

DISTILLERS AND PROHIBITIONISTS: SOCIAL CONFLICT AND THE RISE OF ANTI-
ALCOHOL REFORM IN APPALACHIAN NORTH CAROLINA, 1790-1908

by

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(Under the Direction of John C. Inscoe)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation chronicles the changing images of alcohol distillers in Appalachian North Carolina during the nineteenth century. Although moonshiners broke the law by refusing to pay the federal liquor tax, local communities did not initially view them as criminals following the Civil War. In fact, antebellum distillers were a well-respected, vital part of western North Carolina. During Reconstruction, they continued to garner the support of most mountain residents by opposing the newly reenacted federal liquor tax. Many mountain whites, whether Republican or Democratic, opposed liquor taxation because it threatened to increase federal authority and destroy an important local industry. Consequently, the moonshiner, by combatting the national government, became a celebrated figure in western North Carolina. After 1876, however, the status of liquor manufacturers (both licit and illicit) underwent a major overhaul. Mountain whites who did not distill alcohol increasingly believed that moonshiners were criminals on the fringes of society.

Why did this change in attitude occur? To answer this question, I probe into the impact that industrialization had on mountain society, examine how federal liquor taxation affected party politics in southern Appalachia, and describe the rise of the prohibition movement in western North Carolina. These phenomena, combined with mainstream media's negative portrayal of mountain society, helped to spark a local movement against legal and illegal distillers following Reconstruction. This anti-distiller crusade was both a reflection and a function of a cultural rift between urban and rural highlanders that had been growing since the late antebellum period. By the 1880s, distillers – the moonshiners, in particular – had become symbols of what was wrong with mountain society, thereby providing local townspeople and “outsiders” with an excuse to reform rural Carolina highlanders. Writ large, this study provides an excellent opportunity to view the development and impact of class conflict in southern Appalachia during the nineteenth century.

INDEX WORDS: Southern Appalachia, American South, New South, North Carolina, Civil War, Reconstruction, Temperance, Prohibition, Sons of Temperance, Dispensary, Whiskey, Alcohol, Distilling, Moonshining, Liquor Law Enforcement, Ku Klux Klan, White Caps, Women's Christian Temperance Union, Industrialization, Religion, Zebulon Vance

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, William and Miriam Stewart.

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INTRODUCTION

This book is about social change and conflict in one section of southern Appalachia during the nineteenth century: western North Carolina.¹ The story begins in the late eighteenth century, when most Carolina highlanders regarded alcohol distillers as well-respected members of the community. It ends in 1908, when an overwhelming majority of mountain men, blaming liquor manufacturers for perpetuating intemperance, crime, and violence, voted to enact state-wide prohibition. In between, this book explains why the reputation of liquor distillers took a turn for the worse. It does so by chronicling the origins and development of the anti-alcohol crusade, a movement that historians of the mountain South have thus far largely ignored.

Since the 1980s, scholars have challenged the long-standing assumption that nineteenth century Appalachia was a land of self-sufficient white farmers who lived in isolated, egalitarian communities.² Their studies show that improved transportation routes, population growth, and new manufacturing technologies had always allowed some mountain residents to participate in the larger market economy. An agricultural and commercial elite, most of whom owned slaves or hired tenants, also existed in the region, revealing that mountain society was not only heterogeneous, but also class differentiated. In short, recent scholarship has conclusively

¹ For this study, the counties of western North Carolina will include Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cherokee, Clay, Cleveland, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, McDowell, Macon, Madison, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Surry, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, and Wilkes. Residents from these counties considered themselves mountaineers, and most Americans believed that these counties constituted Appalachian North Carolina during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

² For more on the construction of this myth, see Allen W. Batteau, *The Invention of Appalachia* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990); and Henry S. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978).

demonstrated that economic and social development in many parts of southern Appalachia resembled that of other American regions throughout the nineteenth century.³

Nonetheless, when examining anti-alcohol reform in the nineteenth century, scholars continue to characterize Appalachia as exceptional. They have depicted mountain residents as staunch “traditionalists” who, living in isolation and depending on alcohol distilling to supplement their incomes, retained cultural values hostile to a temperance ethic emerging in areas experiencing urban and industrial growth.⁴ Most studies have also focused on the 1880s and 1890s, when reformers, mostly missionaries and capitalists from outside the region, launched the prohibition movement because they believed that alcohol made mountain society unproductive and impeded economic progress. Many highlanders, however, perceived this crusade as an attack on their way of life and resisted it.⁵ While scholars are correct to argue that a clash between two cultures (“progressives” vs. “traditionalists”) occurred in post-Civil War

³ See Richard A. Straw and H. Tyler Blethen, eds., *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); John C. Inscoe, ed., *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001); Dwight B. Billings and Kathleen M. Blee, *Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Hardship in Appalachia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Donald Edward Davis, *Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000); Ronald L. Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside: Railroads, Deforestation, and Social Change in West Virginia, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Wilma A. Dunaway, *The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Mary Beth Pudur, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina L. Waller, eds., *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Robert Tracy McKenzie, *One South or Many? Plantation Belt and Upcountry in Civil War Era Tennessee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); John C. Inscoe, *Mountain Masters, Slavery and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989); Altina Waller, *Feud: Hatfields, McCoys, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); and Durwood Dunn, *Cades Cove: The Life and Death of a Southern Appalachia Community, 1818-1937* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988).

⁴ Ian R. Tyrrell, “Drink and Temperance in the Antebellum South: An Overview and Interpretation,” *Journal of Southern History* 48 (November 1982), 485-510; Jack E. Weller, *Yesterday’s People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1965); Harry M. Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1962); Mandel Sherman and Thomas R. Henry, *Hollow Folk* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1933); Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders* (New York: Outing Publishing Co., 1921); John C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1921); and Margaret W. Morley, *The Carolina Mountains* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913).

⁵ William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

Appalachia, they have failed to acknowledge that this was neither a new phenomenon nor was it generated by outsiders.

By focusing on the anti-alcohol crusade in western North Carolina, this book allows us to grapple with several critical questions about mountain society and how it changed throughout the nineteenth century. While most of these are addressed in the narrative itself, it is worthwhile at this stage to outline two of the larger issues at stake. The nature of social conflict in Appalachia remains a matter of controversy. Some scholars have characterized it as an insider-outsider phenomenon that developed in the late nineteenth century. According to them, struggles for economic and cultural dominance pitted mountain residents against northern capitalists and missionaries.⁶ Others, however, have argued that this “us and them” dichotomy overlooks internal strife. They insist that local elites, wanting to create a New South, also sought to exploit the region’s working classes.⁷

I have found considerable evidence of conflict within the region that stretches much further back than the post-bellum period. Beginning in the 1830s, the anti-alcohol crusade was both a reflection and a function of a class differentiated society. Viewing themselves as refined and cultivated, town middle-class highlanders embraced temperance because they feared that alcohol was impeding the region’s economic and moral progress. Many mountain residents, especially those in more rural parts of western North Carolina, disagreed, arguing that they had

⁶ Ada F. Haynes, *Poverty in Central Appalachia: Underdevelopment and Exploitation* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997); Ronald Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982); John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982); David Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); David E. Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer: People, Power, Planning in Appalachia* (Boone, KY: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1980); and Helen Matthews Lewis, Linda Johnson, and Donald Askins, eds., *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case* (Boone, KY: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1978).

⁷ Billings and Blee, *Road to Poverty*; Pudup, Billings, and Waller, *Appalachia in the Making*; Waller, *Feud*; Dunn, *Cades Cove*; and Southern Mountain Research Collective, ed., “Essays in Political Economy: Toward a Class Analysis of Appalachia,” *Appalachian Journal* 11 (Autumn-Winter, 1983-84), 19-162.

the right to drink (and distill) alcohol. This conflict over alcohol reform ultimately heightened social tensions within the region and sparked a cultural divide between urban and rural highlanders that would widen following the Civil War.

The second issue – the origins and development of the “myth of Appalachia” – has generated considerable interest among scholars in recent years and requires a more thorough discussion at the outset. Perhaps no other region in the United States has been subject to as much misconception and stereotyping as has the mountain South.⁸ For many, if not most, Americans, southern Appalachia is a land of backwardness, poverty, hopelessness, and violence. It is – to use the words of journalist Dan Rather – “a place that seems like something out of another country.”⁹ The word Appalachia often evokes images of drunken hillbillies, rednecks, feudists, and moonshiners. Its inhabitants are eccentric, illiterate, lazy, and hard-drinking. They are “a different breed of people.”¹⁰

Since the 1970s, Henry D. Shapiro and other scholars have demonstrated that such negative images about Appalachia and its people were largely a post-Civil War construct. These misconceptions were not based on evidence. Instead, they were “invented” by late nineteenth century missionaries, journalists, and local color novelists from outside the region. These men and women “discovered” a people who, as a result of their presumed geographical isolation, lived in the same fashion as that of America’s pioneer ancestors. Time appeared to have stood still in Appalachia. The nation’s rapid advancement in communication, industry, and

⁸ For a recent discussion on stereotypes and southern Appalachia, see Dwight B. Billings, Gurney Norman, and Katherine Ledford, eds., *Confronting Appalachian Stereotypes: Back Talk from an American Region* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999).

⁹ Transcript of “Another America,” CBS News’s *Forty-eight Hours*, December 14, 1989, 2.

¹⁰ Quoted in “Signs of the Times,” *Appalachian Journal* 23 (Fall 1996), 144.

transportation following the Civil War seemed to have bypassed the region. Its inhabitants remained backward, ignorant, and uncivilized.¹¹

Much like Edward Said's analysis of "orientalism," scholarship on the discourse of Appalachia has broadened our understanding of how cultural hierarchies between dominant and subordinate societies are created.¹² As Allen Batteau has explained, negative images about the mountain region were invented (and reinvented during the twentieth century) to serve the "economic opportunism, political creativity, or passing fancy of urban elites."¹³ The so-called "myth of Appalachia" provided northern capitalists and missionaries with an excuse to intervene in the lives of mountain residents, whom they viewed as crude and unrefined, and modernize the region. It also fulfilled middle-class Americans' need to project their own fears about the future onto a people perceived as different. In short, Appalachia became the "other," a place that reminded Victorian Americans why they had embraced industrialization and "progress."

While deconstructing these stereotypes, Shapiro and other historians have assumed that myth-making originated from outside the mountain region. That they have done so should come as no surprise. Most studies of Appalachian industrialism have emphasized "its exterior origins and its imposition upon a population whose own actions had little effect in the creation of new economy."¹⁴ According to the standard narrative, mountain residents became victims to outside forces beyond their control at the turn of the twentieth century. Northern capitalists, absentee

¹¹ Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*; Batteau, *The Invention of Appalachia*; David E. Whisnant, *All That Is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer*; Jane S. Becker, *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Anne Rowe, *The Enchanted Country: Northern Writers in the South, 1865-1910* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso, 1996); Kevin E. O'Donnell and Helen Hollingsworth, eds., *Seekers of Scenery: Travel Writing from Southern Appalachia, 1840-1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004); and Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

¹³ Batteau, *The Invention of Appalachia*, 1.

¹⁴ Robert S. Weise, *Grasping at Independence: Debt, Male Authority, and Mineral Rights in Appalachian Kentucky, 1850-1915* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 6.

owners, and land speculators monopolized power by manipulating local governments and overwhelming “regional cultures with the legacies of industrialization.” Mountain residents were powerless to stop these unwanted changes, much less shape the discourse of Appalachia.¹⁵

Recently, several historians have begun to challenge such assumptions. They have argued that mountain residents played an active role in the development of Appalachian stereotypes. In his study on tourism in western North Carolina during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for instance, Richard Starnes believes that local boosters, hoping to attract northern capitalists and tourists, promoted the region as the “Land of the Sky,” a mystical and exotic place where urban middle-class Americans could escape from “modernity.”¹⁶ Focusing on upper East Tennessee, David C. Hsiung has discovered that negative images about Appalachia and its people began within the region long before local color novelists arrived on the scene in the late nineteenth century. According to Hsiung, as early as 1800, mountain town dwellers and nearby farmers, eager for economic development and wider connections to the outside world, began to emphasize differences between themselves and the more isolated (and poorer) country folk. Chastising their rural counterparts as backward and ignorant, these “outward-oriented” urban inhabitants forged the negative images about the region that local colorists and missionaries popularized following the Civil War.¹⁷

In studying the anti-alcohol crusade, I have also discovered that the origins of many Appalachian stereotypes lay in the antebellum period. By the 1830s, urban middle-class mountain reformers began to identify rural western North Carolina as a backward place where

¹⁵ Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside*; Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*; Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*; and Lewis, Johnson, and Askins, *Colonialism in Modern America*.

¹⁶ Richard D. Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005).

¹⁷ David C. Hsiung, *Two Worlds in the Tennessee Mountains: Exploring the Origins of Appalachian Stereotypes* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997).

inhabitants, adhering to “traditional” drinking mores, failed to meet the standards of “mainstream” American society. Tourists and writers subsequently tapped into these perceptions, laying the foundation for negative images that persist today. Moreover, during the late nineteenth century, local townspeople, having already embraced temperance, reinforced and perpetuated the misconception that most mountain residents were drunken, moonshiners. These men and women admitted that many rural highlanders continued to live in ignorance, consume large amounts of alcohol, and engage in illicit distilling. Echoing the views of local colorists and missionaries, they believed that the “traditional” culture of these country folk required reforming.

I have organized this book into three parts, each constituting a cohesive period in the history of anti-alcohol reform in Appalachian North Carolina. Part 1 sets the stage for conflict between mountain “progressives” and “traditionalists.” It begins with a discussion on the important role that alcohol manufacturing played in the region’s diverse agrarian economy during the early antebellum period. In those years, liquor distilling became a cottage industry used by many farmers to obtain cash, a scarce commodity on the frontier. There was also not yet a stigma attached to those who manufactured alcohol, and for good reason. As elsewhere in the antebellum United States, whiskey and brandy flowed at western North Carolina dances, barn raisings, and militia musters, providing participants with an opportunity to strengthen kinship and community bonds. Highlanders’ demand for and acceptance of alcohol ensured that distillers could always find buyers. These liquor makers were entrepreneurs responding to the demands of the marketplace, and, as such, they gained the appreciation of mountain residents, who regarded drinking and distilling as an integral element of their economy and culture.

Beginning in the 1830s, however, new social and economic forces would conspire against mountain distillers and their clientele. Influenced by the Great Revival, many Presbyterians,

Baptists, and Methodists began to reject the prevailing drinking mores of antebellum Americans. A new middle-class also emerged in the burgeoning towns of western North Carolina. Viewing themselves as refined and cultivated, these doctors, lawyers, and merchants embraced the evangelicals' anti-alcohol crusade, believing that "traditional" drinking habits impeded the region's economic prosperity, and chastised liquor distillers for promoting intemperance. In short, temperance became a badge of respectability, one that helped to demarcate differences between middle-class residents of towns and rural mountain whites. Nonetheless, mountain reformers would have to wait until the late nineteenth century, when the region began to feel the full impact of industrialization and urbanization, before they could gain the support of rural communities.

The emphasis in Part 2 is on the rise of moonshiner violence and the politics of federal liquor taxation in western North Carolina during Reconstruction. It first explains why illicit distillers enjoyed a broad base of mountain support in their fight against the Bureau of Internal Revenue and its "infernal" liquor tax. Following the Civil War, many mountain whites, Republican and Democratic, opposed liquor law enforcement because it threatened to increase federal authority and destroy an important local industry. Consequently, the moonshiner became a folk hero, an outlaw who supposedly killed in self-defense and for a noble cause: to protect his community from an "oppressive" national government. As the issues of Reconstruction and liquor taxation became intertwined, urban reformers found it more difficult to promote anti-alcohol reform and condemn liquor manufacturers for encouraging violence and crime. Meanwhile, North Carolina politicians capitalized on highlanders' hostility to the revenue law. Mountain Democrats linked liquor taxation with Radical Republicanism and the question of "home rule." Republicans counterattacked by disassociated themselves from their national

party's support of the liquor law. In the end, Republicans failed, resulting in a political fiasco that crushed the local party in 1876.

By the 1880s, however, the reputation of moonshiners and legal distillers declined as western North Carolina experienced an unprecedented era of industrial and urban growth. The arrival of the railroad, and along with it "civilization," encouraged many highlanders to revive the anti-alcohol crusade. Part 3 begins with a discussion on the resurgence of prohibition sentiment among town middle-class highlanders during the 1870s. Embracing New South rhetoric, these men and women feared that alcohol had stymied the region's economic and moral potential. They increasingly chastised the drinking mores of rural mountain residents, whom they viewed as backward and unrefined, and passed local-option laws to curtail alcohol consumption in their communities. Like missionaries and capitalists from outside the region, middle-class highlanders concluded that social conflict in Appalachia was not the product of economic exploitation, but rather the result of a "traditional" culture, one that needed civilizing. Moonshiners and legal distillers emerged as central figures in this drama, epitomizing what was wrong with mountain society. They were unwanted remnants of the colonial past, rugged individualists who rejected modernity, embraced violence, and promoted intemperance. Like other "traditional" mountain residents, they had no place in the new industrial social order.

Contrary to what northern and local urban reformers claimed, however, rural highlanders had embraced "progress" and "civilization." Part 3, then, also chronicles the rise of anti-alcohol sentiment in rural western North Carolina at the turn of the twentieth century. The expansion of commercial farming, industrial capitalism, and urbanization ultimately hastened the decline of the isolation of rural culture. In fact, by the 1890s, a growing number of rural residents, having greater access to towns and becoming more entrenched in the larger market economy, chastised

“traditional” drinking mores and blamed alcohol distillers for perpetuating violence, idleness, and crime. Hoping to once and for all eradicate “King Alcohol” from the mountain region, these men and women would ally with their urban middle-class counterparts and embrace state-wide prohibition in 1908.

Taken as a whole, this book chronicles the social tensions that accompanied the beginnings of western North Carolina’s transition from a rural to an urban-industrial economy during the nineteenth century. As such, it is part of a larger story about the origins and development of conflict within not only Appalachia but also rural America. Largely a product of industrialization and urbanization, the anti-alcohol crusade played an important role in this drama: one that often pitted town “progressives” against rural “traditionalists.” In the middle of this battle for social control and cultural hegemony stood the alcohol distiller, whose decline in reputation ultimately reflected rural America’s integration into “mainstream” society.

PART 1:

THE BEGINNINGS OF ANTI-ALCOHOL REFORM, 1790-1860

CHAPTER 1

“THIS COUNTRY IMPROVES IN CULTIVATION, WICKEDNESS, MILLS, AND STILL”: DISTILLING AND DRINKING DURING THE ANTEBELLUM PERIOD

Here's to Old Corn Likker,
Whitens the teeth,
Perfumes the breath,
And makes childbirth a pleasure.¹

Bluford McGee was born in 1832 and raised on the bank of Beaver Creek in Wilkes County, located on the eastern slopes of North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains. In 1850, he and several neighbors departed the county for the gold-fields of California. There, McGee found nothing but hardship. He discovered little gold and developed severe rheumatism, which left him unable to walk. McGee spent the next twelve years at a hospital in San Francisco, where he wrote an autobiography of his childhood in Wilkes County.²

McGee's father, also named Bluford, was a central figure in his autobiography. The elder McGee farmed and made extra money by distilling his surplus apples into brandy and selling it to his neighbors. In fact, McGee remembered that his father made the “best” apple brandy in Wilkes County. Residents anxiously waited to taste the elder McGee's first batch of brandy each season. McGee recalled that his father, signaling that a batch of brandy was complete, would “go out in front of the still house and blow” on the still cap “as loud as he

¹ North Carolina folksaying, quoted in Joseph Earl Dabney, *Mountain Spirits: A Chronicle of Corn Whiskey from King James' Ulster Plantation to America's Appalachians and the Moonshine Life* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 3.

² McGee returned to Beaver Creek sometime after 1870. He worked as a school teacher there until his death in 1883. See B.B. McGee, *The Country Youth: Autobiography of B.B. McGee* (1874; reprint, North Wilkesboro, N.C.: Pearson Publishing Co., 1964).

could.” People from miles around heard this noise and, knowing what it meant, headed off to the still to enjoy the first run, or batch, of the season.

McGee’s teacher was one such brandy connoisseur, who, to the youth’s delight, canceled class upon hearing the high-pitched sound. “The school house was as quiet as a tomb,” McGee remembered, “when all of a sudden a deafening blast from my father’s still cap came crashing in at the door,” startling students and teacher alike. McGee saw the corners of his teacher’s mouth begin “to twitch and glow with radiance, till they spread from ear to ear in a broad smile.” That smile did not subside. The teacher dismissed class, put on his hat, and walked out, “leaving a clear streak of sunshine behind him that made the heart feel glad.”³

McGee’s autobiography reveals that antebellum mountain distillers were not hillbillies or marginalized criminals, as journalists and local colorists would label them after the Civil War. Most were small farmers who augmented their income by manufacturing excess yields of corn, apples, and peaches into alcohol and selling it to neighbors or merchants. These distillers were also respected members of the community. Wilkes County residents, for instance, viewed the elder McGee’s liquor enterprise as a legitimate business. In fact, his first run of the season provided citizens with an opportunity to strengthen kinship and community bonds. Farmers and schoolteachers alike congregated near McGee’s still to drink, gossip, and debate politics.⁴

While devoting considerable attention to moonshiner violence in southern Appalachia following the Civil War, historians have neglected to examine the antebellum distiller thoroughly. Studying alcohol manufacturing provides an excellent opportunity to explore the economic and social lives of mountain residents living on the southern frontier.⁵ Whiskey

³ Ibid., 46, 58-60.

