

The Death Culture of Southern Appalachia

Key Words: Cemeteries, Death, Funeral, Migrant, Ritual, Tradition, United States

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The region of Southern Appalachia is rich with tradition and custom going back to the inhabitants' homelands. Southern Appalachia is a unique place with a distinct culture formed by immigrating pioneers. Despite opposition from the environment and the Native Americans living in the area at the time, these pioneers created their own communities (Taggart 2006:656-657). The Scotch-Irish formed a large part of these immigrants, and their traditions continue today. However, they were not the only immigrants, and it was only through the combined traditions of multiple ethnicities and the creation of new traditions. These traditions created the distinctive culture among modern Southern Appalachia. One cultural distinction is their death culture. The death culture in Southern Appalachia is intuitive not just of their origins but of the immigrants themselves. This paper will explore the death culture first by outlining the history of the Scotch-Irish immigration into Appalachia, as well as some of the other dominant immigrants. Then, the paper will focus in on aspects of the death culture such as funeral traditions, cemeteries and gravestone patterns, the attitude toward death, and the effects of commercialization in the region.

What exactly is Southern Appalachia? Crissman (1994:5) defined it by what it is not, it "excludes New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio," however, Stansberry (2004:6) defined it as what it is, it's "the southern part of the Appalachian region that includes the four western counties of Maryland; the Blue Ridge, Valley, and Allegheny Ridge counties of Virginia, all of West Virginia; eastern Tennessee; eastern Kentucky; western North Carolina; the four northwestern counties of South Carolina; northern Georgia; and northeastern Alabama." For this paper, I will use Stansberry's definition. The use of the term Old South refers to the states which seceded from the Union in the Civil War. It is also important to note the region defined as the Upland South. The Upland South, as defined by Jordan-Bychkov (1998:6), covers a large part of Appalachia but it also extends into Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas (see Figure 1). The cemetery traditions of the Upland South and Southern Appalachia are later discussed in this paper, as will some other aspects of death culture.

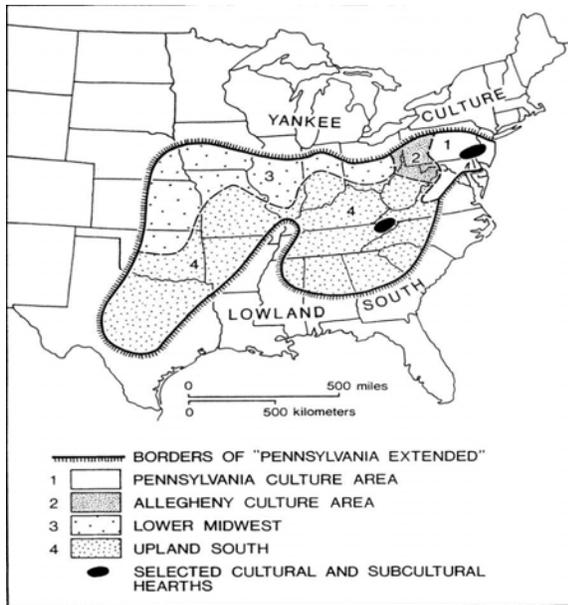


Figure 1. The extent of the Upland South (Jordan-Bychkov 1998:6).

To begin, it is necessary to understand the history of the Scotch-Irish and other migrant groups in order to understand the Appalachian death culture in the region. The three dominant immigrant groups in Southern Appalachia were the English, Scotch-Irish, and Germans. During James I reign (1566-1625), Northern Ireland was annexed and resulted in the emigration into the isolated areas of Appalachian America (McNerney 2017:3). Interestingly, the term Scotch-Irish is only used in America to refer to the English, Scottish, and Irish who immigrated from England between 1600-1800. The majority were Scots and English who had been forced into Northern Ireland after hundreds of years of conflict (McNerney 2017:3-5). An estimated 150,000 immigrated to the New World from about 1718-1775. These immigrants viewed the New World as their only hope (McNerney 2017:5).

