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Cumberland Gap, Tennessee : Building community identity along the Wilderness Road, 1880-1929

Rebecca Vial
University of Tennessee

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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Rebecca Vial entitled "Cumberland Gap, Tennessee : Building community identity along the Wilderness Road, 1880-1929." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

Susan D. Becker, Major Professor

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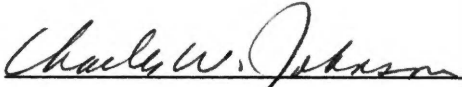
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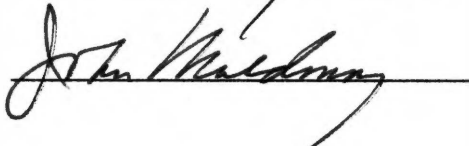
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CUMBERLAND GAP, TENNESSEE: BUILDING COMMUNITY IDENTITY
ALONG THE WILDERNESS ROAD, 1880-1929

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Rebecca Vial

August, 1991

ABSTRACT

This research studies the history of Cumberland Gap, Tennessee, between 1880 and 1929, and analyzes the impact of outside influences on its economic, social, political, and cultural development. A variety of primary and secondary sources, including oral history interviews with residents and former residents of the community, were used. The location of the community on the Wilderness Road and the diversity of the people who settled the area affected all aspects of the community's development.

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INTRODUCTION

Few areas in the United States have inspired writers trying to symbolize the American pioneer spirit more than Cumberland Gap. Crossing the Gap meant conquering America's first western frontier and severing forever America's European ties. Few people lingered near the Gap itself or noticed the small village forming in the shadows of the Cumberland Mountains. Unlike earlier settlements, Cumberland Gap, Tennessee developed after the frontier changed from family subsistence farms to organized commercial community centers. While other areas in the Appalachians, for example, Big Stone Gap, Virginia; Harlan, Kentucky; and Cades Cove, Tennessee, became increasingly isolated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Cumberland Gap, Tennessee, located on the Wilderness Road, expanded economically, politically, socially, and culturally.

While published accounts of Cumberland Gap began as soon as the first white explorers arrived in North America, early writings focused on the terrain, especially the historic Wilderness Road through

mountains.¹ By 1796, after Kentucky and Tennessee became states and all danger from Indians ceased, the few scattered settlements along the Wilderness Road received little mention in frontier accounts.

During the Civil War, the strategic location of the Gap and its symbolic location between the North and South continued to be the focus of studies of Cumberland Gap.² Not until the discovery of Appalachia by local color writers in the late nineteenth century did the emphasis begin to shift from place to people. These writers concentrated on the cultural "otherness"³ of a people "molded by the peculiar forces of the terrain ...and the lack of contact with outsiders."⁴ They

¹Thomas Speed, The Wilderness Road (Louisville: Filson Club, 1886); Archer Butler Hulbert, Boone's Wilderness Road Vol. VI, Historic Highways of America (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1903); Robert L. Kincaid, The Wilderness Road, American Trails Series (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1947; reprint, Middlesboro, KY: Privately printed, 1973).

²Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, D. C.: GPO, 1901); Oliver P. Temple, East Tennessee and the Civil War (Cincinnati: The R. Clarke Co., 1899); R. W. McFarland, The Surrender of Cumberland Gap (Columbus: n.p., 1898).

³David E. Whisnant, All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), xiii.

⁴Jack E. Weller, Yesterday's People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), 14.

ignored places like Cumberland Gap where "mountaineers were familiar with [as] many things"⁵ and events outside the mountains as they were. They sought instead areas "peopled by feudalists, moonshiners, bearded mountaineers."⁶

The field of community studies specific to the South includes few Appalachian cities. Indeed, most studies of urban Appalachians deal with outmigrants. Recent studies by government agencies and "native" Appalachians concentrate on efforts to identify regional differences in the larger arena of twentieth century America. Many of these works look for solutions to problems such as poverty and racism that plague other areas of the United States.⁷

⁵George Vincent, "A Retarded Frontier" in American Journal of Sociology 4 (July 1898), 15.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Michael J. McDonald and William Bruce Wheeler, Knoxville, Tennessee: Continuity and Change in an Appalachian City (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983); Durwood C. Dunn, Cades Cove: The Life and Death of a Southern Appalachian Community, 1818-1937 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988); Sam Byrd, Small Town South (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1942); Jim Branscome, "Annihilating the Hillbilly: The Appalachians' Struggle with America's Institutions," in Helen M. Lewis, Linda Johnson, and Don Askins, eds., Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case (Boone, North Carolina: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1978); Economics and Social Problems and Conditions of the Southern Appalachians, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Bureau of Home Economics and Forest Service (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1935).

While these books, journals, and government reports are valuable for the study of specific areas (Cades Cove) or problems (poverty), none of these Southern Appalachian studies deal with communities that evolved quite like Cumberland Gap. Cumberland Gap's proximity to the Wilderness Road brought not only travellers, skilled craftsmen, and marriageable outsiders but also people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds to the community. The low percentage of Blacks and the community's acceptance of them was more comparable to that of York, Pennsylvania than that of Thomson, Georgia.⁹

Cumberland Gap, Tennessee more appropriately fits the model used by geographer Norman T. Moline in Mobility and the Small Town, 1900-1930: Transportation Change in Oregon, Illinois. Moline outlines the historical perspective of the community and its geographic location relative to the state and county. He then examines the

⁹For a view of York, Pennsylvania and other northern cities from the perspective of an ex-slave see Amanda Smith, An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord's Dealing with Mrs. Amanda Smith the Colored Evangelist (Chicago: Meyer & Brother, 1893; reprint publication of the Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Thomson, Georgia was the home of racist Tom Watson detailed in C. Vann Woodward, Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1938).

forces of change inside and outside the community which affected the fabric of the community. The railroad, the automobile, the highway, and increased state and federal participation in the community affected all aspects of life in Oregon, Illinois, just as it affected all aspects of life in Cumberland Gap, Tennessee. The African-American population of Oregon is not ignored, but neither is it subjected to the close scrutiny usually offered in studies of southern communities.⁹

Although in 1990 most of the people in Cumberland Gap are white, Blacks influenced the cultural heritage of the community. The first Blacks arrived as slaves of John Newly, owner of the iron furnace. The meager "record of Blacks ...is gleaned from accounts of other traders and travellers who mention Blacks in passing."¹⁰ There are few published accounts of Blacks in Appalachia and most of these are general rather than specific in

⁹Norman T. Moline, Mobility and the Small Town, 1900-1930: Transportation Change in Oregon, Illinois (Chicago: University of Chicago Department of Geography Research Paper No. 132, 1971).

¹⁰Lester C. Lamon, Blacks in Tennessee, 1791-1970 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 11, 119.

scope.¹¹ Between 1840 and 1985 Blacks lived in the same houses as their employers, in "Negro tenements"¹² near the furnace and the mill, and owned their own homes in the predominately white community.

Limited in area and in population, the incorporated community of Cumberland Gap did not warrant urban status but the 1910 census did recognize it as a separate community within a rural district. Cumberland Gap was actually a distinct community by 1800, as families in the tri-state area moved to the town for jobs generated by the traffic along the road and often shopped there for products they could not produce on the farm. During the years 1840-1930, a grist mill, iron furnace, and woolen mills developed gradually at the base of the mountain. This normal civic development, encouraged by the community's leaders, was temporarily interrupted by the Civil War.

After the war, new settlers arrived who facilitated industrial development in the area and encouraged modern pioneers once again to travel through

¹¹David Bellows, "Appalachian Blacks: A Demographic Analysis" (MA Thesis, Rutgers, 1974); William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell, Blacks in Appalachia (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985); Nancy L. Grant, TVA and Black Americans: Planning for the Status Quo (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

¹²Sanborn-Perris Map Co., Ltd., New York, 1891, 1901, 1906, 1913, 1925.

Cumberland Gap. The new settlers included a wide variety of people; some remained in the community and some travelled through the Gap into Middlesboro, Kentucky, a New South industrial city springing up in the sparsely settled Yellow Creek Valley. By 1888, when the population had increased tenfold in Cumberland Gap and Middlesboro, religious leaders decided to build more churches and to seek full time ministers. Northern missionaries viewed every community in the old Confederate states as fertile ground for their proselytizing, and the American Missionary Association supported a church and a school in Cumberland Gap. But when the educational facility expanded it moved south of the town to the new community of Harrogate. Meanwhile the local Baptists and Methodists built their own churches in town and lent their support to the public school.

In 1928, the town council reluctantly agreed to reimburse councilman Frank Richardson \$15.00 of the \$25.00 he wanted to spend joining the Middlesboro Chamber of Commerce. Middlesboro would, in return, advertise Cumberland Gap in its promotional literature.¹³ The New South booster expenditures seemed unnecessary to the

¹³Town Council Minutes, 1909-1929, City Hall, Cumberland Gap, Tennessee.

council, because the town had attracted tourists and other visitors since 1750. By 1928, the council had set aside land for tourists to camp free of charge, put up signs directing people to Middlesboro, and fenced a culvert to stop damage to travellers' cars on the main highway through town. In spite of Berger's view of the "devil's wagon in God's country,"¹⁴ the automobile was incorporated into the traditional lifestyles in the Gap community.

Cumberland Gap, then, fits neither into the model of contemporary historians nor the New South model of Henry Grady.¹⁵ Cumberland Gap's development followed instead the small town model more typically found in Springdale, New York or Oregon, Illinois. Sociologists Vildich and Bensman viewed Springdale as a "Microcosm in the Macrocosm" of American society because it "retained ...elements from all historical and many cultural epochs

¹⁴Michael L. Berger, The Devil's Wagon in God's Country: The Automobile and Social Change in Rural America, 1893-1929 (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1979), 99.

¹⁵Henry Grady editor of the Atlanta Constitution is given credit for coining the term "New South". For the text of his 1886 speech in New York see Richard N. Current and John A Garraty, eds., Words That Made American History, Vol. II (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1962), 23-31.

in American society."¹⁶ Oregon's development, according to geographer Moline, changed as the mobility of its citizens and its neighbors changed.¹⁷ Cumberland Gap's ability to accept growth and diversification, yet retain its sense of community, mixed "southerners and hospitality ...with Yankees and the township system of settlement"¹⁸ to form Lingeman's "town in our hearts."¹⁹

From 1796 when Moses Austin first noticed "a Small Town of Six or Ten Houses and Two Stores"²⁰ until the Civil War, the town gradually expanded southeast of the historic Cumberland Gap. The long hunters, John Newly's slaves, foreign travelers, and Confederate and Union soldiers in town throughout its formative years, 1840-1865, gave Cumberland Gap, Tennessee a window on a wider world than the one usually viewed from the frontier

¹⁶Arthur J. Vildich and Joseph Bensman, Small Town in Mass Society: Class, Power and Religion in a Rural Community (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 321.

¹⁷Moline, 1971. ¹⁸Richard Lingeman, Small Town America: A Narrative History, 1620-The Present (New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1980), 76.

¹⁹Ibid., 481.

²⁰George Garrison, ed., "A Memorandum of Moses Austin's Journey," American History Review, V, no.3 (April, 1900).

perspective. The influx of Moguls²¹ and other opportunists during the 1880s brought rapid expansion to the community. By monitoring the increased capital investment, 1886-1892, the community's leaders prevented the collapse of the town structure when the outsiders departed. During 1889-1907 the benevolence of well-meaning missionaries enabled these same community leaders to provide expanded educational opportunities to a larger segment of Gap society.

Throughout its history, Cumberland Gap, Tennessee, population 300, adapted to the changing world at large and to the people left on its doorstep by the Wilderness Road. Seemingly unaware of its geographic limitations, Cumberland Gap maintained its economic viability and community identity in the shadow of the Appalachian Mountains, astride America's first western frontier.

²¹Harry M. Caudill, Theirs Be The Power: The Moguls of Eastern Kentucky (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983).

Chapter I

FRONTIER VISIONS: A BEGINNING, 1750-1886

...the last barrier Nature had reared between us and the delectable country. It stood like a lion at the gateway and for some minutes we gazed at it in terror from Powell's Valley below¹

Between 1760 and 1850, more than 300,000 people walked, rode, or were carried over the Appalachian Mountains through the Cumberland Gap.² Formed by a stream, enlarged by wind and weather, the Gap, 1500 feet above sea level, is 500 feet above a shallow basin formed by parallel ridges. This landscape influenced not only "the settlement patterns in the course of America's westering experience"³ but also encouraged early wanderers to settle the few level acres throughout the mountains. Limited geographically but not isolated, a small village slowly grew in this geologic bowl southeast of the Cumberland Gap along the path leading to the Gap.

¹Winston Churchill, The Crossing (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1904), 96.