⁴ McGee, *The Country Youth*, 58-60.

⁵ Since the 1970s, William Holmes, Wilbur Miller, and other scholars have confronted traditional notions of the late nineteenth century Appalachian moonshiner, pointing out that resistance to federal liquor law enforcement was the

distilling offers a lens through which to view the Appalachian South's process of cultural adaptation and reliance upon trade and outside markets. Both of these aspects of the region's life confirm that southern Appalachia was not a static or closed society before the Civil War.⁶ One of the region's first industries, liquor distilling was often a capitalistic enterprise that enabled farmers to obtain cash, which was a scarce commodity on the frontier. It also promoted social cohesion. As elsewhere in the antebellum United States, alcohol flowed at southern Appalachian dances, barn raisings, and militia musters. Participants in these events felt like equals. The

product of neither ethnic origins nor geographical isolation. Recent scholarship has linked the rise of moonshining to larger economic forces shaping the history of southern Appalachia following the Civil War. Industrialization, the decline of farm size, and growth of urban markets encouraged many mountain residents who lived in rural, economically depressed regions to distill alcohol illegally, thereby escalating the potential for violence. See Ester Kellner, *Moonshine: Its History and Folklore* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1971); Jess Carr, *The Second Oldest Profession: An Informal History of Moonshining in America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972); David W. Maurer, *Kentucky Moonshine* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974); Joseph Earl Dabney, *Mountain Spirits: A Chronicle of Corn Whiskey from King James' Ulster Plantation to America's Appalachians and the Moonshine Life* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974); William F. Holmes, "Moonshining and Collective Violence: Georgia, 1889-1895," *Journal of American History* 67 (December 1980), 589-611; Edward Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); William L. Montell, *Killings: Folk Justice in the Upper South* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1986); Stephen Cresswell, *Mormons & Cowboys, Moonshiners & Klansmen: Federal Law Enforcement in the South & West, 1870-1893* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991); Wilbur R. Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners: Enforcing Federal Liquor Law in the Mountain South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Gordon B. McKinney, "Moonshiners, Law Enforcement, and Violence: Legitimacy and Community in Western North Carolina 1862-1882," (paper delivered at Southern Historical Association meeting, New Orleans, November 1995); Bruce E. Stewart, "'When Darkness Reigns Then is the Hour to Strike': Moonshining, Federal Liquor Taxation, and Klan Violence in Western North Carolina, 1868-1872," *North Carolina Historical Review* 80 (October 2003), 453-474; and Stewart, "Attacking Red-Legged Grasshopper: Moonshiners, Violence, and the Politics of Federal Liquor Taxation in Western North Carolina, 1865-1876," *Appalachian Journal: A Regional Studies Review* 32 (Fall 2004), 26-48.

⁶ Since the 1980s, historians have challenged the assumption that southern Appalachia was a static and closed region during the antebellum period. These scholars have argued that improved transportation routes, population growth, and new manufacturing technologies allowed some mountain residents to increasingly participate in the larger market economy. In short, historians have shown that economic development in southern Appalachia resembled that of other American regions during the nineteenth century. See Richard A. Straw and H. Tyler Blethen, eds., *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Dwight B. Billings and Kathleen M. Blee, *Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Hardship in Appalachia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Donald Edward Davis, *Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000); Wilma A. Dunaway, *The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Mary Beth Pudur, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina L. Waller, eds., *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Robert Tracy McKenzie, *One South or Many? Plantation Belt and Upcountry in Civil War Era Tennessee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); John C. Inscoe, *Mountain Masters, Slavery and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989); and Durwood Dunn, *Cades Cove: The Life and Death of a Southern Appalachia Community, 1818-1937* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988).

important role that distillers played in North Carolina highlanders' economic and social lives before the Civil War prompts reevaluation of the image of the region's most celebrated (and notorious) figure. More so than previous works, which rely heavily upon the oral histories of late nineteenth and early twentieth century moonshiners, this chapter uses manuscripts, store accounts, and census data to argue that a majority of antebellum western North Carolinians regarded alcohol and distilling as an integral part of their society and economy.⁷

America's First Frontier: A Cultural Synthesis

Western North Carolina is a land of mountains, valleys, and plateaus. Extending from Surry County on the north to Cleveland County on the south are the North Carolina foothills that make up the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge range. The Blue Ridge, which is part of the Appalachian chain stretching from eastern Canada to northern Georgia, divides the rest of western North Carolina from the foothills and piedmont to the east. Beyond this mountain range in North Carolina lies a high plateau, which is traversed by several short high ranges. Rivers flow between these ranges, creating fertile valleys across the plateau. Higher in the northwestern part of the state and gradually lowering as it runs southward into Georgia, the plateau is bordered on the west by the Great Smokies. This range divides North Carolina from Tennessee and is home to some of the highest mountains east of the Mississippi River.⁸

A diverse group of Europeans trickled into the region during the mid eighteenth century. English, German, and Scots-Irish migrants, among others, traveled down the Great Wagon Road,

⁷ For scholarship on antebellum distilling, see Margaret Morley, *The Carolina Mountains* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1913); Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders* (New York: Outing Publishing Co., 1913); John C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1921); Cratis Williams, "Moonshining in the Mountains," *North Carolina Folklore* (May 1967): 11-17; Kellner, *Moonshine*; Carr, *The Second Oldest Profession*; Maurer, *Kentucky Moonshine*; Dabney, *Mountain Spirits*; Thomas Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*.

⁸ Morley, *The Carolina Mountains*, 102-103; Ina Woestemeyer Van Noppen and John J. Van Noppen, *Western North Carolina Since the Civil War* (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1973), 1-3; and Laura Thornborough, *The Great Smoky Mountains* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1942), 1-2.

a transportation artery linking western Pennsylvania to the southern colonies, and settled in the piedmont of North Carolina. They believed that the backcountry offered them limitless opportunity. Land was cheaper and more abundant there than in Pennsylvania or western Virginia. Some stopped in the foothill region, where they settled along the rich bottomlands of the Catawba and Yadkin rivers. After settling there, many of them, along with their slaves, pushed westward, ignoring the British government's Proclamation of 1763, which prohibited white migration west of the Southern Appalachian divide.⁹ Ascending the lofty ridges of the Blue Ridge, they began to encroach on the hunting grounds of the Cherokees. "The number of families that have come from North Carolina and Virginia," one Cherokee Indian complained in 1766, "are circumstances very alarming to us ... we were promised quiet possession of our lands and redress for our grievances."¹⁰ This initial influx of Europeans to the region was only a sign of things to come.

At the close of the American Revolution, the North Carolina General Assembly allowed whites to legally settle in the territory west of the Blue Ridge. There, fertile valleys offered strong inducements to those wanting productive tracts of land. French botanist and traveler Francois Michaux commented on the region in 1802: "These mountains begin to be populated rapidly. The salubrity of the air, the excellence of the water, and more especially the pasturage of these wild peas for the cattle, are so many caused that induce new inhabitants to settle there."¹¹ By foot, wagon, and horseback, thousands of whites from the piedmont and foothills ventured onto the high plateau lying between the Blue Ridge and Great Smoky mountains. The

⁹ H. Tyler Blethen and Curtis W. Wood, Jr., *From Ulster to Carolina: The Migration of the Scotch-Irish to Southwestern North Carolina* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1998), 38-43.

¹⁰ Quoted in Davis, *Where There Are Mountains*, 95-96.

¹¹ Francois Andrew Michaux, *Travels to the Westward of the Alleghany Mountains* (London: Richard Phillips, 1805), 290.

earliest settlers acquired land on the rich bottomlands of the New, Toe, French Broad, Catawba, and Swannanoa rivers. Many of them, possessing the most fertile and accessible lands, would emerge as the region's economic, social, and political leaders. Latecomers occupied less desirable lands along smaller rivers and creekbeds. It was not until the early nineteenth century that settlers moved farther up the hillsides into hollows and coves, remote areas that isolated its residents from the outside world.¹²

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, western North Carolina was part of the American frontier. It was a land of migrants, some of whom used the region as a temporary home before moving to Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama, or Georgia. Others stayed. These English, German, African, and Scots-Irish settlers transported some of their native culture with them to the mountains. Migration also brought fundamental change. Immigrants survived by borrowing ideas and practices from one another, thereby creating a hybrid frontier culture.¹³ Adapting to the new environment and coming into contact with Native Americans and other European farmers, settlers shifted from oats, barley, and sheep to an economy that relied upon pigs, corn, and rye.¹⁴ They also adopted from the Cherokees' slash-and-burn technique to clear farmland. Settlers constructed log cabins and barns using German and Swiss carpentry designs and methods. The English, one of the largest ethnic groups to settle in the mountains, heavily

¹² Inscoc, *Mountain Masters*, 13, 53. For a case study detailing the settlement patterns of pioneer farmers in western North Carolina, see Edward W. Phifer, "Slavery in Microcosm: Burke County, North Carolina," *Journal of Southern History* 28 (May 1962), 140.

¹³ Most historians no longer view the frontier as a dividing line between uncivilized and civilized. Instead, they insist that the frontier was a place where "different cultures, environments, experiences, economies, motives, and perspectives came into contact." On this frontier, people exchanged ideas, cultural traits, values, and sometimes lifestyles, thereby creating a new culture. See John Anthony Caruso, *The Appalachian Frontier: America's First Surge Westward* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959); Gregory H. Nobles, "Breaking into the Backcountry: New Approaches to the Early American Frontier, 1750-1800," *William and Mary Quarterly* 46 (1989), 641-70; and Robert D. Mitchell, ed., *Appalachian Frontiers: Settlement, Society, & Development in the Preindustrial Era* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991).

¹⁴ Blethen and Wood, *From Ulster to Carolina*, 33.

influenced political organization, “as the system of English law was transplanted, basically intact, to the region.”¹⁵

The Roots of Alcohol Distilling

The Scots-Irish also influenced the cultural and social development of western North Carolina. These people had migrated to Pennsylvania during the early eighteenth century from the northern Irish province of Ulster.¹⁶ Pressures from population growth soon pushed them to the Pennsylvania backcountry. Beginning in the 1740s, soil exhaustion and the quest for cheaper land encouraged a significant number of Ulstermen (as they preferred to be called) to migrate southward via the Great Wagon Road. Some settled in the piedmont of North Carolina, where they lived on the river bottoms and creeks west of the Yadkin River. From there, Ulstermen moved deeper into the foothills and, after the American Revolution, crossed the Blue Ridge Mountains. By 1800, families of Ulster origins accounted for 43 percent of the population in southwestern North Carolina.¹⁷

Along with cattle herding and Presbyterianism, the Scots-Irish introduced the art of whiskey distilling to southern Appalachia. Other settlers, rich and poor, quickly adopted this cultural practice.¹⁸ As early as the eleventh century, the Gaels of old Ireland had begun to manufacture barley into whiskey.¹⁹ The Scots soon adopted Irish distilling methods and modified them. By the late fifteenth century, the Irish and the Scots had developed distinct distillation methods. The skills of both groups advanced when, through the actions of King

¹⁵ Davis, *Where There Are Mountains*, 97-107 (quotation, 99).

¹⁶ Historian Joseph Dabney estimates that at least a quarter of a million Ulster Scots descended upon American soil between 1717 and 1776. See Dabney, *Mountain Spirits*, 40.

¹⁷ Blethen and Wood, *From Ulster to Carolina*, 29-50.

¹⁸ For a detailed study on the origins of cattle herding and Presbyterianism in western North Carolina, see *ibid.*, 55-62.

¹⁹ No one knows for sure who discovered the distillation process. Before the birth of Christ, the Chinese and Japanese distilled rice into alcohol. Mid-eastern alchemists (re)discovered the distillation process during the Middle Ages, disseminating it to Europe sometime before the eleventh-century. See Kellner, *Moonshine*, 30-31.

James I, they combined their collective knowledge of the distilling process. In 1610, James I, hoping to consolidate his control over the ten counties of Catholic Northern Ireland (Ulster), enticed Protestants from Scotland to settle there. These so-called Scots-Irish, or Ulster Scots, exchanged their skills with the older Irish inhabitants, thereby perfecting the process of whiskey distilling.²⁰

The Scots-Irish continued to distill alcohol upon migrating to Pennsylvania during the eighteenth century. The ingredients used to make whiskey changed, however. Instead of barley, Ulstermen, adapting to the new environment, began to distill rye and corn into whiskey. The ingredients may have changed, but the finished product remained in high demand. Philadelphian Benjamin Rush complained about Scots-Irish distillers on the Pennsylvania frontier in the 1780s, stating, “The quantity of rye destroyed and of whiskey drunk in these places is immense, and its effects upon their industry, health and morals are terrible.” This love of making whiskey did not dissipate when the Ulster Scots journeyed to western North Carolina and other southern backcountry regions. By the late eighteenth century, notes historian Joseph Dabney, “columns of steel blue smoke poured from hundreds of stills over the six-hundred-mile backcountry along the Appalachian mountain chain.”²¹

The Manufacture of Corn Whiskey

The antebellum whiskey-making process varied among distillers, depending upon the quantity of spirits desired, the ingredients used, and the speed of manufacturing needed.

Through trial and error, distillers created their own recipes and passed them on to their children

²⁰ See Dabney, *Mountain Spirits*, 34; Ray Rensi and Leo Downing, “A Touch of Mountain Dew: Art and History of Whiskey-Making in North Georgia,” in *The Many Faces of Appalachia: Proceedings of the 7th Annual Appalachian Studies Conference*, edited by Sam Gray (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1985), 196-197; David Hackett Fischer, *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 729; and William C. Lehmann, *Scottish and Scotch-Irish Contributions to Early American Life and Culture* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press Corp., 1978).

²¹ Dabney, *Mountain Spirits*, 50-51.

or neighbors. A recipe book that William Lenoir of Caldwell County wrote during the 1790s, for instance, reveals that not all western Carolinians agreed upon the best way to distill alcohol.

Lenoir discovered that while some mountain distillers preferred to use rye malt to speed up the fermenting process, others cautioned against it.²² Although recipes may have differed, the actual techniques used to distill alcohol in the region remained similar to those in Ulster.

The Scots-Irish brought both their small stills and their knowledge of manufacturing alcohol to Appalachian North Carolina. Like other antebellum distillers, they most commonly used the pot still, a copper container shaped liked a “large teakettle with a round lid and an extra-long spout.” These stills proved extremely useful because they were light and easy to transport over rugged terrain.²³ Ulster Scots and other settlers who did not own stills could either buy or make them. By the 1790s, merchants traveled the mountain countryside selling pot stills and other items. In 1794, for instance, Buncombe County merchant Zebulon Baird executed a bill of sale to William Lenoir “in consideration of one hundred and thirty pounds, for a still and other items of personal property.”²⁴ Distillers who were less affluent than Lenoir often built their own stills, a skill they learned from the Scots-Irish. Distillers made this primitive variation of the pot still by sawing a hollow log in two and running a copper pipe from one end to the other. With the halves reconnected, “beer poured in at the top, steam sent through the pipe, and alcohol was taken off through another pipe,” the process was complete.²⁵

Once in possession of a still, the pioneer distiller found a proper site to operate it. Since alcohol manufacturing required water, Ulstermen and other antebellum distillers preferred to set

²² William Lenoir’s distilling recipe book, Box 23, Folder 289, Household and Plantation Records, Lenoir Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

²³ Keller, *Moonshine*, 58; and Maurer, *Kentucky Moonshine*, 29-32

²⁴ Johnson J. Hayes, *The Land of Wilkes* (Wilkesboro, NC: Wilkes County Historical Society, 1962), 77.

²⁵ Dabney, *Mountain Spirits*, 67.

up their stills near streams.²⁶ Satisfying this preference was not difficult, for there were countless springs and streams in western North Carolina. Before selecting a stream, however, distillers tested water quality. Some examined the flora that surrounded the branch, hoping to find yellow root or red horsemint, which indicated that the water was soft and more suitable (many believed) for making whiskey. Others collected stream water in a jar, shook it, and tilted it on its side. If bubbles rose when the distiller tilted the jar, he had discovered “soft” branch water and would carry his equipment to that stream.²⁷ Distillers’ preference for soft water backfired on them when the federal government attempted to enforce liquor taxation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Revenuers often searched for illegal stills by studying the plants that surrounded a branch. If touch-me-nots grew along the banks of a stream, revenuers bypassed it, knowing “that moonshin[ers] wouldn’t think of putting their still on a branch with touch-me-nots. For touch-me-nots along a branch means hard water and hard water won’t make corn whiskey. It takes soft water.”²⁸

After finding a proper site, the pioneer distiller selected the corn to make whiskey.²⁹ Distillers would examine each kernel of corn by hand and discard discolored or rotten ones. In order to change the corn’s starch into sugar through fermentation, the distiller first made “corn malt.” This process involved placing unground kernels in a container with several holes in the bottom. The distiller poured warm water into the container, hoping that the corn would sprout in

²⁶ “Fresh water was needed for both the mixing and tempering of the moonshine as well as a coolant for the condensation part of the distillation procedure.” See Rensi and Downing, “A Touch of Mountain Dew,” 200.

²⁷ Kellner, *Moonshine*, 56; and Rensi and Downing, “A Touch of Mountain Dew,” 199-200.

²⁸ John Parris, *These Storied Mountains* (Asheville, NC: Citizen-Times Publishing Co., 1972), 263-264.

²⁹ To make brandy, the distiller would use peaches or apples.

three or four days.³⁰ Distillers sometimes accelerated the sprouting process by burying the corn in manure.³¹ Grown sprouts then dried in the sun or before a fire.

Once the grains were dry, distillers ground them into a coarse meal known as “corn grits.” The farmer used a tubmill, which he could borrow from a neighbor or miller if necessary, to complete this process.³² When placed in an oak barrel and mixed with hot water, the meal became a mush called “sweet mash.” One bushel of the mash stirred into thirty gallons of water produced one to one and a half gallons of whiskey.³³ The distiller then covered the barrel to keep its contents clean and placed it in the sun to dry. After four or five days, he uncovered the barrel and thinned out the “sweet mash” with warm water. Before recovering the barrel, the whiskey maker sometimes added rye malt, made like corn malt, to speed up the fermenting process. The malt rose to “the top in a layer from one to two inches thick, sealed off the air, and sealed in the flavor.”³⁴ During this time, the sugar in the “sweet mash” changed to carbonic acid and alcohol – a soupy yellow mixture known as “sour mash”.³⁵

When fermentation was completed five to ten days later, whiskey makers then separated the mash from water through the distillation process.³⁶ To ensure that the mash did not lose its 10 percent alcoholic content at this stage, the alcohol manufacturer had to distill it promptly.³⁷ He first dipped the mash out into buckets and strained it into the still through a piece of cloth.

³⁰ Distillers desired the sprouts to grow to a length of one to one and half inches. See Williams, “Moonshining in the Mountains,” 13.

³¹ “The added warmth of the oxidation generally cut the sprouting time in half.” See Rensi and Downing, “A Touch of Mountain Dew,” 200.

³² “If he had a stout arm, or a stout wife or son, he might obtain two bushels of ground corn per day.” See Keller, *Moonshine*, 57.

³³ Williams, “Moonshining in the Mountains,” 13.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

³⁵ During the winter, the distiller kept the mash warm by burying it in hot manure or sawdust piles. See Dabney, *Mountain Spirits*, 4, 6, 8.

³⁶ “A skill distiller could tell the proper degree of fermentation by the sound in the barrel; it was at perfection when the bubbling resembled rain drumming on a roof or a slice of pork fring in the pan.” See Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 32.

³⁷ Dabney, *Mountain Spirits*, 5.

The distiller then heated the pot still over a wood fire and cooked the mash at 176 degrees Fahrenheit, the temperature at which alcohol becomes vapor.³⁸ The resulting vapor traveled up the neck of the still and into the worm, a copper coil connected to the pot still. The distiller then set the worm in a cooler barrel under a waterfall. The cold coil turned the alcohol vapor back into alcohol, which traveled out through a pipe directly into a pail, keg, or jug.³⁹

The distiller's work was not yet finished, however. This first batch, or run, of whiskey, required additional distilling. "Singlings," as the initial run was called, still contained excess water and, among other poisonous substances, fusel oil.⁴⁰ To purify this murky liquid, the distiller made a second run – "doublings" – at a lower temperature. Some used the same still to make doublings, while others used two stills to speed up the process. If using one still, the distiller had to remove the spent mash and "wash it out with some unstrained 'beer' left in the mash barrel, a technique said to make the whiskey extra smooth and mellow." He then cleaned the pot with a rag and began to make "doublings."

To estimate the strength, or proof, of whiskey, skilled pioneer distillers studied the "bead" that formed at the top of a clear bottle filled with alcohol. Instruments that measured alcohol proof were not available until the 1820s. If the bead was full of big, loose, collapsing bubbles ("rabbit eyes" or "frog eyes") after a distiller shook a bottle, the whiskey was not 100 proof (50 percent alcohol). However, if "the foam rose and remained in bubbles about the size of a No. 5 shot, the proof was right."⁴¹ Others used oil or lye to test whiskey's proof. An early twentieth century Georgia moonshiner described how pioneers used this method: "You put the

³⁸ Heating the still to the appropriate temperature was an important skill that pioneers learned by trial and error or in childhood from relatives. As historian Esther Kellner explained, "The mash must cook neither too slowly nor too rapidly. If it becomes too hot, the vapor will carry too much steam, or the mash will be scorched. In cases of extreme heat, the steam can build up too fast and the still may explode." Kellner, *Moonshine*, 59.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Williams, "Moonshining in the Mountains," 14.

