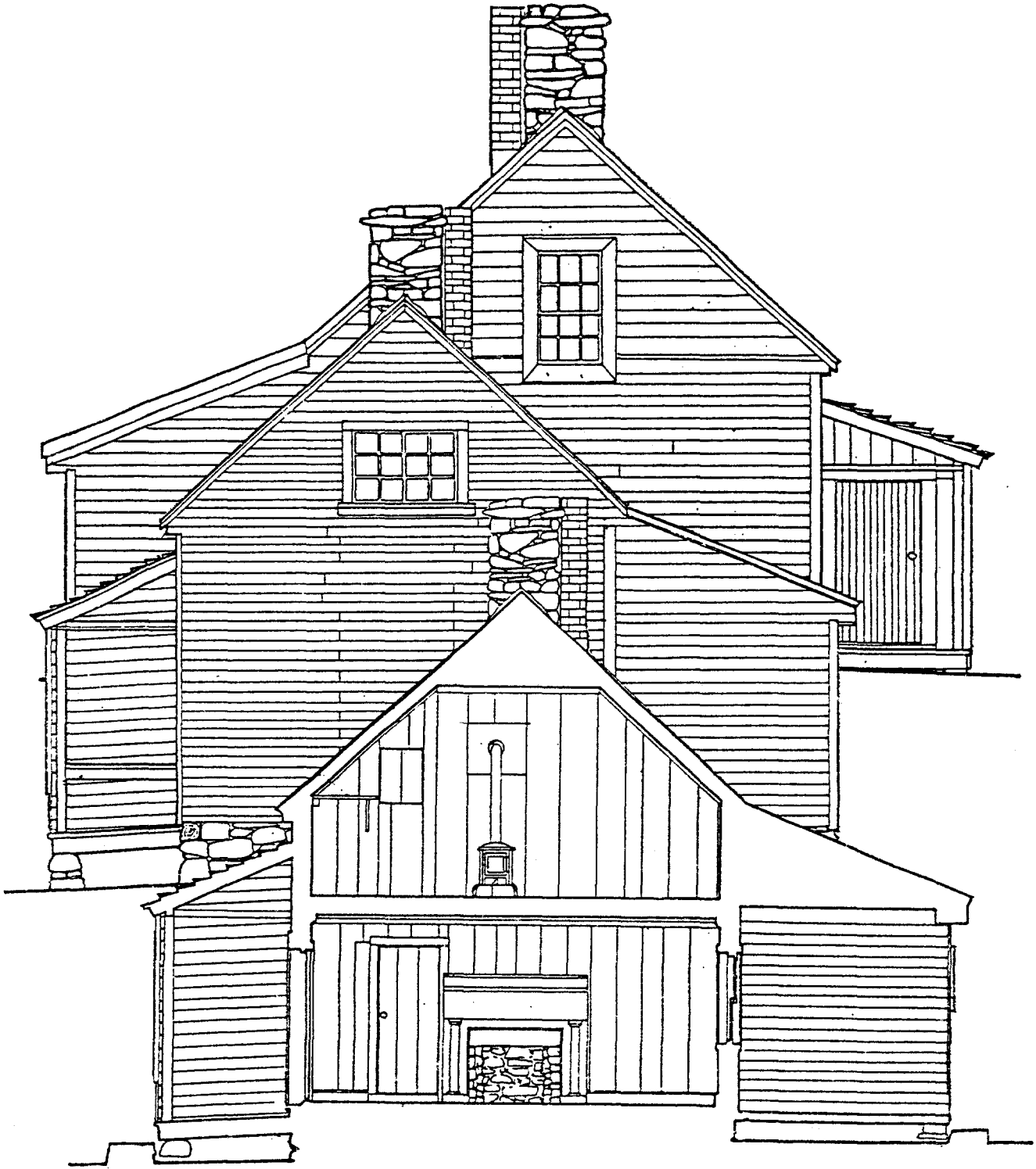


JOHNSON FARM



HISTORIC RESOURCE STUDY

BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY ● 1990





THE JOHNSON FARM

AT

PEAKS OF OTTER

Blue Ridge Parkway

Milepost 86

HISTORIC RESOURCES STUDY
HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

Chapter One: A History of the Peaks of Otter Region

Chapter Two: The Johnson Family

Chapter Three: Evolution of the Johnson Farm

Chapter Four: Management of the Site by the National Park Service

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Historic Structures Report

Bibliography

Appendices

Peaks of Otter Archaeology

Maps of the Peaks of Otter Region

History of Bedford County and the Peaks of Otter

Ordinaries and Hotels at the Peaks of Otter

Turnpikes and Roads in Peaks of Otter Area

The Johnson Farm - Deeds

The Johnson Farm - Maps

The Johnson Family

The Johnson farm and Johnson Family

National Park Service Management of Peaks of Otter and Johnson Farm

Photographs

PREFACE

This study of the historic resources and historic structures of the Johnson Farm at the Peaks of Otter is the result of a cooperative agreement between the Blue Ridge Parkway of the National Park Service and the Appalachian Studies Program of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg. The research team of Dr. Jean Haskell Speer, project director, Frances H. Russell, research associate, and Gibson Worsham, historical architect, conducted research, fieldwork, gathered supporting documents and data, and prepared the report during 1989-1990.

The study focuses on the Johnson Farm complex at the Peaks of Otter in Bedford, Virginia. To understand the Johnson Farm requires understanding of the history of the entire Peaks region, from earliest habitation to the present day. The report begins with prehistoric archaeology at the site and concludes with Parkway management of the site currently. The opening chapter is an overview history of the Peaks of Otter region, examining Indian occupation, early settlement, the growth of travel and tourism in the area, important events at the Peaks, the economic and cultural life of the community as it developed, and the decline and demise of the Peaks community. The second chapter traces the history of three generations of the Johnson family who lived at the mountain farm. Chapter Three traces the evolution of the farm itself--addition and alteration of structures, continuities and changes in the farm economy, interrelationships with the local hotels and effects of tourism, family contributions to the farm, ties with transportation and economic systems beyond the local community, and the effects of modernization and urbanization in isolating the farm and ending its existence as a family farm. Chapter Four provides a history of ownership of the farm and the Peaks area by government agencies and management of the farm site by the Blue Ridge Parkway for over fifty years. The final chapter presents conclusions and recommendations for research, restoration and reconstruction, and interpretive programs. The historic structures report and drawings follow the historic resources study.

Because the Parkway has managed the property for a half-century, and the area has had human occupation for many centuries, it was not surprising to find a wealth of material about the Peaks area and the Johnson Farm site. But it was scattered and hidden wealth that, for too long, offered no coherent picture of the Johnson Farm as an important element of a

larger historical picture. The research team set out to find all available information about the Johnson Farm and about the Peaks community and bring them together in a single study of perhaps the most fascinating cultural landscape on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Previous research (primarily oral history interviews) about the Peaks of Otter area was conducted in the years from 1960-1972 by various Park Service employees, including David Caitlin, F. A. Ketterson, Jack Reeves, and others. The interviews they gathered are invaluable, because many of the interview subjects are now dead. In the 1970s, Ketterson and a research team composed of Rosemary Johnson, Mel Lee and Karen Lee compiled a remarkable body of information about the Johnson Farm, published in five volumes and containing documents, interviews, anecdotes, drawings, photographs, research sources, and evaluations of the credibility of evidence they gathered. We are indebted to the efforts of these researchers. Because we have included the Peaks of Otter interviews and the complete five-volume set of information about the Johnson Farm in the appendices of this report, we found no reason to repeat the detail available in these works themselves. We used them judiciously to synthesize the history of the Peaks community and the Johnson Farm into a more coherent cultural history.

Appendices to this study include not only the Peaks interviews and the Johnson Farm study, but additional historical documents about the Peaks community and the Hotel Mons; tourist accounts of the Peaks from the earliest days; as many maps of the area and the Johnson Farm as we could locate; information on early roads in the area; additional documents about the Johnson family; documents pertinent to the Parkway management of the site; and a complete set of historical photographs of both the Peaks area and the Johnson Farm.

The historic structures report and the measured drawings have been prepared by historical architect Gibson Worsham and his assistants--Holly Olden, Mark Bittle, and Joseph McCarthy III. Precise determinations about the Johnson Farm structures was complicated by the fact that some of the buildings are not original to the farm, have been reconstructed incorrectly according to historical record, or, in the case of the Johnson farm house, have undergone two restorations to different historic periods.

The research team made several trips to the Peaks area and the Johnson Farm site, worked in the Bedford County Historical Museum, the Bedford Library and the Botetourt Library, researched documents and maps in the Virginia State Library in Richmond, and conducted a variety of interviews. Many persons provided generous assistance and advice and we want to thank them publicly.

Librarians are invaluable in studies of historic resources and we thank Carol Tuckwiller of the Roanoke City Library, Page Ware and Mary Hill of the Botetourt County Library, Nancy Strachan of the Bedford County Library, Susan Fritz of Newman Library at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and Minor Weisiger of the Virginia State Library. Other assistance in locating historic documents was provided by County Court Clerks Shirley Chamblin (Botetourt County Courthouse) and Helen Croft (Bedford County Courthouse), Ann McCleary and Beth Wright of the Museum of American Frontier Culture, Nathaniel Mason Pawlett, research historian for the Virginia Department of Transportation, Seaburn Daniel of the Strawberry Baptist Association of Virginia, Darlene Slater of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society, and Danny Johnson, a descendent of the Johnson family.

Members of the Blue Ridge Parkway staff gave freely of time and expertise to help us. Gene Parker, Dirk Wiley, Tim Mauch and Burt Lock were tour guides for the Johnson Farm and through the maze of information on the farm. Peter Givens, Virginia Interpretive Specialist, often answered our calls for help. Allen Hess, Cultural Resource Management Specialist, has been our cheerful, knowledgeable, and patient guide and Arthur Allen, Chief, Division of Resource Planning and Professional Services, a valuable sounding board.

This study could not have been completed without the steadfast support and multiple contributions of administrators and staff at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Dr. Robert Denton, head of the Department of Communication Studies, and Dr. Robert Landen, director of the Center for Programs in the Humanities provided a base of resources and encouragement for our participation in this project. Dean Robert Bates and Adelene Kirby of the College of Arts and Sciences, Evelyn Grender of the Office of Sponsored Programs, and Michelle Shepherd of the Humanities Program kept us fiscally sound. The staff of the Photography Lab copied hundreds of photos in fine fashion. Bernice Born, and

especially Norma Montgomery, of the Department of Communication Studies made this report a reality. The saga of human experience at the Peaks of Otter and the Johnson Farm is one of scope and texture and surprise. It is a story worth knowing and worth telling.

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June 1990

Chapter One: A History of the Peaks of Otter Region

A HISTORY OF THE PEAKS OF OTTER REGION

The Peaks of Otter have attracted human attention for more than 5000 years. The twin peaks, Sharp Top (3870 feet) and Flat Top (4004 feet), are located in the Blue Ridge Mountains in Bedford County, Virginia. The Peaks rise sharply from the adjacent Piedmont region, which adds to the strong visual impact they command.

The valley at the Peaks of Otter may be described as an equilateral triangle, with each side approximately 1800 feet long, lying at an altitude of 2500 feet. Harkening Hill, which may be considered the base, has an elevation of 3364 feet. The apex of the triangle narrows between the two parallel peaks, Sharp Top and Flat Top.

The geographical location of the Peaks of Otter area contributed to its attractiveness to prehistoric Indians.¹ The natural divide between Sharp Top and Flat Top gave easy access from the Piedmont region into the mountains, which had a more abundant water supply than common in mountainous country. The small valley between the peaks had an extensive wet meadow that attracted animals and birds to feed. Prehistoric settlers followed game to the site and must have found the water supply useful themselves. In addition to the wet meadow, fed by springs, seeps, and runoff, the area had, and still has, Big Spring and rushing Little Stony Creek.

Little Stony Creek plunges 1500 feet in three miles down to the Piedmont, creating a natural avenue into the Peaks area. Today, Virginia State Road 43 follows the creek into the area, and this likely was the same route followed by prehistoric Indians.

In the 1960s, archaeologist John W. Griffin conducted a dig at the Peaks of Otter site and secured a radiocarbon date from a charcoal sample found in a pit dug by early Indians.² From the radiocarbon date, Griffin concluded that the charcoal dates from 5,380 plus/minus 140 years, meaning that human beings used the Peaks of Otter site approximately 3500 years B.C. From other evidence gathered at the site of the dig (see map), Griffin described the band of Indians who used the pit as a group of probably a dozen members, who likely wore animal skin clothing, and who wandered around a large area in the course of a year, searching for game, fish, nuts and berries. In the pit where the charcoal was found, the archaeologist also found a chipped, stone weapon point, probably used in a crude spear.

ORIGINS OF THE NAME

According to some sources, Indian inhabitation in the Peaks area continued for centuries and the area once marked the northern limits of the Cherokee Indian Nation.³ Some even suggest that the name of the Peaks of Otter area came from the Indians. One version of the etymological origins of the name suggests that the term "Otter" was derived from the Cherokee "Atari" or "Ottari," which translates to "high mountain."⁴ Another story insists the area was named by early settlers after the Indians gave them a large otter as a peace token.⁵ This latter version seems implausible because no otters have been recorded in the streams of the area (Big Otter and Little Otter rivers) in any recent history.

Other versions of the origin of the name focus on the earliest white settlers in the area of the twin peaks. Two early settlers, Charles and Robert Ewing, came to the Peaks region from Scotland about 1700.⁶ Charles Ewing and members of his family are buried at the southwestern foot of Sharp Top; his will was probated in the office of the Bedford County (Virginia) Clerk in 1761. Another early settler, Scotsman Andrew Donald and his son, Benjamin, built a fine home near what is now the Little Otter River and named it "Otterburn." Because Otter is a famous place name in Scotland, many believe that these early Scottish settlers brought the name in various versions to Bedford County and the Peaks region. A brief survey of Scotland's geography and history lends credence to this theory. One of the most famous battles in Scottish history took place in 1388 at Otterburn, in present day Northumberland in England.⁷ The Douglasses and the Percys met to contest hunting rights in the region, but at the end of the day, the argument was unresolved (though the Scots claimed victory), with both captains and most of their armies dead. The battle was immortalized in Scottish lore, including "The Ballad of Chevy Chase"⁸ and "The Battle of Otterbourne" [*sic*] which concludes:

*O bury me by the braken bush,
Beneath the blooming brier,
Let never living mortal ken [know]
That e'er a kindly Scot lies here.⁹*

In a 1976 article in the Bedford County newspaper, Melvin M. Scott contends the name Peaks of Otter commemorates a high mountain in Scotland, north of Loch Lomond near

Tyndrum. According to Scott, when the early Scottish settlers saw Sharp Top, they must have been reminded of Ben Dobhrain (Mt. Otter) in Scotland. Scott believes, "it is likely our Peaks of Otter were so named by Scotsmen who remembered Ben Otter in their homeland."¹⁰ Throughout Bedford County, even at some distance from the Peaks of Otter, there are such place names as Otterville, Otterview, and Otter Hill.

Uncertainty has also surrounded the naming of the third hill of the Peaks triangle, now called Harkening Hill. The earliest recorded deed in the area, transferring land from Frederick to Henry Mayberry in 1797, describes the tract of land as "beginning at a chestnut in [Thomas] Woods line on the top of Harking Hill . . ."¹¹ In 1819, when Elizabeth Wood Smith and her husband sold the land that would become the Johnson Farm to James Jopling, it was described as "one hundred and fifty-four acres . . . on Harkin Hill . . ."¹² When John Therone Johnson purchased the land in 1852, the land was called "a part of Jopling's "Harking Hill" land . . ."¹³ In 1888, another deed for adjacent land refers to "the 'Hearkin Hill' tract."¹⁴

Johnson family descendents remembered the older people always calling the mountain, "Harkin" or "Harking Hill."¹⁵ Many feel the name derived from the long tradition, spanning from the time of settlement to the time of the last occupants, of allowing cows to roam freely up the mountainside with bells around their necks to locate them. Community residents would listen for the bells to locate their cows. Considering the word "hark" (and its early form "harkien") means to give ear or listen to, their explanation seems plausible. The change to "Harkening" Hill likely was a corruption in pronunciation over time; it does appear on a 1931 map of Bedford County, during the time the Bryants lived at the Johnson Farm.¹⁶ Most all of the family descendents agree that the notion the mountain was ever called "Hurricane Hill" is erroneous and stems from persons outside the community who felt the mountaineer's use of the word "Harkin" was a mispronunciation of "Hurricane" in mountain dialect.¹⁷ Harkin or Harking Hill is probably the most correct name.

EARLY SETTLERS

The first permanent white settler in the Peaks area seems to have been Thomas Wood in about 1735. Wood and three sons, John, James, and Thomas, Jr., were settled in the area by 1750. But, if Wood was the first settler, the first recorded grant of land that included the Peaks of Otter

went to Matthew Talbot and Reverend John Brunskill, May 5, 1749.¹⁸ They were granted 20,000 acres but did not perfect the title, so the land between Sharp Top and Flat Top became part of 5,766 acres patented by Henry Kay in 1773. Over the next twenty years, Kay sold off numerous small farms in the area.

Indeed by the 1770s, the Peaks area was developing quickly. In 1772, the Virginia House of Burgesses passed a resolution that a turnpike should be built from near Buchanan, Virginia, on the James River to Liberty (now Bedford, Virginia). This early road came up alongside Jennings Creek, then followed nearly what is today's Virginia Route 43 down to Liberty. Wagons hauled pig iron, lead, and produce over this road prior to and during the Revolutionary War to supply soldiers in the Piedmont and Tidewater areas.¹⁹

Thomas Wood, Sr., the earliest settler, died in 1763, and left an "estate" to his children. The land was surveyed in 1766, apparently for Thomas Wood, Jr., who inherited most of the land in what is now the Johnson Farm/Peaks of Otter area. When Thomas Wood, Jr. died in 1793, his land was divided among his children. The two of most concern for this study were Elizabeth, who inherited what would become the Johnson Farm and Jeremiah, who received 245 1/2 acres on which the first inn in the area would be built.²⁰

Jeremiah Wood married Polly Dooley in 1796 and they set up housekeeping in a cabin at the foot of the Peaks of Otter near the Buchanan to Liberty toll road.²¹ After Wood's death in 1829, his wife Polly obtained a license to run an ordinary in her home and began operation sometime between 1832 and 1834. This suggests not only that she was familiar with such an operation, but also that there were sufficient travelers and wagoners hauling goods on the turnpike to make her believe this would be a successful business venture. Polly Wood must have been right; she ran her ordinary until the early 1850s when she succumbed to age and competition from another ordinary operation.

At about the time Jeremiah and Polly Wood married, the Peaks of Otter area was surveyed by William Cavanaugh and in 1797, the land that included the two Peaks was bought by one of Virginia's largest land speculators of the day, Wilson Cary Nicholas.²² But Nicholas lost the land through debt to the Bank of the United States. From the Bank, title to the land passed to John Thompson, Jr., of Amherst County, Virginia. In August of 1857, Benjamin Wilkes, already living

on a small farm in the area and running an ordinary, bought the Peaks from Thompson, paying one dollar an acre for 2,700 acres.

EARLY TOURISM

Wilkes epitomizes the entrepreneurial spirit of pioneer America and obviously had faith in the growth potential of the Peaks area. As early as 1849, Wilkes was granted a license to keep a house of private entertainment,²³ which he ran with the help of one of his sons, Leyburn Wilkes. According to one source, they apparently succeeded in putting nearby Polly Wood's ordinary out of business.²⁴ A fictionalized account of the conflict between Wilkes and Polly Woods, based on research, probably is near the truth:

...that Wilk's [sic] sneaky n' tricky, too. . .he got a team 'n' wagon 'n' went t' Buchanan 'n' brung the people up't his hotel, went 't Liberty 'n' brung more right up't his hotel 'n' took 'em right a-past hyar 'th'out e'en lookin' in! 'N' I call that sneaky! Calls 'em tourists, now, not e'en trav'lers anymore.²⁵

Wilkes had discovered the boon of the tourist trade, and he and his son moved quickly to capitalize on it. In 1853, just one year after the Johnson family acquired the farm property on Harkening Hill, Wilkes petitioned the General Assembly for permission to construct toll roads up Flat Top and Sharp Top to collect monies from the increasingly numerous sightseers.²⁶ By 1855, Leyburn Wilkes had acquired a license for "wine and ardent spirits to be drunk and sold" at the ordinary. Then in 1857, Leyburn Wilkes began to build the first hotel in the area, called the Otter Peaks Hotel, with accommodations for 50 people.²⁷ A local resident of the area at the time, John W. Early, described the complex as consisting of "Hotel, cabin with four rooms--eight rooms in the hotel--store house with two rooms--another cabin of two rooms--kitchen--smokehouse--springhouse--an overseer's house--wagoneer's house--corn house and large stable--and a rock house on top of the Peaks [Sharp Top] with tin roof."²⁸ A visitor to the hotel, Henry Morgan, described his experience this way:

In less than half a mile from the spring we come to the celebrated "Otter Peak's House," kept by Mr. Leyburn Wilkes. Better accommodations, more prompt and ready service, and amid more de-

lightful scenery could not be desired. Mr. Wilkes is a young man, kind and affable, whose chief delight is to make the visitors cheerful and happy. He owns both of these mountains, which in time must prove a source of incalculable wealth. His buildings multiply with the increase of travel, and no labor or expense will be spared to make this the most attractive watering place in America. The air is cool and salubrious, and in the hottest season an exhilarating breeze sweeps through the mountain pass, while the low lands of the State are parched, sultry and infected.²⁹

By the time the Wilkeses built their hotel, the Peaks of Otter area had been a thriving tourist destination for many years, for many of the reasons given by Morgan. There was road access into the area, a way to escape the heat and disease of the lowlands in summer, and the kind of "sublime" scenery so attractive to the Romantic imagination of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Many tourists, the famous and the forgotten, were well-acquainted with the Peaks of Otter by the 1850s.