²Arthur K. Moore, The Frontier Mind: A Cultural Analysis of the Kentucky Frontiersman (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1957), 67.

³Jere L. Krakow, Location of the Wilderness Road at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park (Washington: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1987), 13. Hereafter, Cumberland Gap NHP.

Sustained by the "travel that naturally poured through the Gap,"⁴ the village prospered as its commercial and industrial capacity increased.(see Figure 1)

Initially, the constant danger from Indians prevented settlement. Europeans reported the Native Americans as transients passing through unsettled and unclaimed land. The Indians viewed the whites as intruders and fought the steady stream of people moving West. Reports of families "killed at the foot of Cumberland Mountain on the East"⁵ forced travellers to band together for the trip into Kentucky. Perhaps the most famous traveller to cross the Gap, Daniel Boone, after several hunting trips in Kentucky, agreed to take one of these groups north through Indian territory.⁶

Thomas Walker surveyed the route through the Gap in 1750, noting in his journal that a spring "sufficient to turn a Mill"⁷ ran through a cave on the side of the

⁴New York Herald, October 1890; The American Association, Ltd. kept a scrapbook of journal and newspaper articles from every state and many foreign countries. Scrapbook, American Association, Ltd. Collection, Cumberland Gap NHP Library, Middlesboro, KY.

⁵Temple Bodley, "Our First Great West," Register of Kentucky State Historical Society 36, no.116 (July 1938), 195.

⁶John Bakeless, Daniel Boone: Master of the Wilderness (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1939).

⁷Kincaid, The Wilderness Road, 48.



Figure 1. Location of the Gap. Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, U.S. Department of the Interior/National Park Service, October 1990.

Gap. Boone extended Walker's route farther north into Kentucky in 1773, but not until 1796, when the Kentucky legislature authorized construction of "a good waggon road"⁸ to Virginia, was "peaceful passage"⁹ through the Wilderness and settlement of the Gap possible.

Moses Austin saw these first settlers "from the pass of Cumberland Mountain"¹⁰ while travelling on the new road. Before the end of 1796, ten houses and two stores welcomed travellers. The spring first noticed by Walker in 1750 provided a reliable source of water; trees covering the mountains for miles in all directions provided fuel and building materials. The first known industry in the Gap, Robinson's Mill, depended on the free-flowing spring and Crockett's iron furnace consumed enormous quantities of wood. The Robinson home probably served as an Ordinary (Inn) and provided other limited services for travellers through the Gap.¹¹

Framed by the mountains, the village had little flat land on which to grow crops. Settlement of the Gap

⁸William Littell, The Statute Laws of Kentucky I (Frankfort: William Hunter, 1809), 275 -277.

⁹Statutes at Large - Old Deeds of Virginia III (1823), 211.

¹⁰Garrison, "Austin's Journey," 524.

¹¹Russell Dyché, "Sesquicentennial of the Wilderness Road," The Register of Kentucky State Historical Society 44, no.147 (April 1946), 81.

could not flourish until farmers in the surrounding valleys produced surplus crops to meet the needs of the storekeepers and foundry families situated above the fertile bottomlands. Income from timber cutting, storekeeping, and foundry work allowed the Gap families to purchase the food they could not grow and provided local Powell's Valley farmers with a market for their crops. The farmers also carried produce north into Kentucky and south towards Knoxville.¹² (see Figure 2)

The Wilderness Road brought travellers, skilled craftsmen, and marriageable "outsiders" into Cumberland Gap. "The isolation of the Southern mountain settlers" that Bruce Ergood considers the "distinguishing ...key factor"¹³ of the Appalachians did not occur in Cumberland Gap. It began to expand economically, politically, and socially.

Enough people claimed residence in Cumberland Gap, Tennessee in 1813 to establish a fourth voting district in Claiborne County. As in other parts of the country in the 1830s and 1840s, voters enthusiastically supported the political process. On September 10, 1840,

¹²Eugene Alvarez, "Impressions of Cumberland Gap" Virginia Cavalcade (Summer 1964): 11-18.

¹³Bruce Ergood and Bruce E. Kuhre, eds. Appalachia: Social Context Past and Present Athens, Ohio: Ohio University (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1983).

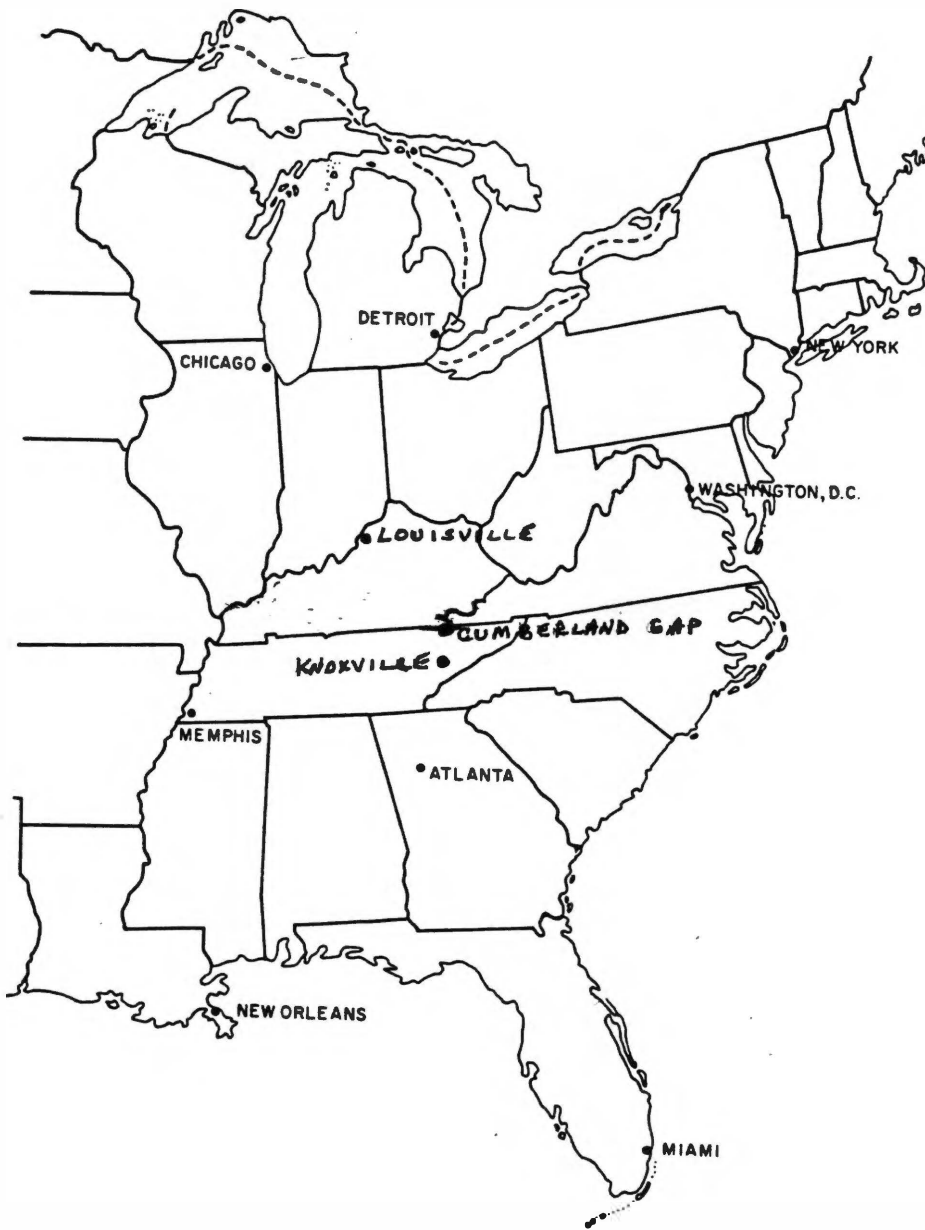


Figure 2. Area Markets. Memphis State University, Bureau of Business and Economic Research, June 1968.

a crowd of between six to eight thousand Whigs came to the Gap by foot, horseback, wagon, and buggy to cheer for "Tippecanoe, and Tyler too!"¹⁴

By mid-century Cumberland Gap, was a thriving community. Virginian John Newly bought the iron furnace in 1841 and moved into the area. Followed by most of his Virginia militia company, Newly and his four slaves operated the iron furnace while the other whites settled throughout Powell's Valley. Although Newly was not the largest slave owner in the area, he encouraged his friend Dr. J. H. S. Morison to come to the Gap to care for his workers.¹⁵ Fellow Virginians Robert Crockett, Daniel Huff, and James Patterson used twenty to thirty slaves each on their large farms in the Valley. Most owners reported one to four slaves to the census taker. The 1850 census lists approximately thirty-three slave owners in or near the Gap.¹⁶ Typical of East Tennessee, "blacks continued to live in small groupings much as they had in the early frontier days."¹⁷ A few free blacks began to

¹⁴Robert L. Kincaid, "Rally of 'Friends of Liberty'," Lincoln Herald Vol. 48, no.1 (February 1946): 30-38.

¹⁵Mildred Divine, interview by Robert L. Kincaid, n.d., Kincaid Papers, Cumberland Gap NHP Library.

¹⁶Claiborne County Census (Washington, D. C.: GPO, 1850).

¹⁷Lester C. Lamon, Blacks in Tennessee, 15.

settle in the countryside, "in drafty shacks on the most hilly and marginal land"¹⁸ and in the "rabbit town"¹⁹ section of Tazewell, the county seat. Free Blacks "Uncle" Stephen Graham and "reliable" Godfrey Posey drove the stage between Tazewell and the Gap.²⁰

Slave owners Huff and Patterson operated their farms, started schools for their children, and opened crossroad stores, tanneries, and other commercial enterprises in the valley. They also formed business partnerships with Gap residents John Newly and Dr. J. H. S. Morison.

Since 1834, the Bean Station, Tennessee to Lexington, Kentucky stage line had operated three times a week over the Wilderness Road.²¹ After 1840, a weekly stage between Tazewell and Cumberland Gap carried freight, mail, and passengers.²² The additional stage line made it easier to conduct business throughout the

¹⁸Ibid., 16.

¹⁹Alexander Moore McCloud, "Old Time Tazewell," Claiborne Progress, Tazewell, Tennessee, March 5, 1970.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹The Tourist Pocket Map of the State of Kentucky, 1834, in Charles W. Wilson and Louis DeVorse, Jr., Geographic Research Collection, Cumberland Gap NHP Library.

²²Claiborne County Stage Book, Microfilm Roll 38, Claiborne County Library, Tazewell, Tennessee.

Gap area. This movement of goods and the influx of people, residents and tourists, gave the historic village the look of a much larger community.

During the Civil War, when both the North and the South claimed the area, a young soldier described these "works of man"²³ from the pass.

Just below us was a big Mill over shot,
run by a big Spring, the finest I ever
saw. It run three mills, a corking mill,
grist & saw mill. Just beyond this was
a big two storied white frame house,
with a yard & fence & shrubbery.