⁴¹ Kellner, *Moonshine*, 60.

oil in when the likker first comes out of the still. The way you tell ... when the bead hops all the way out and sits on top of the surface, it's false. A true bead will stop half in the likker and half out on top."⁴² Whether they tested proof with the jar or oil methods, distillers wanted their whiskey to be 50 percent alcohol.

The Market Value of Distilled Spirits

Immigrants could not bring with them to the Appalachian frontier all of their customs, institutions, and material goods. They survived by adapting to the new physical environment. In the process, these settlers reshaped (or modified) the way they had lived in Europe, discarding cultural practices that were not useful. The Scots-Irish, for instance, stopped using turf for fuel and thatch for home construction.⁴³ If a skill proved beneficial, however, settlers kept it. Whiskey-making was one such practice that Ulstermen transplanted to the New World. In fact, other farmers also began to distill whiskey, using it as a barter item or selling it for extra money. The Ulster Scots may well have introduced the art of manufacturing alcohol to the region, but economic forces encouraged mountain residents, rich and poor, to continue this tradition.

Diversity was the key to mountain agriculture during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Farmers cultivated fruits, vegetables, and other crops to feed their families and sometimes satisfy market demands. All farmers grew corn, which usually made up at least half of a farmer's total output.⁴⁴ This grain thrived in western North Carolina's cooler climate, and fed residents and livestock. Mountain women (and men) served it on the table three times a day as corn mush or Indian pudding. The most popular food item was cornbread, a dish that mountain residents' cooked over an open hearth and served with pork, vegetables, and wild

⁴² Dabney, *Mountain Spirits*, 10.

⁴³ Kenneth W. Keller, "What Is Distinctive about the Scotch-Irish?" in *Appalachian Frontiers*, 72.

⁴⁴ Inscoc, *Mountain Masters*, 14.

berries.⁴⁵ Corn was more than just a food source, however. Pioneer settlers often made mattresses from leftover cornhusks, while others used corncobs as fuel, stoppers in jugs, and fertilizer. Even children benefited from this grain, making corncob and cornhusk dolls.⁴⁶

Corn also provided Carolina highlanders with a viable product that connected them to the larger market economy. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that most Appalachian farming households were neither completely self-sufficient nor isolated from the outside world.⁴⁷ Pioneer and antebellum farmers produced at least a small surplus of livestock and/or grain, which they bartered to their neighbors or sold to storekeepers, itinerant merchants, and drovers. Merchants played an important role linking these rural farmers to external economies. James Patton, an Ulster Scot who migrated to western North Carolina in the 1790s, for instance, traveled throughout the mountain countryside, buying, among other things, corn and selling manufactured goods from the North.⁴⁸ Moreover, a vast network of trails in western Carolina gave the earliest migrants access to the larger market economy. During the 1790s, settlers began to build roads along the region's largest and most important river, the French Broad, which "flows northwestward from near the South Carolina border, through Asheville, into northeast Tennessee." These trails and roads allowed farmers to transport their crops to market or join their livestock with those being driven through the region from Tennessee and Kentucky.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Michael Ann Williams, *Great Smoky Mountains Folklife* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995): 92.

⁴⁶ Kellner, *Moonshine*, 55.

⁴⁷ Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*; Donald L. Winters, *Tennessee Farming, Tennessee Farmers: Antebellum Agriculture in the Upper South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994); Paul Salstrom, *Appalachia's Path to Dependency: Rethinking a Region's Economic History, 1730-1940* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994); Pudup, Billings, Waller, *Appalachia in the Making*; Dunaway, *The First American Frontier*; Blethen and Wood, *From Ulster to Carolina*; Billings and Blee, *Road to Poverty*; Davis, *Where There Are Mountains*; Robert S. Weise, *Grasping at Independence: Debt, Male Authority, and Mineral Rights in Appalachian Kentucky, 1850-1915* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001); H. Tyler Blethen, "Pioneer Settlement," in *High Mountains Rising*, 17-29.

⁴⁸ James Patton, *Biography of James Patton* (Asheville, NC: n. p., 1850), 9-16.

⁴⁹ Tyler H. Blethen and Curtis Wood, "A Trader on the Carolina Frontier," in *Appalachian Frontiers*, 162.

The creation of the Buncombe Turnpike in 1828, running from Tennessee through Madison, Buncombe, and Henderson counties into South Carolina, increased Appalachian North Carolina's already thriving livestock trade. Each October, farmers and merchants from Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina gathered up hogs and other livestock to sell to drovers. These men, many of whom farmed, then transported these animals to South Carolina and Georgia. The beneficiaries of this trade were farmers fortunate to own land near the Buncombe Turnpike, where an estimated 150,000 to 175,000 hogs passed through each year between 1828 and the Civil War. The enormous amounts of grain needed to feed these animals encouraged farmers to raise corn as a cash crop. In Madison, Buncombe, and Henderson counties, residents grew one and a half times more corn than other mountain farmers to feed livestock traveling to South Carolina and Georgia. Most sold or bartered their crop to merchants who had established inns or stands along the turnpike.⁵⁰

But not all farmers had such an accessible outlet for their crops. In remote counties and before the completion of the Buncombe Turnpike in 1828, mountain residents found it more difficult to transport their corn crop to market. Transportation and trade routes were unable to accommodate the demands of these market-oriented farmers. In 1770, mapmaker John Collet described the roads of western North Carolina as "widened bridle-paths."⁵¹ Nineteenth century historian Eli W. Caruthers believed that during the 1790s mountain roads were "almost

⁵⁰ Inscoc, *Mountain Masters*, 17-19, 49-51. See also Wilma Dykeman, *The French Broad* (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1955), 137-151; Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, "The Antebellum Southern Herdsman: A Reinterpretation," *Journal of Southern History* 41 (May 1975), 160; Blethen and Wood, *From Ulster to Carolina*, and F.A. Sondley, *A History of Buncombe County*, 2 vols. (Asheville, NC: Advocate Print. Co., 1930), 2: 665; Jinsie Underwood, *This Is Madison County* (Mars Hill, NC: Underwood, 1974), 18-19; and Kevin Barksdale, "Whiskey Distillation in Antebellum Western North Carolina," *Tuckasegee Valley Historical Review: A Graduate Student Publication* 5 (April 1999), 8-9

⁵¹ John Collett, quoted in William P. Cummings, *North Carolina in Maps* (Raleigh, NC: Department of Archives and History, 1966), 19.

impassable half of the year.”⁵² Bishop Francis Asbury would have agreed. After leaving Asheville in 1800, he gave up a carriage for his more reliable horse. “This mode of conveyance by no means suits the roads of this wilderness,” Asbury wrote in his journal. “We are obliged to keep one behind the carriage with a strap to hold by and prevent accidents almost continually.”⁵³

Many farmers discovered that it was impossible to transport bulk grain over such poor transportation arteries. The crop would often spoil, having taken so long to carry to market. “Under such disadvantages,” Caruthers explained, “a load of grain of whatever kind w[oul]d be eat up before they c[oul]d get it to market.”⁵⁴ This problem continued to plague the region well into the nineteenth century. As late as 1849, traveler Charles Lanman revealed that “the roads have consumed all the corn that can be transported.”⁵⁵ Mountain farmers needed cash to pay debts or obtain goods they could not produce at home. The economic independence that many of them desired remained elusive.

Antebellum western North Carolina farmers found another way to market their corn and fruit. Many discovered that it was easier to distill some of their crops into alcohol before carrying them to market. A mule could carry about four bushels of corn on the long journey to market during the antebellum period. Yet when it was distilled into whiskey a mule could haul an equivalent of twenty-four bushels of corn.⁵⁶ Some mountain farmers also found it more profitable to distill excess yields of corn, apples, and peaches into alcohol and sell or barter it to neighbors or merchants. During the 1790s, these Carolina highlanders may well have produced as much alcohol as nearby residents in Blount County, Tennessee. Historian Donald Davis

⁵² Eli W. Caruthers, quoted in Crow, “The Whiskey Rebellion in North Carolina,” 5.

⁵³ Francis Asbury, *The Journal of the Rev. Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, from August 7, 1771 to December 7, 1815* 3 vols. (New York: N. Bangs and T. Mason, 1821), 3:1.

⁵⁴ Manuscript biography of Richard Hugg King by Eli W. Caruthers (1862), Richard Hugg King Papers, PC 23, State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina, quoted in Crow, “The Whiskey Rebellion in North Carolina,” 5.

⁵⁵ Charles Lanman, *Letters from the Alleghany Mountains* (New York: G.P. Putman, 1849), 195.

⁵⁶ Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 28.

discovered that the average farmer/distiller there produced fifty gallons a year, or “one fourth to one half of the total corn harvest.”⁵⁷

Account books from various stores in western North Carolina and neighboring states show that a bushel of corn and a gallon of whiskey sold for approximately the same amount throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The price of the two products seldom fell below forty cents or rose above fifty cents between the 1820s and the Civil War.⁵⁸ When the price of both commodities was comparable, farmers could make more money by distilling corn into alcohol.⁵⁹ In 1850, for instance, an Alexander County farmer could sell twenty bushels of corn for 10 dollars. Converted into whiskey, those bushels could sell for 25 dollars.⁶⁰ Store accounts also reveal how whiskey’s value in the mountain marketplace compared to that of other important consumer goods. In the 1830s, a Haywood County store retailed both a gallon of whiskey and gunpowder, an essential product, for the same amount.⁶¹

Many western North Carolinians testified to the financial advantages that whiskey and brandy distillation offered them. In 1810, William B. Lenoir informed his father, Gen. William Lenoir of Caldwell County, that his “money will soon be gone, and I must move my saw mill, buy a saw, buy stills & set up a distillery, before I can make any money.”⁶² Life on the frontier was hard, and one of the quickest ways to earn money was to invest in a still. Lenoir’s brother-in-law, Isaac T. Avery of Burke County also believed that liquid was corn’s most lucrative form.

⁵⁷ Davis, *Where There Are Mountains*, 140.

⁵⁸ Ledger, 1831-1861, John Finley Papers; Peden and Kelly Account Book, 1835-1837, Peden and Kelly Papers; Samuel P. Sherrill Account Book, 1845-1847; Thomas Miller Day Book, 1849-1850; Samuel F. Kirby Account Book, 1785-1804; T. P. Jackson Account Book, 1820-1826; James A. Sadler Account Book, 1848-1854; Hiram Burgess Account Book, 1853-1864, all in Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; and Strabane (N.C.) Account Book, 1821, Southern Historical Collection.

⁵⁹ Corn whiskey required at least 2 bushels of grain for each 5-gallon batch. See Davis, *Where There Are Mountains*, 140.

⁶⁰ Miller Daybook.

⁶¹ W. Clark Medford, *The Early History of Haywood County* (Waynesville, NC: Privately printed, 1961), 107-108.

⁶² Quoted in Margaret E. Harper, *Fort Defiance and the General* (Hickory, NC: Clay Printing Co., 1976), 84.

Table 1.1. Percentage of Population and Gallons of Whiskey Produced in the Mountain Region Compared to North Carolina as a Whole between 1810 and 1840

	1810			1840		
	NC Total	WNC Total	WNC %	NC Total	WNC Total	WNC %
Population	555,500	59,380	.11	753,419	104,570	.14
Gallons	1,386,691	238,400	.17	1,051,979	328,353	.31

Source: U.S. Census Office, Third Census, 1810, *Aggregate Amount of Each Description of Persons within the United States of America, and the Territories thereof ... 1810* (Washington, D.C., 1811), 75-76; U.S. Census Office, 1840, *A Statement of the Arts and Manufacturers of the United States ... 1810 ...* (Philadelphia, 1814), 133-134; U.S. Census Office, Sixth Census, 1840, *Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States ... Sixth Census ...* (Washington, D.C., 1841), 43, 186.

In 1824, Avery wrote that he had “made enough corn to do me, perhaps can make whisky enough to pay for my salt, sugar and coffee and perhaps pay my taxes, but money is as scarce as ever.”⁶³ While Avery demanded cash for his product, other farmers used their homemade alcohol as a barter item. Caldwell County residents, for instance, often delivered whiskey and brandy to James Harper, for which he exchanged items such as shoes and horse collars in his store.⁶⁴

Although incomplete because census enumerators only recorded stills with capacities large enough to classify as manufacturing plants, census data suggests that whiskey production increased in Appalachian North Carolina during the early nineteenth century. As table 1.1. illustrates, when compared to the rest of the state, the per capita percentage of alcohol manufactured in the mountain region grew at a faster rate between 1810 and 1840. In 1810, western North Carolina accounted for 11 percent of the state’s population and manufactured 17 percent of state’s whiskey. Thirty years later, the mountain region was producing 31 percent of

⁶³ Quoted in Edward William Phifer, Jr., *Burke: The History of a North Carolina County, 1777-1920, with a Glimpse Beyond* (Morganton, NC: Phifer, 1977), 208.

⁶⁴ Nancy Alexander, *Here Will I Dwell: The Story of Caldwell County* (Salisbury: Rowan Printing, 1956), 94-95.

Table 1.2. Per Capita Percentage of Population and Gallons of Whiskey Produced within Western North Carolina in 1840

County	Percentage of Population/Rank	Gallons Produced/Rank
Rutherford	.18/1	.04/5
Burke	.15/2	.25/2
Surry	.14/3	.39/1
Wilkes	.12/4	.18/3
Buncombe	.10/5	.03/6
Ashe	.07/6	.07/4
Yancey	.06/7	.02/7
Haywood	.05/8	.01/8
Henderson	.05/8	.004/10
Macon	.05/8	.003/11
Cherokee	.03/11	.01/8

Source: U.S. Census Office, Sixth Census, 1840, *Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States*, 43, 186.

the state's whiskey, while only accounting for 14 percent of the state's population. The lack of railroads may have accounted for this increase in alcohol production.

Within western North Carolina, however, some counties produced more whiskey than others (see table 1.2). The top four whiskey manufacturing counties in 1840 (Surry, Burke, Wilkes, and Ashe) together accounted for 48 percent of the mountain population and 89 percent of the alcohol distilled in the region. These counties were also located in the northeastern part of western North Carolina. Counties such as Buncombe, Henderson, and Haywood with a lower percentage of whiskey production were situated closer to the Buncombe Turnpike and other trade routes connecting the mountain region to livestock markets in Georgia and South Carolina. This suggests that farmers there opted to sell their corn to drovers, stand owners, and/or itinerant merchants rather than distill it into alcohol. Buncombe and Rutherford, for instance, together manufactured 7 percent of the region's alcohol, while accounting for 28 percent of western North Carolina's population. Since census enumerators only recorded whiskey production, it is impossible to gauge the amount of brandy manufactured in the region

during the antebellum period. Farmers in Henderson, Haywood, and other counties near the Buncombe Turnpike, growing an abundance of peaches and apples, may well have distilled brandy more often than whiskey.⁶⁵

Despite the existence of large distilleries, alcohol manufacturing remained an important cottage industry in western North Carolina before the Civil War. Wills and inventories disclose that small farmers often left their families land and stills when they died. These men knew that distilleries would allow their families to earn money, a scarce commodity on the frontier. In 1778, for instance, John Witherspoon from Wilkes County bequeathed both “still and mill” to his seven children. Nearly twenty years later, in 1795, Burke County farmer Thomas England, who fattened his livestock on corn mash, insisted that his wife inherit “my stock of Hogs with my still.”⁶⁶ Several of the region’s elite also owned stills, suggesting that the profession was not a function of class and that the community deemed it a legitimate business. Caldwell County’s foremost citizen, Gen. William Lenoir operated a still on his large plantation at the turn of the nineteenth century. Lenoir, along with his overseer George Taylor, distilled excess yields of “fruit trees” into brandy and sold it to neighbors and travelers. This still must have been profitable because Taylor demanded that he receive “a twelfth part of the brandy” they manufactured.⁶⁷

Pioneer and antebellum distillers found various ways to market their product. Like Bluford McGee from Wilkes County, they often sold homemade alcohol to their neighbors.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Lanman, *Letters from the Alleghany Mountains*, 153; and William Wyndam Malet, *An Errand in the South in the Summer of 1862* (London: R. Bentley, 1863), 250-251.

⁶⁶ John Witherspoon Will, November 1, 1778, Wilkes County Records of Wills, Will Book 1; and Will of Thomas England, 1795, Burke County Record of Wills, both in State Archives, North Carolina office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Harper, *Fort Defiance and the General*, 33-34.

⁶⁸ McGee, *The Country Youth*, 46, 58-60.

Tenant farmers sometimes used their distilled spirits to pay the rent.⁶⁹ Young men, especially those unable to own land or a still, capitalized on their knowledge of the alcohol manufacturing process, a specialized skill that they had most likely learned in childhood from relatives or neighbors. Some of them may well have responded to this newspaper ad from nearby eastern Tennessee in 1825:

Wanted immediately, a first rate distiller. A young man without family, who understands the art of distilling corn and rye mixed, and all rye. He must be a man of sober habits. To such a one constant employment and good wages will be given.⁷⁰

Other distillers were more ambitious. Entrepreneur Henry Reid made a small fortune operating a distillery in Burke County during the 1790s. Not satisfied, Reid expanded his liquor enterprise by purchasing a store, where he sold most of his whiskey to neighbors and travelers. This store became an important trade center in northeastern Burke (now Alexander County). Nearby farmers sold their corn to Reid, who used it to operate his distillery. The store was also a popular destination for small distillers hoping to sell their homemade whiskey.⁷¹

Mountain residents sometimes shipped their product to more distant markets. In 1813, distiller John Welch, along with other Haywood County farmers, sold over four thousand gallons of barreled whiskey to Philip Hoodenpile, a former resident who operated a tavern on the Mississippi frontier.⁷² Yearly during the 1830s, Buncombe County farmer and distiller Else Burnett collected good including homemade alcohol from his family and traveled by wagon to Augusta, Georgia. There, he traded the liquor to merchants in exchange for cash or gunpowder, calico, sewing thread, and other manufactured goods.⁷³ Whether using their homemade brew as

⁶⁹ Harper, *Fort Defiance and the General*, 85.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Dabney, *Mountain Spirits*, 73.

⁷¹ Henry Reid Book, 1800-1802, Benjamin Austin Papers, 1756-1803, Special Collections, Duke University.

⁷² See Manly Wade Wellman, *The Kingdom of Madison: A Southern Mountain Fastness and Its People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 34, 158.

⁷³ Fred Burnett, *This Was My Valley* (Ridgecrest, NC: Heritage Printers, 1960), 74.

a barter item or to make extra money, mountain farmers distilled alcohol because they knew that someone would buy it.

The Social Value of Distilled Spirits

In *The Alcoholic Republic*, W.J. Rorabaugh revealed that alcohol consumption in the United States increased dramatically between 1790 and 1840. In those years, he noted, the typical American “annually drank more distilled liquor than at any other time in our history.”⁷⁴ Americans were enjoying a “spectacular binge,” and many Carolina highlanders joined the party. Travelers commented on the drinking habits of mountain residents, and wondered why so many of them drank alcohol. Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury, who included western North Carolina in his annual tours throughout the Southeast during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, often complained that mountain residents had a fondness for alcohol, believing that life on the frontier made them more prone to drink and distill it. “This country improves in cultivation, wickedness, mills, and still; a *prophet of strong drink* would be acceptable to many of these people,” Asbury wrote from Wilkes County in 1795. Five years later, he traveled to Warm Springs in Madison County, where drinking was also a favorite pastime. “My company,” Asbury believed, “was not agreeable here – there were too many subjects of the two great potentates of this western world, whisky – brandy.”⁷⁵ Frederick Law Olmsted and other visitors also commented on the high consumption and availability of whiskey, which they believed most Carolina highlanders preferred over wine, rum, and brandy during the antebellum period.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ W.J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), xi.

⁷⁵ Grady Carroll, ed., *Francis Asbury in North Carolina, the North Carolina Portions of the Journal of Francis Asbury* (Nashville, TN: Parthenon Press, 1964), 134-135, 175-176.

⁷⁶ Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back Country in the Winter of 1853-54* (New York: Mason Bros., 1860): 273; and A.R. Newsome, ed., “John Brown’s Journal of Travel in Western North Carolina in 1795,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 11 (October 1934), 284-313.

Because it was cheap, homemade whiskey was popular in western North Carolina and other backcountry regions. Alcoholic beverages such as wine and rum were available to some mountain residents, especially those residing in or near towns. Yet because they were imported from Europe and the West Indies, these drinks were more expensive than whiskey. In the 1790s, for instance, wine and rum each cost six pounds per gallon at William Tucker's tavern in Caldwell County. In contrast, Tucker sold a gallon of whiskey for three pounds.⁷⁷ Mountain elites often bought imported spirits in bulk from local merchants or retailers in Charleston, South Carolina, and consumed them at dinner parties and ballroom dances. Robert Pearson from Burke County was one such man, a wealthy banker who kept bottles of champagne in his wine cellar. During the Civil War, Unionist women plundered Pearson's home, where they discovered the bottles of champagne and distributed them among themselves. One of these women, upon opening the first bottle, fled when she heard the pop of the cork, declaring that "it was pizen, put there to kill them for nobody had ever seed liquor pop that way."⁷⁸

As its price seldom rose above fifty cents a gallon, corn whiskey proved the cheapest and most popular alcoholic drink in western North Carolina.⁷⁹ It remained affordable for two reasons. Because merchants and tavern owners could always buy whiskey directly from nearby distillers, the demand for it seldom eclipsed its supply. According to historian Ester Kellner, improvements in the distilling process during the early nineteenth century also account for whiskey's low price. James C. Crow, a Scots-Irish chemist and distiller who moved to the southern backcountry in 1825, was the first person to manufacture alcohol by scientific methods.

