

The Lost Heritage

by

Amy Russell

When most people think about the Great Smoky Mountains, their first thoughts are of Gatlinburg, the factory outlets in Pigeon Forge, and sometimes the campgrounds in Cades Cove. What few people remember is the lost heritage and those who had to give up their homes in order to create the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The mountain way of living is forgotten along with electricity and the rapid growth of technology. Few people know what life was like in the foothills, valleys, and hollars.

"Most of the settlers in the Smoky Mountains of East Tennessee were of Scotch-Irish descent. Many of the old customs of Elizabethan England have been passed from generation to generation."¹ There are only a few customs remaining since modernization. The sayings, superstitions, and home remedies prevailed. Life was limited in some ways due to the isolated environment, but it allowed the mountaineers to become self-sufficient and resourceful.

Life was disciplined, and everyone had to "pull their own weight." Families were usually large, and the children were designated chores. Chores were household duties, whether it be working in the garden, stocking firewood, or cleaning the house. People were up before daylight. "Early to bed and early to rise was a second Golden Rule."²

¹Russell, Gladys T., It Happened in the Smokies (Alcoa, Tn.: Russell Publishing Co., 1988), 52.

²Russell, Gladys T., It Happened in the Smokies (Alcoa, Tn.: Russell Publishing Co., 1988), 13.

The mountaineers grew almost everything they ate. Starvation was not a concern among mountain families. Breakfast was the largest meal of the day, and it generally consisted of gravy, hot biscuits, ham, eggs, pork meat, and hot applesauce. Milk was provided by the cows raised on the family's land. The noon meal, which was called "dinner", usually consisted of a variety of vegetables such as: potatoes, beans, peas, cabbage, beets, turnips, and greens which were eaten with cornbread. In the summer, tomatoes, cucumbers, and a variety of fruits were also available.

During the summer, most families "canned" jams, jellies, fruits and vegetables. This process was to ensure a good food supply for the winter. The main food crops were corn, potatoes, and beans. The corn was used for several purposes. Families ground it for cornmeal, and to feed mules, cows, and sometimes pigs. Planting was a long and tedious process which involved the entire family. Pesticides were not used, so "de-bugging" the plants was an everyday chore as well.

According to one native, Gladys T. Russell, of the Great Smoky Mountains, "de-bugging" was hard work. In order to pass the time in the hot sun here is an original rhyme:

"This hard work of bugging beans makes a tired back all bent.
For putting 100 bugs in a jar, I am rewarded the sum of one cent.
Ten more bugs are all I need to collect that sum of one cent.
Someday though I'll quit this job and marry up with some rich gent."

Gladys Trentham Russell is the author of a number of books in which she recalls her life in the Smoky Mountains

before the government took the land. Her homeland is where the Sugarlands Visitor Center is now located. Her family cemetery is all that remains on the property on which she was raised.

Most families had very little income and jobs were scarce. Gladys recalls, "Pa made money selling corn, timber, and tan bark."¹ Moonshiners, who made corn liquor for a living, always had extra money as an income supplement. There were a few sawmills that furnished employment for the families. One day's wages ranged from fifty cents to a dollar.

There was no worry of utility bills in the Smokies. Electricity was non-existent, and water was plentiful and free. There were plenty of creeks and streams that ran through the mountain land. Bathrooms were outside in "outhouses". These were small shacks with a deep hole in the ground. Wood was used for heat, and kerosene for lamps at a cost of five cents a gallon. After the crops were harvested in the fall, firewood was gathered to last for the winter.

Most clothing was handmade with the exception of men's and boy's pants. These were mainly denim jeans with bibs and suspenders, commonly called overhauls. The women made shirts, slips, bloomers, and dresses. It was frowned upon for a female to wear men's clothing. In the wintertime

¹Russell, Gladys T., Call Me Hillbilly, (Alcoa, Tn.: Russell Publishing Co., 1974) 61.

most wore store bought long-handled underwear. Shoes were also bought at the store and expected to last a year. Gladys remembers, "Pa always kept some tanned cowhide from which he cut shoe strings for his and the boy's shoes."¹

Gladys recalls school as being "enjoyable for all mountain children. After all, this was about the only place most of us got to go, except to the store and church on Sunday."² Beginners in school started out with just one little book to last them the whole wchool term. Lessons were reading, arithmetic, spelling, English grammar and geography. Around the seventh and eighth grades, children began to study Tennessee history and U.S. history. One teacher would teach grades one through three, and the principal would teach grades four through eight. The total enrollment averaged about eighty.

The teachers and students walked to school and back. Several students lived distances up to two and three miles away. In the 1920's the federal WPA program came and built outside toilets throughout the county for those who paid for the building materials. Until then, an "out-house" was used for a bathroom, or a pine thicket near the river or creek. The school rooms were small and by recess, the children were usually full of energy. There was not any playgroud

¹Russell, Gladys T., Call Me Hillbilly (Alcoa, Tn.: Russell Publishing Co., 1974), 58.

²Russell, Gladys T., It Happened in the Smokies (Alcoa, Tn.: Russell Publishing Co., 1989), 39.

equipment, so the children used their imaginations and invented games.