Another reason for the Scotch-Irish immigration was economical. Those who lived in the Old World found it difficult to survive and retain their way of life. Rent was rising and the price for "rural goods" was declining (McWhiney 1998:10-11). Most of the Scotch-Irish living in the Old South inhabited the isolated regions from Pennsylvania down to Georgia, known as Southern Appalachia (McWhiney 1998:12). Robert Mitchell estimated that 140,000 settlers made their way to the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia between 1730 and 1780 (Horning 2002:130). Restlessness spurred these settlers to migrate further inland and into the mountains of Appalachia (McWhiney 1998:14-15).

While Horning (2002:129), disagreed with McWhiney, she did agree that the Scotch-Irish migration, also known as the Ulster migration, had an enduring impact on the nature of the early republic as well as the mountainous regions of the Southern Appalachia. It is possible that the Scotch-Irish had a massive influence on the American English language as well (Yoder 2006:48). McWhiney (1998:38) suggested that much of the South was influenced by the Scotch-Irish preferences for an agricultural lifestyle and the priority of leisure. Don Yoder (2006), who grew up in an Irish county in Pennsylvania, traced the Irish and to an extent the Scotch-Irish

influence on Pennsylvania. Their influence permeated the whole state, and from there influenced Southern Appalachia as they spread out into the mountains. It is important to note that the resentment of the Old World between the English and those of Celtic descent, like the Scotch-Irish, continued in the New World. The English typically believed the Celts were uncivilized and the Celts resented the English for trying to force them to abandon their customs (McWhiney 1998:27-28).

Another group that settled in the South in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the Irish, from Ireland, who ended up blending with the Scotch-Irish. The Irish and Scotch-Irish shared traditions, feuded, and stole from each other for centuries (McWhiney 1998:5). Irvin S. Cobb pointed out that the heritage of the South was not Anglo-Saxon, “No the lost Irish tribes of the South are not lost;... for their Irish blood is of the strain that cannot be extinguished, and it lives today, thank God, in the attributes and the habits and the customs and the traditions of the Southern people (McWhiney 1998:36).” How true this is will be discussed later.

The Germans also settled in Appalachia, moving mostly into Pennsylvania before spreading out and migrating into the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia. Some pioneering Germans spread south into the North Carolina mountains as well (McNerney 2017:7). The Germans followed the Scotch-Irish, and were the most influential in the area next to the Scotch-Irish. However, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the French Huguenots migrated into the Appalachian Mountains joining and intermarrying with the Scotch-Irish (McNerney 2017:9).

The belief that Southern Appalachia is one unified ethnic population of Scotch-Irish is unfounded. All immigrants, as well as the Native populations and Africans-- both slave and free, left their own mark on the landscape. It is unreasonable to overgeneralize Southern Appalachia, and doing so perpetuates stereotypes such as references to the inhabitants as “hillbillies” (Stansberry 2004:14). Evidently, there are many who see Appalachia as a homogenous culture of primarily Scotch-Irish descent (Satterwhite 2005), even in the academic world. Satterwhite (2005:319-320) argued that the academics, such as McWhiney and Fischer, focused only on the Scotch-Irish descent in Appalachia and ignored the other cultural influences. This only helped spread dangerous stereotypes. It is true that around 1775 about 37.8% of the Shenandoah Valley was Scotch-Irish (Horning 2002:131), but other migrants came to the area and descent patterns became harder to distinguish as time went on. One thing that the Scotch-Irish did contribute was the use of the fiddle in Appalachian music (Satterwhite 2005:321).

Whether true or false, Southern Appalachia did become a region where, “...The sheltered mountain hollows were populated by a diverse group of 18th- and 19th-century settlers whose descendants enjoyed and continue to enjoy a marked sense of identity bound by kinship and locality (Horning 2002:144).”

After skimming the surface of the immigration patterns and problems in Southern Appalachia, the rest of this paper will focus on the death culture of the Southern Appalachia and how it has evolved. While the immigrants adapted quickly to their new home, some of their funeral traditions survived. There are three main distinctions that set them apart from other cultures.

