

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS
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Built in 1858, John Jackson Hannah cabin, Little Cataloochee (PHOTOGRAPH BY PETE PRINCE)

From Fact to Folklore to Fiction: Stories from Cataloochee

One of the more riveting stories to come out of Great Smoky Mountain folklore involves a cold-blooded killing of Union sympathizers by Confederate Captain Albert Teague during the waning days of the Civil War. On a raid into Big Creek, a section which could boast perhaps of only a dozen families in all, Teague captured three outliers of draft age, George and Henry Grooms and a simple-minded man named Mitchell Caldwell. The three were tied and marched seven miles over Mount Sterling Gap and down along the Cataloochee Turnpike near Indian Grave Branch where the men were executed by shooting. For many years a bullet-scarred tree remained as a gristly monument to these bewildered men. Before the men were killed, Henry Grooms, a noted Smoky Mountain fiddler, was forced by his captors to play a last tune on his fiddle, which, inexplicably, he had clutched as he stumbled along. Grooms chose the famous "Bonaparte's Retreat," which throughout the mountains was forever recalled as "The Grooms Tune."

(continued on page 2)



Page 4: the "mystery building"
(PHOTOGRAPH BY BOB LOCHBAUM)



Page 3: the Thompson Collection

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Stories from Cataloochee, continued

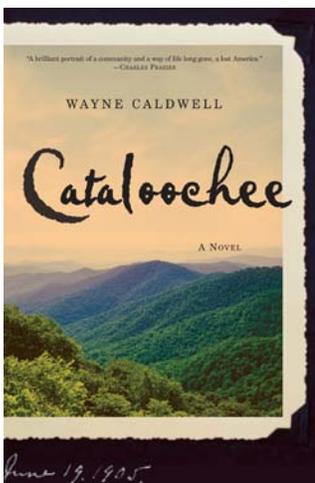
In his book, *The Early History of Haywood County*, Historian Clark Medford identified Groom's tune "as a sad one, running much to the minor key, musicians say. Dogs often howl whenever it is being played. But it evidently did not touch the hearts of the war-hardened scouts. For there in the shadows of 'Ol Starling,' Grooms held his cherished fiddle to his heart for the last time. Its sweet plaintive strains were scarcely hushed in the deep-wooded silence when the lives of Grooms and his two companions were hushed, too."

Smoky Mountain author Elizabeth Powers has observed in *Cataloochee: Lost Settlement of the Smokies* that this story has been recounted in so many dramatic versions that it has taken on all the aspects of a true folktale. She further speculates that it will live forever in the minds of Smoky Mountain folk. Power's speculation is precisely what occurs in Charles Frazier's award-winning novel *Cold Mountain*. In Frazier's version, the setting is moved from Cataloochee to nearby Cold Mountain and the name Stobrod is substituted for the fiddle-playing Grooms and Prangle for the simple-minded Mitchell Caldwell.

In Frazier's retelling, Stobrod played "a piece slightly reminiscent of Bonaparte's Retreat, which some named George Washington's tune. This was softer, more meditative, yet nevertheless grim as death. When the minor key drifted in it was like shadows under trees, and the piece called up something of dark woods, lantern light. It was awful old music in one of the ancient modalities, music that sums up a culture and is the true expression of its inner life."

It was afterward told that when Captain Teague ordered Grooms and Caldwell against the tree, the simpleton, Caldwell, stood and continued grinning at his captors as they were about

to shoot him. This so unnerved these "war-hardened" soldiers that they put his hat over his face, then shot him. It is curious who may have preserved this bit of Cataloochee history for



ABOVE: Book jacket, *Cataloochee* by Wayne Caldwell

RIGHT: Little Cataloochee Baptist Church, established in 1855, built in 1899 (PHOTOGRAPH BY PETE PRINCE)



Tub Mill on Indian (now Palmer) Creek, near where Camel was crushed by a falling rock slab (PHOTOGRAPH BY ALBERT "DUTCH" ROTH)

posterity since the two Grooms and Caldwell died at Indian Grave Branch; nevertheless it has survived sufficiently to be resurrected in Frazier's novel. Just prior to the execution, Teague instructed Pringle to "quit grinning." When the simpleton could not manage to change his facial expression, Teague ordered him to "Take off your hat. Hold it over your face." And when he did, "the Guard tripped the triggers and wood chips flew from the great poplar trunk where balls struck after passing through the meat of the two men."