Little remained of this idyllic picture in the vicinity of John Newly's house when General U. S. Grant arrived at Cumberland Gap in 1864. The Gap had changed hands four times between 1861 and 1864 with each side disabling the mill, the furnace, and the pass above the town before they moved out of the area. "With two brigades of the Army of the Cumberland," Grant remarked, "I could hold that pass against the army which Napoleon led to Moscow." But after spending the night at Dr. Morison's house and inspecting the road, he became "convinced ...of its absolute uselessness as a major military highway." After three years of war it remained "only a trail of dead horses, broken wagons, and blasted

²³Alvarez, 17.

hopes."²⁴

The residents of Cumberland Gap accepted the opposing armies and emancipation in much the same manner as they accepted travelers along the Wilderness Road. Confederate sympathizer John Newly's daughter married Union surgeon John Washington Divine in April 1865.²⁵ Many of the local Blacks, ex-slaves, followed the creek south, settling in the Tiprell area a mile from the iron furnace. Others remained near their former owners on the destroyed Huff and Patterson farms. (see Figure 3)

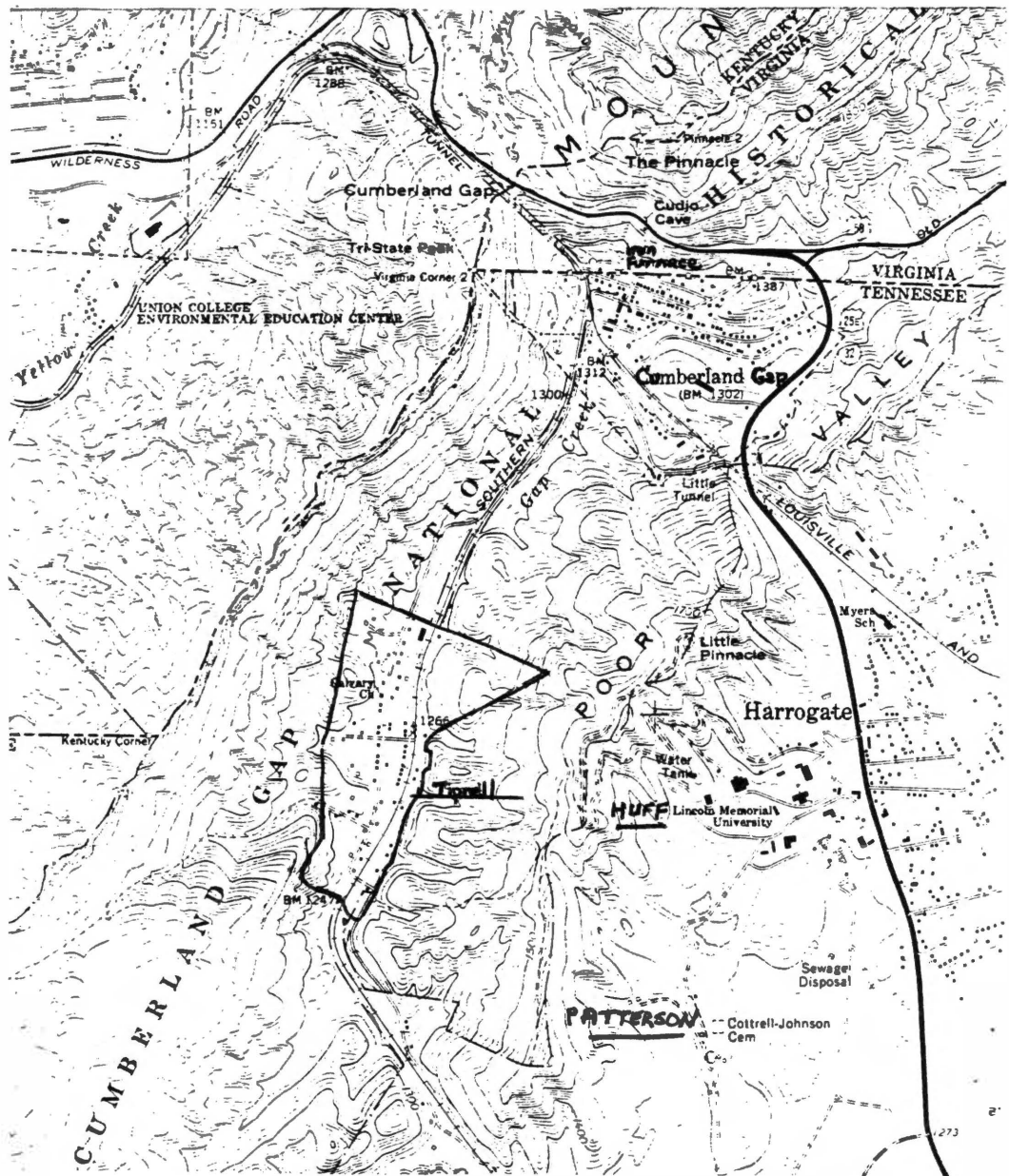
Although the road across the mountain remained "in terrible shape during the war"²⁶ and was not immediately repaired, a semblance of order returned to Cumberland Gap by 1870. The 1870 Census counted 57 whites including two doctors, a school teacher, and three ministers. The 45 Blacks listed their professions as blacksmiths, carding machine workers, foundry and sawmill operators, cabinet makers, a cooper, and a shoemaker.²⁷ The Morisons, Newlys, Pattersons, and others had returned

²⁴Kincaid, Wilderness Road, 274-281.

²⁵Divine Interview.

²⁶Sterling Kincaid Turner, interview by Robert L. Kincaid, August 10, 1940, Kincaid Papers, Cumberland Gap NHP Library.

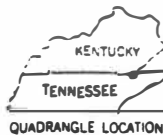
²⁷Claiborne County Census (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1870).



SCALE 1:24000

CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
 NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929

published by the Geological Survey



QUADRANGLE LOCATION

MIDDLESBORO SOUTH

TENN.—KY.—VA.

N3630—W8337.5/7.5

1974

Figure 3. Tiprell, Tennessee. Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, National Geodetic Vertical Datum of 1929, Geological Survey, 1974.

to their pre-war positions of prominence in the community.

Major G. B. (Tip) Cockrell, CSA, returned from the war to reclaim his land south of town in Tiprell where a few Black families had settled. Additional houses built as children married and started their own families joined the houses scattered along Gap Creek. The Black families remaining in the Gap built their houses around the large spring, worked at the iron furnace, and shared their homes with the families forced to leave Tiprell after Major Cockrell's return.

Cumberland Gap was both subject to and profitted from the traffic along the Wilderness Road; thus it survived. As the frontier moved ever westward, neither Indian or federal armies disrupted its natural growth and development. Residents, Black, white, and Native American, adjusted to their changed circumstances, physically close yet separated both by color and by economics.

Across the mountain in Kentucky, the Yellow Creek Valley remained unsettled. Long considered unhealthy because it did not drain adequately, the area was a swampland. Local settlers built their homes on the surrounding hillsides. A few tavern owners and subsistence farmers lived along the Wilderness Road

toward Barbourville, Kentucky, thirty miles north of the Gap.

In less than ten years, the marshy swampland no one wanted became development property sought by national and international investors. By 1890, the Yellow Creek Valley had attracted correspondents from every major American newspaper and magazine who described the frenzied activity north of Cumberland Gap. The catalyst for this dramatic change, Alexander Arthur, rode through Cumberland Gap, Tennessee, crossed the narrow mountainous strip of Virginia, and paused in the historic pass. Looking into Kentucky, Arthur did not see marshlands. He saw instead his "City Upon A Hill."²⁸

²⁸Page Smith, As A City Upon A Hill: The Town in American History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1966).

Chapter II

PLANNED DEVELOPMENT: THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION, LTD., 1886-1890

...at its foot on one bank stood
a furnace...grass grown...in the
single street...shells, bombs,
bullets, old muskets ...evidence
of the strife that once raged there.¹

Although it was not a bustling metropolis in 1886, Cumberland Gap was not the desolate forlorn place Alexander Arthur described. Arthur, to encourage investments in the area, used the imagery of the Civil War not to invoke sympathy for the residents of Cumberland Gap, but to show the potential for development in the area. Arthur's promotional brochures and his persuasive personality convinced financiers in the United States and England to invest in a new Eden on the Wilderness Road. Arthur, as President of the American Association, Ltd., managed to secure financing for a new road through the Gap, a railroad tunnel under the Gap, and a new town, Middlesborough, on the Kentucky side of the Gap. (see Figure 4)

A developer, entrepreneur, lumberman, and agent

¹Alexander Arthur, Middlesborough and Cumberland Gap (Middlesborough: Pinnacle Printery, n.d.), American Association Papers, Cumberland Gap NHP Library.

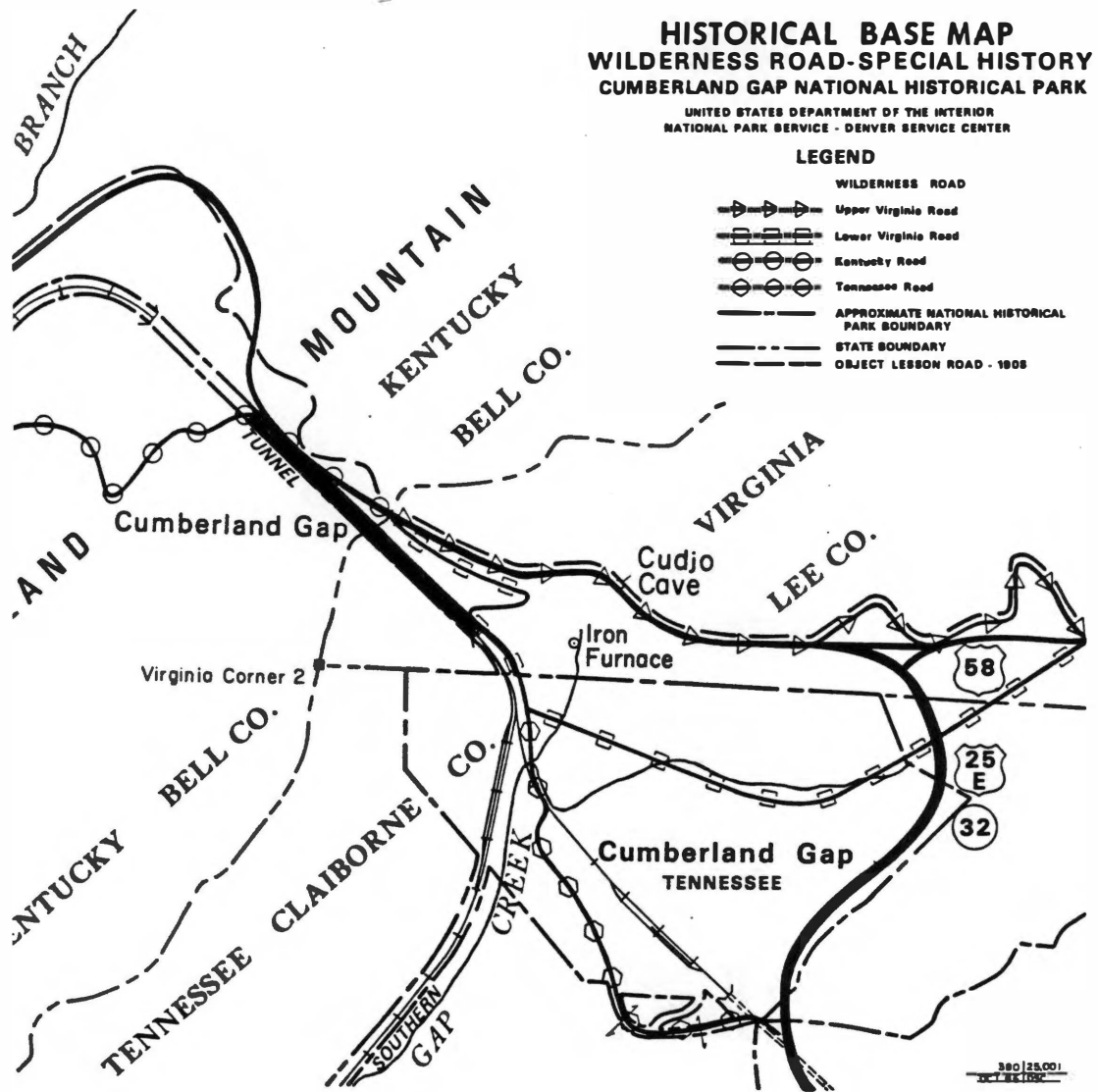


Figure 4. Railroad Tunnel. Historical Base Map, Wilderness Road, Cumberland Gap National Park, U.S. Department of the Interior/National Park Service, October 1986.

of the Richmond & Danville Railroad, Arthur left Newport, Tennessee in 1886 to assess the feasibility of a railroad through Cumberland Gap. He followed a "partially macadamized" toll road that "extended from Morristown to Cumberland Gap...its condition is such as to warrant the remark that no worse road can be found in the state."² In the Gap, Arthur stopped at the home of Dr. James Monroe Harbison, son-in-law of Daniel Huff, ate dinner at Dr. J. H. S. Morison's house, and listened with interest to John Newly's latest plan to get a railroad to the area. Newly, Harbison, and Morison had subscribed to several railroad ventures both before and after the Civil War. They knew a railroad would offer Powell's Valley farmers access to big city markets and help the whole area to prosper and grow. Besides his medical practice, Morison ran a "Cash and Produce Store at Cumberland Gap [carrying]...goods cheap, at or below market value."³ His suppliers, drummers from Knoxville, followed the old stage route through Morristown and Bean Station. The southern route from Tazewell ran through the Huff and Harbison lands and joined the eastern Knoxville, Morristown, Bean Station

²J. B. Killebrew, Resources of Tennessee (Nashville: Tavel, Eastman and Howell, 1874), 376. Reprint 1974, The Reprint Co., Spartanburg, South Carolina.

³Cumberland Gap Spectator, Tazewell, Tennessee and Cumberland Gap, Virginia, January 1, 1872.

road in Cumberland Gap.

Newly and Harbison owned a furniture manufacturing concern that produced inexpensive "Parlor, Chamber, [and] Kitchen" pieces, using their own timber, sawmill, and machinery. Adjoining the Harbison property a half mile from the Gap, W. C. Patterson & Co. at the crossroads sold "Beeswax and Ginseng, Butter, eggs, leather (tanned in our own tan yard), corn, wheat, oats and rye."⁴ Newly and Patterson sold to area businesses, farmers, and townspeople. Limited by the lack of good roads and access to railroads, business growth gradually slowed.