Crissman's book, *Death and Dying in Central Appalachia*, described many of these customs in detail. While Crissman focuses on the region of Central Appalachia, he defines this as "the Appalachian sections of Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Kentucky, and the entire state of West Virginia (Crissman 1994:5)." Since the working definition of Southern Appalachia includes these areas, Crissman's work was relevant to this discussion.

The first of these traditions is the preparation of the deceased, which was very personal in Southern Appalachia. This practice existed before embalming, and the body would be ritually laid straight on a board where the body would be prepared for the burial (Wagner). Before the preparation of the body even began, notice that a person had died would be spread to neighbors and relatives by mouth, and surrounding area was notified by a bell chime (Crissman 1994:26). The bell would be rung at a church and immediately those within hearing would drop everything to find out who it was and what family needed help. In at least one instance in Tennessee, the bell would chime the number of years old the deceased was (Crissman 1994:27). This was one way that the people listening could identify the dead.

Preparation of the body was also called the "laying out." In some cases, it was performed by family members, in others it was done by the neighbors who had arrived at the house for the death watch. The process began by stretching out the body so that they could lay straight and fit in the coffin. In some cases, this meant using warm water or breaking bones. The board was made of whatever was readily available, including doors, tables, a piece of lumber, or an ironing board (Crissman 1994:24,29-30).

The deceased's arms were folded across the chest, the legs were tied together near the feet, and the head was tied in such a way that the mouth could not open. The eyes were also kept closed by using a weight, usually a coin (Crissman 1994:30). One proposed reason for closing the eyes with a weight was that the people believed that a person had to enter heaven with closed eyes to show God that they were asking for forgiveness and were presenting themselves as humble (Stansberry 2004:18).

The body was often bathed as well. Typically, it was washed with water, or a combination of water and soap. Some people would wash the face and hands specifically with soda water, camphor, vinegar, or alcohol so that these locations would retain some color. In a few places, the people would also sprinkle salt on the body because they believed it would prevent swelling and decomposition (Crissman 1994:32).

After the body was cleaned, the body was dressed in a single piece of cloth called a shroud, which was either red, white, or black. However, in early years the people were also buried in their own best clothes which were cut down the back like a shroud to fit the body (Crissman 1994:32-33). An adult woman was often buried in black or white clothes, an adult man in a white shirt, and a child in white clothes (Stansberry 2004:20). After the body was laid out, a neighbor would take a rope and tie the body to the board to prevent the body from moving in any way (Crissman 1994:30).

Embalming was accepted in the mountains only slowly. The first embalmers came to the home of the deceased. Some family members who observed or found evidence of the procedure

were very disturbed by the embalming; other people who may have desired it could not afford it. One bad experience could change peoples' mind about embalming but eventually the practice did grow in popularity (Crissman 1994:36-37).

The second funeral tradition influenced by the immigrants is known as the wake. The wake is perhaps the most unique aspect of the death culture in Southern Appalachia. During the wake the corpse is never left alone for at least twenty-four hours following the preparation of the body; and the corpse was often touched (Semancik 1997). While many of the early settlers of the Appalachian area had some form of wake, the Scotch-Irish wake heavily influenced how it was done due to the large numbers of Scotch-Irish immigrants (Crissman 1994:69). While the mood of the wake varied, the general concept of the wake across Appalachia was a celebration. The beginning of a wake it was more somber, but as it went on there was singing, laughter, games, jokes, stories, and even courting (Crissman 1994:73). Stansberry (2004:13) points out that the Irish wake was not just a time of celebration for the living. The corpse was sometimes stood in the corner so that it could "participate" in the festivities. At this type of wake, it was also punishable to openly grieve instead of celebrating.

