 47–68.
- <sup>42.</sup> Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 58–69; Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 104–6; Poindexter v. May, 98 Va. 143, 34 S.E. 971. The Poindexter v. May decision includes a useful review of the history of Virginia fence laws.
- <sup>43.</sup> Code of Virginia of 1924, 790–91; Code of Virginia of 1924, Sec. 3547; Poindexter v. May, 98 Va. 143, 34 S.E. 971.
- <sup>44.</sup> Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 162 (1968): 1243–48; Hardin, "An Operational Analysis of 'Responsibility'," in *Managing the Commons*, ed. Garrett Hardin and John Baden (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1977), 66–75.
- <sup>45.</sup> Arthur F. McEvoy, *The Fisherman's Problem: Ecology and Law in the California Fisheries, 1850–1980* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Brian Donahue, "'Dammed at Both Ends and Cursed in the Middle.': The 'Flowage' at the Concord River Meadows, 1798–1862," *Environmental Review* 13 (Fall/Winter 1989): 47–67; John T. Cumbler, "The Early Making of an Environmental Consciousness: Fish, Fisheries, Fisheries Commissions and the Connecticut River," *Environmental History Review* 15 (Winter 1991): 73–91; Jennifer Price, *Flight Maps: Adventures With Nature in Modern America* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 1–55. Habitat loss also played a role in the bird's extinction.
- <sup>46.</sup> David Feeney et al., "The Tragedy of the Commons: Twenty-Two Years Later," *Human Ecology* 18 (1990), 1–19; Thomas Dietz, Elinor Ostrom, and Paul C. Stern, "The Struggle to Govern the Commons," *Science* 302 (2003): 1907–12. See also, Bonnie J. McCay and James M. Acheson, eds., *The Question of the Commons: The Culture and Ecology of Communal Resources* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987); Elinor Ostrom et al., eds., *The Drama of the Commons* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 2002).
- <sup>47.</sup> *History of Patrick County, Virginia*, 43–44; Marshall Wingfield, *Franklin County Virginia: A History* (Berryville, Virginia: Chesapeake Book Co., 1964), 28; Helms interview, PCP, Tape 1, Side 2, -/172.
- <sup>48.</sup> Pedro Sloan, *The Way of Life in Turner's Creek Valley Sixty Years Ago* (1943 typescript; reprinted, Virginia: Franklin County Historical Society, 2004), 11; Michael B. Montgomery and Joseph S. Hall, *Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 125.
- <sup>49.</sup> Louise McNeill, *The Milkweed Ladies* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), 103.

