

THE LAST GREAT TREES

THE ANCIENT FORESTS of Appalachia had always played an important role in the daily lives of the mountaineers, but with the coming of the railroads, the great trees took on a new importance. Since the earliest settlement, mountain farmers had cut some timber to clear fields and to construct buildings, fence lines, furniture, and farm implements. For generations, hogs and sometimes cattle had been turned out into the forests to graze on the mast of the huge chestnuts, oaks, and hickories. After the Civil War, many farm families had begun to engage in occasional cutting of timber for sale to local sawmills. Almost every mountain county during these years had at least one sawmill, which usually was combined with a gristmill and located along the banks of a stream. North Carolina mountain counties were typical of the region. Jackson County, for example, had seven of these mills in 1883, Haywood County had thirteen, and Ashe County had nineteen.¹ Prior to the 1890s, however, the market for sawed lumber had been localized; the technology employed was simple, and the amount of timber cut made only a slight impact upon the region's vast forest reserves.

X As late as 1900, over 75 percent of the southern Appalachian region remained in woodland. Although some of the largest walnut, cherry, and other figured hardwoods had been culled, most of the commercial timber was as yet untouched. Almost 10 percent remained in virgin condition.² Travelers through the region in the late nineteenth century commonly reported finding large stands of poplar, oak, spruce, hemlock, and chestnut, in which trees reached from 4 to

1. J. H. Chataigne, *Chataigne's North Carolina State Directory and Gazetteer, 1883-1884* (Raleigh, 1883).

2. U. S. Department of Interior, U. S. Geological Survey, *The Southern Appalachian Forests*, by H. B. Ayers and W. W. Ashe, Professional Paper No. 37 (Washington, D. C., 1905), 15; Horace Kephart Journal, vol. 1, 57, Horace Kephart Papers, Western Carolina Univ.

8 feet in diameter and more than 150 feet in height. "These are the heaviest and most beautiful hardwood forests of the continent," wrote Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson to President William McKinley in 1901. "In them species from east and west, north and south, mingle in a growth of unparalleled richness and variety. They contain many species of the first commercial value and furnish important supplies which cannot be obtained from any other region."³

X Such a storehouse of virgin timber could not long remain untapped in a nation moving rapidly toward industrialization. Following upon the heels of the promoters, the railroad builders, and the mineral men were agents representing northern lumber barons who had begun to cast covetous eyes on Appalachian timberlands.⁴ By the late 1880s, the timber resources of the Northeast and Great Lakes had begun to diminish as a result of industrialization and population growth, and northern lumber producers began to search other areas of North America for their timber supplies. Some looked to the virgin woodlands of Canada; others to the pine and cypress forests of the lower Mississippi and the Gulf Coast; but it was to the coves and ridges of the southern mountains that many of the timber interests turned for their future source of hardwoods.⁴ At first, they were content to acquire only the superior trees, but between 1890 and 1920 the X lumber barons purchased and cut over huge tracts of mountain timberland, devastating the region's forests in one of the most frenzied timber booms in American history. For thousands of mountaineers, the coming of the timber industry not only meant the loss of valuable woodland, but it meant the introduction of the first major form of X nonagricultural work as well. In many areas of Appalachia—especially the noncoal regions—the arrival of the lumbermen heralded the beginning of the new age.

EARLY LOGGING

Logging in the southern mountains passed through two distinct phases. The first, which began about 1880, was characterized by

3. Quoted in Kephart Journal, vol. 1, 57.

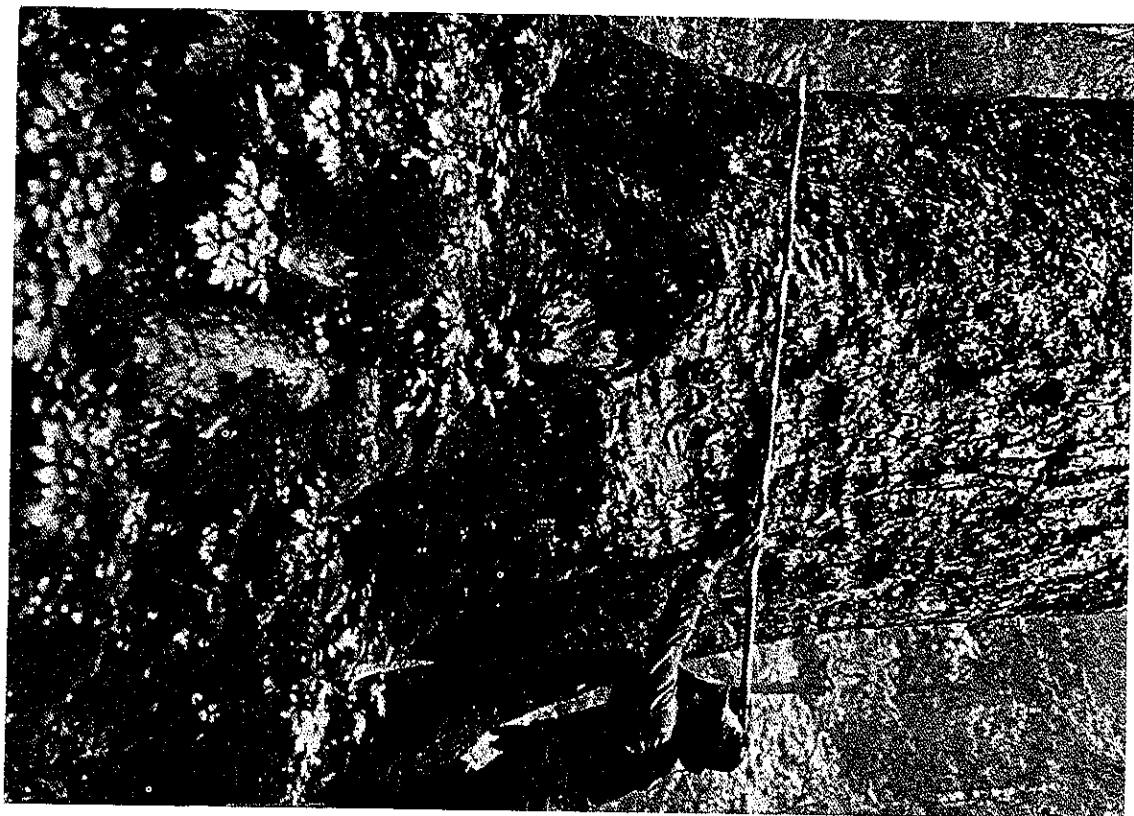
4. *Manufacturers' Record* 13 (18 Feb. 1888), 14. See also Robert S. Lambert, "Logging the Great Smokies, 1880-1930," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 21 (Dec. 1961), 350-63; Jarner W. Silver, "Hardwood Producers Come of Age," *Journal of Southern History*, 23 (1957), 427-53; Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberland*, 61-69.

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selective cutting of choice trees in areas along the more accessible rivers and streams. Long before they established their first sawmills in the region, the northern lumber barons began to send scouts into the mountains to search out and purchase the best hardwood trees. Riding into the hollows on horseback, these scouts located, acquired, and branded the largest black walnut, yellow poplar, and ash trees and wood that had begun to disappear in northern forests.) This timber was then felled and transported to portable sawmills or floated down the river to large mills and distribution centers in flatland towns. In this manner, trees of exceptional quality were removed before major operations began. Fifty cents a foot across the stump was the average price paid to local farmers for such trees—a four-foot tree bringing two dollars.⁵

This period of selective cutting did not substantially alter the economy or lifestyles of the mountaineers. The outside timber companies were not yet prepared to buy large tracts of land or stumpage, or to build expensive sawmills in the mountains. This would come later, when the more accessible forests had been expended and the demand for lumber was at its peak. During the early period of logging operations, the companies relied primarily on water transportation and on the seasonal labor of mountain farmers. Only a few large mills were constructed within the region, and these were located along the trunk lines of major railroads. One of the larger mills was built at St. Albans in Kanawha County, West Virginia, and received logs that were floated down the Coal and the Kanawha rivers.⁶ Another was established at Waynesville, North Carolina, along the line of the Western North Carolina Railroad in Haywood County. It received quantities of walnut, cherry, and oak supplied by local residents.⁷

Most of the timber cut in the mountains during the 1880s and 1890s was felled by farm families during the slack season in agriculture and transported to big mills at cities such as Nashville, Frankfort, and Cincinnati. Logging became an important source of supplementary income to farm families living along the headwaters of the Tennessee, Kentucky, Big Sandy, and Cumberland rivers, or to anyone who was willing to transport logs over the rugged mountain roads by



A Great Yellow Poplar in Southwest Virginia. Courtesy of the Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University.

5. Stanley F. Horn, *This Fascinating Lumber Business* (New York, 1943), 108.
6. Roy B. Clarkson, *Tumult on the Mountain: Lumbering in West Virginia, 1770-1920* (Parsons, W. Va., 1964), 49.
7. Lambert, "Logging the Great Smokies," 353-54.

wagon. The early timber buyers usually purchased their trees "on the stump" and made arrangements with the seller to deliver the logs to the sawmill. This was generally accomplished in one of two ways. The farmer and his sons could "snake" the huge logs out of the mountains with a team of oxen and carry them to portable sawmills installed for that purpose, or he could drag the logs to the head of a creek and let the spring rains carry his product to market.

The latter method proved to be the most popular and resulted in the construction of a number of "splash dams" along tributaries of the larger creeks. A splash dam was an earthen dam built across a stream above the area being logged. A large gate made of straight poles was constructed in the middle of the dam, and after the logs were dumped into the creek below, the poles were pulled out, allowing the water to carry the logs out into the main waterway.⁸ Occasionally, several splash dams would be built on the tributaries of the same creek and would be opened in such a way that all of the logs converged on the main stream at one time, forming a great mass of rocks, water, and timber that roared down the hollow, stripping the creek banks of everything in its path. "They'd let that water open," remembered one mountaineer, "and we lived upon the creek and . . . it just look[ed] like a big thunder cloud a comin'." As it came it raised them logs right off of that water and took 'em right on down the river."⁹

Unfortunately, the splash dam technique not only destroyed the creek bank, it also resulted in considerable loss of logs along the way. Families who lived close to the larger streams, therefore, often chose to tie their logs together into long rafts that were ridden with the spring "fides" down the slow-moving rivers to sawmills in the bluegrass. The average raft would carry about 70 logs, but giant rafts of 100 to 150 logs were not uncommon. Small shelters were sometimes built on the rafts, and oars 20 to 50 feet long were placed on the ends to permit steering.¹⁰ On a clouded and rainy morning in March or April, the mountain men would set off with their rafts on the long

journey to the sawmill towns. After trading in the valley communities, they would walk back to their mountain farms to put in another crop and fell more trees to be rafted downstream again the following spring.¹¹ By the 1890s, logs or rafts were being floated out of all of the mountain counties of Kentucky and many of the counties in West Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina.¹² Rafting was so popular in parts of Kentucky that at times the mouths of the Cumberland and Big Sandy rivers were blocked for miles by solid lines of rafts. In the spring of 1903, before the arrival of the coal industry in northeast Kentucky, more than one thousand Big Sandy rafts were reported to have touched at Catletsburg on their way to Cincinnati.¹³

Early logging operations of this kind provided mountain farmers with additional income, but they did not change the agricultural rhythms of daily life. Mountain men had always engaged in seasonal work in the woods—hunting, clearing fields, cutting fence posts, and the like. Now they received added cash income for their efforts. Work continued to be done, moreover, on a family basis, rather than by logging crews. Neither did selective cutting threaten the overall character of mountain timber or destroy the chance for its reproduction. Many of the lower creeks were stripped of their choicest trees, but the high ridges and remote coves were left untouched. Unlike conditions left by later logging operations, no large areas were completely denuded of timber, and fires directly attributable to logging were rare.¹⁴

From the perspective of outside lumber producers, however, such logging practices were economically inefficient. The percentage of logs lost between the mountains and the sawmills was high. Some were damaged by floods or the accidental breaking of splash dams, while others took years to work their way downstream, arriving at the mill waterlogged and worthless. But the greatest problem for the

11. For an interesting description of logging and rafting practices in eastern Kentucky, see John Fox, Jr., *Blue-Grass and Rhododendron*, 59-61.