The primary concern of the wake was partly to make sure the deceased was, in fact, dead. There were several instances where the supposedly deceased began showing signs of life, including one where the person woke in the wagon on the way to his burial (Crissman 1994:69). Usually the wake was observed one night after the death, but in some instances it was prolonged or shortened depending on the circumstances of the death. Cases of disease or illness usually shortened the wake, while family members traveling to see the body prolonged it (Crissman 1994:70). Usually, the watchers would remain through the night. Sometimes people would take shifts beginning or ending at midnight. On occasion, the lot fell to a younger person to sit up with the dead, and this youngster might turn the occasion into a date (Crissman 1994:71). This date usually involved inviting a few friends including the love interest over and hoping things ended well.

It was the watchers who, before embalming, were charged with rubbing the face of the dead with different solutions to keep color in the face (Crissman 1994:72). As one might expect, there were several problems that could affect a wake negatively. One of the biggest problems at the wake was keeping pests away from the body. Insects and bugs were naturally attracted to the corpse, and many farmsteads were rat infested. Cats were also a problem, since people believed that the cats wanted to eat the corpse. So, the family members and friends would have to keep their eyes on the corpse at all times (Crissman 1994:69).

Another tradition that occurred during the wake was the bringing of food. Food was brought by the neighbors to be consumed during the wake and could in fact turn into a feast that was held in the same room as the deceased. When it was a death by illness, the food would be dropped off by the neighbors, who may not stay due to the contagion (Crissman 1994:72-73). A newer tradition came once technology spread into the mountains. As photography became widespread, family members would often take pictures of the deceased, both inside and outside the coffin (Crissman 1994:74). Conversation at these wakes was typically religious, pondering death and the afterlife and what was now happening to the deceased. The deceased was mentioned often in stories and memories, but his or her shortcomings were never mentioned

(Crissman 1994:73). The best thing that could possibly happen during the wake for the deceased was that a mourner would become “saved” in the Christian sense (Stansberry 2004:21). This gave the deceased’s life and death meaning by redeeming a lost soul in the process.

The third and final funeral tradition was the burial service. While the burial service was not as unique as the other traditions, it was very personal. The burial service was always performed by men who were family or friends of the deceased, and there was nothing commercial about it (Center For Transportation Research). Burials were often hard labor, mainly due to the hardness of the ground.

The burial of the deceased was a community affair (Crissman 1994:60). The bell toll was not just about letting the community know that someone had died, it was also a call for the men to start digging (Stansberry 2004:52-53). Men of the community, usually neighbors, friends, or relatives not part of the immediate family, would participate in digging the grave with no expectation of pay. The immediate family did little but observe and advise if necessary. Where it concerned the digging of the grave directly, men would show up in droves to accomplish the task and it was a highly social event. It was a time to tell stories about anything and everything, and sometimes it was a drinking affair as well. Even when the burial was taking place in a family or church cemetery, the grave was still dug by hand under the direction of the older and wiser men (Crissman 1994:60-61).

The process of digging a grave encountered many potential problems, any of which could delay the funeral process from a few hours to an entire season. The mountainous terrain provided difficulty in transporting the body from the home to the gravesite. Even within the cemetery there were problems trying to figure out where other bodies might be buried. Winter hardened the ground so that before machinery was available it was often impossible to dig a grave. At other times the graves filled with water. Rocks had to be broken with sledgehammers, hand drills, or even dynamite was used (Crissman 1994:63-64). Graves were dug the day of the funeral, as it was believed to be unlucky to leave a grave open overnight (Center for Transportation Research).

Early on in America, coffins were unavailable, or the settlers did not have the expertise needed to make them. The earliest coffins made in Appalachia seem to be hollowed logs, a practice possibly going back to their ancestral home. Later, rough boxes replaced hollow logs and eventually an interest grew in making the boxes look presentable (Crissman 1994:47-49). One woman named Laura was part of a family of local coffin makers who built the coffins prior to the establishment of a funeral home in the area (Stansberry 2004:29-30). According to Laura, the first funeral home did not come to her region of Tennessee until 1936. If the coffin was handmade, it was essential to get it done quickly as the burial occurred soon after the death (Crissman 1994:55).