Among the famous were Thomas Jefferson, who wrote about his measurements of the Peaks in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, published in 1785.³⁰ An often repeated story, perhaps apocryphal, is attributed to John Randolph, the eccentric Congressman from Roanoke in the early 1800s. Randolph supposedly spent the night on Sharp Top, accompanied by a servant, and when he saw the sunrise from such a majestic height, he told his servant "never to believe anyone who says there is no God."³¹ A more interesting version of the story is recounted in Morgan's *Peaks of Otter, With Sketches and Anecdotes of Patrick Henry, John Randolph, and Thomas Jefferson, and Other Distinguished Men, Who Have Visited the Peaks of Otter, or Resided in That Part of the State* (1853). Morgan says:

Since the wild savage from these heights has ceased to sound the war whoop for his assembled chiefs, comparatively few persons have visited them until the last few years. Indeed, for want of roads, they have been almost inaccessible; none but the adventurous would attempt their ascent, yet Randolph, Jefferson and Patrick Henry found the pleasure of watching the stars and the rising sun, and of gazing upon their respective plantations in the interminable plains below, to exceed the fatigue and exposure of the journey. When the rising sun burst its sea of glory upon the keen eye of John Randolph, and lit up the mountain with burnished gold, he pointed his long bony finger towards the east ("that Javelin of Rhetoric") and exclaimed to his companions: "here let the infidel be convinced in a Diety."³²

IMPORTANT EVENTS

In addition to the famous visitors, several significant events took place in the Peaks area in the early nineteenth century. On the Fourth of July in 1820, a group of young men decided to ascend Sharp Top and try to topple what was then the topmost rock, egg-shaped, weighing several tons, and perfectly balanced on top of the other jumble of boulders at the peak of the mountain. Using levers and gunpowder, the young men succeeded in dislodging the boulder and sending it crashing down the mountain side, where it broke into large pieces. Although there are numerous accounts of this story, Morgan again provides one of the most interesting and emotional. He comments:

The time arrives when this rock must be hurled from its base, and no more excite the wonder and admiration of the world. Nature seemed to write upon it, "hands off," but mischievous youths are forever meddling, envious of nature's perfections. In vain did the pious Christian cry against their sacrilegious deeds! how infamous! how blasphemous! but all was vain.³³

Morgan and others seemed soothed by the fact that a large section of this broken boulder was chosen to be Virginia's contribution to the building of the Washington Monument in 1852. The stone was engraved with the following inscription:

*From the summit of Otter,
Virginia's loftiest Peak,
To crown the monument
To Virginia's noblest son.³⁴*

Another event that caused local excitement occurred during the Presidential campaign of 1844 between Democrat James K. Polk and Whig Henry Clay. The Bedford Whigs decided to erect a pole and unfurl a banner on top of Sharp Top to garner support for their candidate. According to one source, hundreds of persons in carriages, wagons and on horseback came along the wagon road to the growing community of Mons and went by foot to the top of the mountain for the

ceremony, including John Goode who was then fifteen but later a Congressman, Solicitor General of the United States, and President of the Virginia Constitutional Convention:

In his "Recollections," he [Goode] notes that the orator of the day was General Leslie Combs, of Kentucky, "who stood a moment and surveyed the vast audience before he said a word. He then reached out, plucked a leaf from an overhanging limb, stooped down and filled it with rain water which had fallen the night before and was collected in a hole in the top of the rock, and commenced his address as follows: 'Fellow citizens: Standing here this morning on the top of the far-famed Peaks of Otter, I propose with this pure rain water which has just fallen from the heavens, to drink the health of Harry [sic] Clay, that fearless Tribune of the people and born leader of men.'"³⁵

Morgan, again, reports the event with his own wry perspective: "There have been several celebrations upon the Peaks of Otter, and several speeches delivered; however, unless the orator be superior in eloquence, the mountain seems to attract the chief attention of the audience. In the Presidential canvass for Clay and Polk, a splendid pole nearly a hundred feet long was borne up these mountains on patriotic shoulders, but the high winds destroyed the flag, and the unfavorable weather detracted much from the interest of the occasion. To completely prognosticate the future [Clay lost the election], during the night some evil-minded traitor cut the pole down."³⁶

AESTHETIC AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

Two well-known artists of the mid-nineteenth century, Edward Beyer and David H. Strother (known as "Porte Crayon") made the Peaks of Otter area famous through their illustrations. Beyer, a graduate of the Dusseldorf Academy, painted the Peaks of Otter and the view from Sharp Top, and lithographs of his paintings were published in popular magazines.³⁷ Strother's drawings of the Peaks of Otter were published in 1856, and the next year he published stories of the Peaks area in his *Virginia Illustrated*. In his book, he mentions a visit to Polly Wood's ordinary in 1853 (then run by her daughter and son-in-law), and describes it as "nothing more than a log hut, showing a single door and window in front. . . . The bare log walls, and cold, yawning fireplace were made dimly manifest by the rays of a single tallow tip."³⁸ Even though the appearance was rude, Strother goes on to extol the excellence of the food and the warmth of the hospitality.

During this early period, the Peaks of Otter were also a place for religious meditation and even conversion. In *The Peaks of Otter, A Monograph of the Religious Experience of a Young Man* (1859), the unnamed author tells of his growing skepticism about religion and even the existence of God as he grew up and completed college.³⁹ On a trip to visit friends in Liberty (Bedford), he decided to ride his horse to the Peaks of Otter, "to enjoy the sublime and far-famed prospect presented from their summit" (p. 23). He was so moved by the scenery, by the "glories of nature" and the "great solitude and silence" that he began to think seriously about his religious shortcomings. Finally, he writes:

I uncovered my head reverently; I contemplated the sublime expanse around me; I looked up into the near, deep vault of the blue sky; I interpreted the symbols of the infinite Godhead; I recognized the presence of God; I kneeled down on the bare rock, the tide of emotions within me seemed to reverberate in the solemn, silent solitude that enveloped me. . . .

The author goes on to say that, since that conversion, whenever he had doubts, he "recurred to the scene and the prayer on the topmost Peak of Otter, and said, I will believe God" (p. 31).

During this early period, travel to the Peaks of Otter area was difficult, but many tourists felt the natural attractions of the place made it well worth the journey. Morgan, the early travel writer, summarizes with exuberance the feelings of the mid- nineteenth century Peaks of Otter visitor:

We leave the [train] cars at Liberty, twenty five miles from Lynchburg, and ten or twelve miles from the Peaks. Here we find stages, carriages, buggies and riding horses to suit every person's taste for travel. Those desiring to continue from the Peaks to the Springs generally prefer public conveyance, but the parties visiting only the mountains choose the more social and chivalrous pleasure of horsemanship. Tremendous is the excitement! The wild prancing steed catches the wilder spirit of its rider--and paws for the race. Now the mighty forest echoes with the multitudinous bound of iron hoofs. Vociferous shouts of laughter drive the partridge and the pheasant from their old possessions, and the sylvan songster flies with notes half spent in air and half down his throat, frightened half to death. Dogs from the distant cabins rouse from their slumbers, bark, howl, run over fences and hedges to join the chase, and yelp in the tangled briar with mad despair. On! on! rush the fiery coursers with the speed of thought. The mountain heaves in sight, but only to cheat the senses, for

perspective hath lost its rules of distance. We seem within a short walk of the mountain top; we inquire and find it *ten miles*. The fact is, the mountain being exceedingly grand beyond our common experience, we cannot judge of its distance, but the delightful road amidst towering forests and beautiful plantations compensates for the length of the journey.⁴⁰

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Shortly after this period of tourist activity in the Peaks area, travel declined for a period because of the Civil War, from which the Peaks' community was not immune. In June of 1864, during the campaign against Lynchburg, Major General David Hunter of the Union army and his staff, according to Brigadier-General Imboden's report, "staid [sic] last night at the hotel near the Peaks of Otter."⁴¹ Hunter's men were marching from Buchanan through the Peaks of Otter to Lynchburg. It is ironic that this campaign brought David Strother ("Porte Crayon") back to the Peaks, not as a tourist but as a member of Hunter's staff. The column also included future presidents Rutherford B. Hayes and William McKinley.⁴²

After the War, unfortunately the Peaks area did not return to a peaceful existence. In 1870, the hotel, now operated by Leyburn Wilkes and his brother-in-law Nicholas Horsley, burned, and Horsley and the Wilkeses entered into litigation against each other that would not be finally resolved until 1893, after the deaths of Horsley and Benjamin Wilkes. In a letter to the Court in 1870, Horsley claimed that Benjamin Wilkes gave him and Leyburn Wilkes all of his Peaks of Otter land in 1858 to use for five years, after which they could pay Wilkes \$5000 for the land or return it.⁴³ Horsley also claimed he had acquired Leyburn's share of the property when Leyburn "came to my house and told me he was broke all to pieces--and to save myself, it would be necessary for me to purchase the Peaks. . . ." In a deposition taken from Edward Harris of Buchanan, he said that Leyburn Wilkes "got to drinking whiskey and invalued himself, so that he had to sell out to Mr. Horsley." Horsley said he paid Leyburn \$1500 for the land, but Leyburn later insisted he only received 175 gallons of whiskey for it.

Benjamin Wilkes countered that he did not mean to give the land away, but only to let Leyburn and Horsley use the land, and that he wanted it back. Horsley contended he had made all the improvements to the hotel site, implying his ownership. Wilkes' opinion was that rather than having improved the land, Horsley had devalued it, because the hotel had recently burned. Witnesses were brought in to list and appraise the improvements Horsely had made to the property.

The depositions, taken from local residents of the Peaks area, give a clear picture of how much development had taken place in the area by the 1870s. Of most interest to this study is the description given by John T. Johnson, who had been living on the present-day Johnson Farm site for nearly twenty years, watching the growth of his community:

Since 1858, [Horsley] has planted some 250 apple trees, kept them pruned and clear of caterpillars and bushes--he has built 2 distilleries--painted the hotel and cabins--built some small shed rooms to the hotel--hen houses and stables--2 cabin houses and outhouses--a workshop--7 or 8 miles of fencing--cleared the rock off some 150 acres of land--opened near a mile of road--built 4 or 5 tobacco barns--manured the orchard perhaps every year--put some 200 acres of land in grass--done a good deal of ditching--cleared off a good of belted timber [sic].⁴⁴

Johnson also observes that the property has steadily increased in value, but that some two miles of fencing were destroyed "by the Yankees." Johnson seemed to have an astute farmer's perspective on land improvements and familiarity with the life of his community.

In another deposition, John W. Early adds that there were "three big tobacco barns covered with boards, a cabin in which Mr. Vaughn lives, with all necessary outbuildings, stable included. Also a house in which John Jennings, colored man, lives with necessary outhouses. A toll house was there in 1858, which was destroyed by Hunter's raiders in 1864."⁴⁵

The Court ruled in favor of Horsley, but ordered him to pay Wilkes the \$5000 plus interest. Horsley eventually defaulted in his payment and in 1877 the land was divided up and sold at auction. Subsequent owners also defaulted on payments and the property litigation remained unresolved until 1893. Even though the original hotel had burned in 1870, it was promptly rebuilt, probably by Horsley who still owned the property at that time.

THE PEAKS OF OTTER COMMUNITY

Near the close of the nineteenth century, the Peaks of Otter area was the scene of a thriving, bustling community. According to Dr. E. L. Johnson, who was growing up on the Johnson Farm in the 1880s and 1890s, there were at least twenty families, some with as many as 12 children, living within a radius of two miles around the Peaks of Otter.⁴⁶ There was a church, a school, an Odd Fellows Lodge, the hotel, two mills,⁴⁷ the homes and outbuildings of the local residents, and an

economy based on farming, fruit orchards, legal distilling, turnpike traffic, and a thriving tourist trade.

An interesting facet of the community was the presence of black families living and working in the community. John Early had mentioned John Jennings, "colored man," living on the Wilkes-Horsley hotel property in 1858. In the latter part of the 1800s, Ned Saunders, a black man, bought property once belonging to Horsley from Alanson Mayhew, a local cooper. The land was located on the lower reaches of Flat Top Mountain, near the current Peaks of Otter picnic ground.⁴⁸ Saunders built a cabin on the property to raise his family. In a 1975 interview with Mabel Saunders Swain, she recalls the family homeplace built by her grandfather and lived in by three generations of Saunders as "a log cabin . . . it was . . . five rooms with the little kitchen . . . had a house, a thing he [her father] called a cornhouse and then . . . a chicken house . . . a barn."⁴⁹ She remembered that her family owned the cabin and later sold it to the government.

Swain and her husband Lon later lived in the Mons community. Her husband, much older than she, often worked at the Johnson farm during the time of Jason Johnson and later with the Bryants, and he did work for the Hotel Mons ("he just watched out and looked out for things up there"⁵⁰). Mabel Swain herself worked as a waitress at the Hotel Mons and knew Eula Bryant and her brother Dick Bryant well. When asked about the interaction between black and white families in the community, Swain commented: "We were treated just like we are now. Everybody was nice to you but they went to different schools and churches."⁵¹ The blacks attended school and church at nearby Antioch at the base of Suck Mountain. In another interview, a white resident recalled that blacks in the area "farmed and worked around," "none of them never did bother nobody and never had no trouble no way," and they were good neighbors, "they was just as good to everybody"⁵²

As the century changed, so would the community. The early twentieth century would see the continued growth of the Peaks of Otter as a tourist destination, but the disintegration of the local community that included the Johnson family.

THE ERA OF THE HOTEL MONS

Ownership of the hotel property at the Peaks of Otter changed hands from time to time into the early years of the twentieth century. But guests continued to be well cared for and to enjoy

their stay. An entry in the hotel register in September, 1912, says: "We found the spirit of kindness and courtesy in our host and hostess, the spirit of bon camaraderie in our fellow-guests, and the spirit of our Creator in the mountains."⁵³ Guests were listed from Bedford, Lynchburg, Roanoke, and Richmond, Virginia, but also from Boston, Kansas City, Pittsburg, Cincinnati, Buffalo, New Orleans, El Paso, Philadelphia, Detroit, Toledo, Los Angeles, and New York.⁵⁴ The address of the hotel at this time was listed as "Peaksville, Virginia."⁵⁵ Early proprietors of the hotel included Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Klatt, "who are regarded by all who have had the pleasure of meeting with her to be a natural-born hostess. . . ."⁵⁶ Sometime in the period from 1905 to 1915, guests were greeted by Mr. A. G. Thompson, described as "a veteran of ninety years," and his wife, called "the inspiration of the entire establishment, and her watchful eye anticipates one's every need."⁵⁷

In 1916, Peaks of Otter, Inc., composed of W. L. Lyle, T. W. Richardson, Hunter Miller, W. C. Ballard, and B. A. Rice, bought the hotel for \$5000 from Henry J. Malchow, who apparently lived in Minnesota.⁵⁸ By 1920, the Peaks of Otter company had built a new hotel building "at Mons, which will about double capacity."⁵⁹

Just when the name "Mons" was applied to the hotel and the community is uncertain, though one source suggests it was first applied to this new hotel, since the old Wilkes' hotel was then referred to as the "Annex."⁶⁰ This seems unlikely, however, because brochures advertising the old hotel in earlier years were already using the name "Hotel Mons"⁶¹ and members of the Johnson family growing up in the late nineteenth century refer to the community as Mons.⁶²

In 1920, the new Hotel Mons was managed by a Mr. and Mrs. Ware, who lived on the property with their three children. Some of the Peaks of Otter company's correspondence gives an intriguing picture of the Wares:

Mrs. Ware is a young woman of a rather unusual type. She is full of high spirits, indefatigable worker, and extremely popular with all the guests. At the same time, she has a temper like a prima donna and is likely to blow up. Ware himself is just the same type. He can do more work than any other man I ever saw. . . and he has the same temperament as his wife. They are really more like two big children than grown-up folks, but as I said are very popular, extremely accommodating and will do anything in the world for you unless for the moment they may be mad at you. . . All you have to do is dodge when the powder explodes.⁶³

Throughout the early 1920s, the hotel had more than 4000 guests each season. A brochure advertising the hotel produced during the Ware's proprietorship, describes the hotel site as consisting of "1. The main building, containing kitchen, dining-room, office, living-room, and lobby, and twelve guest rooms on the second floor, together with toilet and bath equipment; 2. The annex, which is an older building and was for many years the hotel proper; 3. Peaks' View and Road Cottages have four and five rooms with bath; quiet and desirable."⁶⁴ By this time, too, the hotel had its own electric generator and lights were kept burning until 11:00 p.m. at which time the plant closed down and lights went out.

Guests of the Hotel Mons must have been treated in May, 1922, with the production of "The Shadow of the Mighty Peaks," an historical pageant about Bedford County.⁶⁵ The pageant featured the "Spirit of the Mountain," described as "lithe, graceful, and strong, clad in green and veiled in blue, with misty clouds around her head." The pageant depicted episodes of the history of Bedford County from "the coming of the white man," through the formation of the county, the Revolutionary War, Civil War, and World War I, and the recent (1920) visit of President Warren G. Harding. The pageant had scores of performers, a troupe of dancers, and an orchestra.

In 1928, the Wares moved to Lynchburg and were to be replaced by Mrs. Alexander W. Bryant of Petersburg, a widow.⁶⁶ But Mrs. Bryant "dropped dead on a bus to Richmond," and Mr. and Mrs. E. saveutnam, who had built a cabin in the Peaks area in 1918 on land purchased from Mack Bryant of the Johnson Farm family, assumed management of the hotel "purely by accident."⁶⁷ The Putnams ran the hotel together until Mr. Putnam died in an automobile accident in 1930. Mrs. Putnam continued to manage the hotel until her death in June, 1936 at age 43, when her daughter, Myriam Putnam Moore, and her husband took over the operation. The Moores kept the hotel open until October 1, 1936, when the Hotel Mons closed down for good.

Myriam Moore remembers vivid details about life in and about the hotel in the final years of its operation. She recalls:

To visit Hotel Mons was to develop "the Mons habit" and to several generations of Mons-goers the old hotel was a summer landmark. There they enjoyed the cool quiet of summer days in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains. They enjoyed hearty meals supplied from country gardens and good companions for an evening stroll to mark the last colors of the sunset reflected against the two summits,

Sharp Top and Flat Top-- the Peaks of Otter. From Mons they returned home refreshed and replenished. And they returned to the mountain year after year.⁶⁸

Moore recalls that guests in earlier years had come to the hotel by horsedrawn conveyances, but in her era they arrived by automobiles via "the mean and narrow dirt road, Rt. #43 from Bedford City." Part of the welcoming of the guests, she adds, was polite inquiry about their experiences coming up the mountain and the performance (or lack of it) of their cars.

According to Moore, the scenery and climate were superb, but the accommodations for the guests were "homely." "Each bedroom boasted a washstand with bowl and pitcher, and the bathrooms were located at the ends of the halls. . . . Each room was also equipped with an old-fashioned oil lamp, clear glass base and chimney. Most evenings the somewhat uncertain electric plant, housed in a shed out back, cast a flickering incandescence over the evening activities of the guests. But it failed at times, and the rubber [game] of bridge or game of charades was finished by light of the faithful oil lamps."

Other entertainment included wading in the two streams that flowed through the grounds, pitching horseshoes, playing croquet, dancing to a "bouncy jazz pianist who frequently entertained" or to a band from Bedford, sing-a-longs, storytelling, and readings. Moore remembers one Fourth of July celebration when guests were entertained by Governor Pollard of Virginia and the Bedford Fireman's Band. But the principal daytime activity was hiking the mountain roads and trails, enjoying nature and the scenic surroundings. Guests who made the steep climb to the top of Sharp Top could eat lunch at a lunch room operated by the Peaks of Otter Corporation, at which they sold soft drinks, sandwiches, and coffee.

One of the major attractions of the hotel, according to Moore's account, were the meals. She notes that guests would have breakfast at 8:00 a.m. prepared by the hotel staff:

A helper would be cracking eggs into a large white bowl and another helper dicing apple after apple while the head cook rolled out biscuits and arranged them in a large black metal pan. A rich aroma of bacon filled the big, rough but cleanly white-washed kitchen.

Girls in smartly pleated aprons moved about the dining room, setting out the heavy white cups and plates, the big pitchers of milk and orange juice. Morning, noon, and evening, the twelve or so big square tables, each seating 8 people, were laid with white cloths and napkins and laden with food.

[Hikers] later hiked to the summit with energy provided by a stout-hearted Mons breakfast of steaming oatmeal with real cream, fried apples, ham, eggs, hot biscuits and home-made preserves.

. . .the attraction of the dining room was the delicious food. At mid-day and evening full dinners were served, a main dish meat with assorted vegetables and salads, hot light rolls, biscuits, cornbread, rich desserts. (My favorite dessert was warm fresh fruit cobbler smothered in whipped cream!) Served separately, all meals were \$1.00.

Moore concludes that "undoubtedly the old resort was more than a physical plant, a certain location and a state of mind--the whole actuality of Hotel Mons added up to much more than the sum of its parts."

As early as 1928, the Peaks of Otter Corporation began looking for possible buyers of the Peaks property.⁶⁹ Apparently, as popular as the hotel was, it was not making sufficient profit. In company correspondence, dated June 28, 1930, there is this notation: "The hotel is a mere annex to the other department [Sharp Top], and we have not counted on any considerable profit from this source. . . ."⁷⁰ Certainly the Depression took its toll on tourism.

By 1932, there were plans for a new scenic road, "Skyline Drive," to go through the Peaks area, so the Peaks of Otter Corporation began to seek capital for improvements themselves, believing the road would "vastly increase our business."⁷¹ In 1935, the Corporation had the property appraised by an outside agent who made the following assessment:

At the moment, the State Highway Department has its route No. 43 under construction from Buchanan to Peaks of Otter and within a few years will complete a first class road from Buchanan to Bedford via the Peaks. . . . Within the past month, the Federal Government has announced definite location of the National Parks Parkway--the Skyline Drive between Shenandoah and Smoky Mountain National Parks as passing through your Peaks of Otter property.

I cannot conscientiously appraise this property at less than \$750,000. . . any sale of the property at less than \$400,000 will constitute a sacrifice on the part of your corporation.⁷²

The appraiser goes on to give the development scheme for the area, including the building of a lake.

In 1935, the Hotel Mons and much of the surrounding land was purchased by the federal government for creation of the Blue Ridge Parkway and the old hotel complex was demolished. The demise of the hotel coincided with the demise of the Mons community. Over the years, since the turn of the century era when the community was thriving, the Mons community had been withering away. The vast economic and social changes in American life in the 1920s and 1930s, and the increased focus on tourism in the Peaks of Otter area, caused most of the local residents to leave the area to find work. The declining population brought the loss of the Mons school and church, so others left the community to follow the social institutions they needed.

The history of the Johnson family is intertwined with the history of the Mons community and the Peaks of Otter. The Johnsons settled in the area when there was a fledgling community, new transportation routes, and the beginnings of the tourist trade. The Johnson family farm prospered with the growth of the local community and the development of the hotel and tourism industry in the area, and the family was intricately tied to both. The Johnson family watched the community decline and the old hotel meet its demise, just as their own family drifted away. After the Blue Ridge Parkway acquired the Peaks of Otter property, the last members of the Johnson family sold their family farm in 1941 and moved away in search of better employment, schools, and churches. The story of the Johnson Farm is not a story of a Southern mountain farm family isolated from modernization and social change, as people are apt to regard Appalachian residents. Rather, it is the story of dislocation and isolation of mountain farms and mountain communities caused by the effects of modernization and social change.

