

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS Colloquy

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Steve Cole, Sugarlands, Tennessee, tended many bee gums. Photograph by Joseph S. Hall, c. 1939. Courtesy of Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University. (From the Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English by Michael B. Montgomery and Joseph S. Hall, published by the University of Tennessee Press, 2004)

The Mountains Were Alive, with the Sounds of English

Other than a few park employees, no human beings live in the Smokies today. But when the park was established in the 1930s, several thousand people lived throughout the area, mainly in small communities and in homesteads up mountain creeks (*branches* as they're usually known there) and rivers. They spoke one of the country's most distinctive, but often misunderstood, forms of English, a dialect their descendants have continued to keep alive in nearby lowlands on the periphery of the park in Tennessee and North Carolina.

Today visitors drive and hike the steep inclines of the Smokies and learn that outside Cades Cove and a few other places mountain people had only primitive trails and stream beds for travel in the early twentieth century. These visitors can be forgiven for thinking that people were quite isolated from the outside world and that, as a result, their language and culture lagged far behind the rest of the country.

(continued on page 2)

DICTIONARY of SMOKY MOUNTAIN English



Michael B. Montgomery
Joseph S. Hall

Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English, Michael B. Montgomery and Joseph S. Hall. See the back cover for a chance to hear author Michael Montgomery and attend a book signing.

Great Smoky Mountains Colloquy is a newsletter published by The University of Tennessee Libraries.

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The Sounds of English, continued

From the
*Dictionary
of Smoky
Mountain
English*

bee gum. Originally a gum tree that housed a swarm of bees; hence a beehive fashioned from a hollowed section of the trunk of a black gum tree.

charm doctor. A person who can stop bleeding by reciting a formula (usually Exekiel 16:6).

woods colt. A child born out of wed-lock.

upscuddle. A quarrel.

fitified. Of a person or animal: subject to fits of temper or epilepsy, frozen with fear.

jedgmatically. In one's opinion, by one's estimate.

windshaken. A crack or twisted grain in timber, produced by high wind.

disfurnish. To inconvenience, discommode, deprive.

It's commonly thought that mountain speech was (and maybe still is) very old-fashioned—that it is akin to “Elizabethan English.” This romantic idea has some truth to it, but it is certainly far from the whole story. Like Shakespeare, mountaineers traditionally pronounced *service* as *sarvice* and said *afeard* and *holp* for *afraid* and *helped*. But for many reasons they could never be mistaken for the Stratford bard. For one thing, they inherited many terms from Ulster and Scotland, such as *residenter* “resident, old-timer,” *skiff* “thin layer of snow,” and *you'uns* “you all.”

Actually, mountain speech is more innovative than conservative—more of it is new than old. Mountaineers have been coiners par excellence of new words and expressions. Some of these, perhaps predictably, have involved items that early settlers found unfamiliar to their Old World background. A case in point is plant names, few of which were brought from the British Isles (or borrowed from the Cherokee, for reasons not easy to explain). One name that is well known is *hearts bustin' with love* (*Euonymus americanus*), called *strawberry bush* and many other things elsewhere.

Mountain speakers have long taken existing words and fashioned new words out of them. Sometimes this was by shortening them,

producing *splo* “homemade whiskey” (from *explode*, what the substance does in the head); *hippoes* “an imaginary or pretended ailment” (from *hypochondria*); or *batch* “of a man: to live in crude conditions” (from *bachelor*). Words and parts of words were combined in new ways, making *quitate* “to drop out of school” (from *quit* + *graduate*) or *endurable* “long-lasting” (from *endure* + *durable*). Or they were shifted from one part of speech to another, especially from nouns to verbs (*man-power* “to move by brute effort” or *meat* “to supply with meat,” as in “One hog will meat us all winter”).

Among the most memorable creations are fresh and earthy metaphors like *fly over a field and settle on a cow pile* “make a poor choice of a mate”; *kick* “to reject in courtship”; *cackleberry* “hen's egg”; and *charge it to the dust and let the rain settle it* “to forgive a debt”. There are vivid similes like *ugly as a mud fence daubed with chinquapins*, *meaner than a striped snake*, and *pretty as a speckled pup*. Animals are sometimes given names reflecting the sounds they make (*hoo owl* “hoot owl”; *knee deep* “bull frog”; *whistle pig* “ground hog”).