Like Grant twenty years earlier, Arthur questioned the feasibility of building a railroad across the steep, rocky pass through the mountains. Dr. Morison and his son, attorney J. H. S. Morison, Jr., convinced Arthur to consider a tunnel through the mountains. Across the mountains lay the Yellow Creek Valley of Bell County, Kentucky. The Colson family, largest land owners in the valley, showed Arthur virgin forests and coal banks

⁴Ibid.

around the periphery of the valley.⁵ Arthur envisioned a giant planned development, supported by abundant natural resources and connected by rail to the world marketplace.

Obviously, the Morison family and other residents in the area had discussed expansion of local trade and sought access to rails long before Arthur arrived. The war interrupted these earlier efforts by Newby, Morison and the others, but they continued to talk to anyone who showed an interest in the area. If Arthur's employer, the Richmond & Danville Railroad, sent him to the area, the local residents reasoned that his proposal deserved their consideration.

After talking with local promoters in the Gap, Arthur left immediately to secure capital for the venture. Before the end of 1886, unable to find financing in the United States for his grand scheme, Arthur left for England. Armed with reports from J. R. Proctor, Kentucky geologist, and J. B. Killibrew, Tennessee Agriculture and Mineral agent, Arthur secured capital from the Baring Bank of London and became

⁵Prior to Arthur's arrival forty percent of the assessed acreage in and around the Yellow Creek valley belonged to land owners holding a 1,000 acres or more. For an analysis of land investments in Bell County see Alan J. Banks, "Land and Capital in Eastern Kentucky, 1890-1915" Appalachian Journal (Autumn 1980): 8-17.

President of the American Association, Ltd.⁶ He returned with the "virtual equivalent of a blank check."⁷ Within two years, assisted by Colson and Morison, the American Association Ltd. optioned, surveyed, and purchased over 100,000 acres in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia.

Arthur's enthusiasm, promotional skill, and business aplomb, coupled with the historic location of the venture, soon attracted others to the area. Investors and men of independent means such as retired British Colonel Railton and some of the younger remittance men who found less settled areas too remote for their tastes flocked to Cumberland Gap. After the collapse of Rugby and other utopian communities in the eighties, these men looked to the Gap area to supplement their inheritance income and to provide the type of society they enjoyed. Ill-equipped for the rough frontier-type settlement beginning in Yellow Creek, they moved to the established community of Cumberland Gap.

The Watts Steel Company of England sent the young Watts brothers, Edgar and Frank, to manage their business in Middlesborough. They built their home and lodge in Cumberland Gap and began a series of parlor games and

⁶Killebrew; Kincaid, Wilderness Road, 297-304.

⁷Harry M. Caudill, Middlesborough: The Magic City" American History Illustrated (January 1984): 20-31.

concerts in their hotel. Colonel Railton delivered lectures such as "What is a home without a corkscrew?"⁸ Edgar and Frank, with their friend C. E. Prescott's "fine tenor", often entertained in one of the new homes built along North Colwyn Street.⁹

At the lower or west end of Colwyn Street near Morison and Newly's houses, the business district began. Apartments over the grocery stores, shoe shops, printing offices, barber shops, restaurants and other businesses served as living space for the owners until they completed their homes. Afterwards, the apartments housed offices or were rented to store clerks and delivery men. Overnight visitors could choose from three hotels and several boarding houses a few blocks from the railroad depot.¹⁰ Newly's son-in-law Dr. Divine, now a land agent, and his partners established the Cumberland Gap Bank, the first of three banks in town on October 17, 1888. Initially subscribed at \$100,000, it opened November 7 with \$50,000 capital and \$20,000 subscribed in time for the auction of town lots by the Cumberland Gap

⁸Cumberland Gap Progress, Tazewell, Tennessee, November 14, 1888.

⁹Ibid, October 10, 1888.

¹⁰Sanborn-Perris Map Co., Ltd, New York.

Association.¹¹ Colwyn Street followed the lower Virginia section of the old Wilderness Road through the business district but turned at Cumberland Avenue bypassing for the first time the iron furnace before beginning the ascent to the saddle of the Gap.

The local newspaper editor made frequent trips to the Gap to see these changes firsthand. The paper supported development, even though the area seemed "torn asunder" by the railroad, because "real estate is up and still going." The editor assured his readers that the Gap "was not afflicted with the 'boom' fever and showed symptoms of good, steady growth." He noted that a new steam compressor to "help dig the tunnel under the Gap would be in operation" soon, and encouraged local Claiborne countians to invest in the project.¹²

The compressor certainly speeded the process but most of the work on the tunnel still required long hours with a pick and shovel. A series of cave-ins caused by excessive rains hampered completion. Injuries caused by the cave ins often required Dr. W. E. Morison, son of Dr. J. H. S Morison, to treat his patients inside the tunnel or on the side of the mountain in primitively constructed

¹¹Cumberland Gap Progress, October 17, 1888.

¹²Ibid., June 20, 1888; June 27, 1888.

houses and hastily erected tents.¹³ The Blacks, Italians, and poor whites working on the tunnel and railroad squatted on the only land in the Gap not being surveyed and divided into expensive town lots. The workers, "some asleep, some eating, drinking," enjoyed their only day off amid "piles of dirt ...hailed out of tunnel ...as high as a tree."¹⁴

Since the Civil War, Blacks had moved in and out of town, staying anywhere from a few days to a few years. If, as William H. Turner suggests, Cumberland Gap had been "a major focal point in the development and evolution of highland abolition movements,"¹⁵ an informal or secret network may have existed that led Blacks to Cumberland Gap. However the, largest group of Blacks came to the Gap when the Association needed lumbermen, railroad laborers, and miners. Many of these Blacks, like the white laborers, moved to town from nearby farms.

Although the descendants of the Black workers who came to town during the Association period and of the families who settled near the mill during frontier days

¹³Ibid., May 30, 1888.

¹⁴Ibid., April 18, 1888.

¹⁵William H. Turner, "Between Berea(1904) and Birmingham(1908): The Rock and Hard Place for Blacks in Appalachia," in Turner and Cabbell, Blacks in Appalachia, 12.

deny any discrimination in Cumberland Gap, Blacks were nonetheless "limited by local racial custom in their right to mingle casually"¹⁶ with whites. The local hotels did not rent to the workers, so they camped wherever they could.

Across the Gap in Middlesborough, tent cities appeared as stories about the "boom" in the Yellow Creek Valley increased in national and international publications. Middlesborough attracted workers from all over the Appalachians, along with Italian immigrants, and an assortment of con artists, saloon keepers, and petty criminals. The newly established local government simply could not cope with the numbers of newcomers, and stories of shootings, lynchings, and general lawlessness of Middlesborough increased proportionately. The Association hired "three guardians of the peace ...dressed in blue coats and brass buttons,"¹⁷ but they had little or no effect on the general atmosphere of the area.

Cumberland Gap had its share of rowdiness and violence. Most of the disturbances occurred near the train depot and "Hell's Half Acre ...above the tunnel

¹⁶Lamon, Blacks in Tennessee, 15.

¹⁷Cumberland Gap Progress, September 26, 1888.

mouth where most of the workers lived."¹⁸ Survivors of those wild days at the Gap often heard "the bullets whistling over the little town"¹⁹ and put out their lights at night to deter the vandals. The newspapers carried in detail the lynching of Frank Watts' valet, a Negro named Thomas Hunter, for shooting J. A. Burkes. Burkes, railroad ticket agent, telegraph operator, and the marshall's brother-in-law, died outside Renfroe's Pool Hall.²⁰

Lynching of Blacks increased throughout the South during this period, but lynchings in the mountains depended on the crime, not the color of the suspected criminal. In the same year that Hunter was lynched sixty armed and mounted men from Tazewell rode into the Gap in search of the white men who committed the "foul and diabolical double murder" of a laborer and a railroad brakeman as they slept in "a tent occupied by two sporting women."²¹ After lynching the two men identified as the killers, the town decided to build a

¹⁸Kincaid Papers, Cumberland Gap NHP.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Knoxville Tribune, March 26, 1891. All area papers carried stories about the lynching. Scrapbook, Cumberland Gap NHP Library.

²¹Courier Journal, Louisville, Kentucky and other area papers recounted the double murders and lynchings, May 28, 1891. Scrapbook, Cumberland Gap NHP Library.

jail to hold offenders until they could be moved to Tazwell safely. Patrons of the "blind tiger"²² on the ridge between Middlesborough and Cumberland Gap spent more nights in the small cramped structure than hardened criminals.²³

The relative peace on the south side of the mountain and the large medicinal springs southwest of town also attracted "dyspeptic invalids"²⁴ anxious to bathe in the springs and relax in the heathly mountain air. A group of doctors, among them, Dr. Allen McLane Hamilton, great-grandson of Alexander Hamilton, decided in 1891 to invest in the most expensive undertaking in the area. They financed a 200 room sanitorium complete with Turkish baths and a huge hotel. The elaborate Four Seasons Hotel boasted 700 rooms, 300 workers, and required 200 boxcar loads of windows and doors. New York's "Four Hundred" social elite arrived for the opening celebration in a chartered express train.²⁵

²²A "blind tiger" made and sold illegal liquor. Blind tigers became speakeasys during Prohibition.

²³"Tippling" or public drunkenness remains the most common offense listed in the Criminal Minute Book, Claiborne County Circuit Court, Microfilm, Claiborne County Library.

²⁵New York Herald, April 13, 1892 society pages mention the people attending the grand opening of the hotel March 1, 1892. Scrapbook, Cumberland Gap NHP library.

Arthur built a magnificent home for himself adjoining the doctors' property on the old Huff farm. But as the bill for the entire development neared 30 million dollars and the bill for the health resort complex grew to over a million dollars, the "economic bubble burst."²⁶

Arthur's troubles began in 1889, shortly after the final charge of dynamite opened the tunnel under Daniel Boone's path through the mountains. Rains delayed the tunnel project so long that Arthur had to repair the old road between Cumberland Gap and Middlesborough until the railroad could be completed. Arthur finally left for Knoxville in August 1889 to choreograph a rail trip between Knoxville and Middlesborough celebrating his success. His dream of a triumphant entry into Middlesboro shattered August 28, when the first trip of the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap, and Louisville Railroad ended in disaster. Twenty-two miles north of Knoxville, a trestle collapsed with the weight of the train. Several men died and Arthur was seriously injured.²⁷

In 1890, the Baring Bank in London failed. Despite the collapse of its primary investor, the American Association, Ltd. tried to continue operations.

²⁶Caudill, AHI, 27-30.

²⁷Cumberland Gap Progress, August 28, 1889.

The board of directors fired Alexander Arthur and took direct control of the American operations. By 1891, other major backers went bankrupt and stock plummeted. Merchants began to leave and four banks collapsed. "Middlesborough plunged like a falling star ...the somnolent successor to the trifling hamlet of Cumberland Gap."²⁸

Residents of the historic village at the foot of Cumberland Gap watched in dismay as the elaborate Four Seasons Hotel sold to a Chicago wrecking company for \$9,000, nine-tenths of one per cent of its cost. Parts of the dismantled building and most of its contents left the Gap on a special train. The polo grounds, tennis courts and pens that housed dogs for fox hunting disappeared.

Once again, outside competing interests had tried to control access through the Gap and profit from interest in this historic area. Unable to control the opposing armies during the Civil War, the town leaders had had to wait for peace before resuming their normal activities. When Arthur arrived in 1886, these same community leaders maintained their control over the town. They allowed change but only on their terms.

²⁸Caudill, AHI, 27-30.

While land auctions in Middlesborough attracted speculators, raising prices beyond belief, the sales in Cumberland Gap proceeded slowly. Land sales to local lawyers, doctors, and merchants buying lots for "town" houses and small businesses outnumbered sales to outsiders.²⁹ To maintain local control, residents petitioned for incorporation of Cumberland Gap in 1890. When the newcomers adopted English style street names ending in "lyn," few residents objected. But when the Association tried to change the name of the community to Dillwyn Springs, the townspeople, using the voting power of an incorporated city, immediately defeated the measure.³⁰

After most of the newcomers abandoned the area, only the two hundred bed sanitorium, one half mile from the village and visible from the upper Virginia Road through the Gap, remained. Designed as a hospital, the wooden, two-story sanitorium had no value to the salvage company. Its decreased commercial value and convenient location did make the building an attractive investment

²⁹Every issue of the Cumberland Gap Progress in 1888 mentioned people in Claiborne County moving to town.