NOTES

¹John W. Griffin and John H. Reeves, Jr. "A Stratified Site at Peaks of Otter, Blue Ridge Parkway," *Quarterly Bulletin, Archaeological Society of Virginia*, 23 (December 1968), 58.

²For full information on the results, see Griffin and Reeves; also "Peaks of Otter Radiocarbon Date, Data Sheet," Blue Ridge Parkway Archives; "Fifty-three Centuries Is Believed Age of Relic," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 11 June 1965.

³Peg and Alfred Percy, "Sharp Top, Peaks of Otter" (Madison Heights, VA: Percy Press Publications, n.d.), BRP Archives.

⁴"Precolumbian Inhabitants of the Peaks of Otter," BRP Archives, Vinton, VA.

⁵Rural Economics Department, "Economics and Social Survey" (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, n.d.), BRP Archives.

⁶Glenn Babb, *Bedford County Bicentennial Brochure, 1754-1954* (Bedford, VA: Bedford County Chamber of Commerce, 1954), BRP Archives.

⁷Adam Nicholson, *The National Trust Book of Long Walks in England, Scotland, and Wales* (New York: Harmony Books, 1981), p. 258.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Ronald Macdonald Douglas, comp. *Scottish Lore and Folklore* (New York: Beckman House, 1982), p. 94.

¹⁰Melvin M. Scott, "Are Peaks of Otter Named After Scottish Mountain?" *Bedford Bulletin-Democrat*, Bedford, VA, 18 November 1976.

¹¹James J. Kirkwood, "A Preliminary Sketch of the History of the Peaks of Otter." August 1968, BRP, p. 5. Deed Book 10, p. 255. Bedford.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹³Deed Book 32, p. 94. Botetourt County.

¹⁴Kirkwood, p. 8. Bedford Deed Book 62, p. 195.

¹⁵See, for example, Rosemary Johnson, Karen Lee, Mel Lee, and Julie Savage, *The Johnson Farm: Back in 'At Day 'n Time*, Vol. IV, Code II, p. 2; also confirmed in a recent telephone interview with Danny Johnson, May 25, 1990, of Thaxton, VA.

¹⁶Bedford county, VA; reprint of 1931 map by S. S. Lynn.

¹⁷This is an interesting example of the politics of culture at work. It is puzzling, however, that Dr. E. L. Johnson, in a memoir written for the Park Service and included in Johnson *et. al.*, Vol. V, Code R, p. 1, mentions "Hurricane Hill." However, we do not know if Dr. Johnson typed the document himself; it may have been a correction by someone else. It is interesting that there is a Hurricane Mountain not far away in Bedford County, north of Otterville (see Gilmer map of Bedford County, 1864).

¹⁸"Peaks of Otter (Milepost 86)," *Area Histories*, Part 3, p. 1, BRP Archives.

¹⁹Alice K. Burger, "Polly (Dooley) Wood's Life, ?-1855," p. 2, BRP Archives.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 1.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 7.

²²"Peaks of Otter," *Area Histories*, p. 1.

²³Order Book 30, 1849, p.227, Bedford County (VA) Courthouse, Bedford, Virginia.

²⁴Burger, p. 18.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶"Peaks of Otter," *Area Histories*, p. 1.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸From deposition of John W. Early, April 13, 1871, Chancery Cause, Nicholas Horsley vs. Benjamin Wilkes and Leyburn Wilkes, Book 15, File 2805, p. 4, Bedford County Courthouse, Bedford, VA (copy in BRP Archives).

²⁹Henry Morgan, *Peaks of Otter, with Sketches and Anecdotes of Patrick Henry, John Randolph, and Thomas Jefferson, and Other Distinguished Men, Who Have Visited the Peaks of Otter, or Resided in That Part of the State; also A Description of the Natural Bridge and Other Scenery in Western Virginia* (Lynchburg, VA: Virginian Job Office, 1853), p. 14.

³⁰Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden (New York: W. W. Norton, 1954).

³¹History of Bedford County.

³²Morgan, p. 6. For yet another version of the Randolph story, see T. W. Richardson, "Peaks of Otter," *Bedford Bulletin-Democrat*, 29 June 1977, p. 39.

³³Morgan, p. 8.

³⁴Quoted in Morgan, p. 10 and "Footprints," p. 39.

³⁵Richardson, p. 39.

³⁶Morgan, p. 68.

³⁷W.M.E.R., "The Peaks of Otter: Grandstand of the Blue Ridge," *Virginia Cavalcade* (Autumn 1951), p. 28.

³⁸Richardson, p. 41. Some of Strother ("Crayon's") account is fictionalized but based on his actual experiences.

³⁹*The Peaks of Otter, A Monograph of the Religious Experience of a Young Man* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1859). Author unknown. All subsequent quotations will be identified in the text by page numbers in parentheses.

⁴⁰Morgan, p. 12.

⁴¹*The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Series I, vol. 37, Part I (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1891), p. 159.

⁴²W.M.E.R., p. 28.

⁴³David Catlin, "A Summary, Chancery Cause, Horsley vs. Wilkes, 1870-1893," December, 1979, BRP Archives. The rest of the information about this litigation is from this source and accompanying documents compiled by Catlin.

⁴⁴From the deposition of John T. Johnson, April 13, 1871, Chancery Cause, BRP Archives, p. 3.

⁴⁵Early deposition.

⁴⁶Paper written by Dr. E. L. Johnson, December 1960, Bedford, VA, BRP Archives.

⁴⁷"Locations on the Peaks of Otter," located by Marvin Marsh, BRP Archives.

⁴⁸James J. Kirkwood, "A Preliminary Sketch of the History of the Peaks of Otter," August 1968, BRP, p. 13.

⁴⁹Interview with Mabel Swain, April 21, 1975, *Oral History Transcriptions for Peaks of Otter 1960-77*, Code P, p. 5.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵²Interview O/M/M. Crawford, Peaks Transcripts, Code E, p. 12-13.

⁵³"Notes Made at the Offices of the *Bedford Bulletin-Democrat*, November 9, 1979," compiled by David Catlin, BRP Archives, p. 6.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵"The Peaks of Otter, Bedford County, Virginia," advertising brochure for the hotel, date unknown, p. 14. Original in offices of the *Bedford Bulletin-Democrat*, Bedford, Virginia; copy in BRP Archives.

⁵⁶"Hotel Mons' and the Peaks of Otter," advertising brochure, c. 1903-1915, p. 2. Original at *Bedford Bulletin-Democrat*; copy in BRP Archives.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸"Notes," p. 2.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰"Peaks of Otter," *Area Histories*, p. 2.

⁶¹"The Peaks of Otter" and "The Hotel Mons' and the Peaks of Otter" brochures.

⁶²Paper by Dr. Johnson.

⁶³"Notes," p. 3.

⁶⁴"Hotel Mons and the Peaks of Otter, Bedford, Virginia," advertising brochure, 1926. Original in the Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia.

⁶⁵James Elliott Walmsley, *Shadow of the Mighty Peaks* (Bedford, VA: Bedford Printing Company, 1922).

⁶⁶"Notes," p. 4.

⁶⁷Notes from an interview with Mrs. Myriam Moore (nee Putnam), July 25, 1979, BRP Archives.

⁶⁸*Ibid.* See also, "A Note for Tim Givens of Roanoke" by Miriam Moore, March 1, 1969, BRP Archives. All information cited is from these two sources.

⁶⁹"Notes," p. 4.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁷¹*Ibid.*

⁷²*Ibid.*, p. 6.

Chapter Two: The Johnson family

THE JOHNSON FAMILY

The Johnson Farm was owned by three generations of the Johnson family, a period of eighty-nine years. John T. Johnson purchased approximately 102-1/2 acres from James Jopling of Bedford County on July 20, 1852, for \$410.00. The land was referred to as a part of Jopling's "Harking Hill" [sic] land, a portion lying in Botetourt County and a portion lying in Bedford County. This acreage was bounded by land owned by John T. Johnson's father, Castleton, and Benjamin Wilkes. (*Deed Book 32, p.94, Botetourt Co.*) It is speculated that the site of the Johnson Farm may have been the location of the cabin of one of the earliest settlers in the Peaks of Otter valley, a Thomas Wood. The site was sheltered from severe weather by Harkening Hill, on an elevation above the marsh between Sharp Top and Flat Top and was near a spring which would have made it attractive to a homesteader.¹

There may have been two Thomas Woods as there is a will for one dated 1763 and a will for another dated 1793. No title to land has been found for the latter which suggests only squatter's rights.² However, there was a land survey for the latter Thomas Wood in April, 1766, of 270 acres in Bedford County "on the main Ledge of Mountain including the head branches of the North Fork of Otter River, and Bounded as follows . . . to a Mohoggany at a spring of Jennings Creek . . ."³

Thomas Wood's land was divided among his children after his death in 1793.⁴ His daughter, Elizabeth Wood Smith, owned a large tract of land in the Peaks area; presumably some of this acreage was inherited from her father.⁵ In 1819, she and her husband, Jonathan, sold a tract of land containing 154 acres in Botetourt County "on Harkin Hill on the head waters of Jennings Creek [sic] which land was patent to Thomas Wood. . ." to James Jopling of Bedford County for \$500.00. (*Deed Book 13, p. 533, Botetourt Co.*) A portion of this tract was the land sold by Jopling to John T. Johnson in July, 1852.

The circumstances and date of the Johnson's arrival to the Peaks of Otter is not precisely known. The birth of Castleton Johnson, John T. Johnson's father, is recorded in Botetourt County in 1790. John T.'s great-grandfather was Stephen Johnson who married Susanna Pace in 1764 in Goochland County, Virginia. A year later a son, John, was born to them. Sometime during the next few years Stephen, Susanna, and young John moved to Amherst County.⁶

It is possible that John left Amherst County at age fifteen to participate in the Revolutionary War. There is a record of a John Johnson on the muster roll and the pay roll of Clark's Illinois Regiment, Virginia State Troops, from November, 1781, to February, 1784. After his discharge, he returned to Amherst County where he married Penelope Harper of the same county on June 22, 1789.⁷

At some time during the next year John and Penelope left Amherst County and settled in the Peaks of Otter valley as their son Castleton's birth is recorded in Botetourt County in 1790 and in 1810 the John Johnson household is listed in the Bedford County Census. These two records of 1790 and 1810 indicate that the Johnson family was in the Peaks area at this time because the Bedford/Botetourt County line passes through the Peaks region.⁸ A Johnson descendant believes that his ancestors had land grants, possibly from Lord Fairfax. These grants were lost when they were loaned to a Roanoke museum operator.⁹

Castleton Johnson, oldest son of John and Penelope, left home when he was 22 to serve in the War of 1812 as a private soldier in a company attached to the Battalion of Artillery in the 38th Regiment. He was on active duty from January to April, 1814, when he was honorably discharged in Norfolk, Virginia.¹⁰

He returned home and on December 21, 1819, married Nancy Eubank, daughter of John and Sarah Eubank of Botetourt County. The Eubanks lived on the head of Goose Creek in the same area as the Johnsons.¹¹ Two years later Castleton's sister, Judith, married William Eubank, Nancy's brother.¹² Nancy's father gave the young couple livestock and household furnishings at various times until his death in 1856.¹³

Castleton and Nancy settled in Botetourt County in the Peaks of Otter area where he began to farm. It was here on October 13, 1820, that John Therone Johnson, who was to be the first owner of the Johnson Farm on Harkening Hill, was born. When John T. was twenty-one, he married Mary Elizabeth Powell in Bedford County on October 25, 1841. Her parents were Josiah and Millie Fuqua Powell. The Fuquas were a very prominent family in Bedford County. Joseph Fuqua, Mary Elizabeth's grandfather, gave part of the 100 acre site that was developed as the Bedford County Seat, Liberty.¹⁴

John T. and Mary established their household in the area and at the time of the 1850 Botetourt County census had five of their thirteen children. In this same census, Castleton and

Nancy are listed with two children living with them as well as his father, John. John T., his father and grandfather are all listed as farmers.¹⁵

During the 1850's John T. and Castleton acquired property in the Peaks of Otter area. On March 15, 1851, Castleton applied for the bounty land due him for his participation in the War of 1812. In April, 1855, he applied for additional bounty land as he had "legally disposed of" the 40 acres first granted him.¹⁶ In November of the same year Castleton purchased for \$200.00 approximately 220 acres of ". . . land lying on the headwaters of the South fork of Jennings Creek in Botetourt County. . ." from William Eubank. (*Deed Book 33, pp 546-547, Botetourt Co.*) This land crossed the Jennings Creek road and bordered James Jopling's land.¹⁷ In July, 1852, John T. purchased part of the land which was to become the home farm for his family for three generations. This 102 1/2 acres on "Harking Hill" lying in both Botetourt and Bedford Counties had been owned by James Jopling. The deed referred to a "spring under a large rock" which the Johnsons called Rock Spring. (*Deed Book 32, p. 94, Botetourt Co.*) Three years later in May, 1858, he bought from Leyburn and Elizabeth Wilkes for \$100.00 a parcel of land containing approximately 15 acres in Bedford County. (*Deed Book 40, p. 47, Bedford Co.*) John T. and Mary began to develop their new homeplace. Possibly Castleton, who lived nearby, helped his son construct the log buildings for his farming operation and for his home.¹⁸

John T.'s grandfather, John, died in 1856 at the age of 94, and three years later, in 1859, his father, Castleton, died of a fever.¹⁹ As administrator of his father's estate, John T. recorded in Botetourt County the sale of his personal estate. Family members as well as community members purchased the household furnishings, farming tools, and livestock. Among the items listed were two encyclopedias and "a lot of books."²⁰ However, the final settlement of the estate and further development of the farm had to be put aside because of the Civil War.²¹

Many people in the Peaks of Otter community were Union sympathizers; however, the Johnsons were on the side of the Confederacy. Three members of the Johnson Farm family served the South during the war years. John T. captured and turned in Confederate deserters. Two of his sons, Samuel and Charles, served as privates in Company I, 34th Regiment, Virginia Infantry. Charles was paroled at Appomattox Court House in 1865; Samuel was wounded in May, 1864, but appeared on the company muster roll for September and October, 1864.²²

At the time of Lee's surrender, John T. was in Richmond and he, with about forty other men from the area, walked home with only \$2.50 in cash among them. Confederate sympathizers on the way gave them shelter for the night and food to eat.²³ The Peaks valley was not ravaged during the war. In 1864 General Hunter and his troops passed through the Peaks area on his way to and from Lynchburg but did not stop, although his staff stayed overnight at the hotel run by Leyburn Wilkes. The residents were prepared, burying valuable possessions and hiding horses and cattle in the mountains, but the soldiers did little damage.²⁴

With the end of the war and the return of the soldiers, life on the farms and in the community continued as before. The work was hard and there was little cash. John T. began to raise sheep, starting his flock with five sheep that were given to him by a sheepherder from Highland County who stayed at the farm while he was passing through the area on a sheep drive.²⁵ The Johnson Farm prospered under John T.'s management; Harkening Hill was noted for its potato crops.²⁵ He also operated a distillery in a hollow on "Still-House Stream" where he made brandy from apples grown on the mountainside. A grandson recalled hearing his father and grandfather talking about the brandy made at the still. At Christmastime, people came from all over the area to buy the pure brandy which sold for \$1.50 a gallon.²⁶

The family attended the New Prospect Baptist Church located on Sheep Creek in Bedford County. In July, 1879, John T. attended the annual meeting of the Strawberry Association as a messenger from the New Prospect Church.²⁷ He attended to the finances of the church for over twenty-five years and was a loyal and faithful member all of his adult life. He was a man of inestimable value to his community. In an article written after his death in March, 1901, it was stated:

He was a man of integrity. This was shown in all his transactions and relations

He was a man of decision. He would assume a position by slow degrees, but when once he planted himself according to his best light and judgment, he was there to stay. He seemed to absorb the firmness and sturdy strength of the mountain near whose summit he resided . . . he was a gentle, winsome and lovable man: carrying with him wherever he went, a good degree of quiet, quaint humor and pleasant sunshine. His honored children and grandchildren and friends are permanently blessed by his life and memory and the cause of his master permanently enriched by his labors and influence.²⁸

Jason Lee was the third child of John T. and Mary Elizabeth. He was born January 26, 1846, with a club foot, and was six years old when his family moved to their home on the Harkening Hill. According to a family member, he was the favorite of their thirteen children because of his disability.²⁹ On February 4, 1868, in Bedford County, Jason married Mary Jane Cottrell, who was known as Jennie. She was the daughter of James and Margaret Cottrell who lived in the Peaks of Otter community. The evening of their wedding day the couple arrived late for their wedding supper because of the bad condition of the roads. The menu featured guinea as the main course. All the folks present had eaten before Jason and Jennie's arrival. As they entered the room the wedding guests sang:

"God bless the Folks that picked the Guinea
And left the bones for Jason and Jennie."³⁰

After sixteen years of marriage and the birth of seven children, Jason bought his parent's farm. John T. and Mary Elizabeth had lived on their farm on Harkening Hill for almost thirty-two years. John T. bought a tract of land on the south side of the Peaks of Otter area at the foot of the mountain and built a new home. Then in January of 1884, he and his wife sold the home farm to Jason. The 102 1/2 acre tract in Botetourt County was sold for \$410.00 and the 15 acre tract in Bedford County was sold for \$63.00. (*Deed Book 43, p. 636, Botetourt Co., Deed Book 59, p. 194, Bedford County*) Jason also bought the land his father had inherited from his father, Castleton, for \$200.00. This was a 71 acre tract on Jennings Creek Road and was part of the 220 acres Castleton had bought earlier from William Eubank. (*Deed Book 44, p. 628, Botetourt Co.*) A family member said that they practically gave Jason and Jennie the land because he was a favorite child. "Papa's excuse was he wanted to move farther south so his wheat wouldn't freeze out in winter as it did on Harking Hill."³¹ Thus began Jason and Jennie's life together on the Johnson Farm, which lasted for twenty nine years until her death in 1913. Jason stayed on at the farm for another eight years.³²

Like his father, Jason was a prominent and well respected man in the Mons community. He was a farmer, a carpenter, and a cobbler.³³ The farm prospered during his tenure there. Jason had fine horses on his farm; he took excellent care of his horses and other livestock. Jason and

Jennie said that people's character could be judged by the condition of their horses.³⁴ Because of his horses, Jason was able to perform many tasks and get around his farm in spite of his handicap. He planted his fields on horseback but cultivated the fields on his knees.³⁵ Jason became a cobbler because it was necessary for him to make shoes to fit his club foot. He made shoes for other members of his family and for some of his friends and neighbors in the community. He used his carpentry skills to construct a large table in the dining room of his house. It was built inside the room and was so large it could not be moved from its place. He possibly built the dining room as well. During the years Jason lived at the farm, it is probable "that the house was brought to its present appearance."³⁶ Jason, doing most of the carpentry work, helped with the construction of the Union Church in the community.³⁷

Nine children were born to Jason and Jennie; however, one child died in infancy and another died before age nine. In spite of these tragedies, the household was a lively one, especially at Christmastime. The only toys they received at Christmas were candy animals and fire crackers. These were shot off before daybreak and then the candy was eaten. There were candles in every window, wreaths on every door, and neighbors would visit during the season. Also there were dances every night at different houses. The Virginia Reel was danced often. Sleigh riding on sleds made at home was one of the favorite pastimes of the children, another was climbing the Peaks to chase the wild goats who stayed near the top of the mountain.³⁸

Most of the family attended the Jennings Creek Baptist Church in Botetourt County and the New Prospect Baptist Church on Sheep Creek in Bedford County, where Jason's father was a prominent member. Everyone in the community helped one another when help was needed. There were gatherings at the different farms to quilt, to shuck corn, and to make apple butter. There were also sociable gatherings at church and at school.³⁹

In the early 1900's, Jennie was stricken with paralysis and never walked alone again. She did regain the use of her arms and walked with the help of a chair, dragging it around with her as she moved about the house. She spent most of the day in the everyday room in a rocking chair where she could oversee the activities in both the dining room and the lower room. A granddaughter remembered Jennie rocking and singing "Count Your Many Blessings" and at times admonishing the children about their manners when company was coming for dinner.⁴⁰ Her son,

Ed, who became a medical doctor, hoped to restore his mother to full health with a machine that gave her shock treatments, but the paralysis could not be corrected.⁴¹

Eddie's interest in medicine began when he was a child working in the fields. He saw Dr. Jennings ride by on his horse and thought that a doctor's life was easier than chopping corn. In his latter years, he said it did not turn out that way. He trained as a male nurse in New York City and obtained his medical degree from the Medical College of Virginia. After graduation he practiced medicine in Botetourt and Franklin Counties and in Bedford.⁴²

There was no one living at home to take care of Jennie when she became ill. Mary Elizabeth, the oldest child, had married in 1886 and Callie Missouri had married Mack Bryant in October, 1897. Hattie, the youngest child and third daughter, had just entered Belmont Institute, a boarding school in Bedford. She had been there only ten days when she was brought back to the farm to take care of her mother. She never finished her formal education; though when her fiance left the area to study for the ministry, Hattie asked him to correct her spelling and grammar in the letters she wrote to him. Hattie cooked for the family, milked the cows, and was adored by all her brothers and their families who often visited the homeplace.⁴³ She had musical talent and played the organ in the various churches in the area and at home where she had a pump organ.⁴⁴

Jennie died in October, 1913, and was buried in the Suck Spring Baptist Church cemetery in Bedford County. Hattie lived with Jason at the farm until her marriage two years later, in 1915, to Cyrus Eubank, a Baptist minister. Sometime during that year, Jason's daughter, Callie, returned to the farm with her husband and seven children. Jason lived on at the farm until 1923 when he left to live with his daughter, Hattie, and her husband in Stanley, Virginia.⁴⁵ He died there on January 29, 1928, at age 83 and was buried in the Suck Spring Church cemetery by the side of his wife, Jennie. Both Jason and Jennie had been members of the Suck Spring Church for many years.⁴⁶

In August, 1921, Jason sold the greater part of his farm to Mack Bryant, his daughter Callie's husband. This tract of 134 acres consisted of 119 acres in Botetourt County and 15 acres in Bedford County. Mack paid Jason \$1,500.00 for the acreage. The deed was recorded in both counties, but taxes on the land were to be paid in Botetourt County. The remaining 55 acres of his approximately 189 acre farm he sold to the United States Government. (*Deed Book 0, p. 155, Botetourt Co.*) The couple already owned about 106 acres on Jennings Creek which Mack's par-

ents, L.M. and Mary E. Bryant had sold to him in 1904. (*Deed Book A, p. 347, Botetourt Co.*) In September, 1922, Jason also sold Mack for \$5.00 the 2.66 acres on Jennings Creek that he had bought from F. E. Johnson in August, 1915. (*Deed Book 141, p. 480, Botetourt Co.; Deed Book J, p. 477, Botetourt Co.*)