⁷⁷ Alexander, *Here Will I Dwell*, 36.

⁷⁸ Quoted in John C. Inscoc and Gordon B. McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North Carolina during the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 251.

⁷⁹ Ledger, 1831-1861, Finley Papers; Pedan and Kelly Account Book; Sherrill Account Book; Miller Day Book; Kirby Account Book; Jackson Account Book; Sadler Account Book; Burgess Account Book; and Strabane (N.C.) Account Book.

Crow was known for “stressing almost clinical cleanliness and introducing the use of hydrometer, saccharometer, and thermometer for water, sugar, and temperature control.” If able to afford these instruments and understand how to use them, an antebellum distiller “could now distill 3½ gallons of whiskey from a single bushel of corn, whereas their fathers had obtained only 2 gallons.”⁸⁰ Along with whiskey, brandy became popular in Henderson and Wilkes counties, where farmers distilled it from an abundance of apples and peaches and kept its price affordable.⁸¹

The availability of cheap whiskey and brandy encouraged the heavy drinking that temperance societies and “outsiders” condemned in the late antebellum period. Mountain residents did not have to travel far to buy spirituous liquors. In more remote parts of the North Carolina highlands, communities often had a still house, where its inhabitants and travelers could buy or barter alcohol.⁸² Those who did not live near a distiller purchased alcohol from retail establishments. By the 1790s, taverns dotted the mountain countryside and kept alcohol in stock throughout the year. Tax lists reveal that at least one legal tavern operated in every mountain county by 1815.⁸³ The earliest taverns, according the historian Guion Johnson, were probably, at best, crude weather-boarded buildings or log huts. “The more prosperous ones,” Johnson explained, “consisted of several rooms, but most of them had only one large room with no interior division.”⁸⁴ After 1800, entrepreneurs accommodated drovers and tourists by establishing stands, or taverns, at close intervals along the Buncombe Turnpike and other transportation routes. These establishments were far superior to earlier ones, and they often

⁸⁰ Kellner, *Moonshine*, 64.

⁸¹ Lanman, *Letters from the Alleghany Mountains*, 153; and Malet, *An Errand to the South in the Summer of 1862*, 250-251.

⁸² Newsome, “John Brown’s Journal of Travel in Western North Carolina in 1795,” 296.

⁸³ “Comptroller’s Report, 1815. A Statement of the Revenue of North Carolina,” Box 4, Accounts (1731-1935), Office of State Treasurer, State Archives.

⁸⁴ Guion Griffis Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 96. See also Hayes, *The Land of Wilkes*, 26-27.

catered to the rich. Hotels in resort communities like Warm Springs in Madison County and Flat Rock in Henderson County also sold an assortment of fine wines as well as domestic whiskey and brandy. While small farmers did not drink at these establishments, owners were more than willing to purchase alcohol from them.⁸⁵

While Appalachian North Carolinians consumed alcohol because it was inexpensive and readily available, they also drank it because it was part of their culture. The drinking habits and mores of mountain society resembled those of other rural communities in the United States before the Civil War. Not needing the discipline that factory work demanded, farmers often made little distinction between work and leisure. They freely mixed the two, turning some elements of their work life into social events.⁸⁶ The barn raising, a rural folkway practiced in many parts of the South, was one way Carolina highlanders combined the two. Like log rollings and corn shuckings, barn raisings helped mountain residents maintain communal ties, while providing the farmer with much-appreciated labor. Easy access to whiskey enlivened these events.⁸⁷ Charles Lanman witnessed one such barn raising when he stopped at a farm in Buncombe County in 1848. He found his host building a barn, “and some twenty of his neighbors were assembled for the purpose of raising the framework of its position.” These men were having a fun time, laughing as they wiped sweat from their foreheads. Based on their behavior, Lanman figured that “an abundance of whiskey had already been imbibed” by most of

⁸⁵ Lanman, *Letters from the Allegheny Mountains*, 125. For a further discussion on resort hotels, see Sondley, *Asheville and Buncombe County*, 2: 722; Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 32-34; and Underwood, *This Is Madison County*, 17-18.

⁸⁶ Bill Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in Antebellum North Carolina* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 178; and Ian Tyrell, “Drink and Temperance in the Antebellum South: An Overview and Interpretation,” *Journal of Southern History* 48 (November 1982), 506. For more on preindustrial work habits, see E. P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past & Present* 38 (December 1967), 56-97; and Herbert G. Gutman, “Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919,” *American Historical Review* 78 (June 1973), 531-588.

⁸⁷ Frank L. Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949), 104, 112, 116.

his host's neighbors.⁸⁸ However, the use of alcohol during barn raisings and other co-operative undertakings sometimes did more harm than good. When neighbors helped Wilkes County resident Benjamin Cleveland harvest his crop in the 1790s, they became so intoxicated that they never completed the work.⁸⁹

Rorabaugh has discovered that mountain males' demand for whiskey and brandy increased as the communal binge grew more important during the early nineteenth century. This public drinking to the point of intoxication, common throughout antebellum America, prevailed when western Carolinians met at dances and other social events. In 1815, for instance, Francis Asbury journeyed to Barnard's Station in Madison County, where residents celebrated his arrival with a dance that night. To Asbury's disgust, however, the dance provided residents with the opportunity to drink alcohol and play the fiddle, an instrument associated with the Devil. Asbury quickly delivered a sermon to the drunken crowd against "such fiddling and drinking."⁹⁰

Militia musters also allowed mountain men to meet and participate in communal binge drinking. Musters involved military drills, athletic contests, fighting, and drinking. This last activity gave local distillers an opportunity to make extra money. Surry County distiller Hamp Hudson sold his whiskey to residents on militia day in 1829. To Hudson's dismay, however, militia members hesitated to buy it because of rumors that Hemp had distilled the liquor "from a mash-tub in which [his dog] Famus [had been] drowned." No one wanted to "drink one drap uv Hamp's nasty old Famus licker." Nonetheless, as the men stood in formation under the hot sun, their lips and tongues became parched, and they grew increasingly tempted to drink Hamp's whiskey. "Famus or no Famus," one of them finally declared, "I must take a little." The barrel of whiskey was soon dry. "Cap'en,' 'leftenant,' and 'sargint' forgot their hard day's work,"

⁸⁸ Lanman, *Letters from the Alleghany Mountains*, 115.

⁸⁹ J. Jay Anderson, *Wilkes County Sketches* (Wilkesboro, NC: Anderson, 1978), 12.

⁹⁰ Carroll, *Francis Asbury in North Carolina*, 135.

Surry County resident H.E. Taliaferro remembered in 1859. “The ’litia and others fell to discussing questions of great moment; but the whole affair ended in skinned noses, gouged eyes, and bruised heads.”⁹¹

As it did elsewhere in the South, communal binge drinking in western North Carolina occurred most often during election and court days. In 1848, traveler Kemp Plummer Battle witnessed a politician in Yancey County furnishing alcohol to men, hoping to persuade them to vote correctly. He described the situation as follows:

I saw at Burnsville a specimen of mountain canvassing for the General Assembly. The candidate, a man named Flemming, spoke from a goods-box in front of a grog-shop most animatedly and effectively for about an hour with a tin quart-pot in his right hand. Then he went into the shop inviting the crowd to follow him to partake of whiskey. He was elected.⁹²

Mountain inhabitants also assembled in county seats for court week, where they bought and sold goods, met friends, and drank liquor. In 1854, Asheville lawyer Augustus Merrimon complained about citizens’ heavy drinking during court week in the Yancey County town of Burnsville:

“There has been quite a crowd in attendance today and they have tried to see how badly they could behave themselves ... At different times I noticed groups about over the Court Yard and in the center stood a large gauky looking fellow with a fiddle and he would saw off some sill ditty[.] two or three drunken fools would dance to the same.”⁹³ Communal drinking was not solely about getting inebriated, however. Rorabaugh and historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown suggest that the custom had ideological overtones. The communal binge was a symbol of egalitarianism, and made its participants feel like equals. Regardless of their economic standing,

⁹¹ H.E. Taliaferro, *Fisher’s River (North Carolina) Scenes and Characters by “Skitt,” “Who was Raised Thar”* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1859), 20-27.

⁹² Kemp Plummer Battle, *Memories of an Old-Time Tar Heel* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1945), 91-92.

⁹³ A.R. Newsome, ed., “The A.S. Merrimon Journal, 1853-1854,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 8 (July 1931), 329.

men demonstrated their worth and loyalty to the community by consuming large amounts of alcohol. Mountain residents did not exempt politicians from this cultural practice. They, too, had to drink as a means of proving their manhood and egalitarianism.⁹⁴

Western North Carolinians drank alcohol for more practical reasons as well. Like other antebellum Americans, they argued that spirituous liquors were healthful and nutritious. The belief that alcohol was “good for what ails you” alarmed some mountain practitioners who trained in medical schools and rejected folk medicine. “Instead of being lectured with regard to improper diet,” an Asheville physician complained in 1852, “the patient is rejoiced to hear that brandy is an antidote for all his ills, and that by the daily use of this beverage he can still indulge in his favorite viands.”⁹⁵ Mountain residents often considered whiskey essential for protection against the exposure of outdoor work. In 1853, Merrimon wrote that rural farmers thought “that to drink [whiskey] in damp and cold weather will warm them and to drink in hot weather it will cool them.”⁹⁶ Other mountain residents pronounced distilled spirits a cure for colds, consumption, snakebites, and other ailments.⁹⁷ Randolph County Methodist preacher Brantley York remembered that in the mid nineteenth century North Carolina, mothers soothed colicky babies by feeding them a teaspoonful of diluted liquor.⁹⁸

Antebellum mountaineers also sometimes refused to drink milk for fear of contracting “milk sickness.” This disease, afflicting people who consumed dairy products from a cow that had fed on white snakeroot, was often fatal. Thomas Lenoir of Caldwell County, for instance, noted in 1857 that “people on the East Fork have become alarmed about milk sickness.” The

⁹⁴ Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic*, 151; and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 278-280, 329-330.

⁹⁵ *Asheville Messenger*, May 26, 1852.

⁹⁶ Newsome, “The A.S. Merrimon Journal,” 306.

⁹⁷ Wilbur G. Zeigler and Ben S. Grosscup, *The Heart of the Alleghanies, or Western North Carolina* (Raleigh: NC: Alfred Williams & co., 1883), 115-116.

⁹⁸ Brantley York *The Autobiography of Brantley York*, rev. ed., ed. Charles Mathis (Jonesville, NC: Amanuensis Two, 1977), 2.

adult residents may well have decided to drink a safer beverage, such as whiskey or brandy.

Mountaineers' fear of this disease continued well after the antebellum period. Physician Benjamin Earle Washburn remembered that when he arrived in Rutherford County in 1910, older residents refused to drink milk. "Fear of milk sickness may have been the cause," he reasoned, "for I was told that the disease had been much more prevalent a generation before."⁹⁹

Alcohol played an important role in their economic and social lives of antebellum highlanders like Bluford McGee. The region's rugged terrain and relatively poor roads made it easier and sometimes more profitable to distill some of their crops into whiskey and sell or barter it to neighbors and merchants. During the antebellum period, a stigma had not yet been attached to mountain residents who made alcohol. There were good reasons for this lack of stigmatization. Whiskey and brandy were available at barn raisings, militia musters, and social events throughout the early nineteenth century. Many people believed that these distilled spirits were healthful and nutritious and often used them as medicine. Mountaineers' demand for and acceptance of alcohol ensured that distillers could always find buyers. Antebellum whiskey makers were not hillbillies or criminals, as journalists and scholars labeled them after the Civil War. They were entrepreneurs responding to the demands of the marketplace. As such, antebellum alcohol makers gained the appreciation of mountain residents, who regarded drinking and distilling as an important element of their economy and culture. New economic and social forces, however, would soon conspire against the mountain distiller and his clientele.

⁹⁹ Thomas Lenoir to "My Dear Father," December 30, 1857, Thomas Lenoir Papers, Special Collections, Duke University; and Benjamin Earle Washburn, *A Country Doctor in the Southern Mountains* (1955; reprint, Spindale, NC: Spindale Press, 1973), 12.

CHAPTER 2

SELECT MEN OF SOBER AND INDUSTRIOUS HABITS: ALCOHOL REFORM AND SOCIAL CONFLICT DURING THE LATE ANTEBELLUM PERIOD

They drink nor cider, rum, nor beer
No brandy, gin, nor wine
But water sparkling pure and clear
And this is all a sign
The sign of the Sons of Temperance.¹

“No other institutions in our opinion can have a more salutary influence in checking vice, and giving a right direction to our various passions and appetites, than Temperance Societies.” So wrote physician Jason F.E. Hardy, explaining why he and other middle-class reformers had founded the Asheville Auxiliary Temperance Society in April 1831. One of the first of its kind in western North Carolina, this organization was initially a success. That April, forty mountain residents, mostly from Asheville, joined the society because they believed that alcohol was impeding the community’s moral and economic prosperity. Two months later, the number of members had increased to sixty-five. But support for the Asheville Auxiliary Temperance Society was far from universal, especially in more remote parts of the county. Many farmers argued that the society and its desire to eradicate “King Alcohol” – as temperance advocates often termed alcoholic beverages – were “a scheme to deprive the people of their liberty.” Several mountain churches joined the chorus of opposition, threatening to expel congregates who joined the organization. By 1832, the Asheville Auxiliary Temperance Society faced an

¹ Excerpt taken from “Sign of the Sons of Temperance,” transcribed by Ruth E. Jones from Alexander County on August 7, 1850. See Sue Campbell Watts Papers, SHC.

uncertain future, as “enem[ies]” reduced its membership “to a bare majority.” To the dismay of Hardy and other Asheville reformers, “King Alcohol” proved to be a formidable adversary.²

Since the 1980s, historians have debunked the notion that southerners were not receptive to alcohol reform during the antebellum period.³ Ian R. Tyrrell, John W. Quist, and other scholars have argued persuasively that the temperance movement in the South differed little from that elsewhere in the United States. Like their cohorts in the North, most southern reformers were middle-class professionals who tended to reside in large towns with 1000 or more inhabitants. Their members of the urban middle-class were numerous enough to influence local politics, and they embraced the temperance movement, believing that it would improve their communities both morally and economically. These towns, mostly situated in the lowland South, also tended to have a large African-American population, whose presence further encouraged whites to promote alcohol reform as an instrument of social control.⁴

Nonetheless, when examining the antebellum temperance movement, historians continue to characterize southern Appalachia as exceptional. Believing that the region remained isolated from the outside world, Tyrrell and other scholars have insisted that mountain residents retained cultural values hostile to a temperance ethic emerging in areas experiencing urban and industrial

² *North Carolina Spectator and Western Advertiser*, June 11, 1831; and J.F.E. Hardy, *Second Annual Address: Delivered before the Asheville Temperance Society, on the 4th of July, 1832: With the Executive Committee's First Annual Report* (Rutherfordton, NC: Roswell Elmer, Jr., Printer, 1832), 4, 9.

³ Until the 1980s, most historians argued that the temperance movement failed to develop in the South due to its close association in the North with antislavery efforts. See Joseph R. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964); Clement Eaton, *The Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964); and Clifford S. Griffin, *The Ferment of Reform, 1830-1860* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: H. Davison, Inc., 1967).

⁴ See John W. Quist, *Restless Visionaries: The Social Roots of Antebellum Reform in Alabama and Michigan* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); Douglas W. Carlson, “‘Drinks He to his Own Undoing’: Temperance Ideology in the Deep South,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 18 (Winter 1998), 659-691; Ellen Eslinger, “Antebellum Liquor Reform in Lexington, Virginia: The Story of a Small Southern Town,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 99 (April 1991), 163-186; Stanley K. Schultz, “Temperance Reform in the Antebellum South: Social Control and Urban Order,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 83 (Summer 1984), 322-339; Ian R. Tyrrell, “Drink and Temperance in the Antebellum South: An Overview and Interpretation,” *Journal of Southern History* 48 (November 1982), 485-510; and W.J. Rorabaugh, “The Sons of Temperance in Antebellum Jasper County,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 64 (Fall 1980): 263-279.

growth before the Civil War.⁵ Although questioning the extent of isolation in mountain society, historians of Appalachia have agreed with Tyrrell. In her groundbreaking work on the Hatfield-McCoy feud, for instance, Altina L. Waller noted that “[t]he temperance crusade that began in 1830s New England had never reached Appalachia, which simply continued a cultural tradition once dominant in all regions.”⁶

A closer examination of one section of Appalachia, however, suggests that such assumptions are misplaced. Despite its rural character, absence of large towns, and small slave population, western North Carolina was home to a number of temperance organizations such as the Asheville Auxiliary Temperance Society. Their existence further challenges the notion that southern Appalachia was a static and closed region before the Civil War.⁷ In fact, the forces shaping temperance reform elsewhere in the United States – the expansion of the market economy, the growth of urban centers, and the rise of a middle-class – also encouraged many Carolina highlanders to reject the drinking mores of early nineteenth century America. This

⁵ Tyrrell, “Drink and Temperance in the Antebellum South,” 505-507, 509.

⁶ Altina L. Waller, *Feud: Hatfields, McCoys, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 202.

⁷ Since the 1980s, historians have debunked the concept of Appalachian exceptionalism. These scholars have argued that improved transportation routes, population growth, and new manufacturing technologies allowed some mountain residents to increasingly participate in the larger market economy. A slaveholding elite and commercial middle-class, consisting of merchants, artisans, professionals, and entrepreneurs engaged in manufacturing, also emerged in the region before the Civil War, ensuring that mountain society would be class differentiated. In short, historians have shown that economic development in many parts of southern Appalachia resembled that of other American regions during the nineteenth century. See Richard A. Straw and H. Tyler Blethen, eds., *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Donald Edward Davis, *Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000); Ronald L. Lewis, “Beyond Isolation and Homogeneity: Diversity and the History of Appalachia,” in *Confronting Appalachian Stereotypes: Back Talk from an American Region*, edited by Dwight B. Billings, Gurney Norman, and Katherine Ledford (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 21-43; Wilma A. Dunaway, *The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Mary Beth Pudur, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina L. Waller, eds., *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Robert Tracy McKenzie, *One South or Many? Plantation Belt and Upcountry in Civil War Era Tennessee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Warren R. Hostra and Robert D. Mitchell, “Town and Country in Backcountry Virginia: Winchester and the Shenandoah Valley, 1730-1800,” *Journal of Southern History* 59 (November 1993), 619-646; John C. Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*; and Durwood Dunn, *Cades Cove: The Life and Death of a Southern Appalachia Community, 1818-1937* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988).

chapter chronicles the rise and fall of alcohol reform in antebellum western North Carolina. It explains why Hardy and other mountain residents embraced the temperance cause and evaluates the role that proposals for prohibition played in the decline of the movement during the 1850s.

This chapter also broadens our historical understanding of social discord in the Carolina highlands and other parts of the Old South. Historians have long been intrigued by the seeming lack of social conflict within white southern society during the antebellum period. Some scholars have pointed out that paternalism mediated disputes among the majority white population, while others have stressed the important role that “*Herrenvolk* democracy” played in uniting whites of all socio-economic groups.⁸ More recent explanations for this absence of social tensions focus on kinship ties, white males’ adherence to the patriarchal ideal, and notions of honor. Whatever the reasons, historians agree that most southern whites felt it necessary to maintain a united front in the face of growing northern abolition sentiment and potential slave insurrection.⁹

Perhaps nowhere were relations between white southerners more congenial than in southern Appalachia. Historians have insisted that despite the rise of farm tenancy and the emergence of a slaveholding elite, kinship ties, racism, and local institutions such as the church served to mute social conflict in antebellum Appalachia. More importantly, scholars have argued that slaveholders there put regional concerns before class interests. Unlike other parts of

⁸ Eugene D. Genovese, “Yeoman Farmers in a Slaveholders’ Democracy,” *Agricultural History* 49 (1975): 331-42; and George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

⁹ Robert C. Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood in a Southern Community: Orange County, North Carolina, 1849-1881* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987); Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum Southern Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1890s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). For other works on southern white society during the antebellum period, see Bruce Collins, *White Society in the Antebellum South* (New York: Longman House, 1985); J. William Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta’s Hinterlands* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1985); and Frank Lawrence Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949).

the South, mountain masters did not reside on vast plantations that shielded them from the area's white populace. With their varied commercial and professional ventures, they were dependent upon the business of their white neighbors. The mountain elite worked on behalf of the majority white population by promoting tourism, advocating internal improvements, and stimulating trade, while refusing to alter the attitudes or culture of rural farmers.¹⁰

Such scholarly analysis, however, has overlooked the role that middle-class southerners played in sparking conflict within white society during the antebellum period. Recently, Jonathan Daniel Wells has argued that an economically and politically influential middle-class formed in the Old South. These merchants, artisans, and professionals, all of whom tended to reside in towns, were not "slavish imitators of the planter class." Heavily influenced and shaped by ideas originating from the North, they sought to bring change to the region by advocating for cultural and economic modernization. Embracing northern ideas about capitalism, the family, public education, the work ethic, and progress, they often clashed with white laborers, yeomen, and planters. Nonetheless, Wells points out that by the late 1850s devotion to slavery had ultimately reunited "middling" southerners with other whites.¹¹

A middle-class also emerged in southern Appalachia during the antebellum period. As elsewhere in the South, middle-class mountain residents typically lived in commercial centers

¹⁰ Richard D. Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005); Martin Crawford, *Ashe County's Civil War: Community and Society in the Appalachian South* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001); Wilbur R. Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners: Enforcing Federal Liquor Law in the Mountain South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); John C. Inscoe, *Mountain Masters, Slavery, and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989); Waller, *Feud*; Fred A. Bailey, *Class and Tennessee's Confederate Generation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); and Ronald D. Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachia South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982).