Elizabeth Powers records several Smoky Mountains stories which, while not necessarily reaching the status of folklore, do provide fodder for more recent storytelling. Powers recounts a life-long Cataloochee mountaineer's account of Reverend William Camel, a preacher from Cosby, Tennessee, who went camping with another gentleman in a nice spot by a huge rock cliff along Indian Creek near the mouth of Lost Bottom Creek. "They hung their pack sacks up and gathered fire wood enough to last through the night. It was cool weather, spring time. And they built a huge bonfire against the rock cliff. I believe that the fire heated this rock, which was at least eight to ten feet in length and about ten inches thick, to a degree that caused this slab to fall down on its edges by the side of Reverend Wilson Camel, who was sleeping on the ground. The rock then turned over and covered Camel's body except one foot was out visible. The lone companion tried in vain to get the rock off of the Preacher."

Readers of Wayne Caldwell's recently published novel, *Cataloochee*, will quickly recognize that this story provides the basis for Caldwell's fictitious account of a Mr. Camel, a visiting fisherman from Cosby, who suffered a similar fate beneath a falling slab heated by a fire. In Power's account as well as Caldwell's retelling, it took several men and some of the larger boys from the school at Beech Grove to pry the heavy slab off of the unfortunate Camel's body.

Good fiction is often grounded in the chronicles of real human life. *Cold Mountain* and *Cataloochee* are no exceptions. Both are fascinating adventures into the rich repository of Smoky Mountain lore.

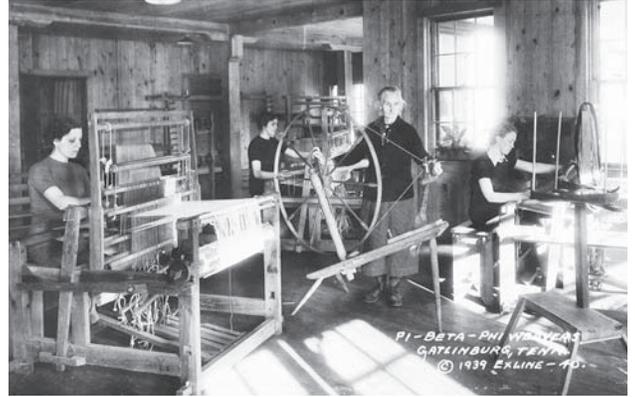
Update on the Thompson Brothers Photograph Collection

I am sure many of you would like an update on the long promised digital collection of Smokies photographs taken by Jim and Robin Thompson. The two Thompson brothers were prominent early to mid-twentieth century Knoxville photographers. Although the collection credits both brothers, the vast majority of the images were taken by Jim Thompson, well-known hiker and proponent of the national park in the Smokies.

The original digital collection was made possible through an agreement with the McClung Collection of the Knox County Library System which holds many of the Thompson photographs. Some time ago, we finished scanning the images from the McClung Collection and from a Jim Thompson album which is part of the Albert "Dutch" Roth Collection, UT Libraries Special Collections. Over the past year, we have been working to clean up the metadata or catalog records which would allow the collection to be searched online.

A few months ago, we received an email from Sheila Connor at the Arnold Arboretum at Harvard University, asking for information about Jim Thompson. She had found our Smokies website and knew that we were digitizing a Thompson photograph collection. The Arboretum, as it turns out, had a Jim Thompson photographic album in its collection. The album contained the inscription "Christmas 1940—To Kel—my old partner in crime, Devotedly Cam." Kel is most likely Harlen P. Kelsey, a member of the Southern Appalachian National Park Commission, while Cam is almost certainly Arno Cammerer, head of the National Park Service. After a comparison of the photographs in the album against our scanned image collection, we discovered, much to our delight, that the Arboretum album contained images that we did not have in our digital collection. Ms. Connor offered to loan us the album for scanning. She told us that Colorado College had a similar album.