The Bryants worked very hard to make their farm nearly self-sufficient, as had the two generations of Johnsons who preceded them. They had a large garden which produced all the vegetables they needed; they had apple, pear, and peach trees, livestock for work on the farm and for food. They hunted wild game in the mountains, produced feed for their animals, and had their corn ground for meal at Kelso's mill in Bedford County. They had only to buy coffee, sugar, and flour. Each fall they bought about 12 to 14 barrels of flour which they stored in the "flour house" off the porch.⁴⁷

The farm was very productive and the crops not used for the Bryants own consumption were sold to individuals and stores in the Bedford market. Tomatoes were sold to the local canneries, one of which was owned by Callie's brother, Robert Johnson.⁴⁸ Even a revival one fall could not keep the workers away when a huge tomato crop was harvested and taken to his cannery.⁴⁹

After moving to the farm three additional children were born to Callie and Mack. One of these children, a son, died at age two.⁵⁰ In 1920, the wife of their son, Jimmy, died in childbirth and the couple took the baby, Jimmy, Jr., and reared him as one of their own. As soon as the children were old enough, about 5 or 6 years old, they began to help their parents with the hard and constant work on the farm. They milked, chopped wood, washed clothes, and fed the livestock.⁵¹ There was also time for playing games such as horseshoes, "Hide 'n Seek," checkers, and rook. They had swings, tops, kites; they climbed trees, went sleigh-riding, and played with the toys that Mack made for them.⁵² Eula Bryant, reminiscing with her sister about their childhood said in answer to Kate's lament that they did not have anything:

Oh, we did, we had more'n anything in the world. We had love with a big family an that's something money can't buy.⁵³

Callie was always working; she was described by her daughter-in-law, Erselle, as an active, strong woman who "was always in a hurry, always an I never saw her set [*sic*] down." She wore long ankle-length dresses and frequently wore a hat while outside.⁵⁴ Callie had very little patience with her household chores as she wanted to be outside working in the fields and in her extensive flower gardens as much as possible. She loved the land and loved to work in the soil.⁵⁵ Her daughter, Eula, recalled that her mother planted every kind of flower that she could obtain. Flowers were everywhere, inside the house yard, on both sides of the yard fence, in the vegetable garden, around the wood sheds and the spring house. Jonquils gathered from the woods by the children were planted along one of the roads leading to the house.⁵⁶

The Bryants had a close relationship with the Hotel Mons. Callie sold her dried strawflowers and fresh flowers in season to the hotel for the dining room tables. Many of the hotel guests walked up to the farm to visit the family and enjoy the beautiful flowers, and some were so interested they sent her seeds for her gardens. Callie always had peas or beans in her apron and kept on with her "snapping or shelling" while she visited with the callers.⁵⁷ Some guests who returned year after year became good friends of the family and brought candy and other gifts to the children and also sent the children boxes of gifts at Christmastime.⁵⁸ The children found other ways of earning money for the family. They guided guests from the Mons on walks around the area and entertained them at the hotel by singing and playing music. They milked cows, helped operate the sawmill, and waited tables in the dining room.⁵⁹

Mack, a quiet, thoughtful man, was the veterinarian for the animals in the area. He, as the Johnson men before him, insisted on excellent care for his horses. He was a Baptist and with the family attended the Jennings Creek Baptist and the Union Church in the Mons community where he was a deacon. The Bryants observed Sunday as a day of rest; no work or hunting was done on the farm on that day. However, Callie cooked for the 25 or so family members and friends from Jennings Creek and Sheep Creek who came for dinner every Sunday.⁶⁰

The Bryant children attended the one-room school house in the Mons community and occasionally their teachers lived with the family during the school term. Because the enrollment of the school declined as the population of the community declined, the last of the children living at home had to travel to schools in Botetourt County.⁶¹

Even with the decline of the community families continued to gather together to make quilts, shuck corn, make apple butter, butcher hogs, cut oats, and chop wood.⁶² These were sociable times, as the work was often followed by a big dinner. There were also oyster suppers and ice-cream socials at the Odd Fellows Lodge where Mack and his son, Harry, were members.⁶³

Between 1921 and 1929, Callie and Mack sold portions of their farm, about 36 acres at various times. Also during this period, several of their children married and left the farm to move to areas where there were greater economic opportunities and better schools for their children. In 1929, while in Bedford, Mack had a stroke that paralyzed him. His son, Dick, brought him home to the farm in a horse and buggy. Mack's working days were over;⁶⁴ he died on May 19, 1931.⁶⁵

Callie remained on the farm for another 10 years, carrying on most of the farm's activities and continuing the family's relationship with the Hotel Mons until its close in 1936.⁶⁶ Her children and grandchildren likely continued the family tradition of coming back home for the weekends or for Sunday dinners.⁶⁷ Also at various times during this period, married children returned to live on the farm in order to help with its operation. However, the farm declined; as the Mons community declined, in July, 1941, Callie and her children sold the remaining approximately 99 acres to the Peaks of Otter Company for \$3,500.00. She moved to Bedford where she was to live for the remainder of her life. It is probable that until the move to Bedford she had never traveled out of her community.⁶⁸ Callie died on March 12, 1955, at age 79.⁶⁹

Callie's brother, Dr. Ed, speaking at a Johnson Family Reunion said about the family:

The entire human relationship is built around the family circle. It is the basis of all forms of government, and it should be a source of joy and pride to all its members.

We have cause for pride in our ancestors, both men and women. They were God-loving people and taught us right from wrong and to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. We are proud of the present generation also, for our men and women of today are exhibiting in their varied fields of business or profession those same sterling qualities which distinguished our ancestors in years gone by.⁷⁰

ENDNOTES

¹Rosemary Johnson, Karen Lee, Mel Lee, Julie Savage, *The Johnson Farm, Back in 'At Day 'n Time: A Social and Historical Study of the Johnson farm and Its Inhabitants 1852-1941, Vols. I-V* (Peaks of Otter: Blue Ridge Parkway, 1975), Vol. I, p. 10.

²James J. Kirkwood, "A Preliminary Sketch of the History of the Peaks of Otter," BRP Archives, 1968, p. 3.

³*Surveyors Record Book 1*, Bedford Co., VA, p. 83.

⁴*Johnson Farm*, Vol. I, p. 11.

⁵Kirkwood, p. 76.

⁶*Johnson Farm*, Vol I, pp. 11-12.

⁷*Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 8-9, 18-19.

⁸*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 12.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 31.

¹¹*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 12.

¹²*Ibid.*, Vol. III, Genealogy.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 12.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 30.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 31, 32, 36.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 13.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 39, 42.

²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 43-47.

²¹*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 13.

²²*Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 49-50.

²³*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 51.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*, Vol. V. Transcript R, p. 1.

²⁷ *Annual Report of the Strawberry Baptist Association of Virginia*. Strawberry Association Office, Bedford, VA.

²⁸ *Johnson Farm*, Vol. III, p. 73.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 50.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16-17.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. V, Transcript R, pp. 3, 4.

³⁹ *Oral History Transcriptions for Peaks of Otter, 1960-1977*. (Peaks of Otter; Blue Ridge Parkway, 1975). Transcript R, pp. 9, 10, 11.

⁴⁰ *Johnson Farm*, Vol. I, pp. 18, 45.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Vol. V, Transcript W, pp. 3, 4.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 49.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 72.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 20.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 51-52.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 74.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 20.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 112-113.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 44.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. V, pp. 12-13.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 40.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 41-43.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 40, 44.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 23.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 56, 106-108.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 25.

⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶³*Oral History Transcriptions for Peaks of Otter*, Transcript M, p. 11.

⁶⁴*Johnson Farm*, Vol. I, p. 26.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, Vol. III, Genealogy.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 26.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 16.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 27.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, Vol. III, Genealogy.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 73.

Chapter Three: Evolution of the Johnson Farm

EVOLUTION OF THE JOHNSON FARM

The Johnson Farm property was inhabited and probably under cultivation for about 175 years, from the time of Thomas Wood's ownership in the 1760s until the last of the Bryants left in 1941. As the years went by, the farmstead grew in prosperity and diversity, reaching a point at which the farm supported large numbers of family members. Then the farm began a slow decline that led eventually to its abandonment as a family farm but to a new life as a popular, educational tourist attraction. The evolution of the farm reflects the ebb and flow of an economic and social system that existed far beyond the farm's mountain community.

Little is known about the development of the farm during the occupancy of its earliest residents. During the time Thomas Wood owned the land, it is likely there was at least a log dwelling on the site and perhaps some cultivation of the land. According to one source, in the survey made for Wood in 1766, one of the boundary pointers is a "high point of the mountain called the old apple orchard."¹ This suggests farming was underway quite early in the area. As the land changed hands from Wood to his son Jeremiah Wood to Elizabeth Wood Smith to James Jopling in 1819, it seems likely that more structures may have been added and more land cleared for cultivation. When Jopling sold the farmsite to John T. Johnson in 1852, one of the pointers is "a stake in a field," suggesting cultivated ground.² As early as 1780, a major gristmill for grinding grain was in operation just down the mountain from the Peaks area. From 1807 to 1832, the mill was known as Fancy Farm Mill or Oteys Mill; after Robert Kelso purchased the mill in 1832, it was known from that time to the present as Kelso's Mill and played an important role in the life of the Johnson Farm.³

When John Therone Johnson bought the land (102 1/2 acres) in 1852, he and his father already had been farming in Botetourt County in the Peaks vicinity for some years.⁴ And they apparently were thriving; Dr. E. L. Johnson recalls that his great-grandfather, Castleton, along with James Jopling and Nicholas Horsley "owned most of the Boundary [the present Peaks of Otter property]."⁵ The sale bill for the settlement of Castleton Johnson's estate (John T.'s father) indicates the kind of farm life the Johnson family lived; what John T. Johnson bought in the estate sale indicates activities on his own farm.⁶

The sale bill lists numerous items taken by Castleton's widow for her own use and reflects farm life at the parents' farm. She received a cow and calf, two sheep, seven shoats, three polk hogs, one sow, and one mare. To support her livestock, she had barrels of corn and supplies of oats and fodder. She retained a wagon, harness, and bridle to make use of her mare, and hoes and a spinning wheel for her own work. The remaining items were foodstores and household furnishings. Most of the household goods were simple, but she did have two beds, numerous chairs, a clock, a tea pot and cream pot, and some valuable counter pins.

John T. Johnson bought items he needed on his own farm, including a hackle, hilling hoes, some carpentry and cooper's tools, two axes, some sheep shears and sheep skins. In addition, he bought some coverlets and several of his father's collection of books. It is interesting that he bought none of the substantial group of livestock, perhaps because he already owned enough livestock of his own.

Purchases by other family members or members of the community (Eubanks, Horsley, Woods, Aringtons, Markhams, etc.) included shoe maker's tools, a plow, scythe and cradle, a grind stone, flax wheels, a loom, quilts, dishes, and more books, even an encyclopedia and a history and life of George Washington. All the items on the sale list create a picture of farm life in the Peaks community and on the Johnson Farm in the middle of the nineteenth century. People there kept cows and cattle, hogs, and raised sheep; they grew corn, oats, rye, potatoes, cabbage, and flax; they made and took care of their own tools, barrels, shoes, clothing, and bedcoverings; they had as many of the comforts and luxuries of domestic life as they could afford and acquire; and they had a small library of books for enlightenment and entertainment.

Another document, detailing the settlement of debts for Castleton Johnson's estate, lists John T. Johnson's payment to R. N. Kelso, owner of Kelso's Mill, for flour and blacksmith's services.⁷ Other payments made out to various debt-holders are for carding wool and for cotton yarn. These payments suggest that the Johnson's took their own grain (corn) to Kelso for grinding and purchased from him what they did not produce--wheat and smithing. They had the wool from their sheep carded by someone else, perhaps because they were producing more than just for their own use, and they bought cotton yarn, made from a plant they could not grow.

When John Therone Johnson and his wife Mary Powell Johnson bought the Jopling land in 1852, they already had five or six of their thirteen children. It seems likely that they moved into

some existing structure on the property and began expanding the farm to meet the birth of successive children nearly every two years. The first child to marry was Jason Johnson, the son who eventually took over the farm, in 1868; the last child was born in 1869; so, by the end of the first sixteen years of the farm's occupancy by Johnsons, about thirteen people were living in the home at the same time (one child died before reaching age three).⁸ If there was only a single pen dwelling on the farm at the time of purchase, surely John T. must have added the other pen of the saddlebag house to accommodate so many children. And with so many mouths to feed and so much family labor available, especially numerous sons, the farm operations must have grown along with the house. A great-grandson, Dr. E. L. Johnson suggests that the Johnsons owned slaves: "[The Johnsons and the Wilkes] had slaves. Horsley, I don't know whether he had slaves or not."⁹ While black families continued to live in the community for several generations and likely were descendents of slaves, there is no evidence at this time to corroborate Dr. Johnson's contention.

Some family stories recount the farm's growing prosperity under John T.'s leadership. The sheep flock stands out in the memory of some of John T.'s grandchildren, probably because this was the last era of sheep raising at the farm. One grandson recalls:

[My grandfather had sheep when he was up there [on the farm], but that was the last sheep was up there. I heard him say many a time that old man Patterson come over, from over yonder at Highland County, drove a bunch of sheep cross and stayed all night up there and give him five sheep, and started out with them there and he kept them there sheep as long as he stayed up here and moved some of 'em down yonder to that old place where we lived [the old home place of Castleton Johnson].¹⁰

This story probably predates John T.'s purchase of the current farm property and may refer to the way he and his father, Castleton, began their sheep flock. When John T. bought the sheep shears and sheep skins from his father's estate, he already was in the business of raising sheep and probably selling the extra wool for some family income. We know he was having the wool carded and there are indications that a wool shed may have existed in the Peaks community at the time.¹¹ Certainly Sheep Creek already had its name in the community, appearing in documents of the period. According to the grandson, by Jason Johnson's tenure at the farm, the family had given up on raising sheep because "the bears and things" caught too many of the lambs.

Another economic boost to the family farm economy during John Therone's era was his famous apple brandy.¹² Even though he was a pillar of his church and community, John T. apparently felt no conflict with his production of spirits. Distilling was not illegal at the time, and liquor was a staple in most homes as a medicine and available to diners and travelers at Leyburn Wilkes' Otter Peaks Hotel. Another of John T.'s grandsons, Dr. E. L. Johnson, remembers his father and grandfather talk about the fine brandy made from abundant apples in the area. He recalls: "Pure apple brandy sold for \$1.50 per gallon. People came from far and near to buy their Christmas supply. They said it was very seldom they ever saw a drunken man."¹³ John T.'s still was located in a hollow above the old hotel on what is still called "Stillhouse Stream." He may have sold apple brandy to his friend Leyburn Wilkes for his hotel, although Wilkes had two still operations of his own.¹⁴

John Therone Johnson and his growing family were an early mountain farm family, but prosperous for their time and place, civic-minded, and respected. When John T. died in 1901, a friend wrote a newspaper tribute to him, saying:

He was a man of integrity. This was shown in all his transactions and relations. The heart of the people safely trusted in him. The church's finances, which were entrusted to him for over 25 years, were accurately and satisfactorily attended to: "His word was as good as his bond." He was a man of decision.¹⁵

John Therone Johnson had established a tradition of sound farming, good business, education, and personal integrity for his descendents at the Johnson Farm.

THE NEXT GENERATION

Family tradition holds that Jason Johnson was a favorite child of his father's (John T.), perhaps because he had a club foot. Jason married Mary Jane "Jennie" Cottrell, from a neighboring family, in 1868 and they began farming land that had been passed to Jason from his father, land inherited from Castleton Johnson. According to the 1880 census records of agricultural production, Jason and Jennie in that dozen years had created a productive farm. They had swine, poultry, a milk cow, horses, and were producing eggs, butter, Indian corn, oats, and potatoes in

abundance.¹⁶ In fact, Jason and Jennie's estimated value of farm production outdistanced his nearby uncle's farm (Stephen Johnson) and production from the land his brother Joshua farmed, even though they all farmed nearly the same acreage. This could be due to the fact that Jason had two horses rather than only one as the others did, his growing family (eventually nine), and his reputed industriousness, in spite of his handicap.

In 1884, John T. decided to sell his farm, supposedly to move to a southern slope so his wheat wouldn't freeze in the winter; he bought land on the south slope of Sharp Top and built a new home.¹⁷ He sold his farm to Jason and Jennie for \$410.00, and the second generation of Johnsons moved into the farmhouse and took over the farm operation. The family cultivated the land with a plow and horses and by hand, without pesticides or fertilizers. Because of his handicap, Jason often sowed seed from horseback or planted and weeded on his knees. The farm hogs ran free in the woodlands, fattening on acorns and chestnuts (mast). The chestnuts were gathered by the bushels each fall and provided the family a valuable cash crop for the purchase of clothing and other necessities and luxuries the family could not produce.¹⁸ According to the 1880 census, the chickens were producing 100 dozen eggs in 1879, and the cow gave enough milk for 100 pounds of butter, both of which were saleable products for family income.¹⁹

The family took good care of their farm and their animals; Jason especially was known to take pride in his horses. A granddaughter recalls that "he had the prettiest horses. You know people in those days, I've heard my grandparents say, if you drive down the road and if you see a skinny hoss, horse, watch out for the people who owns it. It was sorta their way of, you know, judgin' character."²⁰ Jason kept his horses "so shiny and pretty and fat."

A major farm industry in the community was fruit production from the large apple and peach orchard on the slopes of Flat Top mountain. One of Jason and Jennie's children, Dr. Ed Johnson, remembers men, women, and children in the community working from sun-up to sun-down to bring in the crop:

This was the largest orchard in Bedford County, producing thousands of bushels of apples and also a large crop of peaches. The main variety of apples was the Pippin. The best grade of apples were packed in home-made barrels that were made in the orchard, hauled by wagon to Bedford--15 barrels to the load--then shipped to the English market. There was an evaporator situated in the lower end of the orchard where the apples that

were not first-class were dried and also the peaches. These were dried and bleached with sulphur.²¹

While apple production tied the Johnson family into an international economic market, it also provided them with an abundant and pleasurable foodstuff. A granddaughter of Jason and Jennie's remembers that they had delicious little "pare mane" apples even in the wintertime, and that they fixed apples "every way you could think of to eat them."²² Each fall, communal apple butter "stirrings" made gallons of apple butter.

Communal "workings" of many kinds gave the families who lived in the Peaks community extra hands for large-scale tasks and outlets for socializing with one another. One of Jason's sons remembers "they would have a quilting . . . back in that day and time, they did a lot of quilting. They'd put the quilts in and ask a bunch in the next day. All would quilt and all eat dinner and tell all the stories they knew and all the gossip they could find."²³ In addition to quilting, done mostly in the winter, neighbors would gather in the fall for both the apple butter "boilin'" and corn shucking:

Oh, they had a corn shucking in the Fall after you got your corn pulled and piled up in a pile and then you would invite in all the neighbors and a lots of time the women would have a cookin' at the same time. They had the shuckin' and [cookin'] . . . they would shuck out your corn and get through with it. They looked forward to those corn shuckin's. They would have a can of brandy hid in the corn pile and the one that shucked the fastest got that, of course, would get a drink.²⁴

Sundays were special days for gathering with neighbors as well. Jason and Jennie were devout Baptists and allowed no work to be done on the farm on Sundays, other than watering and feeding the animals. Often the preacher and other guests came to the farm for Sunday dinner: "[O]n Sunday they'd cook the vegetables and hot bread and fry the chickens, then time you fed the preacher and all the deacons, and your big family, and washed up dishes, you, you pretty hot and tired . . ."²⁵ Hattie, the youngest daughter of Jason and Jennie, played an organ at the farm on Sundays to accompany the singing of hymns.²⁶

Another family member remembered that "people [in the community] were very sociable," especially during the Christmas holidays.²⁷ There were dances every night at different homes in the area, but drinking was frowned upon. "You would see a candle-light in every window and beautiful wreaths on every door, and everyone was happy and would give you a warm greeting. We did not have many Christmas toys in those days . . . we made our own sleds out of plank and we had long hills to ride About the only thing we'd get for Christmas in the way of toys was some kind of candy animals--goat, sheep, etc. and firecrackers. We would get up before day and shoot the firecarckers up, then we came back in the house and ate the candy animals"²⁸

In addition to productive farming, the family had numerous other skills—skills that often added more income to the family budget. Jason was not only a good farmer, but also a cobbler and a carpenter. He made shoes not just for the family but for the community; he not only improved his own farmhouse and buildings, but he built buidlings in the community such as the Union church.²⁹ Jason and Jennie were economically tied to the old hotel in the Mons community, just as John T. had been, sometimes earning extra money by taking in boarders from the overflow of the hotel. The children also found the numerous tourists who came to the Hotel Mons a source of odd jobs that gave them pocket change and worldly experience. The children would run errands for visitors and serve as guides to take guests to such local attractions as Buzzard's Rock, Needle's Eye, and Table Rock.³⁰ One of the sons, Ed Johnson, remembers his first trip as guide to the top of Sharp Top:

My first trip three pious old ladies were boarding at my home and they wanted to go on the Peaks. My mother dressed up and had me go with them to carry the lunch. I was eight years old and I could walk much faster than they--I got way ahead of them around a curve--and, child-like, I wanted to see what was in the lunch basket. There was a bottle containing some red fluid so I decided to taste it. I took a big swallow and it liked to have burned my stomach up. I thought I was going to die, so I waited for them to catch up with me. I asked them what was in the bottle and they said it was "Snake-bite medicine," and I made the remark that I would rather have a snake bite me than to have that stuff in my belly. This was my first taste of whiskey. I also got a whipping when I returned home because of my bad behavior.³¹

The Johnson farm prospered during the tenure of Jason and Jennie, and that prosperity, combined with their traditional values of strong family, religion, hard work, loyalty and duty, gave their children opportunities for success not always found on mountain farms. Their son, Robert, became a successful farmer and merchant, highly respected in Bedford County.³² Ed wanted to be a doctor, so his family helped him finance his medical education and Jason built a small room on the house to serve as Ed's study.³³ Callie Missouri, a daughter, married but continued to live near her parents, and eventually came back to take over the farm.³⁴ The youngest child of the family, Hattie, had music lessons and went to boarding school (the Belmont Institute) in Bedford.³⁵ Jason's granddaughter recalls "he, I guess made a fairly good livin'. He raised a big family and had . . . you know, they had good lives, and he educated those who wanted to [be]."³⁶ The children all attended the Mons school in the community.³⁷

The family was not without misfortune, however. Not only was Jason handicapped, but the couple had two children who died young, and Jennie had a stroke and was paralyzed the last years of her life.³⁸ The children, now grown, remained loyal to family; Hattie left school, before she scarcely began, to return home and care for her mother, and Dr. Ed spent time trying to find a cure for his mother's paralysis. The family expressed their love for one another in these acts of love, but apparently with little outward show of emotion. One descendent remembers that "Granddaddy Johnson" was

Lord of his household . . . but I don't remember him correctin' me or tellin' me . . . I just don't remember anything 'bout that at all. They weren't too affectionate . . . didn't show it. They weren't demonstrative you know . . . Loyal as anything, but not all this kissin' and huggin' business . . . Grandma Johnson wadn't [*sic*] like that. I think it was their nature.³⁹

For all their lack of warm affection, children and grandchildren remember these years at the Johnson farm and in the Peaks community nostalgically and lovingly. In his eighties, Dr. Ed Johnson, by reputation a no-nonsense man, spoke wistfully of this period:

The village at Mons was a thriving community and everyone was a neighbor and willing to help each other day or night. . . The good old days are all gone now, so are the

beautiful old homes that formed this warm community. If you make a visit to that area today, you see only the Peaks, Flat Top Mountain, Hurricane Hill [sic]--made by nature--and the beautiful Skyline Drive [sic] which has been made by man I feel I owe a lot to my parents and the good people who lived 80 years ago where the Blue Ridge Parkway is today.⁴⁰

This middle period of life of the Johnson family on this farm was probably the farm's most consistently prosperous and stable period. The years from 1884 until 1913, when Jennie Johnson died, were halcyon days for the Johnson farm and the Peaks of Otter community.