³⁰The Manufacturer's Record, August 13, 1890 and several other papers noted the problems caused by the town's refusal to change its name. Railroad maps and other "official" records used the Dillwyn Springs name interchangeably with Cumberland Gap adding to the confusion. Scrapbook, Cumberland Gap NHP Library.

to other newcomers in the village, however. Reverend and Mrs. Arthur Myers realized that the building slowly deteriorating on the ridge above the village would make a perfect addition to their new mountain school.

Chapter III

CULTURAL INTRUSION: REVEREND A. A. MYERS and MRS ELLEN MYERS, 1889-1907

Better to get wisdom than gold
...All this shall pass away.¹

Like Alexander Alan Arthur three years earlier, in 1889 Reverend Aaron Arthur Myers and his wife Ellen followed Boone's Trace or the old Wilderness Road into Cumberland Gap. Like Arthur, they began their journey in the northern United States and fulfilled a dream in the shadow of historic Cumberland Gap. They too depended on others to support their dream and spent much of their time trying to encourage investment in the area. While Arthur concentrated on the land and developing its valuable resources, the Myerses worked with the people, encouraging them to develop their inner resources through education. The mountain school they founded expanded to become an accredited institution attracting students from all over the world.

¹This biblical phrase became the subject of Reverend Myers' sermons after he learned the Four Seasons Hotel had a casino. Joseph S. Suppinger, Phoenix of the Mountains: The Story of Lincoln Memorial University (Harrogate, Tennessee: LMU Press, 1988), 8. Hereafter, LMU.

The world of Arthur Myers revolved around Ellen Green as soon as they met at Michigan's Hillsdale College. During school breaks Ellen returned to her parents' home in Cherry Valley, Ohio, and worked for the nearby Missionary Baptist Church. Arthur rejected his father's advice to study law and spent his school breaks preaching at various churches in the Hillsdale area. Arthur and Ellen married in the summer of 1865, remaining in and around Hillsdale until 1882 when the American Missionary Association sent them to Williamsburg, Kentucky.² At the 1884 Annual Meeting of the A. M. A. in Salem, Massachusetts, Ellen made what is believed to be the first appeal for a group she called "The Mountain Whites of the South".³ The A. M. A., affiliated with the Congregational Church, focused on Negro education and supported John Fee's efforts to teach Negroes at Berea in the "mountain region of Kentucky."⁴ Although the society's program educated a number of Negroes in the South, few whites attended schools with

²Letter to Robert L. Kincaid from Ernest G. Dodge (Ellen Myers' nephew), Washington, D. C., November 14, 1940, LMU Library, Harrogate, Tennessee.

³Ellen Myers, "The Mountain Whites of the South" American Missionary 39 (January 1885): 18-20.

⁴For a history of Berea's change from a Negro school to a "settlement school" see Elizabeth Peck, Berea's First Century, 1855-1955 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1955).

Blacks. It was Ellen Myers' contention that "Christian education is their [white southern Appalachians'] only hope." By bringing up the children "differently from their parents," by giving the "masses ...education and practical religion," missionaries could "effectively efface old habits and prejudices."⁵

After the railroad came to Williamsburg, the Myerses established churches at various rail stops throughout southeastern Kentucky. They arrived in Cumberland Gap just as the tunnel under the Gap opened and the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap, and Louisville Railroad steamed into town. They immediately began work building a Congregational Church and school on Colwyn Street between the residential and the business districts of town.⁶

Area churches conducted regular services and held revivals attended by both Blacks and whites. After ten days of revival in 1888, Captain R. F. Patterson received a special note of thanks from the the "colored people of Tazewell" for the interest he took in their welfare and for attending the revival.⁷ The newspaper printed

⁵Myers, "Mountain Whites of the South".

⁶Dodge Correspondence, LMU Library.

⁷Cumberland Gap Progress, June 16, 1888.

notices for church services in Tazewell and occasionally Patterson would insert a short plea to urge more people to attend church.

The Gap area never supported the number of churches evidenced in other areas of the Appalachians.⁸ The Methodist Episcopal Church, founded in 1784, sent circuit riders to Cumberland Gap as soon as the first settlers arrived.⁹ Although nationally the M.E. Church lost membership through schisms, both before and after the Civil War and most Black members joined the African M. E. Church during the War,¹⁰ the M. E. Church in Cumberland Gap steadily gained members. The members completed a large frame structure in August 1889 and asked Professor Simpson of Rose Hill, Virginia to be their first music director and to assist Pastor George H. Rowan.¹¹

In 1889 as more people moved into town, the

⁸The first church in the area was built near Chadwell's Station, Virginia in 1785. Lauren A. Fulton, taped interview by Robert D. Manning, February 15, 1984, LMU Library.

⁹Wheeler Kesterson, interview by Robert L. Kincaid, 1938, Kincaid Papers, Cumberland Gap NHP Library.

¹⁰Martin E. Marty, Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 255.

¹¹Cumberland Gap Progress, July 10, 1889; July 31, 1889; August 7, 1889; August 21, 1889.

Baptists met in the "commodius hall" over Morison's Drug Store. A few Presbyterians gathered in the dining room of the Watts Hotel but most Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Catholics attended one of the newly completed churches in Middlesboro.¹²

When Alexander Arthur's empire began to crumble, several businesses in Cumberland Gap failed. The newly completed Cumberland Gap Hotel located on a hillside near the Virginia line closed first. Seeing the closing of the hotel as an opportunity to expand their school, the Myerses moved their school out of the Congregational Church and into the closed hotel. They called their new school Cumberland Gap College. Shortly after the school opened, the wife of the British Ambassador to the United States visited and suggested the name Harrow School.¹³

Although it is unclear how the Myers financed their new building or the exact date students started classes, daily maintenance of the school clearly depended on the A. M. A. The earliest "Annual Catalog and Announcement of ... Harrow School of Cumberland Gap,

¹²Ibid., June 16, 1888.

¹³Suppinger, 7.

Tennessee" appeared for the 1893 - 1894 school term.¹⁴ Published by News Printing of Middlesborough, Kentucky, the publisher's page listed the "Harrow School of Cumberland Gap ...sustained by the American Missionary Association, Reverend C. J. Ryder ...Bible House, New York."¹⁵ The catalog carried advertisements for businesses in the Gap on the front and rear inside covers. Most of the advertisers had children in the school and many of them served on the board of directors as well. The Ladies Board of Care for the college included the wives of members of the board and of other prominent Cumberland Gap families.

The school offered a full curriculum for grades one through twelve and a liberal arts college education. Of the thirty-eight younger students, thirty-two came from Cumberland Gap and six came from nearby towns. Local intermediate school students also outnumbered other students. The sixty-four high school students came from Indiana, Nashville, Louisville, as well as the surrounding area and the town itself. The higher education department offered Latin and German in addition to its Normal School curriculum for future teachers.

¹⁴Annual Catalog and Announcement of Harrow School of Cumberland Gap, Tenn 1893-4, LMU Library.

¹⁵Ibid.

Five teachers, including a librarian, assisted the Myerses. Pupils enjoyed free books and tuition but paid three dollars a month for a room, furnishing their own linens, and board. They could also board with private families in the area. The two pictures in the brochure showed the historic Cumberland Gap mountain and the old iron furnace in town.¹⁶

Despite the daily schedules of two railroads and the 30 million dollars recently spent on area development, the brochure contended the school was established "in the absence of railroad and markets." It went on to explain that the school responded to the needs of an area "unable to keep pace with more fortunate portions of our common country."¹⁷

In 1895, hearing that the "Christian General" and former head of the Freedman's Bureau, O. O. Howard, would speak in Chattanooga, Myers arranged for the General to speak at Harrow School commencement exercises in June. The General delighted his audience and afterwards Myers took him across a low ridge south of town where the Four Seasons Hotel once stood. The only building left, the sanitorium, seemed an ideal place to expand Harrow School if Myers could raise the necessary

¹⁶Ibid.; ¹⁷Ibid.

funds.¹⁸

Myers' dream impressed General Howard, and as he looked around, Howard recalled his last conversation with President Lincoln. Lincoln had appreciated the loyalty of the mountaineers, particularly the people in East Tennessee. This school could be a living memorial to Lincoln. Recalling his first visit, Howard later wrote that he wanted to "make this a larger enterprise"¹⁹ but he never acknowledged the Myerses' contribution to the school.

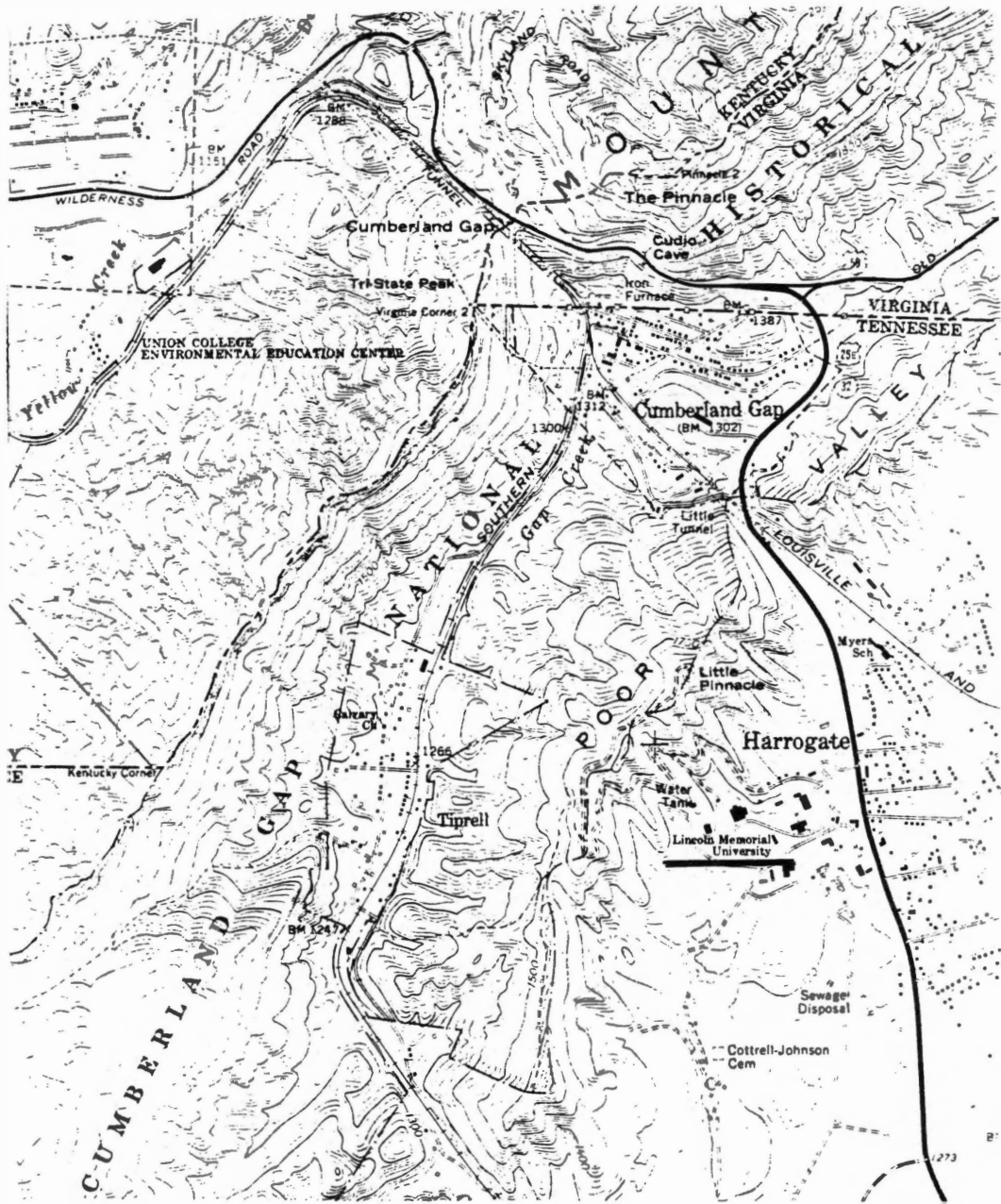
Bolstered by Howard's enthusiasm, Myers took an option on the property. For the next three years, Howard, aided by his lecture agent Cyrus Kehr, raised money to buy the sanitorium and the adjoining six hundred acre farm.²⁰ Meanwhile, Harrow Hall continued the 1895-1896 term in town with seven new missionary teachers replacing the five progressive-minded young ladies who had taught the previous year. (see Figure 5)

Reflecting General Howard's influence, the tone

¹⁸For the most recent biography of Howard see Wm. S. McFeely, Yankee Stepfather: General O. O. Howard and the Freedmen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968). -

¹⁹Oliver Otis Howard, "The Folk of the Cumberland Gap," Munsey's Magazine 27, no.4 (July 1902): 506-508.

²⁰Cyrus Kehr, the organizing President of Lincoln Memorial University, and A. A. Myers jointly took an option on the property. A 1904 survey listed the area as the "Myers and Kehr Tracks", LMU Library.