12. Clarkson, *Tumult on the Mountain*, 49; Lambert, "Logging the Great Smokies," 352-53; Steven A. Schultman, "The Lumber Industry of the Upper Cumberland River Valley," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 32 (Fall 1973), 260-62.

13. Schultman, "The Lumber Industry," 262; Gibson, "The Economic History of Boyd County, Kentucky" 34; Chapman, "The Influence of Coal in the Big Sandy Valley," 23.

14. Lambert, "Logging the Great Smokies," 333.

8. Gibson P. Vance, "Logging and Lumbering in Washington County, Virginia," unpublished MS, 1965, vertical files, Emory and Henry Oral History Project, Emory and Henry College, 11.

9. American Jarrell, Bandytown, W. Va., interview by Gary Miller, 26 Feb. 1973, Appalachian Oral History Project, Special Collections, James E. Morrow Library, Marshall University, 9.

10. Clarkson, *Tumult on the Mountain*, 48-49; Gibson, "The Economic History of Boyd County, Kentucky," 34.

producers was the uncertainty of supply, which kept many mills shut down during the dry seasons of the year.¹⁵ As the demand for hardwood timber burgeoned, therefore, many of the lumber companies began to supplement their existing operations by acquiring tracts of timberlands in unexploited areas of the mountains. After hiring a logging crew, opening a sawmill, and constructing a timber camp, the company was ready to engage in the sustained production of lumber. These initial companies were subsequently joined by other larger companies, preparing the stage for the second phase of logging in the mountains—the systematic cutting of the remaining timber by large, well-integrated operations.

The purchase of timberland by the companies and the removal of the mills to the site of logging operations were made possible by the opening up of the region by the major railroads. After 1890, most of the railroads had continued to build branch lines deeper into the mountains, enabling the lumber companies to establish their mills close to the source of the timber supply. By adding their own logging railroads to the branch lines, the lumbermen were able to reach the most remote hollows and coves. The money behind this new expansion, like that which had backed the earlier phase of the timber industry's development, was primarily from the North. The outside lumber interests were willing to commit the capital for land acquisition, railroad construction, and labor costs, but they expected high rates of production that could not be achieved by selective cutting. Over the next three decades, the production methods used by these companies resulted in rapid removal of almost all of the region's valuable timber and left the land scarred, burned over, and eroded beyond any level attained with the limited logging practices of the local population.

With the decline of selective cutting, moreover, the production of timber in the mountains was no longer just a seasonal extension of agriculture. As logging shifted from a family enterprise to a highly integrated industrial operation, mountain men spent more and more time away from the farm living in the timber camps and logging towns. By 1906, when large-scale operations were in full swing, there were over 10,000 men employed full time in logging in eastern

15. See *Manufacturers' Record* 68 (9 Sept. 1915), 43. According to the editors of this magazine, "Possibly no other line of endeavor is so wholly dependent upon volume for profits as lumber. . . . Therefore, the ability to operate an efficient plant full time during dull periods is essential to the success of a sawmilling enterprise."

Kentucky alone.¹⁶ The new form the industry took after 1890 was to have a greater impact upon the land and people of southern Appalachia than any of the mountain residents had envisioned.

THE TIMBER BOOM: 1890-1920

The great timber boom in the mountains had its origins in the last years of the nineteenth century, as northern lumbermen began to acquire land and standing timber in the region. For the most part, the owners of the small, semiportable sawmills were obliged to purchase their timber on the stump from other landowners, while the larger companies preferred to cut from their own extensive tracts.¹⁷ As early as 1885, land and timber companies were being organized to purchase tracts of from 30,000 to 300,000 acres within a decade, competition for the best timberlands became intense.

In eastern Kentucky, northern companies began to buy timber property in the Big Sandy Valley as early as 1888. In that year, the Thomas Lumber Company and the Chicago Lumber Company acquired tracts in Floyd County and began to cut logs for the Cincinnati market.¹⁸ Three years later, in 1891, the Yellow Poplar Lumber Company of Ironton, Ohio, came to the area and began to purchase large amounts of land along the headwaters of the Big Sandy River. The largest lumber company to operate in the Big Sandy Basin, the Yellow Poplar Lumber Company, owned land not only in eastern Kentucky but also in Dickenson County, Virginia, and Logan and Mingo counties, West Virginia, as well. At its Dickenson County property, the company constructed a huge concrete splash dam near the mouth of Bartlick Creek on Russell Fork, and during the first nine months of its operation loggers put into the Big Sandy River about forty million board feet of choice poplar logs. The dam remained in use until the company ceased operations in 1917.¹⁹

The completion of the Kentucky Union Railroad from Lexington to Breathitt County in 1891 opened the timberlands of much of the

16. The *Lexington Herald*, 16 Dec. 1906, quoted in Watson, "Economic and Cultural Development of Eastern Kentucky," 132.

17. Kenneth B. Pomeroy and James G. Yoho, *North Carolina Lands: Ownership, Use, and Management of Forest and Related Lands* (Washington, D.C., 1964), 21.

18. Sealf, *Kentucky's Last Frontier*, 214-15.

19. *Ibid.*, 216-18; Cubby, "The Transformation of the Tug and Guyandot Valleys," 136.

central portion of eastern Kentucky to lumbermen. The owners of the Kentucky Union Railroad, one of whom was F. D. Carley of the Standard Oil Company, controlled about 300,000 acres of hardwood forests along the line of the new road.²⁰ After the turn of the century, these properties became the site of extensive logging operations. Jackson, the largest town in Breathitt County, increased its population fivefold in the decade after the coming of the railroad and became the location of a number of large sawmills, a flooring mill, and a planing mill. Nearby, a Canadian firm built the short-lived timber town of Royalton on the Breathitt-Magoffin County line, and a Cincinnati company, Mowbray and Robinson, developed about 60,000 acres of forest in Leslie and Clay counties.²¹

Similar developments followed the extension of the Cumberland Valley branch of the L&N Railroad into southeastern Kentucky. The events around Middlesborough in the 1890s stimulated the growth of large developments in Whitley, Knox, and Bell counties. Although the American Association, Ltd., owned much of the best timberland, many smaller companies leased land from the association for the production of crossites, lumber, shingles, tanbark, and other materials.²² By 1910, neighboring Knox County had thirty sawmills in full operation, including those of the Southern Pump Company, the Indian Lumber Company, the Pine Mountain Coal and Lumber Company, and the Bauer Cooperative Company.²³

One of the largest and most successful of the lumber companies that operated in southeast Kentucky was founded in 1890 by Thomas Jefferson Asher of Clay County. The T. J. Asher and Sons Lumber Company operated a large bandmill near Pineville in Bell County and eventually acquired thousands of acres of timberland in surrounding counties. In 1896, the Asher interests were bought out by the Burt and Brabb Lumber Company, owned by Michigan capitalists. The latter firm had been purchasing mineral and timber properties in Leslie and Harlan counties for several years, acquiring some tracts for as little as twenty cents an acre.²⁴ After selling his lumber

20. *Manufacturers' Record* 14 (3 Nov. 1888), 13.

21. Watson, "Economic and Cultural Development of Eastern Kentucky," 134-35; *Manufacturers' Record* 70 (9 Nov. 1916), 59.

22. Howard, "Chapters in the Economic History of Knox County, Kentucky," 23.

23. *Ibid.*, 7, 27.

24. James Henry Jeffries to Mrs. Charles W. Burt, 7 Dec. 1937, Correspondence, and "Abstracts of Titles of the Burt and Brabb Lumber Company's Eastern

company to the Michigan group, T. J. Asher invested in about 50,000 acres of coal lands in Bell and Harlan counties and established the Asher Coal Company, which operated mines at Colmar, Varilla, Tejay (named after Asher), Coxton, Wood, and Chevrolet. Elected judge in Bell County for several terms, Asher made a considerable fortune from his coal and lumber properties. According to the historian of Bell County, he was "by far the leading industrialist . . . and one of the greatest businessmen southeastern Kentucky ever produced."²⁵

The practice of combining coal and lumber interests became common in eastern Kentucky after 1900, as land companies sought to exploit both the mineral and timber wealth of their properties. In 1912, for instance, bankers from New York and Toronto, Canada, created the Kentucky Coal and Timber Development Company to develop 90,000 acres of land they had acquired in Breathitt and Knott counties. In Bell County, the Pine Mountain Coal and Lumber Company was organized to engage in both mining and logging activities.²⁶ Perhaps the best known example of this practice, however, was the Stearns Coal and Lumber Company of Ludington, Michigan, which came to eastern Kentucky in 1903 to develop 113,000 acres of coal and timberlands. Founded by Justus S. Stearns, a wealthy lumber baron, the Stearns Coal and Lumber Company built the big company mining and timber town of Stearns in McCreary County and operated mines and logging camps in Whitley and Wayne counties, Kentucky, and Fentress and Scott counties, Tennessee. The company erected a giant lumber mill at Stearns and maintained a private railroad that stretched for almost thirty miles, connecting the company's vast interests.²⁷

Other areas of the southern Appalachian coal fields also experienced significant timber booms before the arrival of the coal industry. Most of the counties contiguous with the lines of the C&O and N&W in southern West Virginia began to market lumber shortly after the arrival of the railroads. The major absentee land companies of that

Kentucky Lands," Burt and Brabb Lumber Company Papers, Univ. of Kentucky, Box 7, no. 73W4.

25. Fuson, *History of Bell County*, 370.

26. *Manufacturers' Record* 62 (1 Aug. 1912), 71; Howard, "Chapters in the Economic History of Knox County, Kentucky," 27.