¹¹ Jonathan Daniel Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class, 1800-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

and were merchants, professionals, and farmers eager to embrace the larger market economy.¹² Moreover, they sought to improve the region both morally and economically. In western North Carolina, these men and women rejected the prevailing drinking mores of antebellum society, arguing that alcohol impeded commercial prosperity. Beginning in the 1830s, they founded organizations such as the Asheville Auxiliary Temperance Society to reform their rural neighbors and demonized the sellers and makers of distilled spirits. As Hardy and other urban reformers quickly discovered, however, support for these societies was far from universal. Many rural residents remained skeptical, believing that they had the right to drink (and distill) alcohol. They labeled reformers as “fanatics.” Several churches feared that temperance societies threatened to destroy local autonomy, and the churches publicly announced that they would dismiss members who joined such groups.

The conflict over alcohol reform ultimately heightened social tensions in the Carolina highlands, weakening important local institutions such as the church and exacerbating urban-rural relations. The dispute also suggests that the potential fault line in antebellum white society was not between elite slaveholders and the yeomen but instead between the parochial “plain folk” and burgeoning urban middle-class. The anti-alcohol crusade was both a reflection and a

¹² Like E.P. Thompson, I will consider class as both a cultural construction and an objective component of the social order. As men and women of moderate economic means, middle-class professionals were not as wealthy as many large commercial farmers in the mountains or planters in the Black Belt. Some professionals did become members of the urban elite, having amassed large fortunes. But middle-class mountaineers “did consider themselves above the rural yeomen and urban laboring whites,” and, according to Jonathan Wells, “it appears other southerners recognized the higher status that a career as a doctor, grocer, or teacher might provide.” Moreover, middle-class mountain residents, like those elsewhere in the South, became a “self-conscious class” by the late antebellum period. As Wells explains, “Middle-class southerners rallied around ideas about culture that they learned from their northern correspondents and restyled them to incorporate slavery. From ideas about gender and family, to notions about the virtues of industrialization, to discomfiture with the practice of dueling, the formation of the southern middle class depended to a significant extent on cultural values that it adopted from its contacts with the North and, indeed, the rest of the world. Thus, the linguistic and ideological construction of the southern middle-class was just as important to class formation as its objective middling position in the southern social structure.” It is also important to note that southerners of moderate economic means called themselves “middle-class” during the antebellum period, so it is appropriate to use that term. See Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class*; and E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963).

function of an increased class differentiated society. Temperance became a badge of respectability: one that helped to delineate differences between the new village middle-class and rural mountain whites. Alcohol reform sparked a cultural divide that would widen following the Civil War. Seen in this way, the antebellum temperance movement was not marginal, as historians have argued. It was a powerful force shaping social relations in Appalachian North Carolina and other communities across the Old South.

Two Worlds in Western North Carolina

“This town ... is very thin and they live but very indifferently,” land speculator John Brown commented on Asheville and its residents in 1795.¹³ Brown was not impressed, and for good reason. The “thin” settlement consisted of only a store, a hatter’s shop, a small inn, and a gristmill.¹⁴ Asheville, however, soon emerged as the center of political, economic, and social life in western North Carolina. Situated in the French Broad Valley and along the Buncombe Turnpike after 1828, it quickly became a crossroads for most travel and trade west of the Blue Ridge. It also served as a resort community, catering to wealthy South Carolinians and Georgians who journeyed there in the summer to enjoy the cool climate and scenic beauty. By the late antebellum period, Asheville was no longer a “thin” settlement, but, according to a Macon County girl in 1847, “a place unsurpassed in the known world for the intelligence, refinement, correct taste, generosity and hospitality of its inhabitants.”¹⁵ Along with three hotels

¹³ A.R. Newsome, ed., “John Brown’s Journal of Travel in 1795,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 11 (October 1934), 304.

¹⁴ Ora Blackmun, *Western North Carolina: Its Mountains and Its People to 1880* (Boone NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1977), 163.

¹⁵ Laura Siler to “Leon,” September 29, 1847, Lyle and Siler Family Papers, SHC, quoted in Laurel Horton, “Nineteenth Century Quilts in Macon County, North Carolina,” in *The Many Faces of Appalachia: Proceedings of the 7th Annual Appalachian Studies Conference*, edited by Sam Gray (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1985), 15.

and over twenty stores, the village now supported three churches, several schools, a female college, a jail, and a courthouse.¹⁶ John Brown would have been amazed.

Asheville was not the only burgeoning community in western North Carolina during the late antebellum period. In the foothills east of the Blue Ridge, Morganton, Rutherfordton, and Wilkesboro, among other villages and hamlets, developed a thriving commerce, serving as gateways into and out of the highlands.¹⁷ West of the Blue Ridge in the French Broad Valley, summer tourism played a major role in the development of Hendersonville, Flat Rock, and Warm Springs, whose residents supported lavish hotels and other businesses to accommodate their wealthy guests from South Carolina, Georgia, and other parts of the United States. North and west of the French Broad Valley, county seats like Boone, Murphy, and Franklin, although less developed than those to the east, emerged as important trading centers, linking nearby farmers to the larger market economy.¹⁸ In fact, by the 1850s, ten mountain communities, all of which were county seats, had a population of 150 or more inhabitants (See table 2.1). It was from these villages, mostly situated in the French Broad Valley and east of the Blue Ridge, that the antebellum temperance movement would garner its most support.

Regardless of their size or primary function, these communities attracted enterprising men from within and outside the region, facilitating the growth of an urban elite and a professional middle-class. Sons from well-to-do mountain landholding families migrated to

¹⁶ Inscoc, *Mountain Masters*, 31.

¹⁷ Like Robert D. Mitchell, I define hamlets as having 20 to 150 residents and villages as housing 151 to 500 inhabitants. Although villages were numerically small, they functioned much like larger towns, serving as trade and communication centers for residents in the southern backcountry. In a rural context, these villages can be labeled as urban. See Robert D. Mitchell, "The Settlement Fabric of the Shenandoah Valley, 1790-1860: Pattern, Process, and Structure," in *After the Backcountry: Rural Life in the Great Valley of Virginia, 1800-1900*, edited by Kenneth E. Koons and Warren R. Hofstra (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 34-47.

¹⁸ Inscoc, "Diversity in Antebellum Mountain Life: The Towns of Western North Carolina," in *The Many Faces of Appalachia*, 153-166; Gordon B. McKinney, "Preindustrial Jackson County and Economic Development," *Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association* 2 (1990), 1-10; Blackmun, *Western North Carolina*, 284-305; and John Preston Arthur, *Western North Carolina: A History* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1914), 143-214, 491-499.

Table 2.1. Mountain Communities with a Population of Over 100 by 1855

Community	Population
Rockford (Surry County)	639
Morganton (Burke County)	558
Rutherfordton (Rutherford County)	484
Asheville (Buncombe County)	420
Hendersonville (Henderson County)	250
Lenoir (Catawba County)	250
Newton (Catawba County)	175
Waynesville (Haywood County)	170
Marion (McDowell County)	150
Wilkesboro (Wilkes County)	150

Source: Population statistics for Morganton, Rutherfordton, Asheville, Hendersonville, Lenoir, Newton, Waynesville, Marion, and Wilkesboro were taken from J. Calvin Smith, *Harper's Statistical Gazetteer of the World* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855). Population statistics for Rockford were derived from *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853), 308.

these communities, where, already possessing capital and an influential family name, many of them emerged as leading businessmen and political figures. Often serving as county seats, mountain villages also attracted lawyers, judges, and other officeholders. The arrival of these men and their families created a need for teachers, ministers, doctors, and other professionals. If not already there, merchants, innkeepers, and artisans, realizing the economic opportunities that commercial centers offered them, soon followed. Some of these professionals, because they had enough capital to purchase slaves, would become the region's largest slaveholders, forcing their human chattel to work in their hotels and stores.¹⁹

While villages helped to further link their residents and nearby farmers to the larger market economy, a growing number of other Carolina highlanders found themselves more (although not completely) isolated from the outside world during the late antebellum period. The region's most fertile and accessible lands, located in the larger valleys, were no longer available to settlers by the 1830s. Migrants thereafter had to move farther up the hillsides into hollows and

¹⁹ Inscoc, "Diversity in Antebellum Mountain Life," 157.

coves, remote areas that isolated its residents from the world beyond. As trade routes changed and migration dwindled, the Toe River Valley and other regions in western North Carolina that had been fairly accessible and well traveled during the late 1790s and early 1800s also became more isolated, thereby cutting more highland residents off from major trade and communication linkages.²⁰

This influx of settlers into marginal regions, coinciding with the rise of urban centers, created a sense of difference within the population of western North Carolina by the late antebellum period.²¹ Village residents and commercial farmers living in more open valleys increasingly defined themselves in opposition to their rural (and often poorer) counterparts.²² When campaigning for political office, urban middle-class highlanders realized that they had to dress and act differently around rural neighbors to gain their support. As James Graham of Rutherford County advised his brother, William, in 1840, “If a Candidate be dressed Farmlike he is well received and kindly remembered by the inmates of the Log Cabin.”²³ Others began to identify rural western North Carolina as a backward place where inhabitants failed to meet the standards of middle-class society. While traveling through Cherokee, Jackson, Haywood,

²⁰ Insoe, *Mountain Masters*, 53; Edward W. Phifer, “Slavery in Microcosm: Burke County, North Carolina,” *Journal of Southern History* 28 (May 1962), 140; Jason Basil Deyton, “Toe River Valley to 1865,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 24 (October 1947), 446; and Gene Wilhelm, Jr., “Folk Settlements in the Blue Ridge Mountains,” *Appalachian Journal* 5 (Winter 1978), 192-222.

²¹ Recently, historians Beck Van Hall and David C. Hsiung have discovered that cultural differences or “two worlds” emerged within Appalachian Virginia and Tennessee during the antebellum period, “one with towns and diversification, the other with farms and isolated farmers and stockmen, and the two often responded quite differently to political issues.” Although unveiling the political and economic issues that divided urbanizing and rural mountain residents, Hall and Hsiung overlook social issues, such as temperance reform, that sparked conflict between these two groups. See Beck Van Hall, “The Politics of Appalachian Virginia, 1790-1830,” in *Appalachian Frontiers: Settlement, Society, and Development in the Preindustrial Era*, edited by Robert D. Mitchell (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 166-186; and David C. Hsiung, *Two Worlds in the Tennessee Mountains* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997).

²² For a discussion on how “outsiders” used southern Appalachia to help forge a middle-class identity during the antebellum period, see Katherine E. Ledford, “‘The primitive circle:’ Inscribing Class in Southern Appalachian Travel Writing, 1816-1846,” *Appalachian Journal* 29 (Fall 2001 – Winter 2002), 68-89.

²³ James Graham to William A. Graham, May 20, 1840, in Joseph G. de Roulhac and Max R. Williams, eds., *The Papers of William Alexander Graham*, 5 vols. (Raleigh: NCDH, 1957-1973), 2: 91-92.

Henderson, and Yancey counties during the early 1850s, for instance, Asheville lawyer Augustus Merrimon sometimes chastised rural farmers, labeling them as “dirty, impolite, and ungenteel.”²⁴ Fellow Asheville resident Mary Gash agreed. In 1853, she and several visiting relatives attended a Christmas Party in rural Buncombe County. Writing to her aunt after the engagement, the young woman complained: “... to tell you the plain truth there was only a few young ladies there that I thought proper to introduce them to, and I managed that admirably, as it was rather a mixed multitude, mountain *boomers* and backwoods folks in abundance. It reminded one of the ‘poor man’s dinner’ and it was given for the purpose [of] encouraging that class.”²⁵

Gash and other urban middle-class highlanders wanted to be refined, cultivated, and fashionable. Having greater access to railroads and other communication linkages, these men and women frequently interacted with “outsiders” and were more attuned to cultural trends. They subscribed to and read national periodicals such as *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, *Harper’s Magazine*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*. Influenced by these publications, mountain urban dwellers formed debating societies, where they discussed such questions as “Is dueling commendable in any case?” and “Whether it be not unjust to exclude ministers of the Gospel from legislative bodies under our form of government?”²⁶ As one enthusiastic Wilkesboro woman wrote in 1843, “The Young gentlemen of the borough formed a debating society last week which I am in hopes will afford us quite a literary treat this winter.”²⁷ These societies not only served as popular forms of entertainment, but also allowed village residents to meet and

²⁴ Newsome, “The A.S. Merrimon Journal,” 313.

²⁵ Mary Gash to “aunt,” February 15, 1853, Gash Family Papers, quoted in Guion Griffis Johnson *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 63.

²⁶ *Rutherfordton Intelligencer*, March 17, 1842, April 26, 1843; Newspaper accounts for 1851, Cameron Family Papers, SHC; and Wilkes Debating Society Minutes, Thurmond Chatham Papers, NCDAH, both quoted in Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class*, 53-54, 95.

²⁷ Sarah Ann Gordon to Caroline L. Gordon, December 17, 1843, Gordon-Hackett Family Papers, SHC, quoted in Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class*, 105.

forge a common identity, one that stressed the middle-class virtues of industry, self-restraint, and temperance.

More so than their rural neighbors, mountain urban professionals also embraced education reform and economic development. Wanting to enhance their children's ability to succeed in the "modern" world, they funded the construction of primary and secondary schools in Buncombe, Burke, and other mountain counties. By the 1840s, village residents, mostly from the middle-class, enrolled in local seminaries and colleges such as the "Wilkesboro Male Academy" and "Taylorsville Female Academy."²⁸ These students, along with their parents, also hoped to improve their communities both economically and aesthetically. As one Asheville resident explained in the 1850s, village dwellers, "in the spirit of improvement, a love of the beautiful, and a taste for the refined," desired to "make gardens of waste places, and turn barren hillsides into blooming undulations."²⁹ Even those living in smaller, less developed hamlets promoted economic growth and remained optimistic about the future. "We are making roads, building bridges, rearing dwelling houses and churches at a rate that would astonish you," Mollie Carrie from Macon County's Oak Hill community boasted a friend in Asheville in 1855.³⁰ Priding themselves as being civilized and cultivated, Carrie and others did not want "outsiders" to think of the region as a backward place. While increasing urban-rural tensions, mountain professionals' desire for respectability, moral improvement, and economic progress encouraged them to reform their rural counterparts. Influenced by the so-called American Benevolence campaign – a middle-class evangelical movement that relied upon extra-local bodies to improve

²⁸ *Carolina Watchman*, July 13, 1848, January 4, 1849, April 24, 1851, December 10, 1852; Mary Gash to "cousin Ada," March 1, 1852, Mary Gash Papers, NCDAH; and *Asheville News*, February 23, 1854.

²⁹ H.E. Colton, *Guidebook to the Scenery of Western North Carolina* (Asheville: Western Advocate Office, 1860), 14-15, quoted in Inscoc, *Mountain Masters*, 33.

³⁰ Mollie Carrie to Leander Gash, August 3, 1855, Gash Family Papers, NCDAH.

society – many of the highland townspeople participated in the antebellum anti-alcohol crusade because they hoped to uplift the “backwoods” mountaineer from poverty and ignorance.

The Church Speaks

In June 1802, Rev. James Jenkins wrote a letter to Bishop Francis Asbury, describing the first camp revival held in Rutherford County. “Thousands were present,” Jenkins rejoiced, “many poor sinners felt the power of God and were raised up to testify that He had forgiven their sins.”³¹ This news must have pleased Asbury, who, on his annual missionary tours to western North Carolina in the 1790s, had endured “filth, fleas, rattlesnakes, hills, mountains, rocks, and rivers.” Jenkins’s letter reassured Asbury that the work of circuit riders, whose souls “felt for these neglected people,” was paying off. To Asbury’s delight, the “encamping places” of the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians now made the mountain region “look like the Holy Land.”³² The so-called Great Awakening, which had swept through the eastern seaboard during the mid-eighteenth century, had arrived in the Carolina highlands and other parts of the southern backcountry.³³

Baptist, Methodist, and – to a lesser extent – Presbyterian churches were the chief beneficiaries of this religious movement.³⁴ Adapting to the rural landscape, these denominations

³¹ Clarence W. Griffin, *History of Old Tryon and Rutherford Counties, North Carolina, 1730-1936* (Asheville, NC: Miller Printing Company, 1937), 591; and Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina*, 384.

³² Blackmun, *Western North Carolina*, 179, 184, 185.

³³ For a discussion on the Great Awakening in the South and United States, see John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805: The Origins of the Southern Evangelical Mind* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972); Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); and Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

³⁴ “The tightly organized structure of the Presbyterian Church did not work well on the frontier. As settlers moved further away, they advanced beyond the organizational capabilities of the church.” As a result, Presbyterianism was “greatly reduced after about 1810 by the rapid growth of Baptist and Methodist churches in the mountains, and there is no doubt that the absence of qualified Presbyterian clergy caused many old Scotch-Irish families to join those denominations rather than to abandon religious life altogether.” See H. Tyler Blethen and Curtis W. Wood, *From Ulster to Carolina: The Migration of the Scotch-Irish to Southwestern North Carolina* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1998), 47-48, 55-58.

established circuits, whereby a small number of clergy could serve wider geographic areas.³⁵

They also organized camp meetings or revivals. These meetings, usually lasting for several days, helped circuit riders spread religion in regions where churches were widely scattered. “By calling persons away from worldly matters for several days of uninterrupted religious exercises,” concludes Anne Loveland, camp meetings provided an opportunity “both for the conversion of sinners and the spiritual growth of professors.”³⁶ According to historian Loyal Jones, the revivals “won many to the hope that all may achieve salvation and, beyond that, may improve human nature through sanctification.”³⁷ Moreover, these meetings allowed settlers to maintain and strengthen community bonds. In between the daily services, singing sessions, and prayer meetings, revivalists met with neighbors and kinsfolk, gossiped, and debated politics.³⁸

Hundreds of churches, the products of this evangelical movement, dotted the mountain countryside by late antebellum period, providing moral guidance to their members and acting as centers of neighborhood activities. It was from these churches that opposition to alcohol would first emerge in western North Carolina during the antebellum period.³⁹

“The present age,” Gabriel Phillips wrote in 1827, “might emphatically be styled the drunken age, so much does inebriety prevail.”⁴⁰ Like other members of the Broad River Baptist Association in Rutherford and Cleveland counties, Phillips was concerned about the prevalence of intemperance, especially among church members. But this was not a new phenomenon.

³⁵ John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 99.

³⁶ Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980): 72.

³⁷ Loyal Jones, “Mountain Religion: An Overview,” in *Christianity in Appalachia: Profiles in Regional Pluralism*, edited by Bill J. Leonard (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 92.

³⁸ Blackmun, *Western North Carolina*, 183-184.

³⁹ For further discussions on evangelicalism in southern Appalachia and elsewhere in the antebellum South, see Beth Barton Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up: Progress and the Pulpit in Nineteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Deborah Vansau McCauley, *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

⁴⁰ George Washington Paschal, *History of the North Carolina Baptists* (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Baptist Convention, 1955), 492.

Meeting for the first time at Green's Creek in Rutherford County in 1801, members of the Broad River Baptist Association had exhorted their brethren to "keep their bodies in subjection, watch against unlawful desires, and oppose within themselves, all unlawful appetites and refrain from shameful and outbreaking practices."⁴¹ Now, nearly twenty-six years later, the "demon of intemperance" continued to hold "high carnival throughout the entire bounds of the body." Phillips could do nothing but issue another stern warning. "Let us, dear brethren," he pleaded, "unite in earnest supplication to the great Creator, that his creatures may cease to defile the image of their Maker by brutal sensuality, as in that image they were created; and verily we unto them that in brutalizing the creature they heinously offend the Creator."⁴²

Phillips and other members of the Broad River Baptist Association were not alone in their fight against the "demon of intemperance" during the early antebellum period. As elsewhere in the South, Methodists and Presbyterians in western North Carolina also believed that drunkenness was a sin. These denominations agreed that excessive drinking undermined republican institutions, ruined families, and subverted the Church. They were particularly alarmed about the practice of "treating," whereby politicians would furnish alcohol to men during elections, hoping to persuade them to vote the right way. In their view, "treating" encouraged public intoxication and undermined the "rights of freemen" by "reducing politics to bribery."⁴³ As early as 1789, members of the Yadkin Baptist Association, many of whom resided in Wilkes County, protested the practice of "treating" because it created "disorder."⁴⁴ Nearly three decades later, in 1827, the Broad River Baptist Association implemented a more

⁴¹ John R. Logan, *Sketches, Historical and Biographical, of the Broad River and King's Mountain Baptist Associations: From 1800 to 1882* (Shelby, NC: Babington, Roberts, 1882), 9.

⁴² Paschal, *History of the North Carolina Baptists*, 492.

⁴³ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*, 135.