SCALE 1:24000

CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929

published by the Geological Survey



MIDDLESBORO SOUTH

TENN.—KY.—VA.

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1974

Figure 5. Lincoln Memorial University. Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, National Geodetic Vertical Datum of 1929, Geological Survey, 1974.

and focus of the brochure changed. The new brochure was printed in Massachusetts and contained no advertisements. Now the school's statement of purpose was "to pay our country's debt to these Highlanders of America by educating the children of the G. A. R. on slave soil."²¹ Pictures showed a small chapel, the river crossing at Cumberland Ford near Pineville, Kentucky, and two log cabin, one-room mountain schools in appalling condition. For the first time, Ellen Myers, seriously injured in a riding accident, was not listed as a teacher.

Six days after Lincoln Memorial University received its charter in 1897, the trustees established "a model elementary school" and renamed part of Harrow School in Cumberland Gap as the Ellen Myers School. The name change recognized Mrs. Myers for her self-sacrificing pioneer spirit and her role in founding the first elementary school in the area.²² Ellen Myers never fully recovered from her injuries and in the summer of 1897, she died.

Area residents recall that Ellen Myers took her "last and only" \$1,000.00 to secure the L.M.U. property.

²¹Harrow School Catalog, 1896-1897.

²²Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Lincoln Memorial University, February 18, 1897 and June 15, 1898, LMU Library.

However, Myers' will mentions her real estate, \$1,000.00 from "my parents' estate," \$1,000.00 she left to her nephew, and the Myerses' home in Hillsdale, Michigan.²³ Whatever the actual expenditure, the memory of Ellen Myers' generosity and the devotion of her husband to the people of Cumberland Gap remains among the townspeople.²⁴ The Cumberland Gap Hotel and Park Co., in receivership since 1893, became part of the property held jointly by A. A. Myers and Cyrus Kehr in 1898.

When classes began in the renovated sanitorium now called Grant-Lee Hall, Harrow Academy/School moved to the new building. The Ellen Myers School housed the primary or elementary department. The move did not proceed smoothly. Cyrus Kehr wrote several letters to LMU attorney H. Y. Hughes between Christmas 1897 and June 1899. The title to the property was "more complex than we supposed." The strain forced Kehr to leave his job during 1899 because of "brain fever [and] stress." He donated \$2,000 to the University for expenses, but subsequently had to accept advances from friends for the

²³Ellen Myers Will, January 13, 1888; Codicil, July 21, 1894, Microfilm, Wills, Claiborne County Library, Tazewell, Tennessee.

²⁴Gary Burchett, interview by author, March 22, 1991.

²⁵Letter to H. Y. Hughes from Cyrus Kehr, Christmas 1897; June 1899, LMU Library.

care of his family.²⁵

Meanwhile, Rev. A. A. Myers also reflected the strain of teaching and raising funds for the school. "Never thinking of himself not even his appearance,"²⁶ Myers had depended on the care his wife Ellen gave him. After her death he married another missionary, but one year later his second wife died. "Terribly neglected looking,"²⁷ he continued to devote himself to the mountain children. His last project in the area, a home for girls supported by the Nettleton family in Scranton, Pennsylvania and managed by LMU, added to his responsibilities.²⁸ Shortly after the home opened and the university moved into the new building, Myers resigned from the board of directors.

The citizens of Cumberland Gap protested the removal of the higher education departments from town, but Howard and his friends believed that since they had raised the money for the academy and the university they could put it wherever they wanted. At the time, J. H. S.

²⁶Letter to Robert L. Kincaid from Mrs. Mae M. Wild, August 20, 1940, LMU Library.

²⁷Letter to Robert L. Kincaid from Verna Devhaus, July 30, 1940, LMU Library.

²⁸W. J. Jones, President of the Board, The Grace Nettleton Home for Girls, Inc: A Contribution to the Womanhood of America, Harrogate, Tennessee, 1945. Brochure, LMU Library.

Morison represented Cumberland Gap as city attorney and also served on the LMU Board of Directors. A staff member later recalled that because Morison was on the board he cooperated with the decision.²⁹ After Morison moved from the Gap he wrote a bitter letter to the President of LMU denouncing General Howard for "rooting Myers out" of University operations, but he did not discuss the decision to move the college out of Cumberland Gap.³⁰

In February 1907, the Ellen Myers Elementary School in Cumberland Gap burned. The LMU trustees authorized Dr. Stookesbury, president of the university, to continue the elementary school in the basement [ground floor] of the old Congregational Church building, also owned by LMU.³¹ After the fire a former student Nola Estep recalled going to school in a building downtown and her older brother going to someone's house for classes until school resumed in the remodeled church.³²

LMU collected \$5,000.00 insurance on the old

²⁹Address to the Alumni of LMU June 3, 1933 by Reverend F. Avery, LMU Library.

³⁰Letter to Stewart McClelland from J. H. S. Morison, August 20, 1940, LMU Library.

³¹Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors, LMU, May 7, 1907, LMU Library.

³²Nola Estep Comer, interview by author, March 11, 1991.

school building. Board members decided to give \$1,000.00 to the town of Cumberland Gap for a new school, provided they raised an additional \$1,000.00 within two years. The remaining \$4,000.00 they used to build a new Ellen Myers School next to the Grace Nettleton Home for Girls at Harrogate, across from the main LMU campus.³³ LMU's move out of the Gap in 1907 forced the town either to accept Claiborne County's two and one half months school term or to maintain and manage their own city school. - As usual, the community accepted the outside influence, in this case the county, for one term and agreed to finance an additional term, using city funds. The Cumberland Gap School, in the Congregational Church building provided an elementary education for the white students in town and they walked over the ridge one half mile to the Harrow Academy for high school. Most of the teachers at the Gap school qualified to teach after they had attended the Normal School at LMU. Some poorer whites started school after it came under local control but few completed the eight grades or went across the ridge to the Harrow Academy.³⁴

None of the Blacks had attended the American

³³Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors, LMU, May 7, 1907, LMU Library.

³⁴Comer, interview, March 11, 1991.

Missionary Association school in town. LMU did not accept Blacks and no Blacks were ever accepted at the Grace Nettleton Home for Girls administered by LMU.³⁵ The Blacks did not attend school in Cumberland Gap, either. If their parents wanted them to go to school they moved to Tazewell or to Middlesboro. Claiborne County, with assistance from the Rosenwald Fund, built a school for Blacks in 1888.³⁶ Kentucky supported a school, grades one through twelve, for Middlesboro's larger population of urban Blacks. Without transportation, Cumberland Gap's Black students stayed home.³⁷

In Cumberland Gap, Ellen Myers' aim in educating "Mountain Whites" to make them willing to accept Blacks seems not have met with the resistance evident in other areas. No record survives to indicate whether or not the Myers tried to teach all the children in Cumberland Gap. However, after 1894, when the A. M. A supported Berea President John Frost's separate school plan in Kentucky,

³⁵Lincoln Memorial University presently accepts all students regardless of nationality or ethnic origin. The Grace Nettleton Home closed in 1956.

³⁶Cumberland Gap Progress, August 8, 1888.

³⁷In the early 1920s, Mrs. J. D. Estep started tutoring the Blacks and whites who did not attend the city school at her house. Few children attended but it was the first attempt by anyone in the area to educate the Blacks and poor whites in Cumberland Gap.

Ellen Myers changed her will, leaving only a token amount (\$100) to the missionary association.³⁸

No one can know for certain how the school would have developed if Ellen Myers had lived. Ironically, the school she founded, Lincoln Memorial University, a tribute to the Great Emancipator, was built on property once owned by Daniel Huff, the largest slaveholder in the Gap area. In 1903, the school moved further away from Ellen Myers' philosophy when they joined the Southern Education Association. To inform LMU supporters of the school's new objectives, the school catalog reprinted the report of the Southern Education Conference in Richmond, Virginia attended by President John Larry Hale. The main concern of the report was not the traditional classical scholarship stressed by Rev. A. A. Myers, nor the enlightened progressive thought encouraged by Ellen Myers. Rather, the Southern Education Conference was concerned about the lack of schools

where a white boy can learn bricklaying, or plumbing ...the colored race is meeting this problem with abundant means ... When the colored race all become skilled bricklayers, somebody will have to carry the mortar ...[will it be] southern whites? No. We have settled that question long ago.³⁹

³⁸Ellen Myers Will, Claiborne County Library.

³⁹Mountain Herald (LMU Catalog) IV, no.2 (May 1903).

Clearly, Lincoln Memorial was moving in new directions; Ellen Myers' dream of establishing mountain schools to "effectively efface old habits and prejudices" was forgotten.⁴⁰

Arthur and Ellen Myers exemplified the nineteenth century progressives who discovered Appalachia in the late 1890s. Because they meant well and acted for people's "own good,"⁴¹ the Myerses and the townspeople justified the Myerses' involvement in Cumberland Gap. For the Myerses and other late nineteenth century progressives the romanticized possibilities were often more interesting than reality. For them, the fantasy became the new reality.⁴² This is particularly evident in Cumberland Gap. Not only did Cumberland Gap support two churches before the Myerses arrived but Middlesboro built and maintained seven large churches. Far from isolated, the community enjoyed increased railroad service even after the collapse of the Association.

Nor did the Myerses alter the educational system in the Gap community. Before the Civil War, the

⁴⁰Myers, "Mountain Whites of the South".

⁴¹Dennis N. Lindberg, "Appalachia: A Colony within a Colony?" in Lewis, Colonialism, 316.

⁴²Henry D. Shapiro, "Appalachia and The Idea of America: The Problem of the Persisting Frontier" in Ergood and Kuhre, 72.

wealthier citizens had provided teachers for their children. Their children attended the Myerses' school, not the "masses" Ellen expected to influence. Blacks and poor whites started work at an early age; they believed education was irrelevant and unnecessary. The present day community's respect for the Myerses appears to be based on the area's modern education system financed by large amounts of state and federal aid and the university Harrow School became, not necessarily the system as it existed when the Myerses lived in the Gap.

Typically, Cumberland Gap accepted the newcomers, used the skills and the facility they provided, and took charge again after the outside influence moved south of town. In 1903, the village on the Wilderness Road, population 1,000, was the largest community in Claiborne County. The town council requested a new corporate charter in 1907 which would include all of the residents of the Cumberland Gap basin, not just the new section built by the Association included in the previous charter. (see Figure 6) Everyone who lived in the community, not just the elite, would be needed as the town moved into the twentieth century.

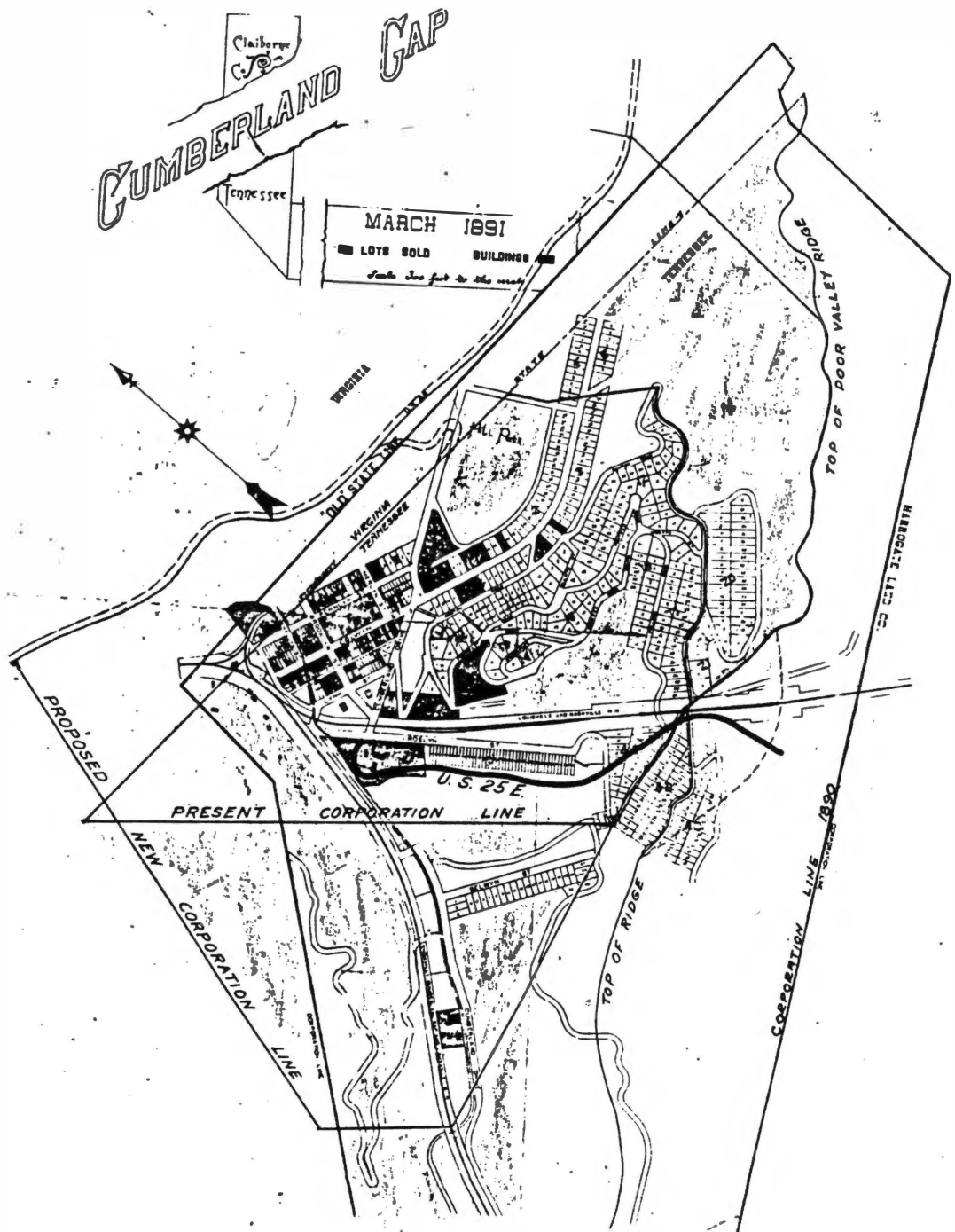


Figure 6. Cumberland Gap, Tennessee. Corporation Limits, 1891 and 1907. Courtesy of Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, Middlesboro, Kentucky.