27. *Manufacturers' Record* 43 (18 June 1903), 439; *ibid.*, 58 (27 Oct. 1910), *ibid.* 78 (11 Nov. 1920), 117.

section—the Flat Top Coal Land Association, the Beaver Coal Company, and the Guyandot Coal Land Association—leased land not only for coal mining but for timber production as well. The land that was not purchased by the railroads or the coal men was quickly bought up in the 1890s by commercial timbermen. According to the West Virginia State Board of Agriculture in 1900, “alien owners” controlled 75 percent of the saleable timber in Wyoming County, 66 percent of that in Logan County, 60 percent in Mingo County, and 40 percent in McDowell County.²⁸

The most extensive logging operations in West Virginia were established north of the New River in Tucker, Pocahontas, and other counties, but large lumber companies also operated throughout southern West Virginia.²⁹ In the Tug and Guyandot valleys, three companies controlled most of the lumber production: the Little Kanawha Lumber Company, a Maine corporation; the Yellow Poplar Lumber Company; and C. Crane and Company of Cincinnati.³⁰ The W. M. Ritter Lumber Company, owned by William McClellan Ritter of Pennsylvania, held large tracts of timberland in Mingo, McDowell, Wyoming, and Mercer counties, West Virginia, as well as land in nearby Pike County, Kentucky, and Buchanan County, Virginia. Ritter constructed his first sawmill in 1890 at Oakvale in Mercer County and later built one of the only company-owned timber towns in southern West Virginia at Maben in Wyoming County.³¹ Before the end of the great timber boom, the Ritter Lumber Company became one of the largest hardwood producers in the country and the owner of timberlands in almost every state of the Appalachian South.³²

In southwest Virginia, the evolution of the timber industry followed a pattern similar to that in Kentucky and West Virginia, rising in the 1890s and reaching a peak shortly after the turn of the century. About the time that W. M. Ritter was opening his first sawmills in

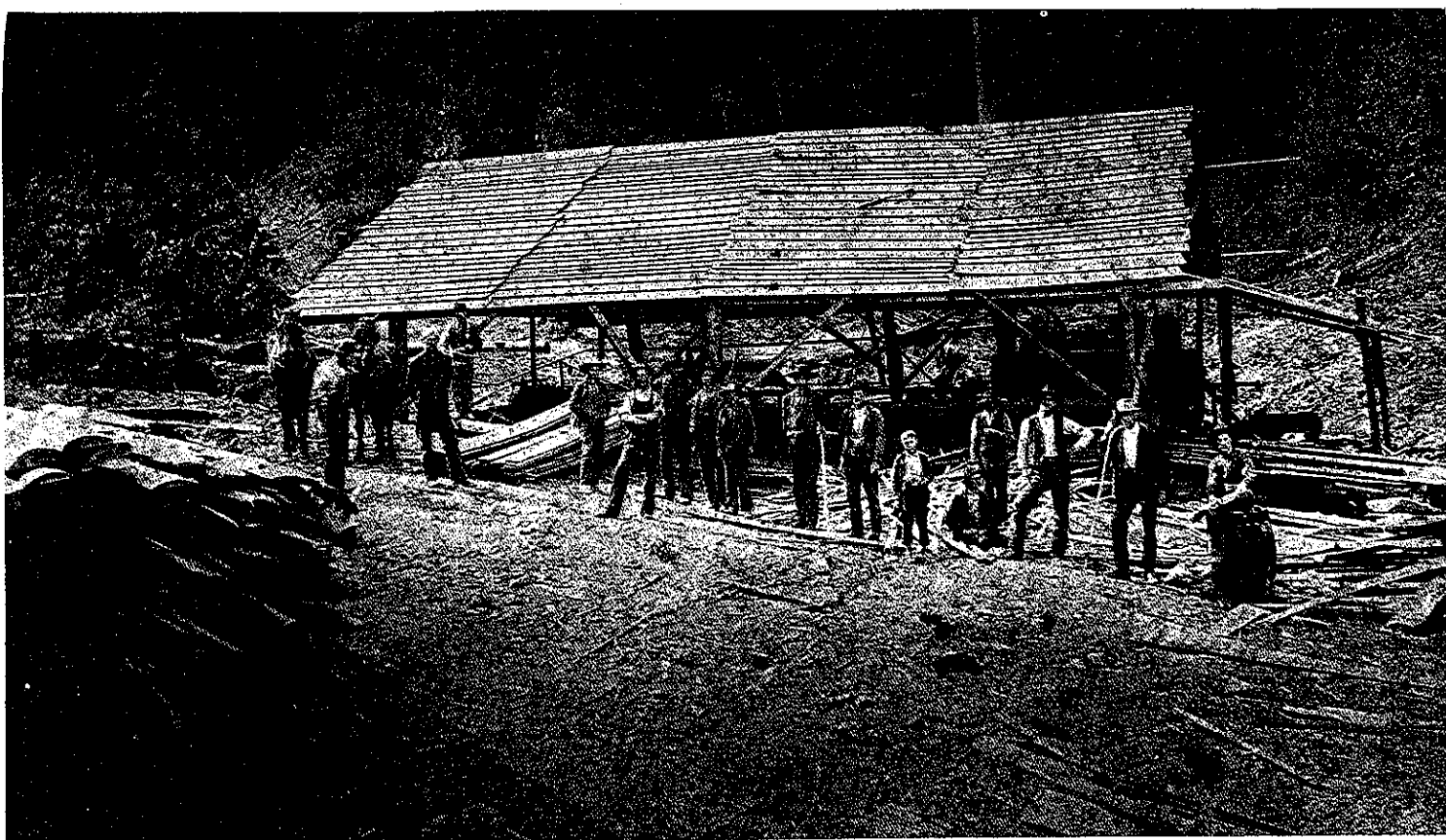
28. State Board of Agriculture of West Virginia, *Fifth Biennial Report, 1899–1900*, quoted in Cubby, “The Transformation of the Tug and Guyandot Valleys,” 139.

29. See Clarkson, *Timber on the Mountain*, for the history of the timber industry in northern West Virginia.

30. Cubby, “The Transformation of the Tug and Guyandot Valleys,” 135–36; Walter R. Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia: A Brief History* (Morgantown, W. Va., 1964), 18.

31. Clarkson, *Timber on the Mountain*, 96–97.

32. William M. Ritter Lumber Company, *The Romance of Appalachian Hardwood Lumber* (Columbus, Ohio, 1940), 13–15, 30–33.



Millhands at a Small Sawmill in Southwest Virginia. Courtesy of George Stevenson, Emory, Virginia.

Mercer County, West Virginia, a syndicate of Wisconsin timber operators began to produce lumber from about 26,000 acres of timber property in neighboring Giles County, Virginia.³³ Subsidiaries of the N&W Railroad leased timberland to a number of small operators along its line, and later the Clinchfield Timber Corporation, an affiliate of the Clinchfield Railroad, developed almost 25,000 acres of forest in Scott and Wise counties.³⁴ Much of the lumber produced in the coal counties of Virginia was utilized in the construction of railroads, company towns, tipples, and other needs of the expanding coal industry, but in the noncoal counties of Smyth, Grayson, and Washington to the south, commercial timber production became an important part of the local economy.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, practically all of the timberland in these counties passed into the hands of outside interests, which after 1900 began rapidly to develop the properties. One of the largest landholders was the Douglass Land Company of New York, controlled by the heirs of George Douglass. The company was founded in 1893 to develop 113,000 acres of land in southwest Virginia, and it subsequently began to lease land to northern lumbermen.³⁵ Pennsylvania interests acquired some of the best of the Douglass lands on White Top Mountain, Mount Rogers, and the upper valley of the Laurel Fork of the Holston River, and established lumber companies at both ends of the property. The Laurel River Lumber Company operated out of Damascus, and the United States Spruce Lumber Company worked out of Marion.³⁶

Other Pennsylvania lumbermen established the Damascus Lumber Company in 1904 and the Hassinger Lumber Company east of Damascus in 1905. The latter company built a sawmill and company town at Komarock, and the Grayson Lumber Company built similar facilities at nearby Fairwood.³⁷ Logging operations became so intense in the Mount Rogers area after 1900 that a logging railroad was constructed from Abingdon in Washington County to West Jefferson in Ashe County, North Carolina, to provide an outlet

for finished lumber. The Virginia-Carolina Railroad—or the Virginia Creeper, as the little railroad was called—further opened up the forests along the Virginia-North Carolina border, transforming the local economy into a bustling lumber products center.³⁸

These activities in the Blue Ridge counties of southwest Virginia were the precursor of the great logging operations that descended on the mountains of Tennessee, North Carolina, and Georgia after the turn of the century. As the timber industry completed its work in the Cumberland Plateau, it increasingly turned its attention to the magnificent forests of the Great Smoky Mountains and southern Blue Ridge, leaving behind only the ravaged hillsides and occasional scrub oaks to be used for mining props by the emergent coal industry.

The lumbermen had launched the new era in the coal fields, but their impact was soon subsumed by the mining of coal. In fact, the Appalachian timber boom reached its peak not in the coal fields, but rather in the logging operations of the Smokies, and there it would have its greatest effect upon the lives of mountain people.³⁹

The mountain farmers of the Blue Ridge, like their counterparts in West Virginia and Kentucky, had long engaged in selective logging, but it was not until the coming of the railroads that developments began to stir on a large scale. The major event in the history of western North Carolina in the late-nineteenth century, for example, was the arrival of the Western North Carolina Railroad in Asheville on 3 October 1880. The railroad had been twenty-five years in the making, and its construction had been marred by tragedy, war, political intrigue, and considerable human sacrifice.⁴⁰ Many in Asheville believed that, with the coming of the iron horse, their region would at last "get into step with other sections of the country that were going forward in the march of progress."

The railroad was soon extended west of Asheville in two directions. The northern branch reached Paint Rock on the Tennessee line in 1882, providing connections with the East Tennessee Vir-

33. *Manufacturers' Record* 26 (21 Sept. 1894), 118.
34. *Ibid.* 64 (4 Dec. 1913), 64.

35. Gibson P. Vance, "Lumbering in Washington County," 4-5.

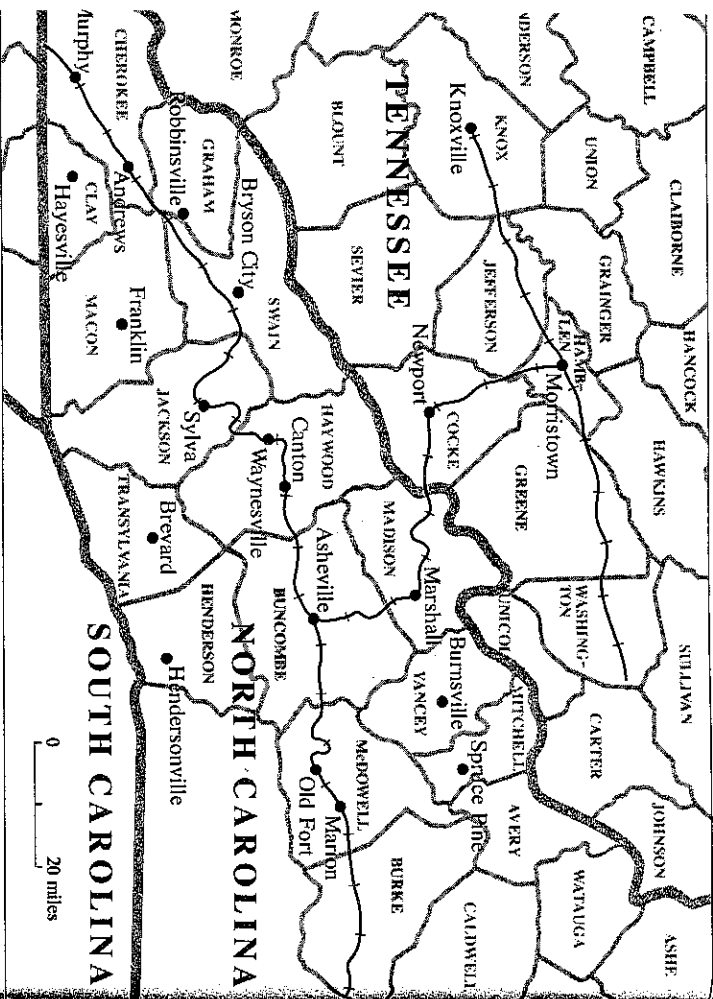
36. *Manufacturers' Record* 60 (7 Dec. 1911), 68.

37. Vance, "Lumbering in Washington County," 20-22; J. Richard Campbell, interview by Cynthia Legard, 27 Aug. 1973, Emory and Henry Oral History Project, Transcript no. 86, Emory and Henry College, 3-4.

38. Gibson P. Vance, "An Unique Little Railroad: The Virginia Creeper," unpublished paper, Emory and Henry Oral History Project, Emory and Henry College, n.d., 1-4.

39. William Donaldson Cotton, "Appalachian North Carolina: A Political Study 1860-1889" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of North Carolina, 1954), 37-38; Ina Woollenmyer Van Noppen and John J. Van Noppen, *Western North Carolina Since the Civil War* (Boone, N.C., 1973), 256-61.