In addition, mountain terminology sometimes, as the saying goes today, “has an attitude.” This is seen in euphemisms like *woods colt* “bastard child” or even *gentleman cow* “bull.” It expresses wry criticism of certain types of pretentious folks, as *trunk Baptist* “a Baptist who keeps his/her membership certificate in a trunk, i.e. is not an active church-goer,” or *short sheriff* “a deputy who pretends to have more authority than is actually the case” (the term contrasts with *high sheriff*).

There's little doubt that mountain folks like to play with language and that they're good at it. Some years ago a residenter told me that he called himself a *hillbilly* because his ancestors had lived in the mountains for generations and “talked like Billy Shakespeare.” Who was I not to believe him?

Michael B. Montgomery
Co-author: *Dictionary of Smoky Mountains English*

Joseph Hall on a field trip to Cove Creek, North Carolina, to record mountain folk songs. Singers Zeb and Winfred Hannah are in the background. Photograph by Mary Halloran, c. 1939. Joseph S. Hall Great Smoky Mountains Original Recordings Collection (AFC 1987/035), Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress. (From the Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English by Michael B. Montgomery and Joseph S. Hall, published by the University of Tennessee Press, 2004)



While a graduate student at Columbia University, Californian Joseph Sargent Hall (1906-1992) was offered a three-month assignment to document colloquialisms and speech usages peculiar to the Great Smoky Mountains. What started as a doctoral dissertation soon expanded into life-long research as Hall returned to the Smokies periodically from 1940 until 1976, filling notebooks and making recordings of conversations, stories, traditional ballads, folk songs, hymns, and popular songs of the mountaineers. His efforts marked the beginning of the most extensive collection of southern mountain language much of which Hall later assembled in three popular volumes: *Smoky Mountain Folks and Their Lore* (1960), *Sayings From Old Smoky* (1972), and *Yarns and Tales From the Great Smokies* (1978). After visiting with Hall in 1990, Michael Montgomery agreed to carry on Hall's work, an effort that resulted in the recent publication of the Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English.

From Pi Phi to Arrowmont: A Smokies Project Partnership

The GSMRP has formed a partnership with Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in Gatlinburg to organize and create a digital presentation of the Arrowmont archives. The first phase of the partnership, which was completed this summer, was to organize the archival material, dating from the planning of the Pi Beta Phi School at the turn of the 20th century. In the second phase, selected items will be digitized and presented on the Internet as a part of the UT Digital Library Center. David Willard, Arrowmont director, Anne Bridges and Ken Wise, Smokies project directors, and Glen Bogart, principal of Pi Beta Phi Elementary School, are seeking grant funding for the second phase. The Arrowmont archives include many early photographs of Pi Phi activities, views of Gatlinburg and the surrounding communities, letters and diaries from early Pi Phi School teachers, and copies of the fraternity newsletter, the *Arrow*, which chronicled the development of the School. When completed, the online archives will provide a starting point for Smokies research and local school history projects.

Pi Beta Phi Settlement School, Gatlinburg, early 20th century.



Aslan Foundation Continues Support of Smokies Project

Knoxville's Aslan Foundation has continued its support for the Smokies Project with a substantial gift. The funds will be used to purchase material for the Great Smoky Mountains Regional Collection and support research on the various Smokies activities including the bibliography of pre-1935 material. We greatly appreciate the sustained support of the Aslan Foundation. For information on giving to the Smokies project, please contact Erica Clark, Director of Library Development, at 865-974-0037 or via email at ericaclark@utk.edu.

On the Smokies Bookshelf

Brewer, Carson. *A Wonderment of Mountains: The Great Smokies*. New Forward by Sam Venable. Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press, 2004. 198 pgs. ISBN: 1-57233-240-9. Reprint of 1981 edition.