A common coffin form in rural Appalachia was a “mummy” form in which the coffins would be narrow at the head and feet and wide at the shoulder. These were typical from the eighteenth century into the early twentieth century (Center for Transportation Research). The outside of the coffins was often covered in a black material. They also began to line the interior of coffins; this was done with some form of white material (Stansberry 2004:19). There was also

a custom in eastern Kentucky to make “coffin quilts” which was a quilt with a coffin and the name of a family member sewn onto the border while they were still living. After the individual had died, the coffin was removed from the border and re sewn onto the quilt in the center (Stansberry 2004:20).

Once everything was ready, the deceased was transferred to the church in a wagon accompanied by friends and family walking behind (Stansberry 2004:21). A funeral service followed, usually with a “fire and brimstone” sermon, before the deceased was transferred to the burial site. Joy, another participant in the Stansberry (2004:39) interviews, said that she remembered flower girls carrying flowers from the church to the cemetery. This was interesting because Stansberry could not find record of this practice anywhere else in the literature on Southern Appalachia.

All three of these traditions were a key part of the social climate in Southern Appalachia and were attended by the whole community. Often, everything done by the community to take care of the dead was done for free, including the minister’s services. This practice may even continue today in some parts of Appalachia such as Kentucky (McNerney 2017:11).

The paper will now focus on Southern Appalachian cemeteries and gravestone patterns. There are three main phases for folk cemeteries in the Upland South, which includes the Southern Appalachia region: pioneer, transitional, and modern cemeteries (Center for Transportation Research). In the mountains, pioneer cemeteries were located in extremely rugged terrain and on higher elevations. Cemeteries are also usually on side slopes (McNerney 2017:12). Laura, mentioned earlier, also pointed out that in the rural regions of Southern Appalachia most people were buried on their own property or their family cemetery (Stansberry 2004:31).

McNerney (2017:12-13) describes the denominational background of these settlers and how many of these churches had cemeteries associated with them. The three most popular denominations were the Primitive Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians. He also notes that the church buildings sometimes housed multiple congregations of different denominations and that it is possible some of these churches which still exist today are no longer representative of their original denomination.

The earliest settlers in Appalachia did not mark graves. Several reasons for this existed. For one, there was a fear that a Native American would find the grave and desecrate the body. There was also not enough time to mark the grave; and, even if there was, the early settlers did not have the skill or desire to do so. If there was a marker, it was often an unmarked fieldstone or wooden cross that would decay quickly and leave no traces (Crissman 1994:120-121). In time, they began to carve rocks as headstones. However, in some places wooden crosses and field stones continue to be used even today either to maintain tradition or simply because the family cannot afford a commercial marker (Crissman 1994:122).

Some common types of grave markers in the Upland South more recently include the Necked discoid type and the Discoid companion. Both involve a disc on top of a rectangular

body. The former had a slimmer neck in between the disc and the body, while the other may or may not have had a neck (McNerney 2017:14). Another common part of the Upland South cemetery culture is the grave shelter (McNerney 2017:17). Grave shelters are light, open structures usually enclosed by a fence. McNerney did not mention how deep in the mountains these commonalities go, but it is possible that if these grave markers followed diffusion patterns as well.

There were, it seems, professional and commercial gravestone makers of Scotch-Irish origin along the eastern side of Appalachia where they had access to materials and a large client base. Many of these carvers had more than one specialty, making stone works other than just grave markers (McNerney 2017:21). It was common even in the mountains to have these dual specialists. However, even with granite and marble being accessible, those in the heart of Appalachia in the rugged mountains would have had a hard time bringing the gravestones to the cemetery sites until more recently.

While on the fringe of Appalachia, professionals sold their gravestones to willing patrons, amid the mountains they mostly relied on folk grave makers. These grave makers can be hard to distinguish from professional ones if they have had enough practice, but folk markers typically are made with local materials and made on a need basis by someone in the area (McNerney 2017:23-24).