40. Quoted in Dudley W. Crawford, "The Coming of the Railroad to Asheville 70 Years Ago," *Asheville Citizen*, 29 Oct. 1950.



6. The Western North Carolina Railroad

ginia, and Georgia Railroad to Knoxville, and the southern branch was constructed to Waynesville in 1884 and to Murphy on the Georgia border in 1890, where it connected with the L&N.⁴¹ The completion of these two branch lines opened up the timberlands of western North Carolina and north Georgia to exploitation. Anticipating the arrival of the railroad, for instance, a group of Minnesota capitalists organized the North Georgia Land Company and began acquiring tracts of land in Pickens, Fannin, Gilmer, and Murray counties, Georgia.⁴² Similar speculations occurred in western North

41. Cotton, "Appalachian North Carolina," 38-39.

42. *Manufacturer's Record* 13 (17 March 1888), 30.

Carolina, especially after the reorganization of the railroad as the Southern Railway Company in 1894.⁴³

The most dramatic developments, however, occurred in the little mountain town of Asheville. Shortly after the coming of the Western North Carolina Railroad, another line was completed from Spartanburg, South Carolina, to Asheville, turning that and nearby communities such as Tryon, Hendersonville, and Brevard into major tourist centers. Asheville, with a population of only 2,000 in 1880, experienced phenomenal growth, becoming a city of 10,000 by 1890.⁴⁴ Soon, tourists by the thousands were pouring into the city for the purported health benefits of its mountain air, water, and climate. As Asheville grew into a major health resort, it also became an important stop for speculators and lumbermen interested in mountain lands. During the next decade, the growth of land sales and logging operations in western North Carolina was staggering.

One of the first outsiders to establish logging operations in western North Carolina was C. F. Buffum, a lumberman from Maine. Buffum had operated sawmills on the Penobscot River in Maine, but the dwindling supply of timber in that area led him to western North Carolina, where in 1888 he set up a bandmill on the Tuckasegee River in Jackson County. His mill was the first of many bandmills in the area.⁴⁵ Later that same year, another company, the Linville Land, Manufacturing, and Mining Company of Wilmington, North Carolina, laid out the town of Linville in present Avery County and began to cut timber from the surrounding forests. By 1890, the Unaka Timber Company of Knoxville had bought up tracts of timberland in Yancey, Mitchell, Buncombe, and Madison counties, and a Glasgow firm, the Scottish Carolina Timber and Land Company, purchased 120,000 acres of land in Haywood and Madison counties to supply its mill and log boom in Newport, Tennessee.⁴⁶ In 1892, the Crosby Lumber Company of Greenville, Michigan, purchased 47,000 acres of land in Graham County, and two

43. Van Noppen, *Western North Carolina*, 258.

44. *Ibid.*, 262; U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of the Census, *Compendium of the Eleventh Census, 1890* (Washington, D.C., 1892), 296.

45. John Parris, "When Buffum's Band Mill Came to Dillsboro," *Asheville Citizen*, 29 July 1978.

46. Cotton, "Appalachian North Carolina," 57; Lambert, "Logging the Great Smokies," 332.

years later, the Foreign Hardwood Log Company, a New York syndicate, and the Dickson-Mason Lumber Company of Illinois acquired tracts of 78,000 and 34,000 acres, respectively, in Swain County.⁴⁷ Another New York firm, the Tuckaseegee Timber Company, operated on 75,000 acres of land in Swain, Jackson, and Macon counties.⁴⁸

The sudden growth of tourism around Asheville in the 1890s directly enhanced the growth of the timber industry in Buncombe and Transylvania counties. In 1895, Joseph H. Silverstein visited the Lake Toxaway area, and, after recognizing the economic potential of the region, "he and a group of associates built the Toxaway Tanning Company, organized the Gloucester Lumber Company, leased a boundary of several thousand acres of valuable timberlands, and built a large band sawmill."⁴⁹ Millionaire J.F. Haynes, who came to Transylvania County because of poor health, founded the Brevard Tanning Company at Pisgah Forest to manufacture tannic acid from chestnut bark.⁵⁰ Other northern tourists were so impressed with the natural wealth they found in the area that they invested heavily in timber properties. A group of capitalists from Williamsport, Pennsylvania, purchased 50,000 acres of timberland in Buncombe County in 1895 and began development of the property the following year.⁵¹ Later, the Asheville Lumber and Manufacturing Company was organized by a group of Ohio promoters, while investors from Michigan formed a similar firm, the Asheville French Broad Lumber Company.⁵²

The most notable tourist and subsequent land developer, however, was George Washington Vanderbilt, grandson of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt. The young aristocrat came to Asheville for his health in the spring of 1888 and was so impressed by the countryside that he decided to purchase land and build a summer estate. Over the next several years, Vanderbilt secretly acquired some 120,000 acres

of land, including fifty small farms and ten "country places."⁵³ He then hired the renowned New York architect Richard Morris Hunt and the premier landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted to design and construct a French Renaissance-style castle unequalled anywhere in the United States. Biltmore House, as Vanderbilt called his 250-room castle, was filled with rare paintings, tapestries, porcelain, and antiques from Europe and surrounded by elegant gardens, greenhouses, and a conservatory. At Olmsted's suggestion, a "model village" was built near the entrance to the estate, housing a hospital, stores, and a church, and a system of forest management was instituted in the Biltmore Forest.⁵⁴

Vanderbilt employed a young Pennsylvania forester named Gifford Pinchot to oversee the development of his forest and to demonstrate the economic value of managed forestry. Determined to show a profit from his forests, Vanderbilt purchased a "private game preserve" of 100,000 acres of virgin timber in Buncombe, Transylvania, Henderson, and Haywood counties, renaming it the Pisgah Forest. Under Pinchot's direction, logging operations were begun at the foot of Mount Pisgah in 1893, but the Pennsylvanian was succeeded two years later by a German forester, Carl Alwin Schenck. Schenck in turn oversaw the construction of a small railroad line into the property, the removal of thousands of board feet of virgin yellow poplar, the planting of seedling trees, and the establishment of the first forestry school in the United States. Schenck, like Pinchot, emphasized not preservation but forest management practices that would assure the continued production of saleable timber. During Schenck's years at Biltmore, the Vanderbilt properties were among the leading producers of hardwood timber in the region.⁵⁵

By 1900, the timber industry had become a major part of the economy of western North Carolina. In addition to the hundreds of small steam mills set up throughout the region, large bandmills with a capacity of more than 50,000 board feet a day were operating at Lenoir, Pinola, and Nantahala, and major tanneries had been erected

47. *Manufacturers' Record* 21 (8 April 1892), 41; *ibid.* 26 (17 Aug. 1894), 42; *ibid.* 26 (7 Dec. 1894), 286.

48. Cotton, "Appalachian North Carolina," 57nn.; *Manufacturers' Record* 26 (28 Sept. 1894), 134.

49. Van Noppen, *Western North Carolina*, 262.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Manufacturers' Record* 29 (21 Feb. 1896), 57.

52. Cotton, "Appalachian North Carolina," 57-58.

53. Carl Alwin Schenck, *The Birth of Forestry in America: The Biltmore Forest School, 1898-1913* (Boone, N.C. 1974), 25.

54. See Van Noppen, *Western North Carolina*, 298-301.

55. Schenck, *The Birth of Forestry*, 27-54; Van Noppen, *Western North Carolina*, 301-7; Harold K. Steen, *The U.S. Forest Service: A History* (Seattle, 1976), 48, 64.

at Morganton, Brevard, Lenoir, Asheville, Marion, Hazelwood, Waynesville, Andrews, and Murphy.⁵⁶ The manufacture of lumber and timber products had become the second leading industry in North Carolina, with 1,770 establishments employing some 11,751 workers—and most of these were in the western part of the state.⁵⁷ In 1900, the southern Appalachian region as a whole contributed some 30 percent of the total amount of hardwood timber cut in the United States.⁵⁸ Yet the advance guard of the timber industry had been able to reach only a fraction of the vast timber reserves, and great sections of remote woodland remained untouched. During the next decade, production continued to expand at an even faster pace, reaching a peak cut of almost 4 million board feet in 1909 (nearly 40 percent of the national production).⁵⁹ At the height of the timber boom in the Smokies, many of the pioneer companies were replaced by larger corporations that often operated on a multistate basis. These corporations brought greater amounts of capital and new technologies to the exploitation of the region's natural resources, constructing railroad lines deep into the timberlands and building temporary company towns to house the thousands of families employed by their operations.

One such firm was the William M. Ritter Lumber Company. Organized, as we have seen, in 1890 in West Virginia by a Pennsylvania lumberman, the company became the largest timber company operating in the southern Appalachians, and Ritter himself became known as "the dean of the Hardwood Lumbermen of America." In addition to extensive holdings of timber property in West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee, Ritter acquired almost 200,000 acres of timberland in western North Carolina, including a 70,000-acre tract in Macon and Clay counties, 70,000 acres in Swain County, and a large tract in Mitchell County. Under the name of the Wilson Creek Lumber Company, Ritter also purchased properties in Caldwell and Burke counties.⁶⁰ In 1909, another Ritter firm, the

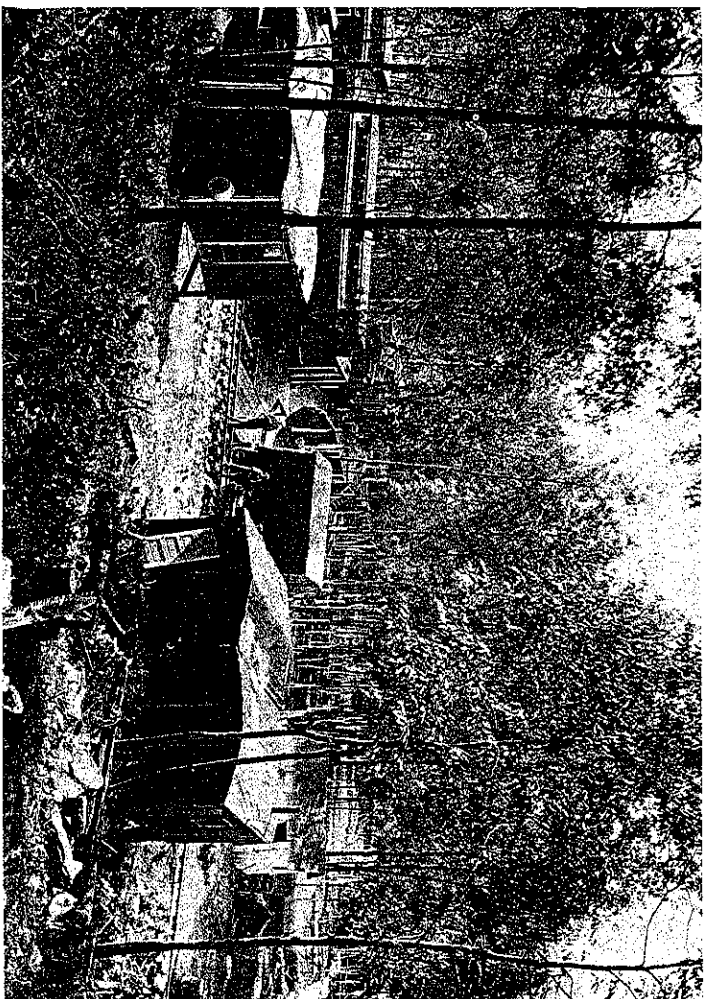
56. U.S. Geological Survey, *The Southern Appalachian Forests*, 19.

57. U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Census Office, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Manufacturers*, III.

58. U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Economic and Social Conditions*, 35.

59. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, *Timber Growing and Logging Practice in the Southern Appalachian Region*, by E. H. Prothingham, Technical Bulletin No. 250 (Washington, D. C., 1931), 10.