We immediately contacted Jessy Randall at Colorado College, who also agreed to a loan of their album for scanning purposes. The Colorado album is stamped with the name Hubert Work, who was Secretary of the Interior in the 1920s. Upon the arrival of the Colorado album, we found additional unique images not in either our previously scanned collection or in the Arboretum



Lizzie Reagan with weaving students, 1939

Arrowmont Presents Historical Weaving Exhibition

The exhibition "Weaving a Life: The Gatlinburg Cottage Weaver's Industry" will be on display at the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in Gatlinburg now through January 5. The Pi Beta Phi fraternity for women began the Arrowcraft weaving program soon after the founding of their settlement school in 1912 to provide economic support for mountain families. It grew to be the largest cottage weaving industry in the U.S. The exhibition showcases the various weaving designs and products that were sold throughout the country via direct sales locally and to Pi Beta Phi alumni clubs as well as documents and photographs from the Arrowmont archives.

Earlier this year, both albums were scanned and metadata records were created for the unique images. The staff of the UT Digital Library, Bridger Dyson-Smith and Cricket Dean, have been working on a methodology to deliver the albums online in a format that preserves the integrity of the original items. Sometime early next year, the albums will be mounted online. The searchable collection of all the digital images will be available later in the year. While the discovery of the Thompson albums delayed the completion of the final product, the addition of the unique photographs and the albums will add a new layer of richness to an already outstanding collection of images.



Cataloochee (FROM THE THOMPSON COLLECTION)

Mystery Building in the Sugarlands

In the early years prior to the movement to establish a national park in the Great Smoky Mountains, much of the Sugarlands, that long gentle sweep of woodlands descending from the base of Bull Head, was cleared and inhabited by a few scattered settlement farms possessing log cabins, barns, fences, and other accoutrements of pioneer life. In time, Dave Ogle would build a store in the lower Sugarlands and higher up, the Pi Beta Phi fraternity would open a settlement school and build a teachers' cottage nearby. The state of Tennessee would commission a road through the Sugarlands. Up in the far reaches of the Sugarlands, the Indian Gap Hotel would be built to accommodate the influx of travelers hoping to reach the Chimney Tops, Alum Cave and other points on the higher slopes. Today, the road is abandoned, and the store, the school, the teachers' cottage, the hotel, and all the cabins, barns and outbuildings of the farms have been torn down—with one exception.

This one exception is an abandoned one-room house situated on a high bench overlooking Bear Branch. The house is a tall structure, constructed of stacked river rocks with a low sloping kitchen unit affixed to the back. It sports a large fireplace at one end and what appears to be an outside porch or deck on the opposite end. The building apparently had a wooden floor and a loft, but these, along with the roof, are completely gone.

The structure on Bear Branch is so unlike the typical log cabins and wood frame houses built by the pioneer settlers, that

it begs the question of who built the house and who lived in it. There is such a strong resemblance between this house and the stone teachers' cottage built by the Pi Beta Phi that one is tempted to suggest that the two buildings have something in common.

The easiest way to the house on Bear Branch is along the Old Sugarlands Trail beginning at the bridge that crosses over the Little Pigeon River near the Park Headquarters Building. Much of the lower part of the Old Sugarlands Trail follows the trace of the disused TN31 highway. At a junction 1.5 miles up the trail, the Old Sugarlands Trail veers sharply left and proceeds to Cherokee Orchard while the old road trace curls away to the right.



(PHOTOGRAPH BY BOB LOCHBAUM)

The old road proceeds approximately a quarter mile to a point where it splits, the right fork leading down to the river where TN31 once crossed on a bridge over the Little Pigeon and the left fork climbing up to a large cemetery. At this point, turning neither right toward the river nor left to the cemetery, but proceeding straight through the junction and on up into the Sugarlands, one will within the next half mile cross two small streams. The second, larger stream is Bear Branch. The stone house stands on the high level bench on the far side of the stream. The house is obscured by heavy vegetation and is not easily spotted from across the stream or below the bench.

Now this brings us back to our original question: What is the story behind the stone house on Bear Branch? Was it built at the same time as the nearby Pi Beta Phi teachers' cottage? Was the house lived in as a home or was it infrequently visited as a mountain retreat or perhaps as a hunting lodge? If you have any information or educated guesses about this house, please email us at smokies@utk.edu or call (865)974-2359. We will forward any information we receive in the next issue of the *Colloquy*.



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