Wealth and poverty did not always play a part in which gravestone the people of Appalachia preferred. Religion was also a factor, at least among the Scotch-Irish, as the Presbyterians purchased their markers from the skilled professionals as opposed to the others (mostly Baptists and Methodists) who typically preferred the plain necked discoid markers (McNerney 2017:22).

These patterns and the history of the Appalachian cemeteries are difficult to discern, because so much has been lost due to time, but cemeteries are just one part of the Southern Appalachian death culture. Another aspect of the death culture is the attitude concerning death, and just how the residents view and deal with death. The attitude in Southern Appalachia tends to be fatalistic, accepting that everyone must come to death in the end. This fatalism coincides with superstitious beliefs concerning death, such as seeing omens of death everywhere, including the omen of a dream about a wedding (Taggart 2005:661). It was believed that if one dreamed about a wedding, a death would come soon.

Their belief about death was centered on the idea that death always won (Wagner 2017). A survey of modern cancer survivors in Appalachia suggested that having cancer in Appalachia was different than anywhere else because it came with the acceptance of loss. One of those interviewed said, "Here in the mountains and valleys, we know people actually die. We go back to the ground we came from (Welch 2011:117)." But how did this view originate?

Death in the Appalachian Mountains occurred quickly and often without any time for preparation. There were a plethora of accidents and diseases and, typically, the process of dying from beginning to end was very short. The young did not worry about death and even the old often left it to the living to deal with their funeral preparations (Crissman 1994:51). This could

be attributed to the qualities of the Scotch-Irish discussed earlier where they generally valued leisure over work.

While the isolated regions of Appalachia were not quite as bloody as the wars that the Scotch-Irish had originally fled from or were displaced by, there were still dangers and high mortality rates (Semancik 1997). One danger was the small-scale conflict with each other. There were clashes with the Native Americans, roaming bandits, and often vigilantes. However, Semancik (1997) suggests that these conflicts all combined did not compare to the death toll in British borderlands. How it compared to the wars of their homeland aside, the constant threat did make the mountaineers wary. They learned to accept that death was coming rather than spend their lives trying to avoid it.

Wendy Welch (2011:108-122) discusses fatalism where it concerns modern health care in the Appalachia region, in southwest Virginia specifically. Welch's discussion shows that there are many reasons why modern Appalachian populations are either considered fatalistic or really are, depending on the circumstances. In medicinal terms, fatalism is defined as letting nature take its course, rather than seeking a treatment or care (Welch 2011:114). A reason for this is simply a lack of resources, or miscommunication between doctor and patient. Welch conceded that some of the patients are indeed fatalistic, which may be a remnant of the attitude of the immigrant populations.

The people of Southern Appalachia also had many death superstitions attributed to the Scotch-Irish. An example is that if you heard a cock crowing at midnight you would die before dawn. Another is that the dead had to be attended prior to the wake. The direction of the buried dead and the dressing of graves with flowers were also associated with the Scotch-Irish (McWhiney 1998:207). It was also common that just after a death occurred the house clocks would be stopped, and mirrors would be draped (Center for Transportation Research). Mirrors and clocks were both associated with death because of this custom.

This traditional death culture in Southern Appalachia has been impacted in recent days. The effects of commercialization have come even to the remote part of the world that the Scotch-Irish inhabit. This commercialization has greatly affected the Appalachian death culture, as over time it is disappearing as the funeral industry grows prevalent within the region.

One of the most difficult things that Appalachians have had to adjust to is allowing the body to be embalmed and to let strangers in funeral homes have control and perform rites that originally were performed in the home by family and neighbors (Stansberry 2004:16). While not legally required in most states, embalming by a professional funeral home has become the common practice. The dressing of the body no longer takes place at home either. The clothes are no longer homemade, but are sometimes provided by the funeral home, and shrouds are not used at all (Crissman 1994:40-41). Coffin making has been replaced by funeral homes instead of local craftsmen. It is now rare that someone in the community makes the coffin instead of buying one from a funeral home (Crissman 1994:52). And, of course, the families have stopped digging the graves by hand. One reason that they no longer dig the graves is because both the churches, the funeral professionals, and the public cemeteries strongly discourage it. They want to make sure the lawns look good because they are selling the graves (Stansberry 2004:58).