60. Ritter Lumber Company, *Romance of Appalachian Hardwood Lumber*, 31.



Logging Camp Housing of the W. M. Ritter Lumber Company, Big Branch, Dickenson County, Virginia. Courtesy of the Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University.

Hazel Creek Lumber Company, began operating a large bandmill at Procter in Swain County and the following year ran a railroad spur, the Smoky Mountain Railroad, up the Hazel Creek watershed.⁶¹ By 1913, Ritter's enterprises had acquired over two billion board feet of hardwood timber in the Appalachian region.⁶²

Other companies were dwarfed by Ritter's vast holdings, but they nevertheless had a major impact upon the region's forests. In the

61. *Ibid.*, 14, 30; John Parris, "They Felled the Giants of the Woodland," *Asheville Citizen*, 27 March 1977.

62. *Appalachian Trade Journal* 10 (Jan. 1913), 20; Ritter Lumber Company, *Romance of Appalachian Hardwood*, 15.

same year that Ritter opened his bandmill on Hazel Creek, another West Virginia firm, the Parson's Pulp and Lumber Company, acquired 35,000 acres of timberland on the reservation of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians in Swain County. The land had been purchased from the Indians several years earlier by a Philadelphia company and was resold in 1909 for \$18 an acre, netting a sizable profit for the northern investors. The Parsons Company planned to ship the virgin hemlock, chestnut, and poplar logs by rail to a large mill at Bryson City.⁶³ In subsequent years, the remote area between Bryson City and Robbinsville took on a boom town spirit, as large companies such as the H.L. Bemis Lumber Company, the Norwood Lumber Company, the Kitchen Lumber Company, and the Montvale Lumber Company moved in to join the West Virginia firms in the removal of the timber resources. The Montvale Lumber Company, which owned 27,000 acres of land on Eagle Creek, was actually a subsidiary of the R.E. Wood Lumber Company of Baltimore, Maryland, one of the largest lumber dealers on the East Coast. At the height of the great timber boom, more than 4,500 people lived within the area. More than 1,000 persons made their home at Proctor, and another 1,000 lived at the headwaters of Hazel Creek.⁶⁴

A similar boom accompanied the construction of a sawmill at Pensacola, in Yancey County, by the Carolina Spruce Company of Philadelphia. The mill was erected to saw the huge native spruce about to be cut off the slopes of Mount Mitchell.⁶⁵ The rich forests of the Black Mountains surrounding Mount Mitchell attracted the attention of a number of outside investors, including a group of Chicago capitalists, who purchased a large tract of land in the area in 1911.⁶⁶ That same year, a syndicate from Troy, New York, purchased a tract of 40,000 acres in neighboring Madison County, along the Laurel River. Operating as the Laurel River Logging Company, the firm constructed a railroad from Runion up the river to the Tennessee state

line and built large lumber mills at Runion and Pounding Mill.⁶⁷ Farther north, in Wilkes and Watauga counties, the Grandin Lumber Company was exploiting 70,000 acres of timberland recently tapped by the Watauga and Yacklin River Railroad. By 1913, the company had nearly completed a big sawmill at the new timber town of Grandin.⁶⁸

Across the state line in Tennessee, the most ambitious operations in the Smokies were undertaken by Pennsylvania lumbermen. The Little River Lumber Company, owned by Philadelphia capitalists, logged on about 80,000 acres of choice timberlands in Blount and Sevier counties. Beginning in 1901, the company constructed the Little River Railroad for a distance of eighteen miles into the heart of the Smokies—from a junction with the Southern Railroad, and built a sawmill and company town at Townsend and a timber camp at Elkmount. By 1910, the millsite at Townsend was producing as much as 120,000 board feet a day and was employing hundreds of men.⁶⁹ In nearby Tellico Plains, Monroe County, another group of Pennsylvania lumbermen owned about 100,000 acres of land and operated as the Tellico River Lumber Company. This firm, too, constructed a standard-gauge railroad for about thirty miles to its timber properties and employed about 500 men.⁷⁰ Together, these two companies controlled most of the lumber production in the Tennessee Smokies.

Throughout the rest of east Tennessee, outside capitalists also controlled the logging industry. A group of West Virginia politicians and businessmen, including John W. Davis, acquired about 40,000 acres of timberland in western North Carolina and east Tennessee, and a similar group from Nashville controlled about 50,000 acres in Morgan, Fentress, and Cumberland counties.⁷¹ New York interests owned the Tennessee Timber Coal and Iron Company, which together developed 80,000 acres of land in Cumberland County and constructed the mill and mining town of Catoosa.⁷² A syndicate of

63. Lambert, "Logging the Great Smokies," 334; *Manufacturers' Record* 56 (25 Nov. 1909), 53.

64. John Partis, "Nature Regains Land of Sawmills, Trains," *Asheville Citizen*, 25 March, 1905; *Manufacturers' Record* 72 (2 Aug. 1917), 85; Larry Mull, "Bemis Lumber Company and the Graham County Railroad," unpublished MS, n.d., University Archives, Western Carolina Univ.

65. "Timber! Started Railroad Boom" *Yancey County Common Times* 2 (Dec. 1976), 1-2.

66. *Manufacturers' Record* 59 (6 April 1911), 74; *Appalachian Trade Journal* 6 (April 1911), 24.

67. *Manufacturers' Record* 59 (9 Feb. 1911), 55.

68. "Developing Mountain Riches," *Manufacturers' Record* 64 (27 Nov. 1913), 49.

69. Robert S. Lambert, "Logging on Little River, 1890-1940," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 33 (1961), 36-38; Carlos Clinton Campbell, *Birth of a National Park in the Great Smoky Mountains* (Knoxville, 1960), 35.

70. *Appalachian Trade Journal* 7 (Sept. 1911), 22.

71. *Manufacturers' Record* 48 (27 July 1905), 46; *ibid.* 49 (10 May 1906), 472.

72. *ibid.* 49 (1 March 1906), 174; *ibid.* 61 (13 June 1912), 59; *ibid.* 63 (6 March 1913), 67.

English capitalists operated a sawmill on 30,000 acres of virgin timberland in Sevier County, and near Chattanooga, Cincinnati investors organized the Grand View Coal and Timber Company to develop 32,000 acres of land on Walden's Ridge.⁷³ Another Cincinnati firm, the Conasauga Lumber Company, operated on more than 65,000 acres of white pine and poplar forest in Polk County and in Fannin, Murray, and Gilmer counties, Georgia.⁷⁴

The most spectacular developments of the post-1900 timber boom, however, were associated with the coming of the Champion Fiber Company and the subsequent founding of the town of Canton, North Carolina. No other lumber company had as great or as lasting an impact upon the Blue Ridge and the Smokies. Champion Fiber Company was organized in 1905 by Peter G. Thompson, owner of the Champion Coated Paper Company of Hamilton, Ohio. Thompson had visited western North Carolina in 1904, looking for timberland which would furnish a steady supply of wood pulp for his profitable Ohio paper mill. He found it in the thick forests along the Pigeon River in Haywood County, settling upon a spot five miles from the village of Clyde as the place for his pulp plant. The location was on the site of the defunct Eastern Capitalist Broom Company and offered abundant fresh water and easy access to the railroad and to timber supplies. In 1905, Thompson secured about 300,000 acres of surrounding mountain land, rich in spruce, balsam, and chestnut, and began the construction of a mill and a company town to be named Canton, after Canton, Ohio. Under the direction of his son-in-law, Reuben B. Robertson of Cincinnati, the enterprise expanded rapidly, including the development of massive logging operations on the three prongs of the Pigeon River.⁷⁵ "The whole scheme," wrote Carl Alwin Schenck, "was the most gigantic enterprise which western North Carolina had seen."⁷⁶

Along with several other northern capitalists, Thompson organized the Champion Lumber Company in 1911 and, after purchasing an additional 100,000 acres, expanded his logging operations

73. *Ibid.* 57 (20 Jan. 1910), 57; *ibid.* 60 (13 July 1911), 52.

74. *Ibid.* 60 (26 Oct. 1911), 62c.

75. *Manufacturers' Record* 48 (14 Sept. 1905), 219; *ibid.* 48 (21 Sept. 1905), 267; Van Noppen, *Western North Carolina*, 308; Larry Mull, "Early Lumbering In Western North Carolina," unpublished MS, University Archives, Western Carolina Univ., 1-2.

76. Schenck, *Birth of Forestry in America*, 148.

throughout Haywood County and into Swain County and eastern Tennessee.⁷⁷ With the help of other subsidiary companies, such as the Suncrest Lumber Company, he constructed logging railroads in some of the most remote parts of the region and built large timber camps at Sunburst, Crestmont, Ravensford, and Smokemont. On the eve of World War I, Champion employed over 7,000 people in its North Carolina operations, including more than 1,000 at its Canton plant.⁷⁸ There were at that time some 6,000 people living in Canton and 2,000 more living in the surrounding area. The plant was consuming 300 to 350 cords of wood a day, and the output of wood pulp was 200 tons a day, most of which was shipped to the parent firm in Ohio. By 1930, the Canton factory had begun to develop and produce postcard paper and had grown into the largest paper and pulp mill in the nation.⁷⁹

The coming of Champion Fiber Company to Haywood County coincided with the height of the timber boom in Appalachia. Although Champion continued to thrive, the timber industry as a whole declined rapidly after 1909. The large amounts of capital Thompson and his associates invested in the Champion plant and properties encouraged long-range planning to assure its continued operation. As early as the 1920s, Champion had established a program of reforestation on its cutover woodlands and was developing a process for using the fiber of fast-growing southern pines for making high-quality paper.⁸⁰ Most timber companies, however, were less concerned about the future earning value of their forested properties. As one local historian has noted, their attitude was, "All we want here is to get the most we can out of this country, as quick as we can, and then get out."⁸¹ As a result, the cutting of commercial trees was usually

77. *Appalachian Trade Journal* 6 (April 1911), 15; *Manufacturers' Record* 59 (2 Feb. 1911), 74; *ibid.* 59 (6 April 1911), 74; Robert W. Griffith, "The Industrial Development of Western North Carolina," *Southern Tourist* (March 1926), 100-103. Thompson's major partners in the new lumber company included William Whitmer & Sons of Philadelphia, who owned several other logging operations in the area.

78. Mull, "Lumbering in Western North Carolina," 1-4.

79. Van Noppen, *Western North Carolina*, 308; Champion Paper and Fibre Company, *This Is Champion, A Proud Name in American Industry* (Canton, N.C., 1954), 12-13; *Manufacturers' Record* 65 (21 May 1914), 55.

80. Griffith, "Industrial Development of Western North Carolina," 103.

81. John Parris, "Lumber Barons Saw Gold in WNC's Trees," *Asheville Citizen*, 19 May 1978.

fine
plan 4-5, 6, 10
con 4-5, 6, 10

extra
5-6, 7, 8

carried out with little or no concern for future growth, and the forests of the region were quickly devastated.

The introduction, moreover, of machine logging by the large lumber companies after 1910 added to the destruction of the mountain forests. The utilization of steam-powered equipment such as Shay locomotives, overhead cableway skidders, and giant bandsaws allowed operators to cut more timber at only a fraction of the cost of earlier methods. But when used with log slides, river flumes, and splash dams, the modern techniques destroyed the streambeds and the reproductive capacities of the land. Great woods fires became almost a yearly phenomenon in the Blue Ridge, as lightning or sparks from machinery ignited sawdust and slash piles left by the loggers. The opening of Champion and other pulp mills provided a market for the smallest trees, lending a new meaning to the term "merchantable timber."⁸² Entire mountains were clearcut and left to erode with the spring rains. By 1919, these logging practices had begun to take their toll on the Appalachian hardwoods. In that year, timber production in Appalachia fell to 2.4 million board feet, and by 1929 it had dropped to little more than 2 million board feet.⁸³ After World War I, timber companies increasingly abandoned their southern mountain properties and turned west to the unexploited timberlands of Oregon and Washington. But the marks which they left on the land and people of Appalachia survived for generations to come.