THE BRYANT YEARS

When Callie Missouri Johnson married Mack Bryant in 1897, they established their own home on Jennings Creek near the Johnson homeplace, but on land owned by Mack's parents. In 1904, they purchased 106 acres on Jennings Creek from his parents.⁴¹ In 1915, Mack and Callie and their seven children moved to the Johnson homeplace, probably because Jason was at an age when he could no longer manage the farm and needed help. His wife was dead and his daughter Hattie married and left the farm and Jason, now alone.⁴² Jason must have welcomed the coming of the Bryants; this assured continuation of the farm for a third generation of Johnson descendants.

In 1921, Jason sold 134 acres of his farm to Mack and Callie Bryant and sold the remaining 55 acres to the U.S. Forest Service. With the land the Bryants owned already, their landholdings increased to about 240 acres.⁴³ Around 1923, Jason finally left the farm on which he had always lived to go live with his daughter Hattie in Luray, Virginia.

Callie and Mack did bring continuity to the farm, but also change, adding their own personal stamp to the life of the farm. Like their forebears, they ran a farm that provided for most of the needs of their family and they found ways to augment their income with small entrepreneurial ventures. One of the ways they made money was selling land and, over the years, they sold off bits and pieces of their holdings.⁴⁴

The Bryants had most of their land under cultivation. They grew a number of large field crops, such as hay, oats, and corn, and they grew significant quantities of potatoes, cabbage, to-

matoes, and beans. The hay, oats, and corn provided food for their animals and the family; they had the corn ground for their use at Kelso's Mill, just as the two preceding generations of the family had done.

Potatoes grew abundantly in the Harkening Hill soil. Family members recount digging "400 or 500 bushels" and once as much as 750 bushels, "a lotta potaters."⁴⁵ Potatoes for the family's use were stored in the cellar of their apple house, covered with leaves. Cabbages, too, grew well and were stored by burying the cabbage in a deep furrow in the ground. One family member recalled growing a cabbage so large that it won a prize at the county fair.⁴⁶ Beans of many varieties were grown and then canned or dried for preservation. In the interest of efficiency, beans grown in the cornfield were planted near the corn so they would grow up the stalks, serving as bean stakes.⁴⁷ Tomatoes seemed especially suited to the soil and climate of the farm, growing well even during a drought in 1930.

The excess of all these crops, above the needs of the family, became cash crops. Potatoes, beans, cabbages, and tomatoes would be taken to markets in Bedford and sometimes Roanoke, and smaller amounts often delivered to Kelso's Mill. Small or blemished tomatoes were sent to the numerous local canneries, one of which was owned by Callie's brother, Robert Johnson.⁴⁸ (When Robert Johnson died, the local newspaper called him "one of the pioneers in the canning business in Bedford County . . . paving the way for many other tomato cannery operators. His business thrived and he invested his money in business property in Bedford" ⁴⁹)

Other vegetable crops included beets, turnips, and parsnips that would be stored in the ground like cabbage; pumpkins, squash, and gourds (that would be used for dippers); mustard greens, kale, spinach, creasy greens, and salad greens; cucumbers for pickles; onions, rhubarb, peas, and peppers; and sweet potatoes that would be sliced thinly and put on the meathouse roof to dry. The family only grew what they enjoyed eating, excluding such crops as cauliflower, celery, broccoli, and eggplant.⁵⁰

Numerous fruit trees grew on the farm, including a small apple and peach orchard and pears and damson plums. Most of the fruit trees no doubt dated from previous generations, but some family members remember buying trees from nurseries.⁵¹ The Bryants grew watermelons and grapes, and gathered wild huckleberries, dewberries, blackberries, raspberries, and strawberries.

The grapes and the berries became jams, jellies, and preserves, and even some homemade wine.⁵² Gallons of apple butter were produced from the orchard trees, as well as dried apples and peaches.

When the Bryant family first moved to the farm, they gathered the abundant chestnuts for eating and for sale, much like their forebears and like most mountain farm families. But about 1917, the chestnut blight destroyed this delicacy and source of income.⁵³ After this time, Mack and some of his neighbors shaped the chestnut wood for sale as railroad ties.⁵⁴ Herbs were grown and gathered both for flavoring food and for the production of home-healing medicinals. The family grew parsley, red pepper, mint, peppermint, and lots of sage for spicing their sausage. Catnip was grown for teas and poultices (called "pollars" by the family) and ginseng (or "sang") was dug from the woods to sell for eight to ten dollars a pound.⁵⁵

In addition to the crops they grew, the Bryants kept animals for food, work, transportation and extra income. A flock of chickens (varying in the memories of the family from fifteen to fifty) provided eggs and meat for the family, and extra eggs for sale. Three to eight dairy cows gave milk (also made into butter and cream), and each year one "beef" would be fattened and slaughtered for meat in the fall to provide food through the winter.⁵⁶ The major source of food for the family were the hogs, including brood sows who would continue to produce shoats. Hogs were kept penned and fed table scraps, corn, milk, and cream to fatten them. Twice a year, in November and in February, hogs would be slaughtered (five to eight a year) and the meat salt-cured and stored in the meathouse or made into sausage, mostly packed in crocks.⁵⁷ The hog killings were a communal and ritualized affair, as they were on most farms in the Appalachian mountains. Various family members recall "neighbors would always come in to help us," "we'd shoot 'em [hogs]. . . turn 'em up on the back, stick, cut their throat," then after scalding the hogs, "we would cut 'em up and cut 'em out . . . Take our tenderloin an' then we'd take our sausage an' my mother, we used to pack 'em down," some sausage packed in casings to hang in the meathouse and some packed in crocks.⁵⁸ The hog meat would be salted down in a huge "meat box," then hung to dry until spring when "you sacked your hams and shoulders and put a 'fectant on 'em--borax is what you called it to make sure ain't no skippers or nothing get in it."⁵⁹ Lard, from the hog fat, would be stored in crocks with pasted cloth covers. Even though the family ate a great deal of pork, the memories of the shared eating of it remained sweet to family members; daughter Eula remembered:

If it was bad and snowy, we might go and cut a big ham. We had a great big fork made out of wire, and my daddy would put it over the fire place, and we'd have meat and mama would make a great big pan of bread, loaf bread, and we'd break us off a piece. We was happy.⁶⁰

Like John T. and Jason's families before them, the Bryants kept and prized healthy, sturdy horses. Mack Bryant served as the local "vetinary," and insisted on good care for all animals. The horses, cattle, cows, and other animals had appropriate shelter, good food, and plenty of water, even when that meant melting water for the animals in periods of deep snow.⁶¹ The horses were dried and curry-combed daily and fed and rested for an hour when the family took their lunch break from the work in the fields. In the Johnson family tradition, good horses were a point of honor for Mack Bryant. A neighbor remembered getting his car stuck in the snow once "and goin' up there and gettin' Mack to bring the team down and pull me out. Our horses were out in the field and were cold and wouldn't pull, and Mack's were in the barn and they pulled. That tickled Mack to death."⁶²

The horses were important precisely because they provided so much of the "horsepower" of an unmechanized farmstead. The horses pulled the wagon, pulled ground sleds for hauling, and did the plowing. The Bryants had plows for various needs on the farm: a "three-legged" plow (cultivator), a "two-legged" or double shovel plow, a "one-legged" or single plow, and a hillside plow with a movable mold board that could be flipped over to continue turning the soil in the same direction after a turn, important on the steep slopes of mountainside farms.⁶³

The Bryant family also kept cats and dogs for pets, and the dogs for coon-hunting. In addition to coons (hunted more as a male social ritual in the mountains than for food), family members killed bear, squirrel, rabbit, pheasants, and a few, scarce turkeys for variety in their diet.⁶⁴ For some years, the family followed the traditional mountain practice of bee "coursing" to keep honey on their table. They explained the practice this way:

. . .we used to do a lotta bee huntin' up in the mountains you know. Course bees, an' take and follow 'em to the tree. See bees. . .in the mountains people used to, back in those days, they [bees] come down to the water to suck the water, an' we course 'em which way they was goin', then we'd have to find out 'bout where they was goin'. They

wadn't goin' but so far 'way from 'at tree [bee tree in which there would be a honeycomb]. We use to cut from 25 to 30 trees every year, every fall an' get the honey out of 'em.⁶⁵

Mack and one of his sons once tried to keep bee hives at the farm, but after a disastrous stinging episode, they gave up their interest in bees.

All of the family members had tasks to do in the running of such a sizable mountain farm. Everyone participated in planting and tending crops and the family garden, and in care of the animals. The male members of the family primarily cleared new ground for crops, cleared roads, repaired buildings, built fences, and Mack, like Jason before him, fixed shoes.⁶⁶ The women cooked huge and hearty meals, washed dishes and clothes (and made their own soap), ironed, mended clothes, and generally took care of the house and its furnishings. For larger jobs, the Bryants and members of the Mons community continued the tradition of communal "workings." Neighbors would gather to saw wood for the winter, shell beans, butcher cattle and hogs, cut oats, shuck corn, make apple butter, and quilt. If the work concluded in time and with enough reserve energy, the whole group would be fed, followed by a party with music and dancing.⁶⁷ Contrary to some myths about the isolation and lack of community among Appalachian people, "family responsibility and independence did not have the strong association with isolation and competition that we currently make," as some previous Johnson researchers commented.⁶⁸ As one Bryant family member in later years puzzled:

Everyone helped one another; you didn't have to have any money, see, but if you wanted to get your winter's wood today, you cut it and you fed twenty to twenty-five, thirty people and then the next day you went to one of those houses and spent your time like 'at, and now we don't have time to even go see a neighbor with the conveniences now. You figure that one out.⁶⁹

Neighbors also gathered at the Bryant home on Sundays for dinner, often as many as twenty-five to fifty guests.⁷⁰ Like their Johnson forebears, the Bryants attended church on Sundays and had strict prohibitions against any kind of work on the Sabbath: "Wouldn't have been a stick of wood there unless some emergency of some kind, cut on Sabbath day. . .no, mercy, no, we didn't

cut wood on Sabbath Day!"⁷¹ In fact, a steady stream of visitors--family, neighbors, and guests from the Hotel Mons--made their way to the Bryant farm.

Many of the hotel guests came to see Callie's flower gardens. The Bryant children remember that their mother loved to work outdoors rather than in the house (she particularly didn't like sewing work) and that the flowers were her pride and her joy.⁷² She planted flowers in nearly every free space around the farmhouse, including dahlias, lilacs, asters, strawflowers, marigold, nasturtiums, poppies, carnations, zinnias, peonies, touch-me-nots, cockscomb, pansies, jonquils, hollyhocks, and roses. Most of the flowers she grew from seeds and cuttings, often sent to her by friends or hotel guests who had visited the farm.⁷³ Jonquils were dug wild from the woods and transplanted along the road. Callie sold her flowers to the Hotel Mons, both fresh cut flowers and dried strawflowers, for 25 to 50 cents a bunch. Her flowers were famous among hotel guests, who made regular pilgrimages up to the farm to see the glorious blooms: "I just betcha there was a, well there never was a mornin' there was anywhere from 10 to 25 or 35 guests that walked from the hotel up to our house to see our flowers an to, you know, they jus' set down out there in the yard, it was so cool. The wind would jus' blow an' they'd sit down there an' talk."⁷⁴ Aesthetic sensitivity to their environment was not lost on any of the Bryants, even the children.

The Bryant children, like each generation of Johnson family children, benefited from their association with hotel guests. They earned money as local guides, played music and sang to entertain at the hotel (Dick Bryant played a homemade banjo with a groundhog skin head), and some family members worked from time to time at the hotel. Burford Bryant milked cows for the hotel and ran its sawmill; Eula worked as a waitress and collected entrance fees at the top of Sharp Top.⁷⁵ In return, some of the guests who came year after year, befriended the children and brought them clothes, candy, and sent Christmas presents (china dolls for the girls one year); Mr. Troughbridge, a regular visitor from England often bought Hershey bars and marshmallows for the children in Bedford.⁷⁶

Everyone in the Bryant clan worked hard, but it is clear that they were a sociable, civic-minded, and fun-loving family as well. In addition to the hospitality of their own home, they participated in the social and cultural life of their community and region. Mack and his son Harry were members of the Odd Fellows Lodge in the Mons community, where the family attended ice cream socials and free oyster suppers (also a long-time mountain tradition).⁷⁷ They went to church

gatherings and to the agricultural fair in Bedford. At home, especially in the long winter days, the family would pop corn together and make ice cream in a homemade freezer using ice from a frozen bucket of water outside.⁷⁸ The Bryants collaborated with their neighbors, the Putnams, in building a small swimming pool that served the community and the Hotel Mons. The Bryants supplied the water for the pool from their springs for about \$25.00 a year.⁷⁹

The Bryants supported education in their community by taking their turn at boarding teachers for the Mons school, which the Bryant children attended. In later years, as the population of the area declined, the school dwindled and met in various buildings in the community including the Hotel Mons. Keeping the school open required a minimum number of students, so Mack Bryant had his daughter Eula attend school two years past the legal requirement to maintain their community school. Nevertheless, the school finally closed, and the last two of the Bryant children had to travel by foot and by bus some distance to the Middle Fork school in Botetourt County.⁸⁰

As the Bryants prospered, they made improvements to the farm. By the 1920s, they were able to replace the wooden, shake-shingled roof of the farmhouse with a tin roof, a better protection against fire.⁸¹ They put in some larger windows, screens on the windows and doors, and improved the kitchen by opening it into the dining room.⁸² They replaced the log chicken house with a frame structure and began to use wire fencing to replace damaged rail or plank fences.

The spread of modernity that made such improvements to the Johnson-Bryant farm possible, also brought about its demise. In the early years of the twentieth century, more and more families in the Mons community began to sell their land to the U.S. Forest Service; more and more of the children of the local families began to leave the area to look for work, no longer willing or no longer able to be mountain farmers. The year 1929, a calamitous year for the whole United States with the stock market crash and the beginning of the Depression, was a dark year for the Bryants as well. Mack Bryant suffered a paralyzing stroke; several of the older children had already left the farm to find work or live elsewhere, two of them being married that year; and sources of income for the farm declined.⁸³ The next year, the Peaks area was hit with a drought.

Callie and the remaining children struggled to keep the farm going and care for Mack, but in 1931, Mack died and the condition of the farm deteriorated.⁸⁴ During the early thirties, the family did manage to purchase a truck and car in trade for chestnut wood, and they enlarged the kitchen and added an outhouse to the farm, now required by state law.⁸⁵ In the Mons community,

the school and the church closed with the decline in population, and the Hotel Mons was in financial trouble because of the decline in tourism during the Depression and pre-war years. For three generations, the Johnson farm had been a prosperous farm in a thriving community, with a lifestyle of which the family was proud. In these last years, the family watched their farm and their community wither, and they became painfully aware that the gap between their lifestyle and others in the country now was widening. About 1932, for example, Roy Bryant met his future wife, Erselle, who was working for the summer at the Hotel Mons. Erselle commented that she "got acquainted with that mountain. I went up there that summer and worked and I thought I had gone to a foreign country. I really did."⁸⁶ After she and Roy married, he wanted to return to the farm to live (he had been working in a CCC camp), but Erselle made a "deal" with him to "stay off that mountain" for two years and then she would go if he still wanted to return. After two years, she recalled, he said "he couldn't be paid to go back up there," but they enjoyed visiting.⁸⁷ When Eula Bryant and her brother Dick married at the same time in Covington, Virginia, the two newly married couples went to breakfast together in a restaurant, and Eula recounts her experience with changing perceptions:

We went into the restaurant to order our breakfast an come round to me, I said, "I want ham 'n eggs, that's what I want for my breakfast, coffee. That's what I'd been used to at home. So did Roy [Markham, her husband] and so did Dick. Idell [her new sister-in-law] pulled a fit, said, "People'd think we was from the back woods." See, you won't [weren't] spose to order such stuff as that for breakfast, you spose to order a glass of juice an' a bowl of cereal an' a piece of toast, but we's from the back woods, we ordered just what we eat in the back woods. . . ."⁸⁸

As the thirties came to a close, the Bryant family began to feel the need to join the mainstream that seemed to be passing them by, and leaving them isolated in a way they never had been before. Most of the other families had moved away from the Mons community and even the Hotel Mons shut down in 1936. Eula and Roy, who had returned to live at the farm after their marriage, moved away in 1939 when their children needed to start school. Jimmy Bryant, the grandson Callie had raised as a son, married and had a child by 1940, and he could see no future for his child if they stayed at the farm--"we knew it was a comin' thing when we'd have to move, you see."⁸⁹ Even

the land no longer was productive. Jimmy recalls, "the stuff wasn't growin' like when we--years ago you could just go out here and plant a bushel of taters and you'd dig fifty and you didn't have to worry about fertilizer and insects, but along in later years it got so stuff wouldn't produce and insects would eat it up. And then you wadn't makin' that kind of money to buy all these powders and equipment and everything, you know like farmers--the little man was being rooted plumb out."⁹⁰

The family found its opportunity to move when the Peaks of Otter Company, which had owned the old hotel and now was acquiring land for the U.S. Forest Service and the newly created Blue Ridge Parkway being constructed in the Peaks area, wanted to buy their land. They sold the farm in 1941 and the last of the Johnson descendents moved away from Harkening Hill. According to family stories, it was particularly hard for Callie, who had lived all her life on the mountain; Jimmy remembered, "she didn't want to leave--she was raised up here and she was getting a little age on her, but she seen it was comin', too, that it was the best thing to do."⁹¹

ENDNOTES

¹Letter from Marvin A. Marsh to a Mrs. Dickinson, September 27, 1975, p. 2, Blue Ridge Parkway Archives.

²Rosemary Johnson, Karen Lee, Mel Lee, and Julie Savage, *"The Johnson Farm: Back In 'At Day 'N Time"* (Peaks of Otter: Blue Ridge Parkway, 1975), Vol. III, p. 34.

³"*Kelso's Mill*," Works Progress Administration of Virginia, Historical Inventory, February 26, 1937, researcher Nora A. Carter, Thaxton, Virginia.

⁴Johnson *et. al.*, Vol. I, p. 12.

⁵Interview with Dr. E. L. Johnson, December 1960, Johnson *et. al.*, Vol. V, Code R, p. 2.

⁶*Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 4-6, "Castleton Johnson Sale Bill."

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 52, "Castleton Johnson Estate Settlement."

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 77, "Genealogy," p. 4.

⁹*Ibid.*, Vol. V, Code R, p. 4. See also, "Note from Chancery Cause, Nicholas Horsley vs. Benjamin Wilkes," Blue Ridge Parkway Archives, p. 3. A deposition taken from John Early in 1871 states that in 1858 on the Hotel property owned by Horsely there was "a house in which John Jennings, colored man, lives with necessary outhouses."

¹⁰Interview with Oscar C. Johnson, Johnson *et. al.*, Vol. V, Code Q, p. 5.

¹¹Interview with Jack Reeves, who researched the history of the area; he mentions an old-timer who remembered a communal sheepshearing barn at the bottom of Sharp Top near Sheep Creek. *Oral History Transcriptions for Peaks of Otter, 1960-77*, Code N, p. 29, BRP Archives.

¹²Johnson *et. al.*, Vol. I, p. 15.

¹³Johnson *et. al.*, Vol. V, Code R, p. 1.

¹⁴See Chapter One of this report.

¹⁵"*John T. Johnson*," newspaper tribute by W. S. Royall, March 31, 1901, in Johnson *et. al.*, Vol. III, p. 73.

¹⁶*Census Records of Virginia, Schedule No. 2, Productions of Agriculture, 1880*, Microfilm, University Libraries, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg.

¹⁷Johnson *et. al.*, Vol. I, p. 16.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, Vol. V, Code R, p. 3.

¹⁹*Census Records*.

²⁰*Johnson et. al.*, Vol. V, Code CC, p. 6.

²¹*Ibid.*, Code R, p. 2.

²²*Ibid.*, Code CC, p. 11.

²³*Ibid.*, Code R, p. 9.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁵*Ibid.*, Code CC, p. 12.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁷*Ibid.*, Code R, p. 3.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁹*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 16.

³⁰*Ibid.*, Vol. V, Code R, p. 4.

³²*Ibid.*

³²*Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 75.

³³*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 17.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁵*Ibid.*, Vol. V, Code CC, p. 6.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷See, for example, "Picture Tells of Early Schooling," *Bedford Bulletin-Democrat*, n.d.

BRP Archives.

³⁸*Johnson et. al.*, Vol. I, p. 18.

³⁹*Ibid.*, Vol. V, Code CC, p. 21.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, Code R, p. 3 and p. 5.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 20.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 65.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 66.

- ⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 68.
- ⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 70, and Vol. I, p. 21.
- ⁴⁹*Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 75.
- ⁵⁰*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 38.
- ⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 65.
- ⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 74.
- ⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 75.
- ⁵⁴*Ibid.*, Vol. V, Code TT, p. 1.
- ⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 75.
- ⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 53.
- ⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 51.
- ⁵⁸*Ibid.*
- ⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 52.
- ⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 84.
- ⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 53.
- ⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 56.
- ⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 58.
- ⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 78.
- ⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 62.
- ⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 93.
- ⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 102.
- ⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 100.
- ⁶⁹*Ibid.*
- ⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 107.
- ⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 106.
- ⁷²*Ibid.*, p. 41.
- ⁷³*Ibid.*, p. 44.
- ⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 108.
- ⁷⁵*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 24.
- ⁷⁶*Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 75, 109.

- ⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p. 109.
- ⁷⁸*Ibid.*, pps. 83-84.
- ⁷⁹*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 25.
- ⁸⁰*Ibid.*, p. 24.
- ⁸¹*Oral History Transcriptions, Peaks of Otter*, Code C, p. 13.
- ⁸²*Ibid.*, pp. 4, 17.
- ⁸³Johnson *et. al.*, Vol. I, p. 26.
- ⁸⁴*Ibid.*
- ⁸⁵*Ibid.*
- ⁸⁶*Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 52.
- ⁸⁷*Ibid.*
- ⁸⁸*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 53.
- ⁸⁹*Ibid.*, Vol. IV, Code H, p. 37.
- ⁹⁰*Ibid.*
- ⁹¹*Ibid.*

Chapter Four: Management of the Site by the National Park Service

MANAGEMENT OF THE SITE BY THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

In the period from 1928-1933, two National Parks were established in the eastern United States--the Shenandoah National Park and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. To make the Shenandoah Park more accessible to the public, a highway was built on the crest of the mountains and quickly became known as "The Skyline Drive." Soon there was support for a roadway to link the two national parks, a park-to-park highway that would link Washington, D.C. with the two parks in the east.

The idea was not a new one. For two decades previously, a group of entrepreneurs in North Carolina had planned and begun some construction on a toll road, for tourist traffic only, called "The Crest of the Blue Ridge Highway."¹ World War I halted the development of the toll road, but the Depression brought renewed interest in the construction of a scenic highway as one of Franklin D. Roosevelt's make-work programs under the National Recovery Act.

By December of 1933, government funds had been appropriated to begin work on the proposed scenic parkway. In 1935, construction began on what was now called "The Blue Ridge Parkway." The Peaks of Otter area was one of the first areas on the proposed parkway planned for development as a recreation and service area.²

The National Park Service acquired the land for the Peaks of Otter section of the Parkway from the National Forest Service. For some years prior to the announcement of the proposed parkway, the Forest Service had been buying up land in the Peaks area, as part of the Thomas Jefferson National Forest. As the National Park Service began negotiations on land acquisitions in the area, they found their progress hampered by land owners who asked "excessive prices" for their land.³ The Park Service, stymied by their own lack of funds and the recalcitrance of the land owners, approached the Forest Service for assistance:

The persistent efforts of the Service to obtain necessary funds for the purpose of acquiring remaining private lands for this important recreational area were rewarded late in the year by an appropriation to the purpose by the Forest Reservations Commission. The National Forest Service is already taking first steps to negotiate for the land.⁴

Much of the land was owned by the Peaks of Otter Corporation, who still maintained the hotel, access and concession service to Sharp Top, and who had planned increased recreational development in the area. The Park Service worked out an agreement to make the Peaks of Otter Corporation the Park Operators, who would help with the land acquisition process and manage the park facilities.

The development plan for the Peaks of Otter area was outlined in a 1934 report by Stanley Abbott, the landscape architect for the parkway. In his report, Abbott notes that "the area of development is now occupied by the Hotel Mons, a commercial resort, which owns a 400 acre 'island' within the National Forest. A toll road is in operation to the summit of Sharp Top."⁵ He lists the proposed developments as a lodge hotel of 125 rooms to replace the existing building, cabins for tourists, a lake in the natural bowl between the peaks, a boat house and restaurant for dining and dancing, a bath house and gravel shore area, camping sites and trails on Flat Top, and horse stables.

Reconnaissance and selection of the necessary land for the Peaks section of the Parkway began in 1934 and became a source of political contention. In a 1934 report, the superintendent of the Parkway noted "flagging parties were soon started near Roanoke at the Peaks of Otter and at Masons Knob. While sections of the reconnaissance along the crest of the mountains were definitely controlled by the gaps, such was not the case with the line between the Peaks of Otter and Adney Gap, generally by-passing Roanoke City. Several lines have been flagged in this vicinity and the present opinion favors the line nearest Roanoke along which surveys are being made."⁶

"Present opinion" changed, according to a 1935 report, when "Senator Glass of Virginia protested the deviation from the crest line by way of the Peaks of Otter and accordingly the Secretary of the Interior announced on July 29, 1935, that the original mountain location should be followed."⁷

By 1936, the issue still was not fully resolved: "Location in the vicinity of Roanoke and between the Peaks of Otter and Bent Mountain. . . was still considered unsatisfactory and a large share of attention was given to this portion of the line."⁸

In 1935, the Parkway entered into an agreement with the Peaks of Otter Corporation by which the Parkway acquired the Hotel Mons property, and the corporation became Park Operator for the future development of the Peaks of Otter area. Those plans did not call for retaining the old Hotel Mons complex, and sometime in the next few years, the buildings were torn down.⁹

The construction program for 1939 indicates that most of the routing difficulties had been resolved. A report for that year says the route "will lead northward 10 miles from the Peaks of Otter and dead-end midway to the James River" and "southward for 12 miles from the Peaks of Otter, terminating at Black Horse Gap through which passes the old Fincastle Turnpike but which cannot be considered adequate public access."¹⁰ From this same report, it was clear that the parkway planners had high expectations for the Peaks of Otter portion of the road:

"Unquestionably the proposed Peaks of Otter development will become a major objective for loop drivers from Roanoke and Lynchburg. It is notable that on Apple Orchard Mountain. . .the parkway will reach 3910 feet, its highest elevation in Virginia. South toward Roanoke the drive coasts on the absolute skyline on a well-defined ridge providing one of the most spectacular sections of the parkway location in Virginia."¹¹

Even though the Peaks of Otter area was to be a major development site, land acquisition problems still plagued the parkway planners. The superintendent warned in 1939 that "should the current rate of appropriation by Congress continue, the park program will be lamentably behind schedule and in certain key areas parkway construction may be said already to have overtaken the park acquisition," including the key area at the Peaks of Otter.¹² The superintendent concluded that "in view of our inability to obtain acquisition funds for the purchase of certain key tracts of land at the Peaks of Otter, development of the lake and major recreational facilities has been impossible. Topographic surveys have been completed and development plans are well advanced so that the work should proceed rapidly when the land can be acquired."¹³

By the beginning of the 1940s, most of the land acquisition difficulties had been resolved and attention turned to the recreational development of the Peaks area. The superintendent's report of 1940 outlines the concerns:

With construction of the Parkway in the Peaks of Otter vicinity now well underway, the importance of an early beginning on Park construction at this renown area is of first importance. Obstructing the likelihood of accomplishing this purpose, however, is the yet remaining need for certain key tracts of land bordering on the proposed lake development. During June general development plans for this major recreational area, which are now well advanced, were discussed with the toll road concessionaire, the Peaks of Otter, Inc. The drawing of a plan which would look forward to the transfer of operator

rights on the proposed park facilities when built to this corporation in lieu of the now reserved rights to collect toll on the Sharp Top road was approved. . . . Emphasis was placed on the Service inability to give any assurances with regard to acquisition of the necessary lands and the possibility of the Peaks of Otter, Inc., making a donation of these lands was cited as a means of advancing the date when the corporation might expect to enter upon its business enterprise on a larger scale within a completed park. The potential popularity of the Peaks of Otter recreational development, because of its close proximity to Roanoke and Lynchburg as well as to other towns and cities, is considered assured.¹⁴

In April of 1939, a Civilian Conservation Corps camp was opened at Kelso, Virginia, at the base of the Peaks area, initially to work for the State Forest, but then assigned to work on the Peaks of Otter. The laborers worked on fire hazard reduction and selective cutting. The superintendent lamented that it was "impossible" for the CCC workers to assist with the development of the lake and major recreational facilities at the Peaks, because of "our inability to obtain acquisition funds for the purchase of key tracts of land."¹⁵ Meanwhile, he added, topographic surveys and development plans had been completed so the work could proceed rapidly when the land was acquired.

By 1941, with the help of the Forest Service and the Peaks of Otter Corporation, the land acquisition difficulties began to be resolved. In a report that year, the superintendent explained the agreement with the corporation:

In anticipation of settlement of the acquisition problems and in recognition of the Peaks of Otter Corporation's desire to cooperate in acquisition costs, a tentative agreement was drawn during the year by which the Corporation would have preferential right of the operation of various facilities within the proposed recreational development. In return and in addition to monetary participation in acquisition costs, the company agreed to abandon its rights for the collection of tolls on the Sharp Top motor road. Substitute bus service is suggested as a means of facilitating the tourist's visit to the top of this 4000-foot peak.¹⁶

This same report of 1941 included reference to an archaeological dig at the Peaks of Otter site, conducted by Dr. Frank Roberts and Research Associate David Bushnell, Jr. of the Smithsonian Institution.¹⁷ The conclusion of their study, according to the report, was evidence of Indian occupation, but no proof to support their theory of folsom occupation.

In 1942, the superintendent was able to report that the land acquisition program, under the auspices of the National Forest Service, was proceeding "well," which he called "one of the monumental achievements of the year."¹⁸ He noted that, so far, development at the Peaks was confined to rough grading of the road and parking areas for the sightseeing bus terminal and construction of office and equipment storage buildings, all done by the CCC workers from Kelso. He suggested there was some urgency to continue with the construction, because the Park Operator (the Peaks of Otter Corporation) wanted to provide sightseeing bus service immediately following the war.

One piece of land acquired in 1941 was the farm belonging to Callie Johnson Bryant. Callie Bryant sold the Johnson farm property to the Peaks of Otter, Incorporated, on July 23, 1941, for the sum of \$3500.00. The deed states that the corporation would receive "approximately 99 acres, more or less, situated near the Peaks of Otter and lying and being mostly in the County of Botetourt with possibly a small acreage in the County of Bedford. . . ."¹⁹ In December of 1942, the Peaks of Otter, Incorporated, transferred the property to the United States Forest Service, who transferred the Johnson-Bryant farmland to the Department of the Interior, and thus the Blue Ridge Parkway, in April of 1943 (*Blue Ridge Parkway Deed No. 11-M*). At the time of acquisition, the buildings on the farm--farmhouse, apple house, spring house, smokehouse, barn, corn crib, shuck shed, chicken house, and outhouse--were listed in deteriorated to poor condition.²⁰

At the time of the acquisition of the Johnson-Bryant property, the Parkway administration was well on its way to developing the interpretive plan for the roadway, even while finishing construction. The 1942 annual report presages the later interest in the Johnson Farm:

A second division of this program well advanced during the year is the placement of interpretive signs and markers. Many place name signs giving elevations of points of interest and a number of story signs recounting tales and legends and bits of history were placed during the year. In this the aim has been to stress the lived-in quality of the mountains as the heart of the story rather than the limited interest of political history in the mountains. It has been gratifying to note the contribution to the folk picture along

the Parkway of the closely allied land leasing program. Restoration of farm fields, the rebuilding of miles of split rail fence, and the turning out of the sheep and cattle again to pasture have added much interest to the drive.²¹

As work proceeded at the Peaks of Otter, Stanley Abbott, landscape architect and then park superintendent, began to reconsider his development plans for the Peaks area. In a 1943 memorandum to the regional director, Abbott expresses his concerns about the proposed lake development at the Peaks. He writes:

The limited amount of developable land to take care of visitation at this potentially popular development, problems of the Bedford City water supply, and the scenic quality of the Peaks of Otter as they are viewed from the Parkway are valid considerations which lead this office to suggest a thorough re-consideration of our plans for this area. . . . Those who may review this question with you. . . have a sufficient knowledge of the area that they could visualize the alternate possibilities from the following description. The basin generally lying at 2,500 foot elevation formed by the triangle of mountains (Sharp Top, Flat Top, and Harkening Hill) is known as the Mons area. This has been under one kind or another of cultivation and use over more than a century, but the principal slopes, Sharp Top and Flat Top, are essentially wild. The past use of the Mons area made development of a lake quite thinkable and led to the present set of plans. It would undoubtedly be impracticable and undesirable to allow the semi-open lands of this basin to grow back into woods obscuring the view of the twin mountains from the Parkway. To fill the basin with water would be one means of maintaining an open condition. A more restrained means would be to pasture the basin area. However, the swamp condition which exists would prevent a thorough pasturing, as the cattle avoid the murky lands and tree growth results. . . . It would be possible. . . for us attractively to fence the entire area, lime, fertilize, to restore the pasture quality, drain the swampy sections inconspicuously and so accomplish our fundamental purpose. It is along these lines that we will approach a re-study of the area. . . . This will mean possible relocation of the lodge site and the state road connection. The gasoline station, coffee shop and cabin area will probably remain as now shown. Of course there would be no bath house. It would also be possible to leave the Polly Woods Ordinary in its present location, a matter of more or less significance.²²

In the last years of the war, from 1943-45, development work continued in the Peaks of Otter area. One by-product of the fire hazard reduction work in the area by CCC workers was the selling of dead chestnut wood for tannin extract and veneer wood.²³ The chestnut blight of the 1930s made the dead wood abundant on the slopes of the Peaks, and the Parkway awarded contracts for its removal. One report suggests that the old Johnson-Bryant farmhouse may have been rented out during this period to wood cutters.²⁴ As the war wound down and travel increased, Parkway officials also began to be concerned about the park's image. The annual report of 1945 states:

A goal of the coming year is increased publicity for the Parkway. We have been called "The Skyline Drive" and "The Scenic" quite long enough. . . . We shall make a determined effort during the year to increase our file of suitable photographs, to release stories about the Parkway to newspapers along the way, and to stir interest in the Blue Ridge Parkway as an entity in the National Park system.²⁵

As part of the strategy to continue attracting visitor attention, the Parkway, through its Park Operator (Peaks of Otter Corporation) began running the sightseeing bus service to the top of Sharp Top, even though the Parkway itself still was unpaved in the area. The 1947 annual report says, "construction of a bus terminal building has been completed for operation as part of the bus service planned to the summit of Sharp Top. This attractive building, though small, provides a ticket office, waiting rooms, public comfort stations, and dining or refreshment terraces. The Parkway sections passing Peaks of Otter remain unpaved but operation of the concession during 1948 is considered desirable."²⁶ By 1950, it was reported that "both the volume of business and gross revenue were encouraging," at the Peaks of Otter site.²⁷

As activity increased in the Peaks of Otter area and attention to interpretive and publicity programs expanded on the Parkway, some work began at the Johnson-Bryant farm to document and perhaps preserve the farm as a future interpretive site. In 1949, building surveys were conducted of the house, the barn, the meat house, and the spring house, and the information and sketch plans were recorded in Parkway documents by 1952.²⁸ The surveys, accompanied by photographs, list the condition of the spring house as "good," the meat house and barn as "fair," and the house as "poor." The other buildings that comprised the farmstead were not surveyed, and

apparently were razed during this period. Some steps were taken to stabilize the remaining buildings.²⁹

The decade from 1956-1966 was a period of intense growth and development in the National Park Service known as "Mission 66," a program to rehabilitate the nation's parks. The Peaks of Otter area, including the Johnson Farm, benefited from this increased planning and infusion of funds. By 1956, a campground had been constructed at the Peaks of Otter and evening talks by the Park rangers were underway.³⁰ To accommodate the growing number of visitors, a visitor center that included the ranger office and exhibits opened in 1958.³¹ In 1959, the Parkway issued and negotiated a twenty-year contract with the Virginia Peaks of Otter Company of Charlottesville, Virginia (a re-organization of the old Peaks of Otter Corporation), who planned to construct a lodge and restaurant, and take over operation of the service station and bus service to the top of Sharp Top.³² Plans for the new facilities were submitted in 1961 and construction began, but difficulties with financing delayed the opening of the lodge and restaurant until nearly 1964.³³ A self-guiding ecology trail at the Peaks of Otter was added to the interpretive program about 1962.³⁴

In 1964, Mrs. Lyndon Johnson, Mrs. Hubert Humphrey, and wives of various cabinet members in the Johnson administration made a two-day trip into Virginia to see "landscapes and landmarks."³⁵ They were accompanied by Secretary of the Interior, Stuart Udall, who explained the purpose of the trip was to point up the value of scenic roads, historic landmarks, and economy vacations for the American family. The group ate lunch at the Peaks of Otter, where the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild set up craft demonstrations on the lawn. Udall hiked to the summit of Sharp Top with the press corps on the tour. The superintendent's report of this event says it "went off extremely well," but makes no mention of any discussion of plans for the Johnson farm with this illustrious group of visitors.

In 1965, a lake, envisioned in the original plans for the Peaks of Otter but rethought by Stanley Abbott in 1943, was finally constructed in the low area between the two mountain peaks. The construction necessitated moving Polly Wood's Ordinary from its original site. Ironically, the lake was named for Abbott.

Even though not mentioned to the tour of presidential visitors, plans for the Johnson farm were underway, in 1964. In that year, Parkway landscape architect, Robert Hope, and the Chief Naturalist, D. H. Robinson, submitted a historic structures report and a project construction pro-

posal for work on the Johnson Farm group.³⁶ In the historic structures report, they list four buildings on the inventory: Johnson Log Saddlebag House, Johnson Log Barn, Johnson Log Springhouse, and the Johnson Log Meat House. They note that the group of buildings was constructed in the mid-1800s and added to or altered in succeeding years; they add that Parkway maintenance has done little more than keep the buildings intact since acquisition. In explaining the significance of the buildings, Hope and Robinson say:

These buildings have been kept for the purpose of perpetuating the rapidly disappearing story of the pioneer mountain farms in the Southern Appalachians. With the development of the Peaks of Otter area for interpretation to the public, it is planned to bring one of the hiking trails through this farm. Here we plan to install interpretive devices telling the story of the mountain farms, and this one in particular. This will be a self-operating exhibit, with free access to the buildings by the visitors.³⁷

To make the buildings safe and to restore the buildings "to a state indicative of the time the Peaks of Otter area was a center of community activity (around the turn of the present century)," Hope and Robinson outline the following rehabilitation:

House--repair floors, doors, porches, etc., to safe condition; remove existing tin roof and replace with wooden shakes; remove siding to expose log structure and repair chinking.

Barn--minor repairs to roof and logs.

Springhouse--repair foundation and logs; remove tin roof and siding; re-chink logs and install wooden roof shakes.

Meat House--repair floor, replace chinking, remove tin roof and replace with shakes.

They estimated the cost of these repairs at \$12,000, and noted that the buildings would not be furnished but left open for inspection by visitors to the area.

Under the historical data section, Hope and Robinson could provide only one short paragraph: "We have no documented information on the history of these buildings, but various old-

timers in the area have given bits of information on the buildings. They were all apparently built about 1845, and owned either then or later by John T. Johnson. At the time of their purchase, in 1943, the land and buildings were owned by Callie Bryant."³⁸

Hope and Robinson's request to begin work on the project was approved and serious discussion of restoration of the Johnson farm began with a meeting at the site on November 2, 1966. Administrative staff of the Blue Ridge Parkway met with Charles Grossman, an historical architect, to look at the farm house and get his advice for programming reconstruction of the main building. Parkway staff included Bob Hope, Bruce Gregory, Charles Dooley, Wilson Grant, John Palmer, Mary Van Turner, Earl Batten, and Hugh Muller.³⁹ As the group walked through the farmhouse, they discussed details and directions for the restoration, yet noted that no decision had been made about which period of occupancy to use as a restoration and interpretation date. The group talked about stripping off the weatherboarding to ascertain the condition of the logs underneath and whether any logs would need replacing, and, if so, what type of wood to use. They all agreed that before any dismantling was done, a complete photographic record of the house as it stood should be made.

Examining the interior of the house, Grossman advised keeping the hand-dressed, planed poplar walls intact and not uncovering them to expose the logs, as had been done in the Polly Woods house. Grossman commented: "I think it is important that we preserve something like this because these people out here lived just as well as they possibly could. You think of a mountaineer as Snuffy Smith. They weren't like that at all. They were hard-working people and they like nice things just the same as anybody else. If you don't believe it, just look at their coverlids and things like that."⁴⁰ Grossman was asked if he thought the Johnson house was a little more elegant than most mountain cabins or farmhouses, and he replied, "Yes. Of course that may be because it was near a trans-mountain road."⁴¹

Grossman insisted that the house itself ought to provide the specifications for the restoration; that is, it should not be improved, nor should anything be removed from it. He felt that the house, as is, "would be a very good interpretation of the mountain people who lived as graciously as they could in the circumstances."⁴² At one point, Grossman posed the possibility of leaving one room of the saddle-bag cabin with the finished interior, and one room with logs exposed to interpret the stages in the development of the farmhouse.⁴³

At some points in the discussion, Grossman and some members of the Parkway staff seemed to talk at cross purposes with one another, probably because Grossman's suggestions did not always match the *a priori* decisions about restoration that Hope and Robinson had made in their historic structures report. When asked if the house should be dismantled and then reconstructed, Grossman felt this probably should not be done because the house would "lose some values." But, later in the discussion, one member of the Parkway group remarks that "we will have a good many questions once we start dismantling."⁴⁴ There is also a lengthy discussion of the type of shake shingles to put on the roof, even though a time period for restoration (which might suggest a tin roof) had not been decided. Grossman never questions the need for shakes, largely, it seems, because the discussion launches him into a subject on which he seems to have expertise. Another somewhat unusual suggestion of Grossman's is his idea to put board roofs on the barn and some other outbuildings (some of which had shakes at the time), "just for the sake of interpretation."⁴⁵

After further discussion about restoration of the fireplaces, windows, and chinking for the logs, one of the Parkway staff says, "Let's do a good job here and we can use it for Ranger quarters."⁴⁶ But the discussion quickly turned to interest in providing more information for restoration and public interpretation. One Parkway staff member asked if there weren't some Parkway personnel who remembered people who lived in the house; all agree that there were still living former residents and that they can provide "all sorts of information" about the house.⁴⁷

This first serious discussion of the restoration of the Johnson farmhouse closed with a summary of the funds for the project. The Parkway staff pointed out that they had only \$8,580 for the restoration, though they requested \$10,000 (out of the total of \$12,000 they requested in 1964, \$10,000 was for actual construction work). Acknowledging that the funds were insufficient, they decided to make the house structurally stable and waterproofed. They asked Grossman what it would have taken to build the house in 1850, and he replied:

Well, let me see. It would depend upon what cattle were bringing, how many cattle it would take, or how many bushels of apples, or how good your neighbors were. It would cost very little cash because what usually happened was that the man whose house it was going to be would hew the logs, he would forge the bolts for his rafters, and he would have a house raising and his labor would cost him nothing because maybe next year he

would go and help his neighbor build his chimneys. . .It wouldn't cost a whole lot of cash; they didn't have cash. It was all done by barter and by swapping work.⁴⁸

Even without sufficient funds, and without the benefit of "barter and swapping work," restoration of the Johnson farm group was undertaken in 1968. As Hope and Robinson had desired, the farm was restored to its imagined condition at the turn of the century. This meant that the weatherboarding was removed to expose the logs, the tin roof came off and was replaced with wooden shakes, the porches, flour room (an enclosed portion of one porch for storing barrels of flour), dining room and kitchen were removed, sizes of some windows were changed, and one doorway was removed and covered over with a log wall.⁴⁹ Some clearing of the fields around the farm was done, "the guideline for clearing being the size of the growth."⁵⁰ A wood-burning cookstove, a chair, and a few farm implements in the barn were the only furnishings. As Grossman had suggested, an extensive photographic record was made of the buildings before, during, and after the restoration.⁵¹

After four years, in 1971, the restoration of the Johnson Farm complex still was not complete, but a proposal was submitted that year to complete the work. The proposed work was "to complete the restoration of the Johnson Farm Group in order to implement the 'living farm' concept. This 'living farm' will be a major exhibit in the Peaks of Otter developed area and will portray mountain life at the turn of the century."⁵² The project proposal listed the required interpretive prospectus as "in preparation," and a memorandum in 1972 directed Interpretive Specialist Bruce and Historian F. A. Ketterson to draw up the plans for interpretation of the Johnson Farm site.