Chapter IV

CONCLUSION: RESURGENCE of HOME RULE, 1900-1929

These small centers are the custodians of freedom, jealously guarded and ably propagated by the intimateness and primariness of their very nature.¹

By 1900, the culturally and ethnically diverse citizenry of Cumberland Gap had withstood the twin onslaughts of industrial might and evangelical energy. The unprecedented growth of the previous twenty years, 1880-1900, strained the community's ability to sustain itself as a separate viable entity. Nonetheless, Cumberland Gap, Tennessee "persisted."

Many of the reasons for Cumberland Gap's persistence stem from its historic location on the Wilderness Road. Lacking farm land, the village became the "neighborhood store" for country folk. It retained the churches and the school as community-centered gathering places. Like the general stores established for frontier travellers, the stores built after the Civil War in the Gap area provided increased amounts of

¹D. G. Marshall, "Hamlets and Villages in the United States: Their Place in the American Way of Life," American Sociological Review XI (April 1946): 159-165.

consumer goods and also served, like the churches and school, as communal meeting places. Finally, Cumberland Gap welcomed both the rural and the urban population from other areas.²

Typical of the new immigrants after 1900, John Estep started peddling produce to the stores in Cumberland Gap. After several years of travelling between his farm and the village, Estep decided in 1906 to move his family to town.³ They moved to a six-family apartment building but his wife found the close quarters unsatisfactory. The family rented two other houses before building a large house on a slight ridge southeast of town. His older children started school at Harrow Hall; his wife took in boarders, planted a small garden, and sold dairy products in town. John Estep worked in the rock quarry and built company houses in the coal camps. His youngest son began meeting the trains at age seven, earning money carrying drummers' cases and luggage between the depot and the livery stable.⁴ In a few short years, the family considered Cumberland Gap their home

²Ibid.

³J. D. Estep, interview by author, March 12, 1991.

⁴Nola Estep Comer, interview by author, March 11, 1991.

and never returned to the countryside.

Members of another immigrant family, the Hamblins, moved from Rose Hill, Virginia to Cumberland Gap, Tennessee about 1906. Henry Hamblin's father, a Black farmer with 48 acres of marginal land, supported six children of his own and several young nieces, nephews, and stepchildren. Henry attended school in 1900 near Rose Hill but he soon left to work as a day laborer on nearby farms and in the coal mines. Although Hamblin may have lived in Oklahoma after he left Rose Hill and before his move to the Gap, the 1900 and the 1910 Virginia censuses show a Henry Hamblin in Rose Hill, Virginia.⁵ When Hamblin moved to the Gap he rented a small house on the hillside near the railroad tunnel.⁶

Hamblin worked in the mines, at the mill, and on the city street crew. He also made "the best moonshine" available anywhere in the Gap. His wife, the daughter of a white miner from Harlan, died after the birth of their tenth child. His oldest son Mildford, age nine, went to work in the mines to help support the large family.⁷ Hamblin's grandchildren, like young Estep, met the trains

⁵Lee County, Virginia Census, 1900-1910, Microfilm, Middlesboro Public Library, Middlesboro, KY.

⁶Mildred Hamblin, interview by author, April 10, 1991.

⁷Ibid.

earning money carrying luggage and other items for travellers. For a nickel, they also posed for tourists' pictures near the old furnace.⁸

Stories of Hamblin's Oklahoma experience, embellished over the years with a Sioux ancestor, made strangers wary, but Gap residents knew Hamblin never refused to help anyone in need. His skill as a healer was as well-known as his skill for making good whiskey. Gathering "bark, weeds, and things," from the woods Hamblin treated the mill workers and other laborers who lived near the railroad tunnel, the old iron furnace, and along parts of the abandoned Wilderness Trail.⁹

Unlike the large, sturdy houses adjoining the road, owned by the Esteps, the Morisons, and other community leaders, the workers' rented houses adjoining the creek seldom had more than four rooms, or indoor plumbing, or electricity, or telephones.¹⁰ Besides the visual separation of the two sections, most of the laborers' houses were legally in Virginia and the Association era homes and businesses were in Tennessee. (see Figure 7)

⁸Faye Jackson and Crystal Rogers, interview by author, March 13, 1991.

⁹Hamblin, interview.

¹⁰Jackson and Rogers, interview.

HISTORICAL BASE MAP WILDERNESS ROAD - TOPOGRAPHY CUMBERLAND GAP NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE - DENVER SERVICE CENTER

LEGEND




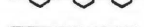


-  WILDERNESS ROAD
Upper Virginia Road
-  Lower Virginia Road
-  Kentucky Road
-  Tennessee Road
-  APPROXIMATE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK BOUNDARY
-  STATE BOUNDARY



Figure 7. Iron Furnace. Historical Base Map, Wilderness Road, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, U.S. Department of the Interior/National Park Service, October 1986.

Although the population on the hillside fluctuated throughout the years, the local census taker, a councilman from Tennessee, only listed the families that remained in the area over several years. The Hamblins and the Evanses, a barber and his wife with no children, regularly appeared on the Gap census.¹¹ Hamblin's white neighbors faced similar restrictions. Before 1910, the census did not differentiate between communities with less than 2500 people and the rural countryside.¹² Consequently, Cumberland Gap statistics and identification of its residents must be gleaned from other sources before reviewing the census.¹³

Tennessee census enumerators regularly included people on the hillside even though the location of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia state lines often changed from census to census. The families on the hillside and along the creek became Virginia residents in 1903 after settlement of the dispute divided the town

¹¹Claiborne County, Tennessee Census, 1900-1910, Microfilm, Claiborne County Public Library, Tazewell, TN.

¹²Margo J. Anderson, The American Census: A Social History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

¹³Tax records, wills, marriages, local Historical Societies, and newspapers are among the sources used to identify Blacks before 1940. Charles S. Johnson, Statistical Atlas of Southern Counties: Listing and Analysis of Socio-Economic Indices of 1104 Southern Counties (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941) details some of the methods available.

between Tennessee, south of the iron furnace and Virginia, north of the old furnace.¹⁴

After the long-running boundary problems were resolved, an unusual degree of cooperation developed among the three states. In 1905, the Middlesboro newspaper joined a campaign led by Cumberland Gap Mayor, J. Frank White, to have an "Object Lesson Road" built through the pass.¹⁵ Object Lesson Roads demonstrated modern technology and all-weather surfaces on short (two miles) sections of existing roads to encourage their application on other roads in the same vicinity.¹⁶ Connections to both communities were vital to Mayor White, who also operated a furniture store in Middlesboro. The federal government agreed to furnish the engineering, a construction corps, and all of the necessary machinery. In addition to the federal contribution, Bell County, Kentucky, Claiborne County,

¹⁴The disagreement dated to the original 1750 survey by Walker and continued until 1903 when the Supreme Court upheld the existing surveys. Legislation Affecting Cumberland Gap NHP, Copy of the Reports, Vol. 190, 1920, 64-88, Cumberland Gap NHP Library.

¹⁵Middlesboro Daily News, June 22, 1905.

¹⁶For additional details on the Object Lesson Road and other early road construction in the area see Mary Verhoeff, The Kentucky Mountains: Transportation and Commerce, 1790-1911, Filson Club Publication 26 (Louisville: John P. Morton & Co., 1911).

Tennessee, and Lee County, Virginia had to provide county funds in proportion to the amount of traffic or use they expected from the road.¹⁷

After years of struggle to overcome the major economic decline precipitated by the collapse of English investments in 1893, Middlesboro experienced a new surge of growth due to a coal boom. By 1905, the community in the Yellow Creek Valley was home to fifteen coal-related companies and had a population of 3,000.¹⁸ During a special session, Bell County commissioners approved \$2,000 for the road; Claiborne County authorized \$700 and pledged an additional \$75,000 bond issue. On May 25, 1905, Bell county approved \$4,550 for the road and Lee County, Virginia contributed \$1500 worth of convict labor and \$500 from other sources for the new road.¹⁹ In addition to the boundary settlement, the cooperation among the three counties reflected the importance of the road to everyone, especially Middlesboro where "practically all foodstuffs" included a high freight

¹⁷Middlesboro Daily News, June 24, 1905.

¹⁸Ronald D. Eller, Miners, Millhands and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982).

¹⁹Middlesboro Daily News, October 7, 1905.

charge.²⁰

Two years later, in 1907, the U.S. Survey Corps headquartered at Cumberland Gap began drawing plans for the pike road. Major G. B. Cockrell, owner and president of the Eastern Kentucky Land Company, donated the land and materials for the Cumberland Gap section of the macadamized road.²¹ Like Mayor White, Crockrell needed a dependable road through the Gap because he owned and operated a commercial cave that averaged \$5,000 in profits from tourists during the April to October season. The new road passed directly in front of the cave entrance.²² After the road opened on July 4, 1908, wagon traffic increased tenfold and the "honk of automobiles [sounded] daily" along the entire sixty-nine mile Middlesboro to Knoxville Pike.²³

Dr. H. C. Chance brought the first automobile to the Gap, a chain-driven 1909 International that Lauren Fulton could hear "two miles down the road." Fulton's father, also a doctor, rode horseback treating patients throughout Tennessee and Virginia. The distinct sound of his horse's hooves meant help was near. Now, Dr.

²⁰Ibid., July 22, 1905. ²¹Ibid., March 9, 1907.

²²Major G. B. Cockrell, interview, September, 1915, Robert L. Kincaid Papers, Cumberland Gap NHP Library.

²³Middlesboro Daily News, March 9, 1907.

Chance's patients listened for the sound of his noisy car.²⁴

One of Fulton's neighbors from Ewing, Virginia married Russell Berkau who had moved to the Gap from Kansas in 1902 to open a fertilizer business. Berkau's fertilizer business increased from one 15-ton carload in 1905 to twenty-five carloads by 1914. This success enabled Berkau to join local wagonmaker J. S. Whiteaker in opening the first auto business in Cumberland Gap. The partners sold cars in Cumberland Gap and Tazewell, Tennessee and Ewing, Virginia.²⁵ Tennessee had 14,830 cars by 1913; nationally, for the first time, more motor vehicles than wagons and carriages were produced.²⁶ Whiteaker's location on the main road offered full service for the local "t-Models"²⁷ and the increasing tourist traffic.

In addition to the now frequent automobiles on the road through town, by 1915 seven passenger trains and

²⁴Lauren Fulton, interview by R. D. Manning, September 15, 1984, tape recording, LMU Library.

²⁵Claiborne Progress, December 13, 1933.

²⁶Tennessee Highway Department, Highway Planning Survey Division, History of the Tennessee Highway Department (Nashville, 1959), 21; John B. Rae, The Road and the Car in American Life (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 57.

²⁷All of the local people interviewed used a colloquialism, "t-Model", instead of Model T.

eight freight trains daily brought people and goods into and out of the area. Salesmen travelled to Cumberland Gap, rented wagons at one of the livery stables in town, and visited general stores located throughout the mountains. Three large hotels and several boarding houses accommodated the salesmen providing meals, laundry, and other services for the travellers.²⁸ The money the commercial and recreational visitors spent in town added to the general prosperity of the community.