Church played a vital role in the mountains. Not only for the ones who were deeply religious, but it was a social gathering as well. Once a week people would come to hear God's word and then do their socializing. Revivals were very common in the mountains, and they were moving experiences. Women would shour and faint. Following the revivials would be a baptismal service. People would walk to these "big meetins" in groups from great distances. Gladys recalls one of the last revivals she attended in the park area in which some of the men from President Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps came.¹

In the pre-park days there were no funeral homes or undertakers. When there was a death in the community, the churchbell was tolled to announce it. It usually tolled according to the age of the deceased. Coffins were made of pine or poplar lumber and lined with black cotton cloth. No embalming of any kind took place, and all the relatives would sit up all night with the body. Long funeral services were held at the community church regardless of who was being buried.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of mountain life to be passed down was it's folklore and superstitions. "The

¹Russell, Gladys, T., It Happened in the Smokies (Alcoa, Tn.: Russell Publishing Co., 1989), 46.

sayings and superstitions played an important role in the life of most Smoky Mountain folks."¹ The folklore was an oral tradition, meaning it was passed down generation to generation by word of mouth.

Behavioral problems were altered by these firm beliefs. For example, it was "bad luck" to spill salt on the table or hang a new calendar before the first of January. Sayings such as "don't put all your eggs in one basket" are still heard today. Many things such as weather signs for planting crops and home remedies that were used for survival are still used today.

The people who are natives of the Great Smoky Mountains had a way of life that was based on routine and tradition. Surprisingly, the majority of the people were not bitter about giving up their land when the first news spread about the creation of a National Park. Most were excited about leaving and going somewhere new. Most were able to sell their land to the government for more than it's estimated worth. Some, however, were upset about being driven from their old homeplaces at any price.²

"The land was bought with a very large sum of hard to get money and a prodigious amount of work in overcoming an

¹Russell, Gladys T., It Happened in the Smokies (Alcoa, Tn.: Russell Publishing Co., 1989), 98.

²Russell, Gladys T., Call Me Hillbilly (Alcoa, Tn.: Russell Publishing Co., 1974), 63.

amazing number of obstacles."¹ The Great Smoky Mountains National Park is one of the thirty-five National Parks established by Congress. It was administered by the National Park Service, which is a bureau of the Department of the Interior.

The 515,225.8 acres constituting this park were then in private ownership, in more than 6,600 separate tracts. One-third was still primeval forest, eighty-five percent was owned by eighteen timber and pulpwood companies.² 1,200 tracts were farms of various sizes, and 5,000 lots were summer homes. All of this activity required about ten years of effort before the park was established on June 15, 1934. The surveying, appraising, and buying was the most difficult. Gladys remembers her Pa being hired by officials to do much of the surveying when the land purchasing began.

"Many of the older folks were never content after moving away from their homes." Some made poor real estate investments and lost their homes because of faulty titles. Gladys remembers, "For several years after moving, when I dreamed at night, the setting for my dreams was the old home place in the Smokies."³ President Franklin D. Roosevelt

¹Russell, Gladys T., Call Me Hillbilly (Alcoa, Tn.: Russell Publishing Co., 1974), 63.

²Campbell, Carlos, Birth of a National Park (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Printing Press, 1960), 12.

³Russell, Gladys T., Call Me Hillbilly (Alcoa, Tn.: Russell Publishing Co., 1974), 63.

dedicated the park on September 2, 1940. Since the park's establishment, many have forgotten, and others will never know of the mountaineers and their lost heritage.

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Publishing Co., 1974.

Russell, Gladys. It Happened in the Smokies (Alcoa, Tn.:
Russell Publishing Co., 1989.

Gift and Release Agreement

We Gladys T. Russell and Amy Russell
Interviewee (print) Interviewer (print)

do hereby give and grant to Dr. Suzanne Marshall, Assistant Professor of History, Jacksonville State University, all literary and property rights, title, and interest which we may possess to the audio or video recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) conducted at

her home in Manyville, Tennessee

on the date(s) of February 25, 1995

for the oral history collection being compiled by Dr. Marshall.

Gladys Trentham Russell
Interviewee's signature

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Date 2-25-95

Amy Russell
Interviewer's signature

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Date 2-25-95

INTERVIEWEE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name: Gladys Trentham Russell M/F Female
 Address: 1701 Elm Dr. Maryville, Tennessee, 37801
 Phone number(s): 615-982-8017
 Approximate age or date of birth: January 8, 1917
 Mother's Name: Mary Jane Ogle Carr Trentham
 Father's Name: ~~Amos~~ Noah Trentham
 Places lived and when: Gatlinburg, Tn. 1917-1933; Pigeon Forge, Tn. 1933-41
Oak Ridge, Tn 1941-1945; Maryville, Tn 1945-1995
 Education: B.A. Elementary + Secondary Education.
 Religion: Southern Baptist
 Business, political and social memberships (past and present) _____
 Present occupation: retired
 Former occupations: school teacher
 Special Skills: _____
 Major Accomplishments: author of 3 published books about life in the Great Smoky mountains.
 National Events in which interviewee has participated: worked as auditor at oak ridge, Tn. during the making of the atomic bomb.
 Local Events in which interviewee has participated: filmed in the CBS movie "Christy"
 National born U.S. citizen? Yes No
 Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No Date: _____
 Country from which he/she emigrated: _____
 Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in the possession of the interviewee: _____
 Individuals recommended by the interviewee who might be candidates for an oral history interview: _____
 Additional information: _____

Table of Contents of Tape

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