As Bruce and Ketterson began their investigation of the site's history as background for preparing an interpretive plan, they came to the conclusion that the previous restoration work at the site and selection of the turn of the century period for interpretation had been based on "unsound" reasons.⁵³ Ketterson felt there was not enough physical and historical evidence extant to make an accurate restoration to this period. In the Interpretive Prospectus finally submitted by Bruce and Ketterson, they call for a revision of the interpretive time period in the Master Plan to give "proper emphasis to the historic American theme as typified in the Blue Ridge mountains until the 20th century."⁵⁴ They note that their plan for interpretation of the Johnson Farm "will begin in 1852 when John Therone Johnson purchased the farmsite from James Jopling and the story will

carry through until 1939 when the last of John T. Johnson's descendents moved off the mountain."⁵⁵

In the Interpretive Prospectus, one of the goals for the Johnson Farm is to present the farm in its relationships to the larger Peaks community of which it had always been a part:

The Johnsons were a part of a larger community in the Peaks of Otter area. This larger community, from the historical point of view, covers a time span of nearly 8,000 years. The story of Indian use at the Peaks will be told at a place and through a media [*sic*] not yet determined. The story of early white settlement from about 1750 on and the resort story can be told at Polly Wood's Ordinary. The story of the late 19th century Peaks community will be told through means and at a place not yet determined. Using the Johnsons and their farm as a vehicle, the story of life in the highlands of Virginia will be told. This story will show how environmental factors shaped the lives of the Johnsons and other families who lived in the mountains.⁵⁶

Topics for interpretation, according to the prospectus, would include economics, social organization, recreation, the life of a woman in the highlands, agriculture in the mountains, and the beginning, growth, and decline of the population in the Peaks area. Architecturally, the report offers the Johnson Farm as "a rare opportunity to interpret a mountain home from its beginning as a rather rude, one-story cabin that grew and became somewhat refined as the economic lot of its owners improved. Thus, we take the cabin from its *one-room* stage, to a *two-room saddlebag* log cabin with upstairs rooms on both sides, then a dining room and kitchen are added as the economic fortune of the family continues to improve, and finally, the log cabin is weatherboarded and a metal roof put on."⁵⁷

To accomplish these goals, the prospectus calls for restoration of the farm buildings and the environs (fields, roads, and paths) to the condition they had reached by the late 1930s. Interpretive programs would include year-round, "living" interpretation and demonstrations that should be part of the farm or home operation (except for large-scale farming of crops which was deemed unfeasible), and an active public school program of interpretation. Further research on the farm and the Peaks community would be necessary to implement these programs; the prospectus calls the research holdings on the site "somewhat sparse" and lists only twelve items available.⁵⁸ Re-

search gaps, including detailed architectural research on the farm buildings, farm tasks, a history of the Johnsons, furnishings, etc., are outlined in the prospectus along with a proposal for an oral history project with Johnson descendents and with others who lived in the Peaks area in the early twentieth century.

The Interpretive Prospectus concludes with a listing of priorities for the Johnson Farm project: (1) accurate restoration of the house and other existing structures, fences, etc. to the 1930s period; (2) planning and development of the school service programs; (3) furnishing the Johnson Farmhouse and barn; (4) reconstruction of the corn crib, chicken house, weaving shed, and sheep barn; and reopening fields that had grown up since the farm was abandoned.⁵⁹

Near the end of 1972, money (\$24,000) was appropriated for the restoration, with an estimated completion date of June 30, 1973.⁶⁰ With work underway to complete restoration of the farm and open it to year-round, in-depth interpretation, interest and activity related to the Johnson Farm accelerated. Early in 1973, Historian Ketterson submitted a Historic Structures Report on the farm and prepared the nomination forms for the National Register of Historic Places.⁶¹ The rehabilitation of the farm site was directed by J. Askins, a Historic Architect from Maryland. At one point during the work process, a minor "glitch" in historical accuracy was discovered. Askins discovered that the standing seam metal roof was short one 24" metal pan (from the original as seen in early photographs) and felt the correction should be made, even though the cost was quite high (\$700.00). The Virginia Unit Manager for the Parkway disagreed, feeling "this replacement seems both unnecessary and luxurious, when there are many other projects awaiting accomplishment at the farm. Were this project a historic restoration I would concur in the roof's replacement, but this is a period reconstruction based on photographs, memories, and best guesses. The presence or lack of one panel is not crucial to the appearance or interpretation of the cabin. This will, after all, be a development showing mountain life and its progression through time with new owners, better jobs, etc."⁶² The Superintendent, in consultation with the historic architect and others, insisted the "this historic restoration will have to be accurate in that there must be twenty-two pans on the roof" and "it is imperative that this crucial aspect of this project be accomplished with the funds currently available."⁶³

In May of 1974, Askins and Parkway personnel conducted the final inspection of the Johnson Farm Rehabilitation work. Landscape Architect, Robert Schreffler proclaimed, "We are

pleased at the outcome of this project."⁶⁴ With the physical rehabilitation completed, the interpretive program was also launched during the 1974 season. Mel and Karen Lee were hired as live-in, living history demonstrators, and they became vigorous advocates of increased historical research about the Johnson Farm.⁶⁵

In their seasonal evaluations at the end of 1974, the Lees listed the successes and failures of the interpretive program at the Johnson Farm and made numerous recommendations. Mel Lee felt "the experiment [with living history] was a success but should not be allowed to rest on its laurels."⁶⁶ He called for further restoration (really reconstruction) of the missing farm buildings (chicken house, weaving shed, etc.), proper fencing and landscaping of the grounds, improvements for the springhouse and water supply, increased efforts to improve the furnishings of the house, a brochure explaining the farm and its history for the visitor, and a greater variety in the demonstration activities for the interpreters. He also expressed hope for increased contact between the Peaks interpretive site and the Parkway historian's office in Asheville, adding "maybe we allowed ourselves to be misled, but there always seemed to be rumors of a treasure trove of information on the farm which lay somewhere in Asheville, but these goodies of information seldom trickled down to us. If such a file exists, I would like to see it shared with the people at the Peaks so that they can be as knowledgeable as possible."⁶⁷

Karen Lee's evaluation concurred. She noted that "visitor response has been so positive, and notoriety has spread so quickly, that we must be increasingly certain of our objectives regarding this demonstration."⁶⁸ Like Mel Lee, Karen also called for more attention to interior furnishings and reconstruction of exterior farm buildings essential to the farm's proper interpretation. She, too, hoped for more restoration of the landscape, some live farm animals, a greater variety of demonstration activities, and a brochure giving the visitor more of the farm and the community's historical background. She, like Mel, felt there was too little information available on the farm, saying, "the research done by the demonstrators must depend rather heavily on specific data we have on the former occupants of the farm. I do not feel the data we have is sufficient. We need to conduct more interviews with members of the family (and other residents of the area), transcribe tapes, get copies of family photographs, and make records of items the family has that were used at the farm. Our opportunities are so rich at the moment, it would be sad indeed if we did not allocate some time to interviewing these people before it's too late."⁶⁹ She added that Rosemary Johnson, who

lived at the Peaks (married to a Park ranger) and a former employee of the park service, was willing to help the Lees gather the historical information needed.

The Lees and Rosemary Johnson began gathering data and conducting oral history interviews, often on their own time. By August of 1975, they made a formal proposal to the Parkway administration to support their project. In their proposal, they wrote: "As you are aware, the Johnson Farm is receiving increased visitation and publicity and in response the Park Service has invested a considerable amount of time and money. Unfortunately, progress and the development of the farm both physically and interpretively is impeded by the lack of an organized body of information."⁷⁰ Referring to the Interpretive Prospectus, they reiterated the need to reconstruct the missing farm buildings and they recommended changing visitor access from the footpath to the road the Johnsons used in approaching the farm. More importantly, they stressed the need and the urgency of conducting oral history interviews: "It is imperative that we proceed with the collection of these materials as our informants are of advanced age. In fact, two valuable sources have died this year."⁷¹ The three then proposed undertaking the work, outlined the work they would do (including room diagrams, item inventories, descriptions of buildings and activities, family history), and gave estimated costs for the work.

Their proposal convinced Richard Stokes, the Unit Manager for Virginia, who supported the idea in a memorandum to the Superintendent, saying he strongly believed "that it is to the advantage of the National Park Service to get as much of this work done this fall as possible."⁷² Stokes noted that the Lees and Rosemary Johnson were the most knowledgeable persons about the Johnson Farm and capable of handling the project. He urged that money be found to support the project: "The amount requested is small compared to what has already been spent on restoring the Johnson Farm House alone. Before additional restoration can be planned, an organized body of information is needed. This proposal will go along way towards fulfilling that need. Expertise is now available to do that job. . . . Let's make use of them!"⁷³

Stokes' faith in the Lees and Rosemary Johnson was not misplaced. They produced in a short period of time a prodigious body of information about the Johnson Farm. They ultimately produced a five volume series, titled *The Johnson Farm: Back in 'At Day 'N Time*, a social and historical study of the Johnson Farm and its inhabitants, 1852-1941.⁷⁴ In these volumes, they present maps of the farm and the area, historical timelines, family genealogy, family documents,

anecdotes drawn from oral history interviews, photographs, information on the farm fields, roads, outbuildings, fences, trees, flowers, animals, foods, work, social and domestic activities, furnishings, medicines, suggestions and sources for additional research, and two volumes of transcripts of oral history interviews. In addition to these volumes, they produced diagrams of buildings, fences, and furnishings, inventories of items already in the house, and items needed to complete the historic interior. In the preface to the five volumes, the three researchers clearly outline their interviewing procedures, their editorial policy on the transcriptions of oral history tapes, their evaluations of the reliability of their interview sources, and their goals for the project. They conclude their preface by saying that their work is not exhaustive but they hope it will be adequate "to meet the needs of the various people involved in the interpretation of the farm. At the decision making level, we see this report as allowing for the choice between portrayal of the usual Americana farm, the portrayal of an actual, specific farm, or any shading between the two. Without the information contained here, this choice would not exist because not enough would be known about the farm as it actually was. . .With this document as a guide we hope the Park Service can proceed with the goal of recreating a farm as it was run by a particular family rather than as a fictionalized Americana stereotype."⁷⁵

Throughout the late 1970s and into the 1980s, living history interpretation and demonstrations continued at the Johnson Farm and continued to attract visitors and school groups. The interpreters' log of the 1980 season documents the variety of farm and domestic activities conducted at the farm by the interpreters and the steady stream of visitors--up to 150 in a single day. Near the close of the season, the interpreters had an all-day apple-butter making at the farm attended by 169 visitors. On the final day, Labor Day, one of the interpreters made this observation:

A busy day here at the farm. Some real interesting, beautiful people came up and it's nice to think that the house rang with laughter and good warm feelings, people getting together again and sharing on the last day of the season. It will sure be hard to close up the place, it's seemed like my second home here this summer.⁷⁶

In the final report for the 1983 season, interpreter Mark Bollinger made it clear how fully the interpreters could now portray the Johnson family, based on information gathered by Johnson, Lee and Lee; he recounted the activities of "Mrs. Johnson," "Miss Callie," and "Little Boy

Johnson." He pointed out that "folks kept stopping by to see us," on some Sundays as many as 300 visitors. He concluded his report with just one plea: "One last item we all agreed on, is that there needs to be a sign or informational station, which will tell folks a little about the farm and its occupants. It's really needed on days when folks stop by and we're all gone to the fields or to town."⁷⁷

After 1983, the Parkway discontinued the practice of having full-time, live-in interpreters at the Johnson Farm, but interpretive programs have continued seven days a week from Memorial Day to mid-September.⁷⁸ Usually a single, seasonal interpreter handles the program, with occasional help from one or two volunteers in the park on the week-ends or with large groups. Interpreters at the farm learn most of their information from three loose files that contain information about how to run the farm daily, plantings at the farm since 1987, and a few materials on the history of the farm and the family. Visitation at the farm has increased from about 5000 visitors in 1985 to 21,000 in 1989.⁷⁹

The current interpreter at the farm gears his presentation to the questions and interests of the visitor. He is knowledgeable about the farm's history from the early settlers to the present, but stresses the 1920s and 1930s period when the Bryants lived in the house and the period to which the farm has generally been restored.⁸⁰ The opportunity to visit the farm is "advertised" in a weekly listing of activities in the Peaks area and announced at other evening programs in the Park. Some interpretive signs guide the visitors to the farm, but no printed materials about the farm or its history are available.

Other interpretive programs in the Peaks area include weekend programs at Polly Wood's Ordinary by a costumed interpreter (when financially feasible), a 15-minute program each hour by a Park Ranger at the top of Sharp Top on local geology and the natural and cultural history of the Peaks area (Polly Wood's Ordinary, the Hotel Mons, general settlement, the Johnsons), and each evening during the summer season, evening programs at the Ranger Station on natural sciences/natural history, mountain cultural history, regional music demonstrations, and other aspects of southern Appalachian culture. Once a year during the season there is a special "Mountain Day Program," with large-scale craft demonstrations and other special events.⁸¹

As of 1990, the Blue Ridge Parkway will have managed the Johnson Farm property for about 50 years. Much has been accomplished in restoration of the property and interpretive programming. But there are more possibilities.

ENDNOTES

¹Harley E. Jolley, *Blue Ridge Parkway: The First Fifty Years* (Boone: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1985), p. 8.

²Stanley Abbott, "Appalachian National Parkway from Shenandoah National Park to Great Smoky Mountains National Park," report on Recreation and Service Areas, Type and Scope of Development Proposed, 1934, Blue Ridge Parkway Archives.

³Superintendent's Annual Report, Blue Ridge Parkway, 1934, p. 11, BRP Archives.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵Abbott, p. 1.

⁶Superintendent's Annual Report, 1934, p. 6.

⁷Superintendent's Annual Report, 1935, p. 7.

⁸Superintendent's Annual Report, 1936, p. 8.

⁹In a letter from Myriam Moore to the Peaks of Otter ranger in 1956, she reports she did not vacate the hotel until 1937. See, also, Gwyn W. Rowland, "The Peaks of Otter Community, An Historical Sketch," *Parkway Milepost* (Fall/Winter 1984-5), p. 3. The decision to tear down the hotel and other buildings in the Peaks community was short-sighted for purposes of cultural interpretation.

¹⁰Superintendent's Annual Report, 1939, p. 12.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Superintendent's Annual Report, 1941, p. 12.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁸Superintendent's Annual Report, 1942, p. 12.

¹⁹Deed, Callie Bryant *et. al.* to Peaks of Otter, Inc., July 23, 1941, Deed Book 195, p. 289, Bedford County (VA) Courthouse.

²⁰Rosemary Johnson, Karen Lee, Melvin Lee, and Julie Savage, *The Johnson Farm: Back in 'At Day 'N Time*, Volume III (Peaks of Otter: Blue Ridge Parkway, 1975), p. 27.

²¹Superintendent's Annual Report, 1942, p. 16.

²²Superintendent's Annual Report, 1944, p. 10.

- ²³Superintendent's Annual Report, 1945, p. 5.
- ²⁴Johnson *et. al.*, Volume I, p. 27.
- ²⁵Stanley Abbott, "Confidential Memorandum for Regional Director Taylor, Region One," December 3, 1943, pp. 10-11, BRP Archives.
- ²⁶Superintendent's Annual Report, 1947, p. 2.
- ²⁷Superintendent's Annual Report, 1950, p. 2.
- ²⁸*Building Surveys*, Johnson House, Barn in Bryant Group, Meat House in Bryant Group, Spring House in Johnson Group, 1949-1952, BRP Archives.
- ²⁹Johnson *et. al.*, Volume I, p. 27, as reported from conversation with F. A. Ketterson, Park Historian.
- ³⁰Superintendent's Annual Report, 1956, p. 3, and 1958, p. 6.
- ³¹Superintendent's Annual Report, 1958, p. 4.
- ³²Superintendent's Annual Report, 1959, p. 4.
- ³³Superintendent's Annual Report, 1961, p. 2, and 1962, p. 3, and 1963, p. 3.
- ³⁴Superintendent's Annual Report, 1962, p. 7.
- ³⁵Superintendent's Annual Report, 1964.
- ³⁶*Historic Structures Report*, Part I, Johnson Farm Group, Class CC, Blue Ridge Parkway, January 30, 1964. BRP Archives.
- ³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 1.
- ³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 2.
- ³⁹"Meeting at the Johnson Farm Group to Discuss Restoration of the Main House," November 2, 1966. Transcript of discussion. BRP Archives.
- ⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 4.
- ⁴¹*Ibid.*
- ⁴²*Ibid.*
- ⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 8.
- ⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 14.
- ⁴⁵*Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 16.
- ⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 19.
- ⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 25.
- ⁴⁹*Historic Structures Report for the Johnson Farm* (draft), 1973, p. 3, BRP Archives.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹Copies of the photographs are included in this report. The originals are in the Blue Ridge Parkway Archives.

⁵²*Project Construction Proposal*, 1971, BRP Archives.

⁵³Memorandum from Ketterson, "Johnson Farm Restoration," November 11, 1972, p. 1.

⁵⁴*Interpretive Prospectus*, Johnson Farm, 1972, BRP Archives, p. 2.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶⁰Work Order #5140-20008, October 2, 1972, BRP Archives.

⁶¹*Historic Structures Report for the Johnson Farm; National Register of Historic Places Inventory--Nomination Form*, May 31, 1973, BRP Archives.

⁶²Letter from H. Gilbert Lusk to Superintendent, December 28, 1973, BRP Archives. This whole problem is detailed in a series of correspondence from December 1973 to January 1984, BRP Archives.

⁶³Letter from James L. Bentley, Acting Superintendent, January 3, 1974, BRP Archives.

⁶⁴Memorandum from Robert Schreffler to Superintendent, May 10, 1974, BRP Archives.

⁶⁵See Memorandum from Rosemary Johnson, Mel Lee and Karen Lee to John Stockert, Interpretive Specialist, August 8, 1975; also, Mel Lee, "*Seasonal Evaluation 1974*" and Karen Lee, "*Seasonal Evaluation 1974*," BRP Archives.

⁶⁶Mel Lee, "*Seasonal*," p. 1.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶⁸Karen Lee, "*Seasonal*," p. 2.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁷⁰Memorandum, Johnson *et. al.* to Stockert, p. 1.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁷²Memorandum from Richard Stokes to Superintendent, "Attached Recommendation for Johnson Farm Historical Research," August 22, 1975, p. 1.

⁷³*Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁷⁴These five volumes and the rest of the work produced by the three researchers has been cited throughout this study, is included in the Appendices to this study, and originals are in the Blue Ridge Parkway Archives.

⁷⁵Johnson *et. al.*, "*Preface*," Volume I, pp. 7-8.

⁷⁶*Johnson Farm Log*, June-September 1980, p. 22.

⁷⁷Mark Bollinger, *Peaks of Otter, Johnson Farm Final Report*, October 31, 1983.

⁷⁸Telephone Interview with Dirk Wiley, *Peaks of Otter*, May 23, 1990.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

⁸⁰Telephone interview with Tim Mauch, Ranger, *Peaks of Otter*, May 25, 1990.

⁸¹Wiley interview.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Peaks of Otter area, including the Johnson Farm, offers one of the richest sites for cultural interpretation along the entire Blue Ridge Parkway. The continuous human occupation of the area for thousands of years, the community matrix of agriculture, tourism, and commercial trade, the well-documented evolution of a mountain farm and farm family through three generations, and the interdependence of white and black families in a small, mountain community present opportunities for cultural preservation and cultural interpretation that will make Parkway visitors appreciate the complex history of mountain life and enhance their Parkway experience.

Unfortunately, at the present time, visitors to the Peaks of Otter may come and go and never know the fascinating saga of human experience that preceded them on the same landscape. Some visitors may stay at the lodge, walk to the lake's edge, look at the Peaks and leave knowing nothing of the area's cultural richness. Others may go to the visitor's center and learn something of the natural history of the area; some may attend an evening program or journey to the top of Sharp Top and listen to a ranger's brief talk about the area and learn about some aspects of the cultural life of years past. Some will venture up the path to the Johnson Farm, walk around the farmstead, perhaps ask questions of the interpreter, and leave with the impression that this was a lovely, but isolated mountain farm, perched on the side of a lonely mountain (even though the interpreter may well tell them differently). It is all too easy to leave the Peaks knowing little or nothing, or with mistaken impressions, of its past life.

One member of the research team stayed overnight at the Peaks of Otter Lodge during work on this report, and "played tourist," to assess the level of information available to the visitor about the cultural life of the area. Nothing in the lodge or rooms would help the visitor know about the Peaks community or the Johnson Farm. Only a dish on the lodge menu and a drink named after the Johnsons (probably inappropriately in the latter case and only recognizable to those familiar with the family) and the posted list of weekly program activities gives guests any idea how to learn about the local culture. At the ranger station/visitor center, the exhibits focus almost exclusively on the natural history of the area, with only two photos displayed of the Johnson Farm restoration project. A handmade sign tacked unobtrusively to a door invites visitors to hike to the Johnson Farm and, of course, rangers on duty will encourage the visit and give more information. Making one's way up the path and finally reaching the farm, it is easy for the visitor to feel that this

surely was an isolated mountain farm, idyllic and out of the ebb and flow of the changing currents of history.