⁴⁴ Paschal, *History of the North Carolina Baptists*, 243.

radical policy by adopting a resolution “to withhold their support from any candidate for office who may be found in the habit of treating with spirituous liquors to obtain votes.”⁴⁵

Mountain evangelicals were also concerned about the negative impact that drunkenness had on the moral fabric of society. Many of them shared Rutherford County Rev. Henry Kerr’s view that alcohol was “destructive of the best interest of society at large.” Drunkenness, Kerr and others believed, “destroy[ed] the peace and happiness” of the family, making “cruel fathers” and wives “widows,” while also instigating “crime” and “deprivation.”⁴⁶ Even more disturbing, evangelicals contended that excessive drinking impeded the progress of religion. They feared that the heavy use of ardent spirits had led professing Christians away from God. The region’s earliest evangelicals would have agreed with members of the Tuckaseegee Baptist Association in Haywood, Jackson, and Macon counties, who, in 1840, insisted that drunkenness encouraged “men” to reject the gospel. Without the gospel, which was “design[ed] to lead us from evil to holiness [and] from the love of sensual gratification to a desire for spiritual enjoyment,” people would live “contrary to the spirit of Christ” and leave the Church.⁴⁷

Before the 1830s, most churches in western North Carolina had relied on moral suasion to combat public drunkenness and alcoholism. The minister would stand in front of the congregation, wave his fist in the air, and warn of the “seducing and dangerous effects of this popular demon.”⁴⁸ Many church-going people remained unconvinced, however. Church minutes reveal that “drinking to excess” was the most common sin committed by male members. In almost all cases, the accused had become inebriated in public, explaining why churches often charged men, not women, for being intoxicated. Mountain women drank alcohol, but,

⁴⁵ Logan, *Sketches, Historical and Biographical, of the Broad River and King’s Mountain Baptist Associations*, 44.

⁴⁶ *North Carolina Spectator and Western Advertiser*, February 11, 1832.

⁴⁷ E.H. Stillwell, ed., *Minutes of the Tuckaseegee Baptist Association, 1829-1957* (Nashville, TN: Historical Commission, Southern Baptist Convention, 1962), 6-8.

⁴⁸ Logan, *Sketches, Historical and Biographical, of the Broad River and King’s Mountain Baptist Associations*, 9.

conforming to the social precepts of the day, did so in the privacy of their own home, where members were less likely to see them drunk.⁴⁹ Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches responded by punishing accused drunkards. As early as 1798, the Three Fork Baptist Church in (what is today) Watauga County expelled a member for “drinking liquor to excess.”⁵⁰ Mountain congregations, especially those in more remote regions, where the local church had more power over the community than civil officials, continued to discipline “drunkards” well into the nineteenth century.⁵¹ In 1844, the Senter Primitive Baptist Church in Ashe County resolved unanimously to exclude members who repeatedly engaged in heavy drinking.⁵² Six years later, the Mount Zion Methodist Church expelled a Macon County resident for “getting drunk.”⁵³ More often than not, however, if the offender admitted his guilt and professed repentance, his church forgave him.⁵⁴

Although condemning drunkenness as a sin, pioneer churches did not promote total abstinence from alcohol, largely because it played an important role in the economic and social lives of western North Carolinians. Preachers approved of moderate drinking and sometimes consumed alcohol. After all, the Bible had not explicitly prohibited them and others from drinking it in small quantities. Else Barnett would have agreed. Before preaching to his congregation at North Fork Baptist Church in Buncombe County during the 1820s, he drank

⁴⁹ Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic*, 13.

⁵⁰ *Minutes and Membership Roll of the Three Forks Baptist Church* (Boone, NC; 1801-1974), February 1, 1798 (Raleigh: North Carolina State Archives, 1980).

⁵¹ Dunn, *Cades Cove*, 111.

⁵² J. C. Weaver, ed., *Records of the Senter Primitive Baptist Church, Nathan's Creek, Ashe County, North Carolina* (Arlington, VA: J.C. Weaver, 1989), 17.

⁵³ Mount Zion Methodist Church minutes, September 27, 1850, Box 1, Folder 13, Siler Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. For more examples of churches that excluded members for getting intoxicated, see *History of Cove Creek Baptist Church, 1799-1974* (Sugar Grove, NC: the Church, 1974), 6; *Minutes and Membership Roll of the Three Forks Baptist Church*, September 1, 1800; and Paschal, *History of the North Carolina Baptists*, 234-235.

⁵⁴ See Globe Church (Caldwell County, NC) Record Book, 1797-1911, 22, 26, 27, 65, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina; and W. Earl Greene, *Meat Camp Baptist Church, 1851-1981: A History* (Boone, NC: Minor's Publishing Co., 1983), 103.

“about three fingers of properly distilled apple brandy.”⁵⁵ Nor did most mountain preachers attack the makers of alcohol, who contributed generously to their churches from the profits of distilleries.⁵⁶ As demonstrated in the previous chapter, there was not yet a stigma attached to residents who distilled alcohol. In fact, Baptist preachers, most of whom were not paid a regular salary, often made extra money by operating stills.⁵⁷ But such tolerant attitudes towards distilling and drinking would change during the early 1830s.

The Origins of Temperance Reform

One of the first temperance societies in western North Carolina was formed at a meeting called by Rev. Henry Kerr at the Brittain Presbyterian Church in Rutherford County on July 4, 1831. Kerr had been preaching at Brittain for thirteen years, during which he had become a leading proponent of benevolent reform. In the late 1820s, he had organized Sunday school, Bible, and home mission societies throughout Rutherford County. In 1831, he turned his attention to “King Alcohol.”⁵⁸ Unlike those before him, Kerr disapproved of moderate drinking because he believed that it led to drunkenness. “The moderate use of [alcohol],” he charged, “by professors of religion and moral persons, encourages and emboldens the intemperate, and leads the unwary to the verge of danger and death.” Wanting to prevent such “evils,” Kerr organized the Little Brittain Temperance Society, an auxiliary to the North Carolina Temperance Society, founded in Raleigh just a few months earlier.⁵⁹

Influenced by the burgeoning anti-alcohol movement in the North, Presbyterians like Kerr played an important role in the founding of temperance societies in the Carolina highlands

⁵⁵ Fred Barnett, *This Was My Valley*, (Ridgecrest, NC: Heritage Printers, 1960), 16.

⁵⁶ Wellman, *The Kingdom of Madison*, 159.

⁵⁷ Stephen Morgan was one such man, a Baptist minister from Buncombe County who manufactured his own brandy. See Theodore F. Davidson, *Reminiscences and Traditions of Western North Carolina* (Asheville, NC: Service Printing, 1928), 19.

⁵⁸ Griffin, *History of Old Tryon and Rutherford Counties*, 177-180, 586.

⁵⁹ *North Carolina Spectator and Western Advertiser*, July 23, 1831.

and other parts of the state. Before Missionary Baptists and Methodists officially followed suit in 1833, the Presbyterian Church, believing that moderate drinking led to drunkenness, had urged its members not to consume, sell, or distill alcohol. In 1815, the Presbyterian Synod of North Carolina met in Fayetteville, where it encouraged local congregations to form “Moral Associations for the suppression of Vice and Immorality.” That same year, James Hall, who had founded several Presbyterian churches in western North Carolina during the 1790s, called for a state-wide meeting to create a “moral association” and “to promote the formation of auxiliary societies.”⁶⁰ Such a group became a reality in 1831, when the Presbyterians helped to organize the North Carolina Temperance Society. The Temperance Society hired agents to travel across the state and establish local auxiliaries. More likely than not, one of these agents had contacted Kerr, who, already an opponent of “King Alcohol,” agreed to form the Little Britain Temperance Society.

One of the first of its kind in western North Carolina, this organization quickly boasted a membership of eighty-seven. It garnered most of its support from middle-class village professionals, merchants, and artisans. Officers in the Little Britain Temperance Society, for instance, were all prominent men, most of whom resided in or near the county seat of Rutherfordton. Like those in Asheville and other developing communities, these reformers embraced the antebellum temperance movement because they believed that alcohol not only corrupted the morals of highlanders, but also made them unproductive.⁶¹ The society’s president was former county commissioner John Carson, also president of the local Bible Society and vice president of the Rutherford Sunday School Union. Joshua Forman, who served as vice president of the temperance society, moved to Rutherfordton in 1826 from New York, where he had

⁶⁰ Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina*, 454-455.

⁶¹ As Henry Kerr, the society’s secretary, pointed out in 1832, “a general disuse of ardent spirits ... would be an essential improvement in farming.” See *North Carolina Spectator and Western Advertiser*, February 11, 1832.

helped found the town of Syracuse. The society's secretary was Henry Kerr, minister of the Little Brittain Presbyterian Church, while the executive committee consisted of a postmaster, a merchant, a former commissioner for the village of Irvinsville, and a future sheriff.⁶²

White middle-class residents were not the only Carolina highlanders who embraced temperance reform during the antebellum period. Many Cherokee Native Americans also supported the anti-alcohol movement. In the early 1830s, Chief Yonaguska formed a temperance society in Quallatown, believing that alcoholism was not only destroying the tribe, but also provided whites with an excuse to confiscate Cherokee lands. Many mountain whites testified that the Cherokees responded favorably to Yonaguska's crusade against alcohol.⁶³ In 1836, Macon and Haywood residents wrote that sobriety among the Cherokees had surpassed that of whites in the region.⁶⁴ Two years later, William Holland Thomas, a white merchant and adopted son of Yonaguska, remembered that every Native American in Quallatown had signed the temperance pledge.⁶⁵ By 1845, he insisted that only eight Cherokees in that community drank alcohol.⁶⁶ Although Thomas, hoping to portray the Cherokees as stable and worthy citizens, exaggerated the extent of sobriety in Native American society, historians John R. Finger, Stanly E. Godbold, and Mattie R. Russell agree that intemperance among the Cherokee subsided during the 1830s and 1840s. This helps to explain why many urban reformers, unlike

⁶² These men were Elijah Patton, William H. Walton, William Irvine, Pinckney Reid, Silas R. Melton, James Morrison, Samuel Andrews, Jason Carson, and Jesse Groves. See *North Carolina Spectator and Western Advertiser*, July 23, 1831. A description of these men and their professions can be found in Griffin, *History of Old Tryon and Rutherford Counties*.

⁶³ Lanman, *Letters from the Alleghany Mountains*, 106-108; John R. Finger, *The Eastern Band of Cherokees, 1819-1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 65-66; and Stanly E. Godbold, Jr., and Mattie U. Russell, *Confederate Colonel and Cherokee Chief: The Life of William Holland Thomas* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 19-20.

⁶⁴ Macon and Haywood County residents to William Thomas, January 31, 1836, Roll 2, (microfilm) William Holland Thomas Papers, Special Collections, Duke University.

⁶⁵ William H. Thomas to Hon. James Graham, October 18, 1838, quoted in John H. Wheeler, *Historical Sketches of North Carolina from 1584 to 1851 ... with Biographical Sketches of her Distinguished Statesmen, Jurists, Lawyers, Soldiers, Divines, Etc.* (1851; Reprint, Baltimore: Genealogical Pub. Co. for Clearfield Co., 1993), 205-206.

⁶⁶ Finger, *The Eastern Band of Cherokees*, 66.

those in other parts of the United States, devoted considerable attention on combatting alcohol abuse among “native” white settlers who adhered to preindustrial drinking mores.⁶⁷

By the early 1830s, many white Baptists and Methodists, influenced by the Great Revival, also began to reject the prevailing drinking mores of antebellum Americans. This change of public morality was the result of evangelicals’ belief that people were hopeless sinners living in a world that was inherently evil. In order to achieve personal salvation, people thus had to refuse “worldly temptations.” Preachers believed that innocent pastimes like moderate drinking would ultimately lead to sin.⁶⁸ Along with public drunkenness, they also increasingly cringed at the sight of politicians giving whiskey to voters and neighbors passing a jug of whiskey to one another after a hard day’s work. But all was not lost, for these sinners could find salvation. It was the duty of the church to lend a helping hand, using moral persuasion to encourage the alcohol drinker to become sober. Not only would abstinence give him salvation, but his “influence upon others, especially the young people, would be for good; and crime, vice, and immorality would be lessened.”⁶⁹

The formation of the North Carolina Temperance Society in 1831 further solidified the attitudes of evangelicals on the subject of alcohol reform.⁷⁰ By the early 1830s, Baptists and Methodists had become the largest denominations in the South and wanted to expand beyond the region. Finding themselves in competition with the older, more established Presbyterian and Congregationalist denominations, Baptists and Methodists responded by creating new structures that centralized authority. They also moved away from “Spirit-inspiration” that had originally

⁶⁷ *North Carolina Spectator and Western Advertiser*, February 11, 1832.

⁶⁸ Bill Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in Antebellum North Carolina* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 191-196.

⁶⁹ Daniel Jay Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina, 1715-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1945), 21.

⁷⁰ Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina*, 455-456.

drawn large numbers to them and codified standards on how to conduct a camp meeting and ensure proper decorum. As historian Deborah McCauley has demonstrated, “religious experience was no longer considered the appropriate focus for denominations that had ceased drawing their leadership and much of their membership from the plain-folk, as they once had, but now cultivated a clergy of educated professionals who, in turn, tended to a growing middle – as well as upper – class church membership, much of it concentrated in towns and cities.”⁷¹

Power now shifted from local congregations to centralized agencies such as the Baptist State Convention and the Methodist Conference that catered to the interests of urban middle-class residents. Like the Presbyterians, these agencies embraced American Benevolence, a new national missionary movement that relied upon extra-local bodies to promote missions, seminaries, and temperance. Thus, in 1833, the Baptist State Convention, perhaps responding to the creation of the North Carolina Temperance Society, recommended that its brethren make “immediate efforts to form societies in all our churches and neighborhoods ... to put a stop to the destructive practice of intemperance.” Shortly thereafter, Methodist quarterly conferences also formed temperance societies throughout the state and encouraged its members to “abstain from making, vending, or using ardent spirits.”⁷²

Although such societies were organized in Rutherford, Buncombe, and Wilkes Counties, church support for temperance reform remained limited in western North Carolina during the 1830s.⁷³ This was largely due to the emergence of Anti-Missionism, a social movement popular among Baptists and Methodists living in more remote, sparsely populated regions.⁷⁴ When evangelicals began endorsing extra-local seminaries, missions, and temperance organizations,

⁷¹ McCauley, *Appalachian Mountain Religion*, 113-118.

⁷² Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina*, 456.

⁷³ *North Carolina Spectator and Western Advertiser*, May 7, June 11, July 23, 1831.

⁷⁴ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “The Antimission Movement in the Jacksonian South: A Study in Regional Folk Culture,” *Journal of Southern History* 36 (November 1970), 515.

many congregations disapproved, viewing them as a break with tradition. They feared that these societies threatened to destroy local autonomy and denounced them as being “inventions of men” without spiritual authorization.⁷⁵ In 1830, when the Baptist State Convention endorsed the funding of missions, about half of the associations in North Carolina split from the Baptist Church, creating a distinct “Primitive Baptist” body. That same year, “traditional” Methodists, seeking to strengthen local authority, followed suit by forming the Methodist Protestant Church.⁷⁶ As historian Martin Crawford has suggested, “Antimissionary dissidence embodied a profound suspicion of the emerging middle-class character of Southern society.”⁷⁷

From the beginning of alcohol reform, Primitive Baptists and “traditional” Methodists in western North Carolina perceived the temperance movement as an attack on their way of life. Several Buncombe County churches, for instance, opposed the first temperance society founded in Asheville in 1831. In fact, one minister who joined the society quickly withdrew from it, having been threatened with dismissal from the church.⁷⁸ In Surry County in 1832, the Fischer’s River Association voted to remain an anti-missionary body.⁷⁹ Six years later, the Mountain Baptist Association in Wilkes County declared non-fellowship with churches that favored missions and temperance societies.⁸⁰ The conflict between Primitive and Missionary Baptists came to a head in 1840 in Haywood, Jackson, and Macon counties, when the Tuckaseegee Baptist Association announced that it would support temperance reform. Unified hostility from many of the churches forced the association to issue a circular letter defending its position.

⁷⁵ Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina*, 341; and Dunn, *Cades Cove*, 112.

⁷⁶ Cecil-Francis, *Common Whites*, 199; and Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina*, 341.

⁷⁷ Crawford, *Ashe County’s Civil War*, 10.

⁷⁸ Hardy, *Second Annual Address: Delivered before the Asheville Temperance Society*, 9-10

⁷⁹ Ina Woestermeyer Van Noppen and John J. Van Noppen, *Western North Carolina Since the Civil War* (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1973), 73.

⁸⁰ Johnson J. Hayes, *The Land of Wilkes* (Wilkesboro, NC: Wilkes County Historical Society, 1962), 121.

This letter helps to shed light on why church-going people, although agreeing that drunkenness was immoral, opposed temperance organizations. In it, Elder John Hayes first clarified the association's position. "By 'entire abstinence,'" he explained, "we mean abandonment not only of the use, but of the manufacture and traffic in the article as a beverage." Foreshadowing events to come, this call for "entire abstinence" reveals that temperance reformers were becoming more radical. Whereas before they only condemned moderate drinking, reformers now denounced alcohol distillers for encouraging "the foul stain which has [been] cast upon our holy religion." Hayes then addressed "the prominent objections" among members of the association. Most rejected church-based temperance reform because they saw it as an "infringement on the rights, a violation of the liberty of our members." Hayes believed that this was absurd. "If the objection be good for anything in this case," he countered, "it is equally good against every principle and precept of the gospel of Christ, for there is not one which does not deny every Christian the right to sin, and restrain him from an indulgence in evil, which in this case he miscalls liberty." Hayes further argued that the association had not exceeded its authority by prohibiting members from drinking, selling, and distilling alcohol. In his view, Jesus Christ granted churches "the judicial power" to make and enforce laws promoting "holiness" and "spiritual enjoyment." "It is by virtue of this authority," he concluded, "that ... sinful follies, in which men indulge, have been declared inconsistent with the Christian character, and incompatible with fellowship in the church."⁸¹

The Rise of the Sons of Temperance

In the midst of these theological disputes over alcohol reform, the Sons of Temperance arrived in western North Carolina. Founded in New York in 1842, the Sons was a fraternal order in which members pledged total abstinence from alcohol. In 1843, the Sons organized a branch

⁸¹ Stillwell, *Minutes of the Tuckaseegee Baptist Association*, 6-8.

in Raleigh and hired lecturers to recruit new members throughout the state.⁸² The arrival of these lecturers could not have come at a better time for mountain evangelicals. Divided over whether churches had the authority to ban alcohol even if the Bible did not prohibit it, they welcomed the Sons of Temperance. Because it was a secular organization (formed without respect to religious principles), many believed that the Sons of Temperance could help churches avoid the schisms that had emerged within the Tuckaseegee Baptist Association and other congregations. Church members could join this organization, thereby freeing associations and conferences from deciding whether or not to ban alcohol. Moreover, many evangelicals, noting that “the use of strong drink [was] taking deep root,” insisted that their churches were not sufficient temperance societies.⁸³ Thus, according to historian Anne Loveland, they began to regard the Sons of Temperance “as the best and most efficient existing means of promoting temperance.” The Sons, because it was a secular enterprise, could reach out to the “unchurched” and make them “decent members of society.”⁸⁴ In regions like the Carolina highlands, where only one in seven persons was a church member, mountain evangelicals and “outsiders” alike agreed that the Sons of Temperance promised to bring great change.⁸⁵

As elsewhere in the United States, the Sons of Temperance received its strongest support from urban middle-class western North Carolinians.⁸⁶ More so than previous church-based

⁸² Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 29-30.

⁸³ *Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina*, 15, quoted in Paschal, *History of North Carolina Baptists*, 305.

⁸⁴ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*, 150-151.

⁸⁵ Gordon B. McKinney, “Economy and Community in Western North Carolina, 1860-1865,” in *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Mary Beth Pudur, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina L. Waller (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 174.

⁸⁶ For a discussion on the important role that middle-class people played in the Sons of Temperance and other societies in the United States, see Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Tyrell, “Drink and Temperance in the Antebellum South,” Tyrell, *Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800-1860* (Westport, 1979); Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic*, Norman H. Clark, *Deliver Us from Evil: An Interpretation of American Prohibition* (New York, 1976); C.C. Pearson and J. Erwin Hendricks, *Liquor and Anti-Liquor in Virginia, 1619-1919* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1967); Joseph R. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and*

reform societies, it promoted the values that mountain professionals and commercial farmers had been advocating for decades. These urban-based reformers echoed the Sons' view that temperance would bring moral and material improvement. Drunkenness not only led to personal ruin and destruction, the Sons charged, but also impeded commercial prosperity. Prominent businessmen like James Patton in Asheville, who had urged his sons in 1845 to hire "young men" of "sober and industrious habits," found this message appealing.⁸⁷ Mountain reformers also urged people to restrain their appetites in order to achieve success in business or farming. As one member of the Sons of Temperance, stressing the middle-class virtues of sobriety, self-control, and industry, wrote in 1854:

The difference between [Mr.] Smith sober and [Mr.] Smith drunk is this – Smith drunk was rummy, ragged, and riotous – Smith sober is joyful, jovial, and jolly. Smith drunk was stuttering, stupid, and staggering; Smith sober is clear-headed and cautious; Smith drunk was sick, sore, and sorry; Smith sober is hearty, healthy, and, happy; Smith drunk was ill-read, ill-bred, and ill-led; Smith sober is well saved, well behaved, and well shaved.⁸⁸

Augustus Merrimon, who joined the Sons of Temperance in the early 1850s, agreed. "It is strange to me, however common a thing it is, that men, rational, intelligent men, will drink and become intoxicated," the future senator from Asheville wrote in 1853. "Why men get drunk, degrade themselves, destroy their physical system ruin their minds, blast all their hopes and prospects, disgrace themselves, their family, their friends and neighborhood is something that I cannot account for."⁸⁹ For Merrimon and other urban mountain professionals, the Sons promised to help men, who were "in the habit of lying drunk about the streets," redeem themselves and

the American Temperance Movement (Urbana, 1963); and James B. Sellers, *The Prohibition Movement in Alabama, 1702-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1943).