Interviewed in 1910 by the *Manufacturers' Record*, the Reverend Dr. A. E. Brown, superintendent of the mountain school department of the Southern Baptist Convention, lamented the effects of the timber boom upon the Appalachian forests. Dr. Brown had been born and raised in the mountains and had devoted his life to the religious and educational well-being of the mountain people. His travels throughout the region had brought him into close touch with existing conditions and had led him to feel great apprehension for the future of the mountain country, owing to the destruction of the forest areas. "When I first started my work in these mountains, 30 years ago, when the forests were untouched," he noted, "the mountains were full of sparkling brooks and creeks which required a two or three weeks rain to make muddy; today, a few hours' rain will muddy them . . . ; many of the mountain streams are dry throughout the

82. Lambert, "Logging the Great Smokies," 357-59.

83. U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Economic and Social Conditions*, 35.

summer and fall, while in winter, the waters descend in torrents and do vast damage, rendering worthless the bottom lands which used to be the most desirable for farming purposes."

Nearly all of the large tracts of timberlands, he added, had been bought up by outside companies. "They have never been timbered by any methods that tend to conserve the forests for the future. These companies cut practically every tree from 12 inches up, and are utterly indifferent to the interest of the natives." In removing the timber, loggers had paid no attention to young growth, leaving piles of brush, bark, sawdust, and the tops of trees strewn throughout the forest. This dry brush frequently caught fire, severely burning thousands of acres of woodland, killing mature trees, seedlings, and saplings alike. Lesser fires of the undergrowth had affected at least 80 percent of the forested area. In some places, the young growth itself was now being cut for pulpwood, and the young chestnuts were being cut for the tannic acid they contained, so that between the fire and the pulpwood and tannic acid manufacturers, the remaining forest was being devastated. "Unfortunately," Brown observed,

the men who owned timberlands did not seem to realize they had any other value beyond what they could get for them from the lumbermen, and as the lumbermen had no other interest other than to get out of the timberlands all that was possible, no thought was given to the effect which the cutting of the timber may have on the mountain regions or looking to reforesting the area.

While this work, of course, has given employment to the natives of the mountains since it has been going on, it is destroying the future for them, because the sides of the mountains have been denuded of their top soil and the bottom lands have been overflowed and swept away, thereby destroying their value for agricultural purposes.

I know areas containing hundreds of acres of lands which used to be most fertile and valuable, and which are now practically worthless. This does not apply alone to restricted lands, but can be seen throughout all parts of the Southern Appalachian mountain district.

Moreover, he concluded, the lumbermen had been strongly opposed to the states' passing laws to regulate the manner in which their work should be done, and they had worked strenuously against laws that would tend to curb their operations. "These are some of the great changes that have taken place, all due to the lack of intelligent cutting of timber in the mountains. Those who have destroyed the forests

reaped the only benefit; those left behind, the natives, will have to bear the brunt of this work."⁸⁴

THE NATIONAL FOREST MOVEMENT

The wanton destruction of Appalachian forests stirred a number of Americans like the Reverend Dr. Brown to push for government action to conserve the remaining mountain timberlands. Several decades earlier, a nascent conservation movement had begun to lobby for protection of the nation's forests, although most of the initial interest was in the protection of public lands in the West. Large timber companies that had acquired thousands of acres in the public domain by subterfuge and fraud had, by unrestrained cutting, begun to turn much of the land into wasteland.⁸⁵ In 1875, a group of concerned scientists formed the American Forestry Association (AFA) to look into the destruction of forest resources, and the following year, Congress established the Division of Forestry in the Department of Agriculture to gather statistics and disseminate information on forestry.⁸⁶ Pressure from conservation groups such as the AFA finally helped to secure passage in 1891 of the National Forest Reserve Act, which permitted the president to set aside portions of the public domain as "forest reserves" in which the land and resources would be retained permanently in public ownership. On 30 March 1891, President Benjamin Harrison created the first such reserve, the Yellowstone Timberland Reserve, and he later placed an additional thirteen million acres of timberland in Colorado, Wyoming, and California on the list of protected lands.⁸⁷ In 1897, Congress enacted the Organic Administration Act establishing guidelines for management of these forest reserves. According to the act, the national forests were to be managed for their own protection and "for the purpose of securing favorable conditions of water flow, and to furnish a continuous supply of timber for the use and necessities of citizens of the United States."⁸⁸ By 1900, the conservation movement had acquired significant political influence, and some 35

million acres of timberland had been designated for protection. Since federal legislation, however, provided no funds for the acquisition of private property for forest reserves, and since little public land remained in the heavily populated East, all of the land so designated was in the public domain west of the Mississippi. Increasingly, after the turn of the century, therefore, conservationists tended to campaign for the establishment of national forests in the East, especially in Appalachia.

The rapid growth of conservationism after 1890 coincided with the emergence in American politics of what is called the progressive era, and the effect of the conservation movement upon Appalachia was characteristic of many of the political themes of that era. Conservationists were generally members of the new urban middle and upper class—the same group which had begun to use the mountains as a tourist mecca. Most were well educated, and many held professional positions as teachers, scientists, doctors, or technicians. While they deplored the rampant exploitation of the nation's natural resources, most believed ardently in the idea of progress through industrial growth, so long as that growth was orderly, efficient, and controlled by a strong central government. Their faith lay in the development of ambitious federal programs of "scientific management" to regulate the use of natural resources. The political philosophy underlying these programs was that decisions about resource management should be made by "technicians guided by standards of efficiency," that is, by the progressives themselves, rather than by popularly elected politicians at the local level. Their belief in the centralization of power led them to adopt a 'holistic' rather than a particularistic outlook on management practices. Considering resources such as water, timber, minerals, and land to be interrelated elements, they were quick to adopt the idea of efficient "multiple use" planning.⁸⁹

Not all of the conservationists, however, agreed on the proper utilization of the national forest reserves. A small wing of the movement advocated preserving the timberlands in their natural state through the abolition of all commercial activities, including logging and mining. Naturalists like John Muir and other members of the Sierra Club, founded in 1892, hoped that sections of timberland

84. *Manufacturers' Record* 57 (20 Jan. 1910), 52.

85. William E. Shands and Robert G. Healy, *The Lands Nobody Wanted: A Conservation Foundation Report* (Washington, D.C., 1977), 10–11.

86. *Ibid.*, 12; Steen, *The U.S. Forest Service*, 13.

87. Steen, *U.S. Forest Service*, 27–28.

88. Shands and Healy, *Lands Nobody Wanted*, 10–11.

89. Samuel P. Hays, *The Response to Industrialism, 1885–1914* (Chicago, 1957), 157.

could be set aside for recreational and scenic purposes. In addition to preserving the natural heritage of the country, they argued, the national forests ought to provide an "escape" from the "industrial pace" of urban life.⁹⁰ This perspective was later embodied in the creation of national parks, but at the turn of the century, most attention focused on the continued use of the forests for economic purposes. The majority of the leaders of the conservation movement, including its most renowned leaders, Gifford Pinchot and Theodore Roosevelt, perceived the primary purpose of the forest reserves to be the protection and management of timber resources for commercial production. "Forest reserves," wrote Pinchot, chief of the Forest Service, in 1905, "are for the purpose of preserving a perpetual supply of timber for home industries, preventing destruction of the forest cover which regulates the flow of streams, and protecting local residents from unfair competition in the use of forest and range."⁹¹

Conflict within the conservation movement, between advocates of "scenic preservation" and supporters of "economic forestry," continued to complicate the management of the national forests and subsequently had a major impact upon land use practices in the southern Appalachian region. But common threads which bound the two groups together played an even more important role in shaping the future of the mountains. Both factions approached the issue of conservation from a decidedly nationalistic and predominantly urban perspective. National needs, whether they were those of the tourist, the scientist, or the industrialist, were given priority over local concerns. The popular image of the mountaineer as backward, degenerate, and uncivilized (the very "idea of Appalachia") seemed to justify this attitude, placing power in the hands of those who seemed "best equipped" to bring progress and civilization to the region. For many urban progressives, the creation of national forests in Appalachia became the easiest way to protect the resources they most coveted and the best way also to bring "*Our Southern Highlanders*," as Horace Kephart labeled them, into the modern age.⁹²

Efforts to create a national forest reserve in the southern Appalachians—like tourism and the timber industry—began in the 1880s

90. Steen, *U.S. Forest Service*, 113-15.

91. *Ibid.*, 79.

92. Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders*. Kephart was himself active in the movement to create national forests and later national parks in the southern Appalachians. His book was first published in 1913.

and 1890s. As early as 1885, Dr. Henry O. Marcy of Boston read a paper before an assembly of the American Academy of Medicine in New York City, in which he called for the establishment of a national park in the southern Appalachian Mountains for the climatic treatment of disease. The area's salubrious climate and proximity to the urban Northeast had begun to turn western North Carolina into a major health resort, and Dr. Marcy wished to extend the benefits of the region to larger numbers of Americans.⁹³ Marcy's proposal attracted little attention, however, until late in the 1890s, when an Asheville physician, Dr. Chase P. Ambler, originally of Ohio, revived the idea. Ironically, Dr. Ambler's concern was not for the construction of a health resort, but for the preservation of the timberlands and trout streams for tourist purposes. Along with a group of Asheville businessmen and lawyers, Ambler organized the Appalachian National Park Association in 1899, to bring the park question before Congress. On 2 January 1900, this group presented a memorial to Congress written by Charles McNamee, a prominent lawyer and cousin of millionaire George W. Vanderbilt, calling for the location of a national park and forest reserve in western North Carolina "because of the natural beauty of the area." The memorial urged Congress to act immediately if the magnificent forests of the region were to be saved from the rapid encroachments of lumber interests. At the urging of Senator Jeter C. Pritchard of North Carolina, Congress referred the issue to the Department of Agriculture and authorized five thousand dollars to provide for a preliminary investigation and survey of the timberlands of the entire southern Appalachian region.⁹⁴

The report issued by Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson on 3 January 1901 bore the distinct mark of Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot and recommended the establishment of a national forest reserve in the southern Appalachians to protect the timber resources of that region from "indiscriminate" cutting. Although the movement for government purchase of a large area of forest land in the East had chiefly contemplated a national park to be administered by the Interior Department, Wilson's recommendation was for the continued utilization of the timberland as a forest reserve under the control of

93. Jesse R. Lankford, Jr., "The Campaign for a National Park in Western North Carolina, 1885-1940" (M.A. thesis, Western Carolina Univ., 1973), 1-2.