- <sup>50.</sup> Chester and Erma McKenzie interview, PCP, Tape 5, Side 1, 373/320; Hopkins interview, PCP, Tape 7, Side 1, -/114. The transcript shows "steamed" instead of "cleaned." The word on the tape is clearly "cleaned." Max S. Thomas, *Walnut Knob: A Story of Mountain Life and My Heritage in Song* (Radford, Va.: Commonwealth Press, 1977), 47. Thomas's book is semi-fictional in nature, but he is respected locally for his historical lore.
- <sup>51.</sup> Louise Vanover Vore, "Dickenson County Va-Newspaper Articles, 1890–1900s," <http://ftp.rootsweb.com/pub/usgenweb/va/dickenson/newspapers/1890-001.txt>, [p. 13] (accessed 21 October 2003).
- <sup>52.</sup> Emily W. B. Russell, "Indian-set Fires in the Forests of the Northeastern United States," *Ecology* 64 (1983): 78–88; William A. Patterson III and Kenneth E. Sassaman, "Indian Fires in the Prehistory of New England," in *Holocene Human Ecology in Northeastern North America*, ed. George P. Nicholas (New York: Plenum Press, 1988), 105–35; Davis, *Where There Are Mountains*, 28–31; Brian Donahue, *Reclaiming the Commons: Community Farms and Forests in a New England Town* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 212; Jeffrey Kirwan, Forestry Department, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, personal communication, 30 March 2004; E. Lucy Braun, *Deciduous Forests of Eastern North America* (1950 reprint, New York: Free Press, 1974), 219, 232, 246.
- <sup>53.</sup> William Lynwood Montell, *The Saga of Coe Ridge: A Study in Oral History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970), 94. This racial feud began in 1888; see 91, 96. There was a history of racial tension between whites and the Coe Ridge community before this event.
- <sup>54.</sup> Franklin B. Hough, *Report Upon Forestry* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1878), 470; Gravatt, "The Chestnut Blight in Virginia," 6; Russell, "Pre-blight Distribution," 185.
- <sup>55.</sup> Hermann W. Merkel, "A Deadly Fungus on the American Chestnut," *New York Zoological Society Tenth Annual Report* (1906), 97–103. For general accounts of the chestnut and blight see: Davis, *Where There Are Mountains*, 192–98; Youngs, "'A Right Smart Little Jolt!"; David O. Smith, "American Chestnut: Ill-fated Monarch of the Eastern Hardwood Forest," *Journal of Forestry* 98 (February 2000): 12–15; George H. Hepting, "Death of the American Chestnut," *Journal of Forest History* 18 (July 1974): 61–67; Amanda Ulm, "Remember the Chestnut!" *American Forests* 54 (April 1948): 156–59, 190, 192.
- <sup>56.</sup> Roane, *Chestnut Blight*, 1–2; Joseph R. Newhouse, "Chestnut Blight," *Scientific American* 262 (July 1990): 106–11; G. F. and D. E. Gravatt, "Introduced Tree Diseases and Insects," in *Trees: The Yearbook of Agriculture, 1949* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), 447; "Chestnut Blight Caused by the Fungus *Endothia parasitica*," Forestry Commission Booklet No. 3 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1950), inside front cover.
- <sup>57.</sup> Gravatt, "Chestnut Blight in Virginia," 3, 7–9; Berlin Eye, "Forests of Warren County," in *An Economic and Social History of Warren County*, Elliot Clarke Haley, et al. (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia, 1943), 45.
- <sup>58.</sup> Chester and Erma McKenzie interview, PCP, Tape 5, Side 1, 373/320; Helms interview, PCP, Tape 1, Side 2, 196/163; Robert Samuel Slate and Sally Slate interview, PCP, Tape 3, Side 1, 200/166; Margaret Lynn Brown, *The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 99; Stupka, *Great Smoky Mountains National Park*, 23; Ulm, "Remember the Chestnut!," 192.
- <sup>59.</sup> Wigginton, *Foxfire* 6, 409; Carolyn and Jack Reeder, *Shenandoah Secrets: The Story of the Park's Hidden Past*, rev. ed. (Vienna, Va.: Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, 1998), 136; Davis, *Where There Are Mountains*, 196.
- <sup>60.</sup> Catherine Keever, "Present Composition of Some Stands of the Former Oak-Chestnut Forest in the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains," *Ecology* 34 (June 1953): 44–54; Thomas C. Nelson, "Chestnut Replacement in the Southern Highlands," *Ecology* 36 (April 1955): 352–53; Frank W. Woods and Royal E. Shanks, "Natural Replacement of Chestnut by Other Species in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park," *Ecology* 40 (July 1959): 349–61; J. Frank McCormick and Robert B. Platt, "Recovery of an Appalachian Forest Following the Chestnut Blight, or Catherine Keever—You Were Right!," *American Midland Naturalist* 104 (October 1980): 264–73; Stupka, *Great Smoky Mountains National Park*, 24–26.
- <sup>61.</sup> Gravatt, "Chestnut Blight in Virginia," 13; R. L. Humbert et al., *Industrial Survey of Floyd County* (Blacksburg, Va.: Engineering Extension Division, Virginia Polytechnical Institute, May 1930), 27; Ward Compton interview, RCG, F5; Harris interview, PCP, Tape 1, Side 2, 630/159; Alfred J. Stamm, "Chemicals From Wood," in *Trees*: 640; Gravatt, "Introduced Tree Diseases and Insects," 447.
- <sup>62.</sup> Campanella, *Republic of Shade*, 151.
- <sup>63.</sup> Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 239–68; Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, 106–10.

<sup>64</sup>. Judge Gino Williams, Floyd County, personal communication, 19 May 2004; Floyd County, Virginia, Board of Supervisors minutes, 11 August 1975; Floyd County Code Sec. 10–5; Patrick County, Virginia, Supervisors Order Book No. 9, 348; Franklin County, Virginia, Code 4.1 (ordinance approved 21 October 1997). The Floyd and Patrick ordinances closed the commons by defining property lines and streams as fences, regardless of whether a physical fence was present. The Franklin County code simply requires owners to prevent strays and to fence in their animals. This part of the ordinance may replace an earlier one. However, the code does not cite it (earlier ordinances are cited for other parts of this "Animal and Fowl" section of the code) and no one in the county supervisor's office or town clerk's office recalls an earlier ordinance of this sort. The hunting commons also are closing in response to cultural change as newcomers (called "foreigners" by local people), who do not share a family tradition of hunting, post their land against hunting.

<sup>65</sup>. Donald G. Young, county administrator, Grayson County, Virginia, personal communication, 14 May 2004, 21 June 2004; Ronald L. Newman, acting county administrator, Carroll County, Virginia, personal communications, 29 January 2004, 21 May 2004.

<sup>66</sup>. Thomas interview, PCP, Tape 1, Side 2, 154/91; Thomas, *Walnut Knob*, 47.

<sup>67</sup>. Williams, *Appalachia*, 312–14; Thomas E. Wagner, Phillip J. Obermiller, and Bruce Tucker, "Introduction," in *Appalachian Odyssey: Historical Perspectives on the Great Migration*, ed. Obermiller, Wagner, and Tucker (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2000), xi–xiii; Ruby Faries Arrington, *From the Mountains They Came—The Story of "Little Patrick"* (Privately published, 1994, copy in Blue Ridge Regional Library, Historical Center, Bassett, Va.), 56.

<sup>68</sup>. This is an early example of "ecological grief." See, Phyllis Windle, "The Ecology of Grief," in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, ed. Theodore Roszak, Mary E. Gomes, and Allen D. Kanner (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995), 136–45.

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