⁸⁷ James Patton, *Biography of James Patton*, (Asheville, NC: n.p., 1850), 23-25. In fact, one of Patton's sons, along with a grandson, became members of the Sons of Temperance. See *Asheville News*, January 8, 1851, March 1, 1855.

⁸⁸ *Asheville News*, August 24, 1854.

⁸⁹ Newsome, "The A.S. Merrimon Journal," 306; *Asheville News*, March 1, 1855.

“hold respectable stations in society.”⁹⁰ Moreover, it appealed to middle-class residents by stressing the importance of education and sponsoring schools in Weaverville, Taylorsville, and Wilkesboro.⁹¹

Of the nineteen known societies affiliated with the Sons of Temperance in western North Carolina, twelve were located in county seats, suggesting that the order thrived in communities becoming more involved with the larger market economy.⁹² Moreover, fifteen of these societies were situated either in the French Broad Valley or east of the Blue Ridge. Having greater access to railroads and other major transportation arteries such as the Buncombe Turnpike, farmers there opted to sell their corn to drovers, stand owners, and/or itinerant merchants rather than distill it into alcohol, and were more receptive to temperance reform. The four remaining temperance societies were located in the far northeastern and southwestern parts of the region, where farmers had limited access to major transportation arteries.⁹³ More dependent on distilling to transport their corn to market, these farmers viewed the anti-alcohol crusade as an attack on their way of life, helping to explain why there were so few temperance societies in those more remote regions.

An examination of the socio-economic status of officers in local divisions reveals a link between the Sons and urban middle-class mountain residents. Like their predecessors in the

⁹⁰ *Spirit of the Age*, January 9, 1852.

⁹¹ *Carolina Watchman*, July 13, 1848, January 4, 1849, April 24, 1851, December 10, 1852; *Asheville News*, February 23, 1854; and Mrs. M.H.G. to “cousin Ada,” July 18, 1853, Mary Gash Papers, NCDAH.

⁹² These county seats were Asheville, Rutherfordton, Shelby, Jefferson, Marion, Burnsville, Wilkesboro, Lenoir, Taylorsville, Morganton, Franklin, and Marshall. The seven non-county seat communities where residents organized divisions were Reems Creek (Buncombe County), High Brighton (Buncombe County), Sulphur Springs (Cleveland County), Helton (Ashe County), Mountain Cross (McDowell County), Old Fort (McDowell County), and Quallatown (Cherokee County). See *Asheville Spectator*, July 13, 1853; *Asheville News*, July 28, 1853; *Mountain Banner*, January 3, November 14, 1849; *Spirit of the Age*, March 21, May 30, July 25, October 10, 1851, January 9, September 15, 1852, March 3, April 6, 1853, March 28, 1855; “Celebration of the Fourth of July in Burnsville,” from the *Highland Messenger*, July 24, 1846, in Lloyd Bailey, ed., *News from Yancey: Articles from Area Newspapers, 1840-1900* (Burnsville, NC: Yancey Graphics, 1983): 10; and Lanman, *Letters from the Alleghany Mountains*, 107-108.

⁹³ Two of these societies were located in Ashe County, while the remaining two were situated in Cherokee and Macon counties.

Little Brittain Temperance Society, officials in the Rutherford Sons of Temperance in 1850, whose organization boasted a membership of fifty, were successful businessmen or professionals. The “Worthy Patriarch” was William Tanner, a merchant who employed two clerks. The remaining officers consisted of two carpenters, two Methodist ministers, a physician, a carriage maker, a blacksmith, a hatter, a saddler, and a lawyer.⁹⁴ With the exception of H.M. Corbitt, who lived in the nearby settlement of Mountain Creek, these officials also resided in Rutherfordton.⁹⁵

The officers in the Rutherford Sons of Temperance were typical of those living elsewhere in western North Carolina. Professionals and religious leaders from Jefferson, Shelby, and other commercial centers monopolized high office in county divisions.⁹⁶ Officers in the Ashe Sons of Temperance, for instance, included a physician, a merchant, a carpenter, and a lawyer.⁹⁷ Whigs and Democrats alike served as officials in the Sons, suggesting that the organization was nonpartisan. Moreover, ambitious young men may have used the Sons as a springboard into local politics. The Asheville Sons of Temperance provided future senators Robert Vance and Augustus S. Merrimon with their first leadership positions. In fact, Vance would become “Worthy Patriarch” of the local division in 1851.⁹⁸

Because the Sons of Temperance was a secret society, it is difficult to determine the socio-economic status of its members. Historian Ian Tyrrell has discovered a membership list in Rowan County in piedmont North Carolina, helping to bolster his argument that the temperance

⁹⁴ These men were H.M. Corbitt, William Albright, A. Hamby, John R. Pickett, J.W. Vandiver, W.H. Wilson, John T. Miller, A.H. Roberts, J.M. Covington, G.W. Baxter. The occupations of these officers came from the 1850 population census.

⁹⁵ Two other officials in the Rutherford Sons of Temperance, J.N. Scoggins and J.P. Halford, were not listed in the 1850 census. For a list of the officers in this local division, see *Mountain Banner*, April 9, 1850.

⁹⁶ *Spirit of the Age*, May 30, 1851, March 3, 1852; *Asheville News*, July 28, 1853; *Asheville Messenger*, April 30, 1851; *Mountain Banner*, November 14, 1849, April 9, June 25, 1850.

⁹⁷ For a list of the officers in this local division, see J.M. Gentry to Ashe Sons of Temperance, October 22, 1850, Ashe County Records, NCDAH. The occupations of these officers came from the 1850 census.

⁹⁸ *Asheville News*, January 8, 1851, July 28, 1853.

movement won its southern support from small-town middle-class and artisan groups.⁹⁹ But no such membership lists exist for western North Carolina. Fortunately, Ashe County farmers signed a petition in 1854 that called for state-wide prohibition.¹⁰⁰ Since the Sons of Temperance organized this campaign, these petitioners may well have been members or supporters of that society. Moreover, in 1852, farmers in nearby and economically comparable Yancey County signed an anti-prohibition petition and (presumably) opposed the Sons of Temperance.¹⁰¹

A comparison of these two groups shows that the Sons received its strongest support from professionals and entrepreneurial farmers more eager to embrace the larger market economy. Of the twenty-three Ashe County prohibitionists positively identified in the 1850 agricultural census, seven, although listed as owning farms, had other professions.¹⁰² Three of them were mechanics, two were merchants, and two were Baptist preachers.¹⁰³ Of the twenty-six Yancey County anti-prohibitionists positively identified, however, the 1850 census listed all of them as farmers.¹⁰⁴ This suggests that farmers may have been less likely to support the Sons of Temperance than professionals.

⁹⁹ Tyrrell, "Drink and Temperance in the Antebellum South," 493.

¹⁰⁰ Memorial from Ashe County, NC to the Honorable, the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina, 1854, Petitions, Box 12, General Assembly Session Records, NCDAH.

¹⁰¹ These two counties were situated in the northeastern part of western North Carolina. Both were predominantly rural and agriculture. Farmers in these two counties grew mostly corn and oats, and lived on farms that were roughly the same size. The average size of a farm in Ashe County was 293 acres, while in Yancey County it was 303 acres. The cash value of farms in Yancey County, however, was higher than those in Ashe County. The cash value of a farm in Yancey County was \$614, while it was \$366 in Ashe County. Nonetheless, these counties are economically comparable. See J.D.B. DeBow, *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, DC: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853), 318-321. For the names of anti-prohibitionists in Yancey County, see To the Honorable, the General Assembly of North Carolina, 1852, Petitions, General Assembly Session Records, NCDAH.

¹⁰² The remaining forty-four male petitioners in Ashe County could not be positively identified in the 1850 population or agricultural censuses. See *Agricultural and Manufacturing Census Records of Fifteen Southern States for the Years, 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880* (Chapel Hill: Library Photographic Services, University of North Carolina, 196-), North Carolina Agricultural Census, reel 1 (Ashe County), reel 3 (Yancey County).

¹⁰³ The three mechanics were William Hawkins, George Hawk, and Aaron Johnston. The two ministers were Richard Gentry and Richard Jacks, while the two merchants were David Smith and Nathan Waugh.

¹⁰⁴ The remaining thirty-seven male petitioners in Yancey County could not be positively identified in the 1850 population or agricultural censuses. Although the 1850 census failed to give the profession of seven of the twenty-six known petitioners, these seven men did own farms, suggesting that they were agriculturalists.

Moreover, the Ashe County prohibitionists were wealthier in property holdings than their counterparts in Yancey County, revealing that the Sons was popular among commercial farmers. The average cash value of prohibitionists' farms exceeded that of the Yancey County group by \$762 to \$397. The average landholding of the Ashe County group was also 545 acres, more than doubling the size of Yancey County anti-prohibitionists' farms. The percentage of unimproved land was also slightly lower in the Yancey County group than in the case with Ashe County prohibitionists. Yancey County anti-prohibitionists had 13 percent of their lands improved, while Ashe County farmers had 15 percent improved.¹⁰⁵ Like urban professionals, these Ashe County farmers may have supported prohibition (and the Sons of Temperance) with the hope that it would help make society more productive.¹⁰⁶

Mountain Patriots, Women, and Stereotypes

As they had done for nearly a decade, the Asheville Sons of Temperance celebrated the birthday of George Washington on February 22, 1855. William M. Hardy, the son of a physician who founded Asheville's first temperance society in 1831, began the ceremony by reading a portion of Washington's Farewell Address. Reverend Chapman then walked on stage, where he delivered "a very eloquent and able" sermon that praised "the Father of His Country" and warned the crowd of the dangers of "King Alcohol." Following Chapman's speech, members of the Sons of Temperance partook in a "Celebration Supper at the Court House." The Ladies of

¹⁰⁵ If we exclude the farms of prohibitionists who were listed as professionals, the acres of improved land in Ashe County increased to 27 percent, markedly higher than in the case of Yancey County anti-prohibitionists. See *Agricultural and Manufacturing Census Records of Fifteen Southern States*, reels 1 and 3.

¹⁰⁶ These farmers were also wealthier and had larger landholdings than others in Ashe County. While the average cash value of a farm in that county was \$366, it was \$762 for prohibitionists. The average size of a prohibitionist's farm was 545 acres, while other Ashe County residents had farms averaging 293 acres. Anti-prohibitionists were poorer and had smaller landholdings than other farmers in Yancey County. While the average cash value of a farm in that county was \$614, it was \$397 for anti-prohibitionists. The average size of an anti-prohibitionist's farm was 217 acres, while other Yancey County residents had farms averaging 303 acres.

Asheville had worked hard to prepare this “Celebration Supper,” and the Sons were not disappointed.

The table was richly laden with the choicest viands, which would have done honor to princely pomp or regal splendor. It was a banquet no less pleasing to the eye than palatable to taste, and was discussed with a relish that was increased in intensity in proportion to the beauty and grace of their fair committee of arrangements who acted in the capacity of ‘*waiting maids*’ to the ‘*Sons*.’”

After the “Celebration Supper,” the local order’s “Worthy Patriarch,” William Rankin, raised his glass of water and made a toast to the memory of President Washington and his wife, Martha.¹⁰⁷

This ceremony sheds further light on why the Sons of Temperance endured in western North Carolina and other parts of the South during the late antebellum period. More so than temperance societies before it, the Sons specialized in public pageantry, organizing sign pledges, barbecues, and parades on Washington’s birthday and other national holidays. These elaborate affairs, which often received press coverage, helped the Sons of Temperance link their cause with the Founding Father’s struggle for American Independence. The symbolism was explicit, as shown by a Sons-sponsored Fourth of July celebration in Wilkesboro in 1851. Residents there heard a stirring speech by state lecturer C.C. Hackett. As one participant, calling himself “Independence,” remembered, “[Hackett] improved the time very aptly and clearly, pointing out the propriety of employing our national anniversary in concerting plans for removing those national evils and vices which so much prevent the blessings and privileges achieved by our fore-fathers and still perpetuated to us by a kind Providence.” After Hackett’s speech, another member of the Wilkesboro Sons of Temperance read a “Parody on the Declaration of Independence” to the crowd, comparing the “repeated injuries” of “King Alcohol” to those committed by the English crown on American colonists during the 1770s.¹⁰⁸ Throughout

¹⁰⁷ *Asheville News*, March 1, 1855.

¹⁰⁸ *Spirit of the Age*, July 25, 1851.

western North Carolina, local orders organized similar celebrations, where they condemned “King Alcohol” for, among other things, the “establishment of an absolute tyranny over the moral, civil, and religious rights of the people of these United States.”¹⁰⁹

Along with satisfying the “patriotic longings” of men, the Sons also appealed to mountain females.¹¹⁰ Women had supported the temperance cause from its beginning because they believed that alcoholism increased spousal abuse and “ruined” families. Women in Wilkes County, for instance, quickly joined the John’s River Temperance Society in 1831, one of the first organizations of its kind in western North Carolina. In fact, these women outnumbered male members sixty-five to forty.¹¹¹ Early reformers, aware that women wanted to protect the domestic sphere, stressed the negative impact that alcohol had on the family.¹¹² As Jason Hardy from Asheville explained in 1831, “[Drunkenness] destroys the fond hopes of kind and benevolent parents, and involves in gloom and misery the lives of tender and affectionate wives.” Many Asheville women agreed. Shortly after organizing the Asheville Auxiliary Temperance Society, Hardy reported that sixty-five people had become members, “a number of whom [were] Ladies.”¹¹³

Although the Sons excluded women from full membership, it did consider them indispensable allies and supported the Daughters of Temperance, a national society founded in 1848. Like those in Asheville, mountain women, many of whom joined the Daughters of Temperance, played an important role in organizing and catering Sons-sponsored events.

¹⁰⁹ The Sons of Temperance organized such celebrations in Asheville, Lenoir, Burnsville, Sulpher Springs, Wilkesboro, Taylorsville, and Shelby. See *Spirit of the Age*, March 21, 1851, January 9, March 10, 1852, March 18, 1853; *Asheville News*, March 1, 1855; Bailey, *News From Yancey*, 10; J.M. Gentry to Brethren of Sharon Division, February 5, 1851; J.M. Carson to Sharon Division, March 27, 1851, both in James Gordon Hackett Collection, 1806-1887, NCDAH.

¹¹⁰ Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic*, 194-195.

¹¹¹ *North Carolina Spectator and Western Advertiser*, May 7, 1831.

¹¹² Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*, 31.

¹¹³ *North Carolina Spectator and Western Advertiser*, June 11, 1831.

Members of the Sons of Temperance appreciated the work of these women and welcomed them to attend meetings.¹¹⁴ On at least one occasion, the Sons even allowed a woman to publicly speak on the subject of temperance. In 1851, the “Ladies of Shelby” gave a Bible to the Sons of Temperance in Sulphur Springs in Cleveland County. Cordelia Hamrick then addressed the crowd of 120 with “our best wishes and fervent desires, that the ruling hand of a kind Providence will continue to roll on the Temperance Car, until all the sons of earth shall be engaged in bearing aloft the Banner of Temperance, and shall take shelter under the branches of the Tree of Life.”¹¹⁵

Behind the scenes, mountain women encouraged their husbands, relatives, and friends to embrace temperance. Writing to her son, Isaac Theodore Avery, in 1852, Elizabeth Avery from Burke County reminded him of the dangers of drunkenness, citing the death of Sherwood Branch, an alcoholic who had drowned in a nearby river. “When you see any of your friends and acquaintances falling into temptations, you can warn them of the[ir] danger,” she pleaded. “Call to the[ir] minds the anxiety of the[ir] friends here ... to hear that they are falling into all kinds of vices and wickedness – the very thought is too distressing to think of.”¹¹⁶ Other women tried to persuade their loved ones to join both the Sons and Daughters of Temperance. As one Buncombe County female wrote to her cousin in 1852, “I was somewhat sorry to learn that you did not hear Mr. Hewlett, for if you had heard him I think from that hour you would have been a real strong, hot headed, fiery footed, run mad, deep down, dyed in the wool, Daughter of Temperance.”¹¹⁷ For mountain woman reformers, many of whom were probably educated and

¹¹⁴ *Spirit of the Age*, March 21, 1851, January 9, March 10, 1852, March 18, 1853; *Asheville News*, March 1, 1855; Bailey, *News From Yancey*, 10; and J.G. Ballow to Wilkesboro Division Sons of Temperance, March 17, 1851, James Gordon Hackett Collection, 1806-1887, NCDAH.

¹¹⁵ *Spirit of the Age*, March 21, 1851.

¹¹⁶ Elizabeth Avery to Isaac Theodore Avery, November 14, 1852, Avery Family Papers, privately owned, Morganton, NC.

¹¹⁷ Mrs. M.H.G. to “cousin Ada,” July 18, 1853, Mary Gash Papers, NCDAH.

from urban, middle-class families, the temperance movement allowed them to not only protect the domestic sphere, but to also serve as “representatives of virtue” in the public sphere.¹¹⁸ From the experience, they gained a sense of self-worth and a political voice.

Female and male reformers were also responding to emerging stereotypes regarding the drinking mores of mountain society. Since the 1790s, “outsiders” had commented often on the extensive use of alcohol among mountain residents. But these early travelers, mostly evangelical circuit riders, did not view the drinking habits of mountaineers as different from those elsewhere in the state.¹¹⁹ By the 1830s, however, evangelicals began to single out western North Carolinians, believing that life on the frontier had made them more prone to drink alcohol. In 1835, Baptist agent James Thomas, making special reference to the western part of the state, wrote:

The Temperance reform is evidently on the decline, and the use of strong drink is taking deep root, more or less in all this fruitful country. I have seen not less than 17 distilleries in operation this fall in my field of labour; and woeful to tell, many professors of religion, who say they desire the prosperity of Zion, to do good, eschew evil, and abhor drunkenness in all its forms, make, sell, use, give, and send abroad this awful evil, and they often quote the Scriptures to justify their course.¹²⁰

Many travelers and other “outsiders” continued to perceive the region as a land of intemperance and distilleries during the 1840s and 1850s. British geologist George Featherstonhaugh complained that Haywood County residents drank alcohol on a regular basis. “Here was a village most beautifully situated,” he wrote about Franklin in 1847, “but I could not learn that there was a man of education in the place disposed to set an example of the value of sobriety to the community.”¹²¹ Commenting on the abundance of stills in the Carolina highlands

¹¹⁸ Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*, 40.

¹¹⁹ Carroll, *Francis Asbury in North Carolina*, 134-135, 175-176; and James Buckingham, *The Slave States of America* (London: Fisher, Son, & Co., 1842): 210-211.

¹²⁰ Paschal, *History of the North Carolina Baptists*, 305.

¹²¹ George Featherstonhaugh, *A Canoe Voyage Up the Minnay Sotor*, vol. 2 (London: R. Bentley, 1847): 281.

in 1849, an unnamed Salisbury resident in Rowan County believed that mountain residents “with few, very few exceptions, sit still in ignorance and stupidity.”¹²² Six years later, a Fayetteville journalist, appealing to eastern prejudices against mountain residents, claimed that “in almost every ravine and mountain gorge of Western North Carolina you will find a still house and an apple mill, placed there for the purpose of turning the healthy grains and fruits of the earth into maddening and killing beverage.”¹²³ Perhaps the most damaging remarks occurred in 1852, when a writer for the *Spirit of the Age*, the state’s official organ of the Sons of Temperance, described his travels in the Carolina highlands. Although praising the region for its fertile lands, scenic beauty, and commercial prosperity, he saw “one object, in all the way to and from the mountain, which I looked upon as a disgrace to the age in which we live and a complete breach upon the natural creation of the Christians’ God. The object is a little dirty looking distillery.”¹²⁴

These negative images could not have come at a worst time for western North Carolinians. By the 1850s, intrastate sectionalism had resulted in the creation of other damaging stereotypes about the mountain region. As Calvin H. Wiley, editor of the *North Carolina Journal of Education*, explained in 1857, “[O]ur Eastern friends are much of the notion that the West is a nation of semi-barbarians, destitute of good breeding, politeness and everything else like refinement, living in the woods and subsisting on roots and berries.”¹²⁵ Two years later, a Raleigh journalist returned from a trip to Asheville, where he had made an unexpected discovery: “[T]he people of the West are neither savages nor ignoramuses; but on the contrary, they are intelligent, high-minded, hospitable, and civilized.”¹²⁶

¹²² *Carolina Watchman*, March 29, 1849.

¹²³ *North Carolina Argus*, January 20, 1855, quoted in Inscoc, *Mountain Masters*, 165.

¹²⁴ *Spirit of the Age*, December 8, 1852.

¹²⁵ “The East and the West,” *North Carolina Journal of Education* (1857), 13, quoted in Inscoc, *Mountain Masters*, 139.

¹²⁶ *North Carolina Standard*, September 7, 1859, quoted in Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina*, 34.