Recommendations for future research, restoration, and interpretation begin with the premise that the Johnson Farm was an integral part of the larger Peaks community for all its history and that the farm must be understood within the context of the community. Both need to be more fully studied and interpreted. To do less is to misconstrue the region's history and culture.

This is not a new idea. In 1972, Park Historian F. A. Ketterson called for more adequate research about the Johnson site, including historical base maps, and a reconceptualized restoration of the farmhouse and outbuildings. He wrote that such research

should guide everything that is done in the restoration of fields, paths, roads, and things like that. One result that can be attributed to the absence of the historical base map and its role as the guiding development and management tool for the restoration is our current access to the Johnson Farm. We bring visitors in by means of a footpath that I do not believe existed in historic times, instead of bringing them in over the historic access road to the Johnson Farm. In bringing people in by this footpath, we convey, albeit unintentionally, I am sure, a false impression of the isolation in which the dwellers at the Johnson Farm lived. It would be quite easy for a visitor to assume that this was the way that the people who lived at the Johnson Farm came in and conclude that they . . . did indeed live a very isolated life. The fact of the matter appears to be that they were relatively unisolated.¹

When Ketterson drew up the interpretive prospectus for the Johnson Farm the next year, he reiterated his assertions. He noted at the outset that for eighty centuries humans had inhabited the Peaks area, ranging from aboriginal hunters and gatherers to Indians to European pioneers and farmers to tourists and travelers of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, concluding "both the variety of use and user and time span covered make the Peaks story somewhat complex to interpret."² As Ketterson outlined plans and details for the interpretation of the Johnson Farm, he advised that "the interpretive stories told at the Johnson Farm and elsewhere in the Peaks area should be carefully tied together in order to give visitors a clear understanding of the factors and

forces that created the culture that grew up in the Southern Highlands and to point up that these stories are a part of the total American experience."³

In 1975, when Rosemary Johnson and Mel and Karen Lee collected and wrote their five-volume study of the Johnson Farm, they too were mindful of the "big picture" perspective that would make the interpretation of the farm authentic and credible. They wrote:

It is important to keep in mind that the Johnson Farm did not exist in isolation but was part of an active community that existed between the Peaks of Otter. This community influenced and shaped the farm. The fortunes of the farm followed the rise and decline of the community. In many respects the farm was like most farms in the Southern Appalachians but its position in a resort area contributed to its uniqueness. Having a hotel and its attendant stream of visitors so near provided the farm with ideas and economic advantages not available to most mountain farms. Neither was the farm physically isolated as stereotyped mountain farms usually are. The availability of good roads through the area and to the town of Bedford in particular, eliminated the need for total self-sufficiency often imposed on more remote communities. The uniqueness of the farm's physical location needs to be carefully considered as a part of its interpretation before a true picture of it can emerge.⁴

When the Lees served as live-in interpreters at the farm, they expressed frustration with their inability to convey the whole context to visitors and asked for more information to be provided, either by written materials or signage, for visitors.⁵ In successive years, interpreters (and rangers) who have followed the Lees at the farm have often expressed the same frustration and called for more resources.

To tell the story of the Johnson Farm and the Peaks community adequately, more needs to be done in three areas: research, restoration, and interpretation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Over the years, a great deal of material has been collected about the Johnson Farm and some about the Peaks of Otter community. These materials have been scattered and disorganized and the interrelationships between the two bodies of material largely unexplored. This present

study has brought together that extant material, augmented gaps with new research materials, and developed a coherent history of the Johnson Farm within its cultural community. Any such systematic gathering and interpretation of data points more clearly to holes that need filling. The following are recommendations for additional research that needs to be done about the Peaks community and the Johnson Farm:

1. Archaeological investigation begun in the area in earlier years needs to be extended. Investigation of additional prehistoric sites will add to information about early hunters and gatherers and the evolutionary change to Indian occupation. Historical archaeological investigations of the Mons community area, the old hotel site, and the Johnson Farm will yield a more complete picture of the early life and changes in community lifestyle.
2. In addition to archaeological information, further research about Native American movements and cultural life, and early contacts with white settlers in the Peaks area, would provide a basis for interpretive programs. As Ketterson noted in his 1973 interpretive prospectus for the Peaks area, "the story of Indian use at the Peaks will be told at a place and through a media [*sic*] not yet determined."⁶ Before the Indian story can be told adequately, more research needs to be done.
3. Two of the most important influences on life in the Peaks of Otter area and at the Johnson Farm were the system of roads in the area and the effects of tourism, including the presence of an ordinary or hotel in the area, from the days of early settlement. This current study brings together research on both these topics and analyzes some of the effects of roads and tourism on the area. More should be done. For example, we need to know more about the Jennings Creek Road and the early tavern there on the way to the James River, especially the effects of the river link on trade in the area. We need to know more about the wagoners who traversed the old turnpike (we know the early Wilkes' hotel provided a "wagoner's house")⁷ and what effect they had on the farm economy of James T. Johnson and other farmers in the region. Continued search is needed for documents and records pertaining to the various hotels at the Peaks site (and, for the on-going record, documents about the current lodge need to be assembled).
4. As part of the increased information about the economic trade network, it would be valuable to know even more about the economic ties of the Peaks community to Kelso's Mill, Bedford, Buchanan and even points beyond. This would add important information about social and cultural ties and associations, as well. Other economic ventures in the community also need

more examination, including the sawmill, distilling, and the terraced apple orchards with markets in England.

5. One very significant part of the Peaks story seems to be the presence of black mountain families in the area and their status and role in the community. A number of black families apparently lived on Long Mountain and some, like the Saunders and Swains, lived in the Peaks community for generations and interacted often with the Johnsons and other white families in the area. Research on the black residents and careful study of the remains of the Saunders cabin will help add the dimension of an often ignored story in mountain life.⁸
6. Central to the life of the Mons community and important to the Johnson family were the Mons school, the Union church, and the Odd Fellows Lodge. There should be continued search for documents, photographs, and interview subjects to give a more complete picture of these structures (the church and the Odd Fellows Hall were the same) and the activities that took place in them.
7. Throughout the generations, the Johnson family had ties with numerous churches in the Peaks area in addition to the Union church at Mons. They were associated with the Jennings Creek Baptist Church, Suck Spring Baptist Church, and New Prospect Baptist Church (which no longer exists). Continuing research begun in this report on the Johnson's church affiliations would help with understanding this important influence in their lives.
8. Because the Johnson farmhouse has undergone several restoration efforts, and because there is an alleged but unknown link to the cabin of Thomas Wood or other early settlers, a dendrochronology (wood-dating) study of the farmhouse would give more certainty to interpretive efforts. The dendrochronology study can pinpoint, from tree-ring growth, the date of earliest construction of the structure. If indeed some part of the house dates to the time of Wood, it would give added significance to the site; if not, it would prevent incorrect interpretation.
9. In the years from 1960 to 1975, numerous oral history interviews were conducted with former members of the Peaks community, Johnson family members, and others with knowledge of the community and the family. Inquiries have not determined where the tapes are currently or if there are tapes that were never transcribed. The tapes need to be located, copies made for use and for long-term storage, transcripts made for any untranscribed tapes, and, if resources permit, a rechecking of tapes against transcripts, and marginal notations made of incorrect information given by interviewees (we found numerous instances of such information).

10. The interviews about the Peaks community and the Johnson Farm are invaluable, because many of the interview subjects are now dead. But the interviews often reflect amateur or hasty approaches to gathering the information. Follow-up interviews, made by trained interviewers, with subjects already consulted or with Johnson descendents or descendents of other families in the Peaks area would be desirable.
11. More comparative research with other mountain farms of the same era would confirm the uniqueness or typicality of the Johnson Farm. Many previous researchers and interpreters have argued that the Johnson Farm is unique among Appalachian mountain farms because of its location on major thoroughfares and an important tourist destination. This may well be the case. However, it may be that other mountain farms also prospered and were part of the American mainstream until modernity isolated them. The Johnson Farm may be more typical than unique, but even that would be an important story to counteract prevailing opinions about mountain life. The Peaks community does seem to be different from many mountain communities because it was a tourist destination and because of the partial integration of black families, though this, too, needs further confirmation.
12. The entire Peaks community, including the Johnson Farm, should be considered for designation as a significant cultural landscape (rural historic district) by the National Register of Historic Places. As additional research is conducted on the larger community, particularly the role of the black mountain families in the area, a nomination should be prepared for the whole district.⁹

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESTORATION AND RECONSTRUCTION

Calls for additional restoration and reconstruction of buildings at the Johnson Farm have been part of previous studies of the site. Historian Ketterson, in his 1973 Interpretive Prospectus, wrote that "the Johnson Farmhouse, other farm structures, fields and roads and paths should be returned to the condition they had reached by the late 1930's. The farmhouse, barn, springhouse, and meat house should be restored, and the corn crib, chicken house, weaving shed, two hog pens, sheep barn, outhouse, bell pole, and fences around the house and the garden should be reconstructed."¹⁰ Karen Lee, one of the live-in demonstrator/interpreters in the mid-1970s, reiterated Ketterson's recommendation: "To completely restore the remainder of the buildings would involve 1) rebuilding the front portion of the spring house. . . . 2) building a chicken house 3) apple house/root cellar 4) corn shed, shuck shed and tool shed on the barn and 5) hog pen. The building

of the root cellar is especially important if we want this to look like a working farm. There is no place to keep potatoes, apples or canned goods without it."¹¹ As late as 1989, interpreter Burt Lock still was discussing the possibility of building reconstruction. He wrote in his *"Interpreters' Journal"*:

Four of the nine 1920/1930s out-buildings remain as exhibits, those that are still open to visitors are satisfactory to provide some idea of an Appalachian mountain farm of that era. There is room for improvement with additional exhibits to make the Johnson Farm even more interesting.

The "Apple House" has been removed. A model was made from photographs, research descriptions and examined by family descendents. This model was in anticipation of a replacement exhibit. For the visitors' safety the site of the former "Apple House" was closed in 1988 with a rustic split rail fence to prevent anyone from falling into the hole and possible injury.¹²

Lock also noted that the existing corn house on the site was not original to the farm but moved from "another Johnson Farm on the Sheep Creek Road [Oscar Johnson farm]."¹³ Other oral history interviews and a photograph show that the Bryants had a frame construction corn house, rather than the log house now on the site.¹⁴

Over the years, with the urging of historians, interpreters, and rangers, the dinner bell pole, fences around the house, and the garden have been reconstructed. Access to the farm is possible over the wagon road which was the main way into the homestead, not just a footpath through the woods.

If the Bryant years remain the period chosen for interpretation (probably the best choice because the period for which there is the most information), several reconstruction projects would make the site more historically accurate. These projects would include:

1. Reconstruction of the frame corn house and the frame chicken house built by Mack Bryant in the 1920s, the two hog pens (since hogs were the primary food source), and the outhouse, required by law and built by the remaining Bryants in the 1930s.

2. Reconstruction of the weaving shed/apple house. This structure likely was quite old and was fundamental to the life of the farm. Because it continued to carry the name "weaving shed," even though it had not been used in that way in recent memory, it may well have dated from the era of John Therone and Mary Johnson (and perhaps earlier), when large loom weaving was necessary to produce the "counterpins" that provided the family's bed coverings. Early mountain farms often had such outside loom houses. The lower part of the structure probably always served as a root cellar for food preservation. During the Bryant era, the structure was used for food storage of all types and storage for other family goods. Apples and potatoes were stored fresh in the cellar, along with canned foods in the winter. In the summer, canned foods were moved into the upper level of the structure and covered with quilts to keep out the light. The upper level also was used to hang onions and other vegetables to dry and to store out of season clothing such as shoes and overcoats.¹⁵
3. Reconstruction of the extensive flower plantings typical of Callie Bryant's years at the farm. Callie's showy gardens lured visitors to the farm during her day, and could do so again. They also help visitors appreciate the aesthetic sensibilities of mountain dwellers.
4. Clearer definition of the road providing access to the farm *as a road* would help clarify the mistaken sense of isolation of the farm.
5. Reconstruction of the foundations of the Hotel Mons complex would demonstrate the the spatial relationship of the hotel to the Johnson Farm and explain their interconnectedness.
6. If sufficient evidence can be found to reconstruct the Saunders cabin in the area, it would provide a significant interpretive site for understanding the role of black mountain families in the Peaks region.

For these recommended reconstructions, there seems to be sufficient data in oral history descriptions, photographs, and drawings to make structures and their locations historically accurate.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERPRETATION

The Peaks area and the Johnson Farm represent an important cultural landscape and rural historic district. The potential for interpretation barely has been tapped. The visitor needs more information, and more of the area's rich cultural resources need to be exploited for visitor appreciation. The possibilities are limited only by sources of funding. The following is not an exhaustive, but suggestive, list for interpretive planning:

1. At the very least, visitors to the Peaks of Otter need some printed information available about the history of the Peaks community and the Johnson Farm. This might be a simple brochure or an elaborated booklet, perhaps both--one free and one offered at modest cost. Material included should be a brief history of the Peaks area, especially the growth of tourism, an overview of the Johnson Farm through the generations, the relationship of the farm to the Mons community and the hotels, and an explanation of the demise of the community. This information needs to be available at both the Peaks of Otter Lodge and the visitor center.
2. The visitor center would benefit from expansion to make it adequate to tell the story of the Peaks community and the Johnson family, as well as the natural history of the area. Exhibits about Indian occupation of the site, early tourism, the various hotels, economic and cultural activities in the community, life at the Johnson Farm, black mountain families in the area, the decline of the community, and the Parkway's own role in the area would fascinate and educate tourists. A video production about the area would be a strong interpretive tool; slide shows also could be used, and a screening area in the center would make both more effective.
3. Maps detailing the Peaks community, the Johnson Farm, and their connections to other nearby locations should be part of any printed information or media presentations about the area's history. The name of Harkening Hill should be returned to its original of Harking Hill and the farm may be more aptly named the Johnson-Bryant Farm.
4. With reconstruction of the foundation of the Hotel Mons, and perhaps appropriate signage at the site, an interesting interpretive program about the continuity of tourism in the area might be developed, including a tour of Polly Wood's Ordinary, the Hotel Mons site, and the current lodge.
5. Working with the concessionaire, the present-day lodge could become a site of increased and complementary interpretation, with positive benefits for the operator as well. The

lodge might adopt more of the atmosphere of the old Hotel Mons; information about the look of its dining room, food served, and social activities is available. Photographs of the old hotel and other aspects of the Mons community and the Johnson Farm could be used in lodge and room decor, leading visitors to ask for more information. Printed information about the area's cultural resources could be placed in each guest room, especially stressing the history of inns and hospitality in the area for generations. Closer thematic relationships between the lodge and the historic site would enhance the visitor's experience of the Peaks of Otter.

6. Linking the Johnson Farm to the present-day lodge would reinvigorate a long tradition of mutual interdependence. If, for example, Callie Bryant's flower gardens were restored to the farm, fresh flowers could be supplied to the lodge; visitors could then be encouraged to visit the brilliant gardens at the farm.
7. To help visitors appreciate the interactive network of the Peaks area, maps guiding the visitor to drive along the old turnpike, Sheep Creek road, to Kelso's Mill, and even to some interesting sites in Bedford and Buchanan would add the experience of those staying at the lodge for an extended period.
8. With some real ambition, the current "Mountain Day" program, held at the visitor's center, might be expanded to give information and demonstrate activities vital to the life of the Peaks community over the years--distilling, sheep shearing, soap making, the wagoner's trade, communal workings, tourism, the black presence in the community, music and dances at the hotel, religious activity, and so on. Now that the lodge is open year-round, seasonal activities of the old community might provide a basis for current activities; for example, Dr. Ed Johnson's description of Christmas in the community could provide a model for entertaining today's guests.

What is most needed seems to be a new interpretive plan for the Johnson Farm and the Peaks area based on current research about the historic area. The last plan, written in the 1970s,

is used still for training interpreters and for directing the interpretive program for the farm.¹⁶ Clear guidelines need to be set for priorities in interpretation; that is, what *must be* interpreted about the farm and the community to any visitor, and what may be reserved for only the most interested visitor. Interpretive plans for the area need to be holistic and comprehensive, integrating the Johnson Farm and the Peaks community in all segments of the plan.

In 1853, just as the Johnsons began their tenure at the farm that bears their name, Henry Morgan wrote: "Perhaps no American scenery is more interesting than the Peaks of Otter."¹⁷ His feeling was true then, and prophetic.

ENDNOTES

¹Memorandum to Superintendent Liles *et. al.* from Historian Ketterson, November 11, 1972, pp. 3-4, Blue Ridge Parkway Archives.

²"*Interpretive Prospectus*," Johnson Farm, Peaks of Otter, March 26, 1973, p. 1, BRP Archives.

³*Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴Rosemary Johnson, Karen Lee, Mel Lee, and Julie Savage, *The Johnson Farm: Back in 'At Day 'N Time* (Peaks of Otter: Blue Ridge Parkway, 1975), Volume I, p. 10.

⁵Mel Lee and Karen Lee, "*Seasonal Evaluation 1974*," BRP Archives.

⁶"*Interpretive Prospectus*," p. 2.

⁷See Chapter One of this report.

⁸A telephone discussion with geographer Ruth Ann Mitchell in the Atlanta office of the National Park Service confirmed identification of the Saunders cabin as a cultural resource on the Parkway needing study and interpretation.

⁹Discussion with Mitchell and Ian Firth at the University of Georgia, who has conducted preliminary investigation of the Saunders cabin site and the Oscar Johnson farm site led us all to conclude that such a nomination made more sense than a nomination for the Johnson Farm alone.

¹⁰"*Interpretive Prospectus*," pp. 4-5.

¹¹Karen Lee, "*Seasonal Evaluation 1974*," p. 4, BRP Archives.

¹²Burt Lock, "*The Johnson Farm Interpreters' Journal*," January 1989, p. 11, BRP Archives.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Johnson *et. al.*, Vol. II, p. 16.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Telephone interview with Dirk Wiley, Peaks of Otter, May 23, 1990.

¹⁷Henry Morgan, *Peaks of Otter, With Sketches and Anecdotes of . . .* (Lynchburg, VA: Virginian Job Office, 1853), p. 5.

Historic Structures Report

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APPENDICES

PEAKS OF OTTER ARCHAEOLOGY

A Stratified Site at Peaks of Otter
Peaks of Otter Radiocarbon Date, Data Sheet
53 Centuries Is Believed Age of Relic (News Article)

MAPS OF THE PEAKS OF OTTER REGION

Map of the Line Between Virginia and North Carolina, 1749
Historical Map of Bedford County, Virginia, 1750-1865
Historical Map of Botetourt County, Virginia, 1770-1820
Botetourt County, 1821
Peaks Section of Map of the State of Virginia, 1825;
corrected 1859
Portion of Map of Botetourt County
Plat of a Road to Fincastle (Early Plat of Turnpike)
Bedford County, 1840-1860
Bedford County, 1864
Bedford County, 1931
Diagram of the Peaks Community (Bryant Era)
Plat of Park Service Land at Peaks of Otter, 1944
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Distinguished Men Who Have Visited the Peaks of Otter, or
Resided in That Part of the State (1853)
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of a Young Man (1859)
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 Article)
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 Locations on the Peaks of Otter
 James Richard Gross' Family
 Subscriber Tells of Youth in Cottrell Cottage at Peaks (News
 Article)
 Kelso's Mill
 Notes on Mills in Bedford County
 Apple Orchard Camp (Brochure)
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 Housing of Bedford Farm Folk (1940-45)
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 Oral History Transcriptions for Peaks of Otter, 1960-1977

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Polly Wood's Ordinary Was Home As Well As Inn (News Article)
 Polly (Dooley) Wood's Life, ?-1855
 Notes on Polly Wood's Life
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 Benjamin Wilkes and Leyburn Wilkes
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 (Brochure)
 Letter from Myriam Moore to Park Service, and Her
 Recollections of Hotel Mons
 Notes from Interview with Myriam Moore (last person to
 operate Hotel Mons)
 Panorama of Mons and Cottages (Photographs)
 Miscellaneous Photographs

Miscellaneous Notes on Peaks Hotels
To Whom It May Concern, Printer's Devil (editorial on razing
of Hotel Mons)
Peaks of Otter Lodge Lures Visitors to a Heavenly Mountain
Hideaway (News Article)

TURNPIKES AND ROADS IN PEAKS OF OTTER AREA

Plat of a Road to Fincastle (Early Turnpike Plat)
Virginia Turnpikes in 1848 (Map)
Virginia Turnpikes in 1860 (Map)
Map of Virginia Featuring Turnpikes
Excerpts from *A Seed-Bed of the Republic*
Excerpts from *Around the Bend*

THE JOHNSON FARM--DEEDS

Deed Between Jonathan and Elizabeth Smith and James
Jopling, 1819
Survey for Heirs of Jeremiah Wood (1830) and Preliminary
Notes on Family of Jeremiah Wood
Deed Between James Jopling and John T. Johnson, 1852
Deed Between John T. and Mary Johnson and Jason Johnson, 1884
Deed Between John T. and Mary Johnson and heirs and Jason
Johnson, 1889
Deed Between Jason Johnson and M. S. Bryant, 1921
Deed Between Callie Bryant and heirs and Peaks of Otter,
Inc., 1941
Notes on Johnson Farm Deeds

THE JOHNSON FARM--MAPS

Early Plat of John T. Johnson Land
Map of the Johnson Farm
Diagram of Johnson Farm Plantings

THE JOHNSON FAMILY

Johnson Family Bible Record
Johnson Family Pedigree Chart
Related Family Trees
Johnson Family Graveyard, Headstone Information
Johnson Family Obituaries
News Articles about Dr. E. L. Johnson
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Miscellaneous Items

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Memorandum of Items Needed at Johnson Farm, 1975
Memorandum on Johnson Farm Sign, 1975
Memorandum of Location of Tapes Made in 1967, 1975
Memoranda on Sanitary Facilities/Heat at Johnson Farm, 1975
List of Buildings at Peaks of Otter, 1977
Johnson Farm Information Sheet
Diagrams of Fences, Walks, Outhouse, Dining Table at Johnson Farm
Miscellaneous Notes on the Johnson Farm
Dedication of Abbott Lake (Program and News Article)
First Annual Daybreak Hike, Peaks of Otter, 1980 (Program)

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Inventory of Cemeteries and Grave Sites
Information from Three Graves, Peaks of Otter
Interpretive Use of Polly Wood's Ordinary
Sharp Top Trail Information
Miscellaneous Notes, Articles, Etc. on Peaks of Otter

PHOTOGRAPHS

Peaks of Otter Area
Hotel Mons
Johnson Family
Johnson Farm