94. *Ibid.*, 14-21.

the Department of Agriculture. "The idea of a national park is conservation, not use," he wrote, "that of a forest reserve, conservation by use. I have therefore to recommend a forest reserve instead of a park. It is fully shown by the investigation that such a reserve would be self-supporting from the sale of timber under wisely directed conservative forestry."⁹⁵ Wilson's report struck a blow against efforts to create a national park in western North Carolina. Proponents of a park, especially the tourist industry, were not to see their dream realized until the late 1920s and 1930s, when the government established the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway. But conservationists at the turn of the century were elated with Wilson's recommendation. Even the Appalachian National Park Association shifted its campaign to support the forest reserve movement, maintaining that it had favored both a park and a forest reserve and had never opposed the cutting of mature timber in some areas.⁹⁶

The campaign for a southern Appalachian forest reserve attracted support from a variety of interest groups. Pinchot headed an effective lobby of scientists, foresters, and government technicians, and a number of congressmen, including Senator Pritchard, threw their support behind the cause. The most influential supporter, however, was Theodore Roosevelt himself, who, after becoming president in 1901, made forestry, conservation, and the creation of forest reserves a major theme of his administration. Land companies and, of course, most lumbermen opposed the reserve initially, but some of the more "progressive" large lumber companies increasingly came to favor the idea of federal forest reserves. Acquisition of their timberlands, they reasoned, would not only relieve them of the burden of local taxes but would eliminate their expenses for "timber stand improvement."⁹⁷ Having sold the land to the government at a profit, they would still have access to the land for timber cutting and a sustained yield managed at public expense. To the larger, well-capitalized companies, there was a clear, long-range economic advantage. In fact, at their annual conventions in 1902, both the *National Lumber Manufacturers' Association* and the *Appalachian Lumber Manufacturers' Association* voted to support the forest reserve movement.

95. Shands and Healy, *Lands Nobody Wanted*, 13; "Secretary Wilson on National Parks: His Letter Presenting A Preliminary Report," 3 Jan. 1901, quoted in Lankford, "Campaign for a National Park," 22.

96. Lankford, "Campaign for a National Park," 25-28.

National Hardwood Lumber Association and the National Lumber Manufacturers' Association endorsed resolutions favoring the creation of a national forest reserve in the southern Appalachian mountains.⁹⁷ Smaller mill operators and independent lumbermen continued to oppose the movement.

Despite the efforts of conservationists, however, Secretary Wilson's recommendations received only limited support in a budget-minded Congress. Legislation authorizing purchase funds for an eastern forest reserve was introduced in 1901 but failed to pass then and in several subsequent Congresses. Resistance to the concept was led by the powerful speaker of the House, Joseph G. Cannon, who vowed to spend "not one cent for scenery."⁹⁸ Nevertheless, support grew steadily, as forest conservation was increasingly linked with water problems such as irrigation, navigation, flood control, and hydro-power production. Tragically and costly floods like that which struck the Monongahela River in West Virginia in 1907 stirred further public agitation for watershed protection, and in the election of 1908, both national political parties came out in favor of conservation.⁹⁹ Finally, on 1 March 1911, Congress passed the landmark Weeks Act, authorizing the purchase of "such forested, cut-over, or denuded lands within the watersheds of navigable streams as . . . may be necessary to the regulation of the flow of navigable streams . . ."¹⁰⁰ The act provided \$11 million for the acquisition of land and directed the secretary of agriculture to recommend lands for purchase. On 27 March 1911, the Forest Service secured approval for the establishment of the first purchase units of the Appalachian forest reserve—the Mt. Mitchell, Nantahala, Pisgah, and Yadkin areas of western North Carolina.¹⁰¹

The passage of the Weeks Act and the subsequent purchase of timberlands initially stirred little popular reaction in the affected areas of the southern mountains. A few business leaders voiced optimism that the forest reserves would boost tourism and insure a

97. *Ibid.*, 35.

98. Shands and Healy, *Lands Nobody Wanted*, 14.

99. Steen, *U.S. Forest Service*, 96.

100. "Weeks Act of March 1, 1911," in U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Forest Service Manual* (Washington, D.C., 1978), 1021-27-1021-30; Shands and Healy, *Lands Nobody Wanted*, 15.

101. Pomeroy and Yoho, *North Carolina Lands*, 211.

perpetual supply of timber, but most local residents reacted indifferently to the legislation.¹⁰² Most of the land being studied for acquisition had already passed out of the hands of local people and into the control of timber companies and other corporations, and, under the new law, these lands would continue to remain open to public access and to use by the timber industry. Not until the late 1920s when the Department of the Interior began to condemn small tracts of farmland for inclusion in national parks—especially for the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park—did mountain residents begin to express opposition to the expansion of government lands. Efforts at that time by the Forest Service to consolidate and expand the national forests were increasingly opposed by local residents.

The initial acquisition of land immediately following the passage of the Weeks Act, however, was limited to large tracts of "high quality" ridgeland located on the headwaters of navigable streams.¹⁰³ Such tracts generally did not include farmland or residences and were usually purchased from absentee owners. One of the largest tracts purchased in these years was part of the George W. Vanderbilt estate near Asheville. As early as 1913, Vanderbilt had offered to sell to the government some 87,000 acres of the Pisgah Forest, but negotiations had broken down because of the steep price. Following Vanderbilt's death, Mrs. Vanderbilt agreed to sell the acreage to the government for approximately \$5 per acre, but not before selling most of the marketable timber at \$12 per acre to a private company.¹⁰⁴

By 1916, sufficient land had been added to the Vanderbilt tract to create the first eastern national forest, Pisgah National Forest. In 1918, the Pisgah was joined by three more such forests—the Shenandoah in Virginia, the Natural Bridge in Virginia, and the White

102. Albert Phenix, "Southern Appalachian Forest Reserve: Its Practical Bearing Upon the Country's Industrial and Commercial Development," *Manufacturers' Record* 65 (25 June 1914), 41-43. Examination of the Asheville *Citizen* from 1910 to 1920 reveals little local reaction to the creation of the National Forest Reserves; Mary Rose Dullaghan, "The National Forest Service in Contention," unpublished undergraduate paper in author's possession.

103. Pomeroy and Yoho, *North Carolina Lands*, 211-212; Steen, *U.S. Forest Service*, 125.

104. Phenix, "National Forest Reserve," 42. See Contract, George W. Vanderbilt and wife to Louis Carr, 17 Jan. 1913, on file in the U.S. Forest Service Office, Asheville, N.C. Copy in author's possession.

Mountain in New Hampshire. Two years later, five more forests were created in southern Appalachia—the Boone (now part of the Pisgah); the Nantahala in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia; the Cherokee in Tennessee; the Unaka in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia; and the Monongahela in West Virginia. By 1920, the Forest Service had acquired over 250,000 acres of land in western North Carolina alone. This acreage, however, represented only about 13 percent of a two-million-acre program which was planned for the North Carolina mountains.¹⁰⁵

The greatest growth of national forest acreage in Appalachia came in the 1920s and 1930s, as the Forest Service sought to consolidate its holdings and to expand acquisition to denuded and cutover lands. Initial purchases had concentrated on timberlands of high quality, but the rapid depletion of timber reserves and the high lumber prices prevailing after World War I led industry and government officials to stress the need for reforestation of cutover timberlands. With the passage of the Clarke-McNary Act (1924) and the McNary-Woodruff Act (1928), the Forest Service began a massive effort to acquire and "rehabilitate" devastated forest lands.¹⁰⁶ By 1940, the federal government would control over five million acres of timberland in the southern Appalachians, including almost 800,000 acres of national forest in western North Carolina.¹⁰⁷

This rapid growth of government-owned lands would bring the Forest Service and its sister agencies, the Tennessee Valley Authority and the National Park Service, into increasing conflict with local mountain people. As greater quantities of land were purchased and as larger numbers of remote farms and ancestral homesteads were acquired through condemnation, local hostility to these government agencies continued to grow. The fact, moreover, that the greatest expansion in government lands came during the depression decade of the 1930s made it appear that the federal government was following a well-laid plan to destroy the mountain way of life. In the minds of many local residents, the purchase of mountain land for forests, lakes, and parks had not only contributed to the depression of the local agricultural and timber economy, but it was also depriving a

105. Shands and Henly, *Lands Nobody Wanted*, 15; Pomeroy and Yoho, *North Carolina Lands*, 213, 217.

106. Steen, *U.S. Forest Service*, 182-94.

107. Pomeroy and Yoho, *North Carolina Lands*, 217.

hard-hit people of their last chance at independent survival.¹⁰⁸ During the 1930s, the government's acquisition of large numbers of small farms sold at sheriff's auctions for nonpayment of taxes seemed to support these feelings of suspicion, hostility, and despair.

In fact, the movement of mountain people out of the coves and hollows actually had been a goal put forward by some proponents of the Appalachian Forest Reserve even before the purchase of the first mountain lands. As early as 1914, William L. Hall of the United States Forest Service had argued that the timber and water conservation measures authorized by the Weeks Act created an opportunity "to remake the Appalachians" by replacing the region's subsistence agricultural economy with a more "natural" system of timber culture. The creation of national forest reserves, suggested Hall, would help to eliminate some of the region's social and economic problems by forcing mountaineers to migrate to the cities and mill villages of the New South, where they would enjoy "the advantages of social intercourse, school, and livelihood that village life afforded."¹⁰⁹ Northern missionaries and social reformers had long been engaged in work to "uplift" the mountain people, and many had argued that the major impediment to progress in the region was the isolated and scattered nature of mountain settlements. The migration of the mountaineers to the industrializing centers would be an important step toward the solution of what was called the mountain problem. "As the undertaking actually works out on the ground," wrote Hall, "it is a movement to remake the Appalachians, . . . and set the region to performing the function for which it was clearly intended."¹¹⁰

Whether or not the acquisition of mountain land by the federal government reflected a conscious effort to move the mountain people out of the mountains, such policies did contribute to the transformation of mountain society. On the eve of World War II, when the flow of people out of the coves became a rising flood of migration into industrial centers both within and outside of the region, the Forest Service had acquired almost five million acres of forest land in Appalachia, including some 20 percent of the total surface land in the

eighteen western counties of North Carolina.¹¹¹ In some counties, the federal government owned as much as 80 percent of the total surface land.¹¹² This transition in land ownership played a major role in shaping the structure and nature of mountain society in the mature industrial order of the postwar years. By that time, the federal government had become an inextricable part of mountain life.

PUBLIC WORK

The remaking of the Appalachians was not limited, of course, to the impact of the timber industry and the emergence of the national forests and other federally owned lands. The arrival of the railroads after 1880 stimulated a variety of nonagricultural developments—including furniture, textile, tourism, oil, chemical, and mineral-related industries—which combined to pull large numbers of mountaineers into the new industrial system. Just as changing land ownership patterns pushed some mountain families off the land and into burgeoning cities and towns, the promise of steady employment and a cash income pulled others into the mines and mills, into what mountain people called "public work." This "push-pull" effect resulted in the transformation of the mountain labor force from a predominantly agrarian to an increasingly industrial or semi-industrial character.

The largest source of nonagricultural employment in the Blue Ridge during these years was the timber industry and its dependent industries—lumber, furniture, leather, and rayon mills. The number of individuals employed in these industries in western North Carolina, for example, increased more than tenfold between 1900 and 1920. While the majority were employed directly in logging operations, others worked in small planing mills and pulp mills, or in the small furniture companies of Asheville.¹¹³ Hundreds of Blue Ridge families migrated to the eastern foothills to find work in the furniture plants of Lenoir, Mount Airy, and Morganton, while others moved to the industrial boom towns of East Tennessee. At Kingsport, Tennessee, wood was used in the manufacture of photographic

108. See William G. Davis, "Uncle Sam Ruined Swain's Economy," *Asheville Citizen*, 25 Oct. 1978. Davis was a county commissioner in Swain County, N.C.

109. William L. Hall, "To Remake the Appalachians: A New Order in the Mountains That Is Founded on Forestry," *World's Work* 28 (July 1914), 335.