Most salesmen and tourists came directly to the Gap. Automobile traffic seldom slowed down through Harrogate and the LMU campus because both lacked service stations and conveniently located running water, vitally important to the easily overheated cars and their thirsty drivers. Cumberland Gap's water supply originated in the cave above town. Since 1897, the townspeople had depended on the owners of the cave for this vital commodity. After 1916 when LMU acquired the cave property, the Cumberland Gap city council negotiated with the school for its water supply.²⁹

²⁸Nola Estep Comer, As I Remember Cumberland Gap (Maynardville, Tennessee: Ireland Cooke Printing Co., 1976), 3-4.

²⁹Town Council Minutes, 1909-1929, City Hall, Cumberland Gap, Tennessee.

Throughout its existence, LMU depended on the largesse of national philanthropists. But as more local families benefited, educationally and economically, from LMU, contributions from area families increased. Consequently the school acquired not only money and property but a variety of local businesses. The nature of the gift often prevented LMU from selling the donated property, and the University soon found itself operating a wide range of businesses in addition to its educational enterprises.³⁰

The water company subsidiary caused many problems for both the school and the surrounding communities, especially Cumberland Gap, because the town continued to depend solely on LMU for its water supply. In 1918 LMU installed new wooden water pipes in Cumberland Gap, but they leaked everywhere, destroying the streets. The concerned village council wanted the pipes fixed, replaced, or removed. Meeting in 1918, they discussed "with fervor" placing fire plugs at the extreme end of East Colwyn Street, which housed many of the town's doctors and the First Baptist Church.³¹

Increasingly after 1918, growth and progress in

³⁰Gary Burchett, interview by author, March 22, 1991.

³¹Town Council Minutes, Cumberland Gap.

the Gap depended on the town's ability to provide additional services. Since its first incorporation in 1890, the town had operated on a cash basis. This prevented large, unnecessary expenditures, but also limited the size of the town's treasury. Cumberland Gap's mayor and six aldermen did not receive salaries. The town clerk paid the bills he received from the taxes he collected, reserving only a small percentage for his services.³² Taxes, however, no longer supplied the necessary reserves for all expenditures. In 1917, for the first time the city council decided to "borrow money to pay its indebtedness." By 1923, the mayor agreed to meet with Claiborne County officials to "get some assistance" for a new school to replace the dilapidated Congregational Church building. The county authorized \$5,000, provided that the city deeded the property to the county and raised an extra \$3,000.00.³³

To enact progressive-era reforms in urban services and to increase revenue, the council passed a series of ordinances during the 1920s. Noncompliance carried fines of one to ten dollars. Besides forbidding marble playing, bicycle riding, or roller skating on the sidewalks, the council set a ten mile speed limit through

³²Ibid.; ³³Ibid.

town, and banned all "unnecessary whistling or blasts from horns, exhaust whistle cutouts or other appliances on automobiles in town." Property owners had to have a building permit for new construction or face a fine. To keep the city water "in an unpolluted and clean condition" they fined anyone who threw things into the creek and drainage areas.³⁴

Although water continued to flow from the cave above town, LMU wanted to limit the town's supply during dry seasons. After the school cut off water to over one hundred residents without warning in 1927, the town council negotiated with LMU to limit water service only when an emergency actually existed. The town's fire committee retained access to water at all times in case of fire.³⁵

LMU next proposed the construction of a 100,000 gallon reservoir near the mouth of the cave, and the installation of water meters at all pay outlets in the Gap. Cumberland Gap's mayor expressed everyone's disapproval of the tank and the meters. He worried that the tank would collapse, the water would be too warm if held inside the tank, and additional meters would increase everyone's cost. An informal vote showed a

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

majority of townspeople objected to LMU's proposal, but favored attaching a chlorinating plant to the present pipe lines to comply with Tennessee Board of Health guidelines. Obviously the town supported progress, but mistrusted LMU after so many years of controversy.³⁶

As more and more tourists arrived by automobile, the extra traffic along Colwyn Street, now part of the Dixie Highway system, required frequent street repairs. Grading, stone, oil, and labor took a larger part of the town's budget each year. Although the the town spent \$1,719.07 on roads the two previous years, in 1928 the State of Tennessee assessed the town \$2,000.00 for maintenance of the freshly asphalted state road through town. The council forwarded the \$500.00 "now on hand" and once again borrowed the balance from the bank.³⁷

For more than a hundred years, the traffic that followed the Wilderness Road through the mountains had sustained the town. Although the road no longer passed the old iron furnace and an electrical woolen mill had replaced the water powered grist mill, the town still provided for and depended on the "travel that naturally poured through the gap."³⁸

³⁶Ibid.; ³⁷Ibid.

³⁸New York Herald, October, 1890, Scrapbook, Cumberland Gap NHP Library.

Since colonial times the trail through the mountains had supplied an impetus for change to the surrounding area. Thomas Walker recognized the area's potential in 1750 when he recorded the existence of the cave stream. In less than a hundred years John Newly and other community leaders anticipated the arrival of a railroad following the road through the Gap. Although interrupted by the Civil War, these same community leaders encouraged Alexander Arthur to invest in the area along the road through the Gap. The rapid changes along the road after 1886 brought Arthur and Ellen Myers to educate the people who lived near the geological formation known as Cumberland Gap.

Culturally and ethnically diverse, the community greeted newcomers warmly, subscribed to mainstream religions, and accepted change as an inevitable life process. Decidedly not an isolated, fundamentalist Appalachian community, Cumberland Gap stood at the gateway to the western frontier and, unlike Robert Munn's description of Appalachia, it was never a part of any state's backyard.³⁹

Unwilling to let outside economic interests gain control of the town's most valuable resources, the people

³⁹Robert F. Munn, "The Latest Rediscovery of America" in Ergood and Kuhre, 8.

resisted the lure of industrialization and its accompanying New South mentality. Race issues, long considered "the central theme of southern history,"⁴⁰ did not consume the Gap community. Blacks, part of the frontier community, remained economically and emotionally committed to the developing village of Cumberland Gap. Henry Hamblin, an African American, was respected for his personal qualities and remained a vital part of village life. This acceptance of Blacks, recorded throughout the community's history, contradicts one of the critical elements generally used to define a southern community. Slow steady growth, not rapid industrialization, assured the continuity and integrity of the Gap.

Along with goods and services, the Wilderness Road brought ideas. These ideas, exchanged and utilized by a diverse group of people, created in the shadow of the mountains a place called Cumberland Gap, Tennessee.

⁴⁰Ulrich B. Phillips, "The Central Theme of Southern History," American Historical Review XXIV (October, 1928), 31.

EPILOGUE: FACING THE NEW FRONTIER

Stand today on the corner of Cumberland Avenue and Colwyn Street with any of the residents of Cumberland Gap and they will point with nostalgia to a worn spot on the windowsill of one of the many empty buildings in town. When they were younger, "Mr. Henry" Hamblin, their friends and neighbors all gathered in the evening, and rested against the windowsill to play the banjo, fiddle, harmonica, and "the jugs."¹ With the tourists gone and traffic virtually nonexistent, the local community could relax. The children, after a busy day playing around the old furnace, climbing to the Pinnacle, and exploring the cave, watched in awe as one after another the adults joined in the fun. "It was a different life back then,"² they all recall.

From its inception, the town was "caught up in a complex national network."³ The first settlers dealt with the complexity of a European war, a new nation struggling to assert its authority, and the reality of an

¹Burchett, interview.

²Comer, interview.

³Smith, 304.

unknown and unsafe frontier. Assuming governmental responsibility for its own affairs required the consent of three state governments. Because of its historic and strategic location, Cumberland Gap endured destruction from both the North and the South during the Civil War. Yet the veterans who returned for a reunion in 1894 found that many things remained the same.⁴ Like their hometowns Cumberland Gap grew, accepted newcomers, accommodated oldtimers, and allowed the restless to move on.

Experiencing less decline during the Great Depression than the surrounding communities and no significant outmigration, the population stabilized and businesses remained viable. New Deal programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Tennessee Valley Authority offered a few jobs to Gap residents, but most of the large scale endeavors bypassed the town. Plans to establish a National Park focusing on the historic pass waited as Congress decided to fund the Great Smoky Mountains National Park first. Cumberland Gap National Historic Park, established to celebrate the passing of the first barrier West, received Congressional approval in 1941.

Almost the entire Virginia section of Cumberland

⁴Cumberland Gap News, September, 1894.

Gap township eventually became part of the National Park. (see Figure 8) The three states bought the land and then deeded it to the federal government. The residents along the creek and on the hillside behind the iron furnace had to move. In an event reminiscent of an old-fashioned barn raising, the townspeople dismantled Henry Hamblin's four room frame house and rebuilt it south of town on the Tiprell Road.⁵

World War II took most of the young men in the community out of the mountains. After the war a majority of the young men, both Blacks and whites, left for military service as soon as they came of age. Rail service declined, and when the new highway bypassed the town in 1964 many residents believed the community would soon fade away. Undaunted, the town leaders applied for economic development funds, refurbished the downtown, and started a spring festival. For a few years the railroad ran an excursion train from Knoxville for the event.⁶

Today writers, travelers, and government officials continue to focus attention on the landscape of the Gap and the road through the mountains, often

⁵Hamblin Interview

⁶Comer, As I Remember Cumberland Gap, 23.

LOCATION MAP



Figure 8. Cumberland Gap National Historical Park.
Memphis State University, Bureau of Business and Economic
Research, June 1968.

ignoring the little village of Cumberland Gap, Tennessee, population three hundred. The iron furnace, now a tourist attraction, stands silently beside the waters of Gap Creek spewing from the cave above the town.

In a few years the bypass road will be replaced by twin tunnels under the mountain. Forced to relocate again in 1985, the Hamblins moved across the new highway to a modern split-level home in nearby Harrogate. Like many former residents they still attend church in Cumberland Gap and Henry Hamblin's grandchildren take their children to see the old iron furnace and play in the rushing water from the cave.⁷

By 1995, the trail through the Gap will be restored and modern pioneers will be able to follow Daniel Boone's path through the Gap. Perhaps a few people will leave the tourist trail and linger in the little village in the shadow of the mountain, listening as Henry Clay did, "to the tread of ...millions,"⁸ and

⁷Jackson and Rogers Interview.

⁸Many sources quote Henry Clay. The New York Times, June 17, 1959 attempted to stop misquotes by publishing the correct phrase.

watching, as Fredrick Jackson Turner did, "the procession of civilization, marching single file"⁹ through Cumberland Gap, Tennessee.

⁹Ray Allen Billington, ed., The Frontier Thesis: Valid Interpretation of American History? (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Where do you live?

How long has your family lived in the same part of Cumberland Gap?

Where did they live?

Where did they live before they came to the Gap?

Did anyone leave the area? Why...When...

Did they return? Why...When...

Where did you go to school? your family? the teachers?

Were there other schools in the area? Who attended the other schools? Who were the teachers?

Were there more churches in Cumberland Gap then there are now? What happened to them? Who attended?

Did the churches care for the poor? What about orphans...older people...mentally or physically handicapped?

What male organizations were active in town...Fire Dept...Masons...Kiwanis...?

What female organizations were in the area...sewing...literary...church related...

Were there business groups in town?

Did any of these groups have fund raising activities?

Did you work in Cumberland Gap? What kind of work did you do?

What did you do for recreation? Music... movies... radio...newspapers...magazines...books...

Are elections different now than they were? How?
Local...State...National...

What services did the government (all branches) provide?

Did you or anyone in your family hold public office?
paid...volunteer...

Did anyone in your family join the military during World
War I? Where did they go?

What happened in the community during the War?

What do you remember about temporary visitors to the
town?

Did they come by automobile...train...horseback...wagon,
etc... Was the road in good condition?

Who were they ... business... government... family...
friends... ?

Where did they stay? how long?

Did anyone visit and decide to remain? Why? Why not?
Where did they live...go to school...church...

Did you know Brother Myers? Your family? Do you know
anyone who attended Harrow School? LMU?

What do you know about the American Association?

Did you or your family know the English investors...other
people who moved into the area at the same time? Are any
of them or their families still in the area?

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent

_____ name

The sound recording and transcript of my interview with Rebecca Vial on _____ may be used by her for research papers and publications. They will also be available for public inspection in the Special Collections section of the James D. Hoskins Library, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee 37996-1000.

_____ signature

_____ date

_____ You may use my name.

_____ You may NOT use my name.
Release after _____ years.

VITA

Rebecca A. Vial was born in New Orleans, Louisiana and attended Bishop Toolen High School in Mobile, Alabama. She graduated with a B. A. in history from Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, Tennessee, and is currently an employee of the National Park Service.