Stansberry conducted interviews with people who lived in Southern Appalachia who were old enough to see some traditions come and go. One interviewee, Laura, mentioned earlier, said that the funeral home made the wake more convenient, but was much more impersonal. She said that the death just does not stick with you like it used to when it was in the home (Stansberry 2004:31-32). Wayne and Betty agreed that the burial process had become less personal, and that this was because the professionals wanted to spare the family from dealing with the death firsthand (Stansberry 2004:44). Betty explained that bodies cannot even be moved when someone dies at home (Stansberry 2004:44). I know from personal experience that the body must be inspected by medical personnel and the police if someone dies at home before anything else is done. This would have a direct effect on many of the Southern Appalachian burial customs.

Stansberry interviewed Neil and Joy. During his interview, Neil discussed how a friend of his, Jim, recently asked Neil to build his coffin (Stansberry 2004:34-35). Neil believed that Jim felt that the cost of a commercial coffin was a money-making proposition, and he did not want his coffin to be commercialized. As the interview went on, Neil also discussed his belief that the funeral industry should not be so commercialized. Rather, it should be something you do for your neighbors, your friends, and not expect compensation from it (Stansberry 2004:35).

During the interview, Neil expressed that he was against and disturbed by the commercialization of everything but of funerals in particular. Joy, Neil's wife, could also remember when everyone would linger at the gravesite for an hour or more before leaving, but now she says they must leave the gravesite immediately because the attendees are anxious to cover the grave (Stansberry 2004:39).

Through the course of the interviews Stansberry (2004:61) found several themes: there is still a strong sense of community in Appalachian burials, religion plays an important role in what burial practices they observe, the modern funeral industry for better or worse has strongly influenced how the Appalachians bury their dead, and the change in economy of the Appalachian lifestyle, from farmer to laborer, has changed when funerals are scheduled. After hearing the testimonies, Stansberry (2004:63) believed that the limited personal involvement prolongs the grieving process rather than protecting the family of the deceased.

Interestingly, many cultural changes occurred, and modern funeral practice were accepted in the 1930s and 40s in Southern Appalachia at the same time as a massive relocation in western Virginia, an area that became Shenandoah National Park (Horning 2002:131). Horning said that this relocation was popularized by spreading the belief that the people they were pushing out were all degenerate descendants of the Scotch-Irish. The stereotypes about Southern Appalachia discussed in the beginning of this paper played a major role in condoning the relocation those who previously inhabited the region. Archaeologists did not return to study the region until sixty years later. Crissman (1998) states that modern practices in the funeral industry began in the 30s and 40s, and Stansberry's interviewees were old enough to just remember the last of the traditional burials being performed around the same time. Taken altogether, the 1930s and 40s had a drastic impact on Southern Appalachia, and some may even call it a devastating impact.

While the funeral industry continues to distance people from the after-death process and the handling of the body, it appears at least to some extent that the people of Appalachia continue to be more involved on a personal level with the burial of their dead (Stansberry 2004:24). Even if they are prohibited or discouraged from performing most of their traditions, a funeral remains a community affair, and they still believe that it is a time to gather and remember.

What will happen to the people of Southern Appalachia in the coming years? The effects of globalization over the past century has marked death for many different cultural distinctions, and it may be that the same happens to the traditions that survive in Southern Appalachia. However, these immigrants have proved to be extremely stubborn, and often do not take the word of others very quickly. They have maintained a strong sense of community, which can be seen in burial customs new and old. The harsh world they lived in, however, also served to give them a fatalistic approach toward death. In the end, only time will tell what will happen to this culture, or any culture, as the effects of globalization sweep in. Until then, the beauty of what makes each culture different should not be taken for granted, as the future remains uncertain.

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