110. Hall, "To Remake the Appalachians," 336. See also Shapiro, "A Strange Land and Peculiar People," 158-65.

111. Based on statistics provided in Si Kahn, *The Forest Service and Appalachia* (New York, 1974), 2, 136.

112. Davis, in *Asheville Citizen*, 25 Oct. 1978.

113. Based upon analysis of the *Reports of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of North Carolina, 1900-1920*. These statistics are incomplete, however, and should be considered to reflect only partial levels of employment.

print stock, and at Elizabethton, Tennessee, wood pulp was used in the production of rayon.¹¹⁴ In 1928, the American Enka Company, a Dutch-owned corporation, began to produce rayon at a mill near Asheville, and by 1940, it had attracted some 3,000 employees.¹¹⁵

A by-product of the timber industry was tannin, a product derived from chestnut and oak bark and used in the manufacture of leather. The growth of the tan-bark industry provided employment for hundreds of mountain residents and gave rise to a thriving leather industry in the region. At the height of the industry's activity in 1916, there were nearly 1,200 people employed in tanning and leather manufacture in western North Carolina alone. The arrival of the chestnut blight, the popularity of the automobile, and the introduction of synthetic fabrics, however, brought about the sudden demise of the mountain leather industry. By 1926, the North Carolina Bureau of Labor Statistics reported less than four hundred individuals working in the leather and tanning trades in the western counties.¹¹⁶

For hundreds of mountain families, the movement from agriculture to timber-related employment was also accompanied by migration from the farm to one of the many temporary company towns established throughout the region. Most of the smaller, more remote timber camps provided short-term housing for male employees, but the larger timber towns offered more substantial residences for entire families. One of the largest of these towns was constructed at Sunburst in Haywood County, North Carolina, by the Champion Fiber Company. At the height of the timber boom, Sunburst housed more than 2,000 people and maintained a commissary, a clubhouse, boarding houses, and a church which doubled as a school, a dance hall, and a skating rink.¹¹⁷ Other towns, such as those at Runion, Smokemont, Ravensford, Townsend, and Crestmont, typically housed from 300 to 1,000 individuals and provided proportionately less in the way of social facilities. Timber towns resembled other company towns of this period, except for their shorter life expectancy. Houses were generally small and of board-and-batten type construction, with no indoor plumbing or sanitary facilities. Companies were usually reluctant

to invest more than a minimal amount of money in communities that were expected to survive only as long as it took to extract the surrounding timber. Residents of these towns had little voice in community affairs and were dependent on the company for maintenance of community health and safety.

With the decline of timber production after World War I, most of the company towns disappeared, and their residents returned to farms or searched for employment elsewhere. For many of the mountaineers of the Blue Ridge and Smoky Mountain country who had been lured to the sawmills, the collapse of the timber industry was disillusioning. On the farm the family had worked together in a disciplined way on common tasks, but the old disciplines had begun to break down under the weight of the new wage system. Gradually, through the years, farm life had begun to deteriorate. Fields went uncultivated and grew up in weeds. Fences went down because the men were working at the lumber mills, and supplies, which before had been grown entirely on the farm, were now bought at the store or commissary. "When the sawmill had finished its work and folded up as suddenly as it had come," remembered Granville Calhoun, "they saw the illusion of permanency by which they had been tricked; their fields overgrown, fences unrepaired, farm tools rusted, young men strangers to the plow and hoe, children demoralized." All of this had happened gradually, he recalled, "and when the people came to realize it, it was out of their control."¹¹⁸

As logging in the mountains declined, therefore, thousands of mountaineers began to search for other industries to fill their new dependency upon wage-employment. Some found temporary opportunities in mining and smelting operations, which began to expand in the Blue Ridge after the turn of the century. At Ducktown on the Tennessee, North Carolina, and Georgia border, the Tennessee Copper Company began extensive development in 1901 that attracted hundreds of local residents to its copper mines. The open smelting pits of this New York-owned corporation not only consumed all of the fuel wood from the area but also emitted a sulfurous acid gas that denuded the surrounding forests, creating a 23,000-acre barren wasteland. "The entire surroundings," lamented Carl

114. U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Economic and Social Conditions*, 85.
 115. Van Noppen, *Western North Carolina*, 364.
 116. *Reports of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of North Carolina* (Raleigh, 1916, 1926).
 117. Interview with Larry Mull, Calhoun, N.C., 9 April 1975, at the abandoned site of Sunburst; Larry Mull, "Lumbering in Western North Carolina," 3-5.

118. Granville Calhoun, quoted in Rebecca Cushman, "Seed of Fire: The Human Side of History in Our Nation's Southern Highland Region and Its Changing Years," unpublished MS, North Carolina Collection, Univ. of North Carolina, n.d., 143.

Schenck, "had been converted into a desert, dissected by deep gullies and ravines, looking like the landscape of the moon."¹¹⁹ In nearby Maryville, Tennessee, the Aluminum Company of America completed its sprawling works, and mountaineers flocked to the factory for jobs in the rolling mill or smelting plants.¹²⁰

In North Carolina, the expansion of mica mining operations in Yancey and Mitchell counties and the opening of large kaolin deposits in Jackson, Clay, and other counties provided additional employment opportunities. Between 1906 and 1926, the number of persons employed in mining in western North Carolina jumped from 55 to over 800, with many more employed in transportation and service-related industries.¹²¹ Before the bottom fell out of the mica market in the late 1920s, the mines in Yancey and Mitchell counties produced 75 percent of the mica mined in the United States.¹²² Neighboring villages such as Burnsville, Spruce Pine, and Hayesville experienced significant economic growth during these years, as nonfarm employment increased the local demand for consumer goods.

Other mountain families were caught up in the great textile boom that swept the Southeast at the turn of the century. Cotton mills had operated in the South long before the Civil War, but it was not until the 1890s that the rate of new mill construction in the region surpassed that of the old mill districts of New England. Between 1890 and 1897, the number of spindles in the South increased by 151 percent; by 1904, the South had taken the lead over New England in the amount of cotton consumed by its mills.¹²³ At the same time that northern capitalists were pouring large amounts of money into Appalachian timber and mineral lands, New England investors were transferring millions of dollars into the construction of cotton mills, primarily in Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, and North Carolina. This transfer of New England textile capital into southern mills was the result of a number of factors, including the proximity of raw materials, cheap water power, lower taxes, and cheap nonunion

labor, but the greatest of these attractions was the large untapped source of cheap labor. It was estimated that in 1897 the cost of labor was 40 percent lower in the South than in New England, and the average working day was 24 percent longer.¹²⁴

While the majority of southern cotton mills were constructed in piedmont counties, mountain counties attracted their share of the booming textile industry. Some small mills were constructed in rural communities such as Marshall, Hendersonville, and Swannanoa, but major textile centers emerged in Rutherfordton, Forest City, Lenoir, Marion, Elkin, and Asheville. From 1900 to 1930, thousands of mountaineers left their farms for the mill districts of these towns or for the mill villages of distant cities such as Greenville, Spartanburg, Kingsport, Knoxville, Elizabethton, Chattanooga, Dayton, Bristol, or Rome.¹²⁵ After the turn of the century, when labor supplies began to diminish in the piedmont, many of the mill owners actively recruited workers in the mountain districts, sending agents into remote areas to tap what was believed to be an inexhaustible source of cheap labor.¹²⁶ Life in the textile mills, the recruiters preached, would be "like heaven" compared to the struggles of living on a small mountain farm.¹²⁷ As one supporter of the southern textile industry argued:

If I were a Carnegie or a Rockefeller seeking to improve the conditions of our poor mountain people, I would build them a cotton-mill. I would gather their children in just as soon as they are big enough to doff and spin, and instead of feeding them on homilies and panegyrics, I would pay them a stipend that would buy them more than "bread and meat." I would teach them with real money what money brings.¹²⁸

124. *Ibid.*, 307.

125. *Manufacturers' Record* 16 (10 Aug. 1889), 13; U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Economic and Social Conditions*, 85-86; Cotton, "Appalachian North Carolina," 65.

126. Broadus Mitchell, *The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South* (Baltimore, 1921), 208; Frank T. De Vyver, "Southern Industry and the Southern Mountaineer," *American Federationist: Official Magazine of the American Federation of Labor* 35 (1928), 1319; Wade H. Harris (ed. of the *Charlotte Observer*), "Abundant American Labor South's Great Asset," *Manufacturers' Record* 90 (28 Oct. 1926), 126-29.

127. See Herbert Francis Sherwood, "Our New Racial Drama," 492-93.

128. Thomas Robinson Dawley, Jr., *The Child that Toileth Not: A Story of a Government Investigation* (New York, 1912), 140.

119. Schenck, *Birth of Forestry*, 114. See also North Callahan, *Smoky Mountain Country* (Boston, 1952), 101; *Manufacturers' Record* 39 (21 March 1901), 170.

120. Callahan, *Smoky Mountain Country*, 100.

121. *Reports of Bureau of Labor Statistics*, 1906, 1926.

122. *Manufacturers' Record* 81 (16 Feb. 1922), 55.

123. Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 306-8.

For over three-quarters of a million mountaineers, the migration from mountain cabin to mill village was a major break with their land, their families, and their culture.¹²⁹ The hopes with which they abandoned their farms for life in the mill villages were too often quickly dashed by the realities of the cotton mills.¹³⁰ Housing was poor, crowded, and unsanitary, and wages ranged from 35 to 60 cents a day. The typical work day was eleven and a half hours, and men, women, and children worked from 65 to 72 hours a week.¹³¹

Approximately 80 percent of the workers in most mills were women and children. One investigator from the Department of Labor found that at a typical mill, 60 percent of the employees were females and fully one-half were children between the ages of twelve and sixteen.¹³² Under these conditions, for some mountain families the move to the mill village came only as a last resort.¹³³

There was an alternative, however, to the mill villages. After the turn of the century, the timber industry in West Virginia and the Cumberland Plateau began to give ground rapidly to the arrival of the coalmen. By the time logging had begun to decline in the Blue Ridge, labor demands were reaching their height in the coal fields. The coal barons were no longer able to fill their labor needs from the local population, and they began to recruit in other areas of the mountains, in the Deep South, and in southern Europe. For many mountaineers, the transition from logging to coal mining was a natural progression, and they poured by the thousands out of the mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina into the nearby coal fields of Kentucky, Virginia, and West Virginia.¹³⁴

The ascendancy of coal marked the end of the lumber era in the mountains. Logging would continue in the Smokies until the last

129. Sherwood, "Our New Racial Drama," 489.

130. An excellent fictional account is Grace Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread* (New York, 1932).

131. *Manufacturers' Record* 32 (22 Oct. 1897), 197.

132. Dawley, *Child that Toileth Not*, 137.

133. The history of the southern textile industry will not be detailed here since the majority of cotton mills were located outside the mountains and thus beyond the scope of this book. See also Benjamin Franklin Lerner, *The Cotton Textile Industry of the Southern Appalachian Piedmont* (Chapel Hill, 1933); Lois MacDonald, *Southern Mill Hills: A Study of Social and Economic Forces in Certain Textile Mill Villages* (New York, 1928); Shapiro, *Appalachia On Our Mind*, 162-85.

134. Statistical information on the amount of migration between the Blue Ridge and the coal fields is not available. This observation, however, is based upon the reading of hundreds of family histories and oral history transcripts from the

great tree was cut or until the federal government quieted the saws by establishing national forests, but the lumbermen would never again reign supreme. In the 1920s, most of the lumber companies abandoned the mountains, leaving behind a land and a people deeply scarred by their operations. The lumbermen's place in the new industrial order was assumed by others who carried forward the modernization process. The timber boom lasted less than thirty years in Appalachia, but in that time it touched the lives of generations of mountaineers. In the end, however, its impact was obscured by events being played out in the coal fields, for it was there that the machine age came to have its most ominous effects.

region. The author's own family migrated from small farms in the Blue Ridge of Virginia and North Carolina to employment in the timber mills and, after 1910, to the coal fields of southern West Virginia.