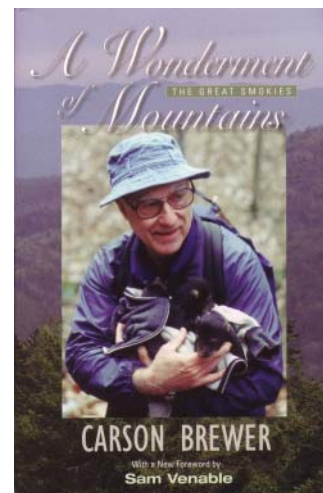
With the passing of Carson Brewer, *Knoxville News-Sentinel* columnist, in 2003, the Smokies people and places lost a true friend and advocate. Brewer collected hundreds of stories, both tall and real tales, in his travels around the region. He shared many of them over the years in his *KNS* columns. His writing is plain and simple but full of grace and gentle humor as he talks about the people who have inhabited the mountain regions of Tennessee, many of whom have also died since the faithful rendering of their stories by Brewer.

It is to Brewer's columns that one must turn to discover the art of panther hunting, the probable outcome of giving a knife to a sweetheart or the various medicinal uses for soot. He talks of the true joy of hiking in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park which "burns up calories, defogs the brain, makes the blood flow faster, lifts the spirit." (p. 41) While the scenery is spectacular, it is the hiking companions that interest Brewer the most as he relates memorable hikes with veteran hikers Margaret Stevenson, Dr. Elgin P. Kintner, John Stiles, and his favorite companion, his wife Alberta.

Venable's introduction to this edition is a welcome overview of Carson Brewer's life and accomplishments, details the modest Brewer would have been reluctant to reveal about himself. While many books have been written on the Great Smokies from the 18th century to the present and they will certainly be the topic of many books in the future, few will capture the true wonder of the mountains and their people as well as Carson Brewer.

Visit Our New Website

Tiffany Conner, Smokies project assistant, has been busy updating the project Website. Take a look at: www.lib.utk.edu/refs/smokies. The site includes links to various Smokies organizations and collections, links to digital projects, both from UT Digital Library and other sites, and links to current and past issues of the *Colloquy*.



COMING SOON TO THE UT DIGITAL LIBRARY:

Photographs of William Cox Cochran

During an August 1886 trip to East Tennessee, William Cox Cochran, a Cincinnati lawyer and amateur photographer, took 118 pictures, primarily of the Great Smoky Mountains Region. In 1959, his daughter donated the photographs to the UT Libraries. The photographs are currently undergoing a conservation treatment to flatten them. Each image is attached to a backing which has curved over the years. They will then be scanned and added to the UT Digital Library with the accompanying identifying information about the place, date and people in the photograph. After the scanning process is complete, they will be encapsulated in a mylar-like material and stored flat which will preserve them and prevent them from warping. When ready for public viewing, access to the digital mages will be through: diglib.lib.utk.edu/dlc.



GSM Colloquy

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JOIN US FOR A LECTURE BY AUTHOR

Michael B. Montgomery

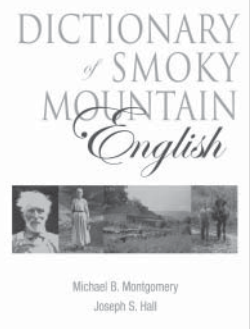
Distinguished Professor Emeritus of English
at the University of South Carolina

2 PM, SATURDAY, MAY 15

Hodges Library Auditorium
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Free and open to the public.
A reception and book signing
will follow the lecture.

THIS EVENT IS SPONSORED BY THE
UT PRESS, UT LIBRARIES, AND THE
EAST TENNESSEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY.



DID YOU MISS THE FALL 2003 ISSUE OF *COLLOQUY*?

We cannot blame the postal service for the missing Fall 2003 issue. The press of other job-related activities prevented us from completing a fall issue. We apologize.

Anne Bridges and Ken Wise
Smokies Project directors

PAST ISSUES OF THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS COLLOQUY ARE AVAILABLE AT OUR WEBSITE:

www.lib.utk.edu/refs/smokies/