Although they became more publicized (and accepted) after the Civil War, such misconceptions encouraged many Carolina highlanders to embrace the antebellum temperance movement. More likely than not, the image of the backward, drunken mountaineer insulted village residents who considered themselves refined and cultivated. This stereotype also threatened to make it more difficult to attract outside capital and convince legislators to extend the state railroad into the mountain counties.¹²⁷ Fearing that businessmen would not invest money in a region where intemperance prevailed, mountain reformers insisted that the so-called Liquor Problem was improving. “Hurra for Madison,” J.M. Scales wrote to the *Spirit of the Age* in February 1851. “She has always had a bad name, but she has retrieved it now. She can look up now, as proud as any village, and say I am for cold water.” That same year, residents of a mining village in McDowell County reassured “outsiders” that they were doing everything possible to combat “King Alcohol.” “In fact,” they pointed out, “the house that the [Sons of Temperance] Division was organized in, was built and used for the purpose of dealing out that all-pervading destroyer of health, morals and property.” Other mountain village residents wrote to state newspapers, bragging about their communities. “If you will allow us to indulge a little in County pride,” Taylorsville reformers in Alexander County reported to the *Spirit of the Age* in 1851, “we would say that we have the neatest and most quiet little village we have ever seen ... we have no tippling Shop here.” In fact, by 1853, the local division boasted a membership of 156. Members of the Asheville Sons of Temperance, which numbered 180, were just as confident. “We challenge the State to show us a town that has done better for itself and the cause,” they declared in the *Spirit of the Age*.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ For a detailed discussion on western North Carolinians’ fight for internal improvements during the antebellum period, see Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 152-176.

¹²⁸ *Spirit of the Age*, February 7, October 10, July 12, 1851, April 6, 1853.

Ironically, middle-class mountain residents helped create the stereotypes that these “outsiders” had popularized during the late antebellum period. As historian John Inscoe explained, “Travelers only occasionally veered from their well-beaten paths, and when they did so their encounters with the more remote local residents were sporadic and superficial.”¹²⁹ Most antebellum journalists and tourists instead talked to the more accessible village residents.¹³⁰ But these men (and women) also voiced concern about intemperance among western North Carolinians, especially those living in more remote areas. “I presume that you think that our mountain people here are not much in favor of reading temperance newspapers,” an unnamed Hendersonville resident wrote to the *Spirit of the Age* in 1851. “This I must confess is too much the case.”¹³¹ An anonymous Franklin resident agreed, believing that “the hard-headed opposition of some of our mountaineers” had stymied temperance reform.¹³²

County seat politicians and professionals, making contact with country folk only on court and election days, came to believe that drunkenness prevailed in rural mountain society. Asheville lawyer Augustus Merrimon, for instance, often complained that rural Carolina highlanders would “see how badly they could behave themselves” during court week by “drinking and cursing.” “I do not know any rival of this place in regard to drunkenness, ignorance, superstition and the most brutal debauchery,” he complained about farmers in Jewell City in Madison County in 1853. Nor were women innocent. “I saw two women drunk and one cursed and swore desperately and proposed to whip some of her male friends that did not please her,” Merrimon wrote of the Yancey County Court in Burnsville. “Oh, what a shocking sight to

¹²⁹ Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 37.

¹³⁰ Hsiung, *Two Worlds in the Tennessee Mountains*, 19.

¹³¹ *Spirit of the Age*, February 7, 1851.

¹³² *Ibid.*, December 15, 1852.

see a woman drunk. A woman! Ah, a woman drunk! Shame on the unfortunate wretch!”¹³³

Other mountain reformers even requested that “outsiders” help them, pointing out that no other “section of the country so much needs light, knowledge, and action stirred up among the people upon the Temperance Reform.”¹³⁴ Tourists and writers tapped into these local perceptions, laying the foundation for negative images that persist today. Of more immediate importance, however, mountain reformers, acting on these misconceptions, began to advocate for state-wide prohibition during the 1850s. The shift in tactics brought to a climax the social tensions that had been brewing within western North Carolina society for decades. The mountain distiller emerged as the central figure in this drama.

The Anti-Distiller Crusade

Since the colonial period, North Carolina politicians had rejected legislation that impinged on the rights of small distillers, believing that liquor manufacturing was an important “cottage” industry. Laws that required retailers to purchase a license did not extend to the producers of ardent spirits. Colonial regulatory measures included clauses that allowed small distillers to sell their own alcohol without a license. State officials continued these policies, permitting people who sold a quart or more of whiskey to vend without a license. Legislators knew that most North Carolinians, especially those living in the western part of the state, regarded liquor manufacturing as an inalienable right and economic necessity.¹³⁵ Nowhere were these attitudes more prevalent than during the 1790s, when the national government levied taxes

¹³³ Newsome, “The A.S. Merrimon Journal,” 329, 311, 329.

¹³⁴ [Wilkesboro Division] to James Hackett, July 15, 1850, James Gordon Hackett Collection, 1806-1887, NCDAH.

¹³⁵ Walter Clark, ed., *State Records of North Carolina*, (Goldsboro, NC: Nash Brothers, 1895-1905), vol. XXIII, 79-80, 182-185; vol. XXIV, 279-280. See also House Bills (October 28): Bill to Prevent Distilling Grain into Spirituous Liquor (Rejected), Session of October – November 1779, General Assembly Session Records, NCDAH.

on imported and domestically manufactured alcohol. Western North Carolinians vehemently opposed these duties and ignored the law.¹³⁶

Distillers had also escaped the wrath of alcohol reformers during the early nineteenth century. Like those elsewhere in the South, mountain temperance societies first attempted to outlaw the practice of “treating” and prohibit the consumption of alcohol near churches and colleges.¹³⁷ They also voiced dissatisfaction with the license system, arguing that it had not solved the “Liquor Problem.”¹³⁸ Despite laws that required retailers of “Good Character” to purchase an alcohol license, reformers insisted that taverns remained a public nuisance, a source of “drunkenness, crime, and infamy.”¹³⁹ State legislators responded by passing a law in 1801, which made “treating” a crime punishable by a fine of one hundred pounds.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, the General Assembly, hoping to eliminate less responsible retailers, “raised the license fee from forty-eight shillings in 1816, to ten dollars in 1850, and to thirty dollars in 1858.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Jeffrey J. Crow, “The Whiskey Rebellion in North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 66 (January 1989), 1-28.

¹³⁷ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 39; *North Carolina Spectator and Western Advertiser*, November 5, 1831, February 11, 1832; and Hardy, *Second Annual Address: Delivered before the Asheville Temperance Society*, 3.

¹³⁸ Laws regulating the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages had existed in North Carolina since the colonial period. In 1715, the General Assembly, hoping to restore order after the Tuscarora uprising, enacted a law that required retailers to purchase a liquor license from the governor and made public drunkenness a crime punishable by a fine. In 1740, Governor Gabriel Johnston, largely due to public hostility against drunken disturbances at tippling houses (or grog shops), recommended that the General Assembly improve the license system. Legislators responded the next year by outlawing the tippling house and giving county courts (and justices of the peace in 1758) the authority to grant licenses to people of “Good Character.” The first state law in 1779 regarding the retail of alcoholic beverages was virtually a reenactment of the colonial system. In 1798, however, the General Assembly legalized the tippling house, an act that helped spark the beginnings of temperance agitation in North Carolina. See Clark, *State Records of North Carolina*, vol. XXIII, 79-80, 182-185; vol. XXIV, 279. For a more detailed description on the genesis of state regulation concerning the vending and consumption of alcohol during the colonial and antebellum periods, see Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 1-11.

¹³⁹ Hardy, *Second Annual Address: Delivered before the Asheville Temperance Society*, 6 (quotation); Rutherfordton *North Carolina Spectator and Western Advertiser*, February, ?, 1832; Rutherfordton *Intelligencer*, September 28, 1841; Asheville *Messenger*, quoted in Salisbury *Carolina Watchman*, May 13, 1852; and Raleigh *Spirit of the Age*, May 11, 1853.

¹⁴⁰ In 1837, the General Assembly raised the fine to \$200. Seventeen years later, the state legislature also passed a law expelling members from the General Assembly, if convicted of treating. See Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 37.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

Nonetheless, temperance reformers believed that these laws had failed to reduce alcohol consumption. Licensed or not, tavern owners and other retailers continued to sell a “degrading vice” that had already “beggard thousands of families, broken the hearts of multitudes of wives and mothers, and sent many a hapless victim to a premature grave.” Temperance supporters feared that America was in great peril. “Should this vice continue to increase,” Henry Kerr from Rutherford County warned in 1832, “it will destroy our national character. It will hurl us from the proud eminence on which we stand among the nations of the earth, to the depth of degradation and infamy.”¹⁴² Kerr and other mountain reformers would soon shift responsibility for the “Liquor Problem” to alcohol manufacturers. After all, these men (and women) were producing most of the spirits that taverns and other retail establishments sold.

This movement against alcohol distillers was in part a response to increases in alcohol production in Appalachian North Carolina during the antebellum period. As noted in the previous chapter, between 1810 and 1840, the per-capita production of whiskey in the mountain region grew at a faster rate than in the state as a whole (see table 1.1). Within the Carolina highlands, however, some counties manufactured more alcohol than others. Surry, Burke, Wilkes, and Ashe counties accounted for 89 percent of the whiskey produced in the region. These counties were situated in the far northeastern part of western North Carolina, where farmers, having limited access to major trade routes, relied on liquor manufacturing to make extra money and became the most outspoken opponents of the anti-distiller crusade. Counties with a lower percentage of whiskey production – such as Buncombe, Henderson, and Haywood – were located near the Buncombe Turnpike and other transportation arteries linking the region to livestock markets in South Carolina and Georgia (see table 1.2). There, farmers found it easier

¹⁴² *North Carolina Spectator and Western Advertiser*, January 14, 1832.

and more profitable to sell their grain to stand owners and drovers. The movement against distillers received its strongest support from these counties.

In 1832, Kerr launched a series of attacks on liquor manufacturers, insisting that they, along with tavern owners, encouraged intemperance. “We would ask the conscientious distiller,” the reverend wrote, “how he reconciles it to his feelings, to contribute to this great evil and misery. It may be said, that by his means, the bread of the needy is literally converted into a poison.”¹⁴³ That same year, Jason Hardy from Buncombe County accused distillers of emanating “every species of crime, wickedness, and abandonment” throughout the Carolina highlands.¹⁴⁴ Thomas Lenoir, the son of a late-eighteenth century mountain distiller and one of its leading planters, continued where Hardy had left off. Delivering a speech to a local temperance society in Lenoir in Caldwell County on Christmas Day, 1843, he chastised the distillers of alcohol:

There are those among us who are daily converting the bread; the staff of life into a slow and deadly poison, to destroy the mind and morals of the father and the peace and happiness of the family circle!! ... Unfortunate man! It is never too late to do better, come now and make a last resolve, that you will assume your proper station in life.¹⁴⁵

By the early 1850s, members of the Sons of Temperance joined this chorus of opposition, condemning alcohol distillers for promoting drunkenness and immorality.¹⁴⁶ For these reformers, the distiller had become a symbol of what was wrong with rural society. They were products of a “frontier” environment, one that needed civilizing.

Missionary Baptists and Methodists also increasingly condemned the distillers of ardent spirits. As early as 1840, the Tuckaseegee Baptist Association recommended that churches in

¹⁴³ Ibid., January 14, February 11, March 3, 1832.

¹⁴⁴ Hardy, *Second Annual Address: Delivered before the Asheville Temperance Society*, 4.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas Lenoir, temperance speech, December 25, 1843, Folder 251, Lenoir Family Papers, 1763-1940, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁴⁶ *Spirit of the Age*, July 21, 1851, December 15, 1852.

union “use their influence to arrest the evil of ... making, vending, and using intoxicating drinks as a beverage.”¹⁴⁷ Methodists agreed. By the late 1840s, the Holston Methodist Conference, which supervised churches in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee, allowed ministers to expel members who distilled alcohol.¹⁴⁸ Baptists soon followed suit. In 1850, Gabriel’s Creek Church in Madison County voted not to “retain in membership persons who make, vend, or use intoxicating liquors, except for medical or mechanical purpose.”¹⁴⁹ The Broad River Baptist Association declared in 1853 that alcohol distilling was “immoral and injurious to the religious prosperity of the community at large, and therefore ought by all prudent ways to be discountenanced by the churches composing this body.” Five years later, it adopted a more stern resolution, recommending that churches and ministers not “receive and baptize distillers of ardent spirits into the fellowship.”¹⁵⁰

The expulsion of distillers, however, sparked conflict within Baptist and Methodist churches. Although sympathetic to temperance reform, many mountain churchgoers, especially Primitive Baptists and “traditional” Methodists, denounced these resolutions as an infringement on the rights of distillers. Methodist circuit rider Augustine F. Shannon, for instance, encountered hostility from rural Haywood County residents in late 1840s, when he announced that the Holston Conference “disapproved [of] Stilling in the Church.” “Some got mad and some was well pleased,” Shannon wrote in 1849. “Some Sinners then said I was right & some

¹⁴⁷ Stillwell, *Minutes of the Tuckaseegee Baptist Association*, 13.

¹⁴⁸ Mary Rowles and Hunter K. Rountree, eds., *The Diary of Augustine P. Shannon, 1848-1850* (Nashville, TN: Historical Records Survey, 1940), 48, 50.

¹⁴⁹ John Ammons, *Outlines of History of French Broad Association and Mars Hill College: From the Organization of the Association in 1807 to 1907, Being a Period of 100 Years* (Mars Hill, NC: Mars Hill College Press, 2001), 27.

¹⁵⁰ Logan, *Sketches, Historical and Biographical, of the Broad River and King’s Mountain Baptist Associations*, 82, 96.

Methodist Said that we lived in a free Country & that one had a right to do with his own as he pleases.”¹⁵¹

Rural Baptists often believed that the Church had exceeded its authority. In 1852, for instance, the Primitive Baptist Church in Alexander County refused to expel congregates who distilled alcohol, arguing that they had a right to make a living unmolested by religious or secular organizations. In fact, the church voted to banish thirty-four members for supporting the resolution banning distillers from worship services.¹⁵² The expulsion of distillers would continue to divide Baptists throughout the decade. After the King’s Mountain Association agreed to exclude distillers from membership in 1859, several churches withdrew from their congregations, forming “themselves into a separate association with anti-temperance proclivities.” These “rebellious” churches then expelled members who had supported the association’s resolution. A “rebel faction” in Cleveland County even refused “to surrender the church book” and fastened “three additional locks” to keep their opponents from entering Walls Baptist Church.¹⁵³

During the 1850s, many highlanders began to reject the Sons of Temperance on the basis that society had turned the anti-alcohol reform into a secular enterprise and weakened the authority of local churches.¹⁵⁴ Welcomed by evangelicals in the 1840s as an organization that could help them avoid the schisms that had occurred over the issue of church-based reform, the Sons ultimately heightened tension within rural mountain congregations. In 1851, for instance, the Old Fields Baptist Church in Ashe County expelled several members who belonged to the

¹⁵¹ Rowles and Rountree, *The Diary of Augustine F. Shannon*, 48.

¹⁵² *Spirit of the Age*, December 15, 1852.

¹⁵³ The King’s Mountain Association included churches from Cleveland, Rutherford, and Gaston counties. See Logan, *Sketches, Historical and Biographical, of the Broad River and King’s Mountain Baptist Associations*, 177-178, 180-182, 184-188.

¹⁵⁴ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*, 150-151, 155-156.

Sons of Temperance. These members were all either prominent businessmen or religious authorities, further suggesting that the Sons received its strongest support among the burgeoning middle-class. Two of them were successful merchants and the sons of Richard Gentry, a well-to-do farmer and former clerk of the Ashe County Superior Court who was also expelled for joining the fraternal society. The other banished congregates were Aaron Johnston, a popular minister, and merchant Nathan Waugh, who was Richard Gentry's son-in-law. These expulsions would not have surprised most western North Carolinians. The rift between temperance and anti-temperance forces had been growing since the late 1820s, a product largely of the American Benevolence movement led by the middle class. Rural Baptist churches in Alleghany, Alexander, Cleveland, Rutherford, and Wilkes counties soon followed the example set by the Old Fields Baptist Church by expelling members who joined the Sons of Temperance.¹⁵⁵

Although anti-missionary churches believed that drunkenness was immoral, antebellum distillers could rely upon them for support. For one, many members of these churches manufactured alcohol. They believed that neither the church nor the state had the right to prohibit the use, sale, or manufacture of alcohol.¹⁵⁶ In 1857, Squire Gouge, a distiller from Buncombe County, claimed that God had given farmers "the ingredients and the smartness to make what [they] wanted." "God gin us these things to be used," Gouge continued. "Now scripiter says God looked upon all he had made and said it was good, and ef so be he hadn't intended us to drink licker, he hadn't intended us to drink licker, he wouldn't ha' gin it to us."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Crawford, *Ashe County's Civil War*, 9-10; Paschal, *History of the North Carolina Baptists*, 304-311; J.F. Fletcher, *A History of the Ashe County, North Carolina and New River, Virginia Baptist Associations* (Raleigh, NC: Commercial Printing Company, 1935): 24-25, 34-37, 48-49; Arthur L. Fletcher, *Ashe County: A History* (Jefferson, NC: Ashe County Research Association), 152-154; Minutes of the Elk Creek Primitive Baptist Church, July 2, 1851, Elk Creek Primitive Baptist Church (Alleghany County, NC) Records, 1839-1890, SHC; and *Spirit of the Age*, December 15, 1852.

¹⁵⁶ Stillwell, *Minutes of the Tuckaseegee Baptist Association*, 7-9.

¹⁵⁷ Porte Crayon (pseudonym), "A Winter in the South," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (November 1857), 732.



Figure 2.1. Sketch of Squire Gouge in Porte Crayon's "A Winter in the South" in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 15 (November 1857), 732.

Rural Carolina highlanders also sympathized with liquor manufacturers, pointing out that "no man is, by any means compelled to drink to excess, and that stills [were] harmless in themselves." Others labeled temperance advocates as "fanatics," "Wolves in Sheeps' clothing," and "followers of false Prophets." As one member of the Asheville Sons of Temperance complained to the *Spirit of the Age* in 1851, "I can assure you every thing has been said of us that the miscreant can concoct and set in motion."¹⁵⁸ On at least one occasion, farmers threatened reformers with violence. In 1852, twelve armed men, led by a deacon of a local Primitive Baptist church, disrupted a temperance rally in Taylorsville, firing "their war-like instruments into the air" and cursing at the crowd before returning "to the nearest distillery."¹⁵⁹ The conflict

¹⁵⁸ *Spirit of the Age*, July 25, 1851.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, December 15, 1852.

between these two groups would further intensify during the 1850s, when the Sons of Temperance launched a campaign for state-wide prohibition.

Prohibition and the Decline of Temperance Reform

In July 1853, J.R. Weaver from Madison County “sat in the Jury Box to try issues between the State and some of the citizens [of that county], for Assaults and Batteries, hog stealing, & c.” Reviewing the cases, Weaver, also a member of the Sons of Temperance, was appalled. “In every instance,” he believed, “it was proven that *Alcohol* was the prompter, except one case of hog stealing, and in that, one of the witnesses said the prisoner was ‘*toxicate*’ when he started to the mountains, the morning he killed the hog.” To make matters worse, Weaver argued that local politicians were responsible for these crimes by promoting drunkenness. “We have six Candidates for the Clerkships in Madison County; five of whom are treating with a vengeance,” he wrote to the *Spirit of the Age*. “They have their regular appointments over the County for the citizens to meet and drink *a treat* – they meet and drink, and fight!” Although doing everything possible, the Sons and local churches had failed to defeat “King Alcohol.” “Legal suasion,” Weaver concluded, “is the only hope for Madison.”¹⁶⁰

By the early 1850s, mountain urban reformers, like those in other parts of the United States, increasingly argued that the government should assist the temperance crusade. For decades, they had relied upon moral suasion to combat intemperance, but to no avail. Whiskey and brandy continued to flow at militia musters and other social events. Taverns still dotted the mountain countryside, encouraging disorder and crime.¹⁶¹ Nor had legislators taken steps to dissuade distillers from manufacturing “the staff of life” into “poison.”¹⁶² “King Alcohol,”

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, August 3, 1853.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., September 15, 1852, August 3, 1853.

¹⁶² *North Carolina Spectator and Western Advertiser*, March 3, 1832; and *Spirit of the Age*, May 11, 1853.

reformers feared, was controlling the General Assembly, “forbidding [it] to pass laws of immediate and pressing importance.”¹⁶³ As one western North Carolinian explained in 1853:

Of the many Traps that are set to catch men and money, I will mention a few. The counterfeiter has his trap – the highway man, the gambler, the Abolitionist, each have theirs; but the Legislature has wisely provided for the protection of our citizens from their wiles, and for the punishment of those who may be convicted of being guilty of setting any of the above Traps – but strange to say, it has made provision for setting other Traps, which have caused the loss of more lives – the waste of more property – filled the Jails with more inmates – the penitentiary with more convicts – the poor-house with more Paupers ... than all the Traps that have ever been set beside! I allude to the *license* grog-shop, and the dealers in intoxicating liquors in general.¹⁶⁴

Believing that recent laws prohibiting the sale of alcohol near churches and colleges had proven beneficial and that moral suasion had failed, the Sons of Temperance launched a campaign calling for state-wide prohibition in 1852. Over three thousand western North Carolinians, nearly a third of whom were women, joined the cause.¹⁶⁵ These mountain reformers signed memorials, sent petitions to the General Assembly, and wrote editorials in local newspapers, insisting that prohibition was necessary to end pauperism, crime, and moral decay.¹⁶⁶ The General Assembly disagreed, however. In 1852 and 1854, legislators decided that state-wide prohibition was unconstitutional because it infringed on the rights of citizens. Legislators also castigated the reformers as being “reckless of results.” Concluding their report in 1854, the House committee declared that prohibition was “a species of fanaticism, which has its parallel only in the insane desire, of those, who would deprive, at one fell blow, every planter

¹⁶³ *Spirit of the Age*, July 25, 1851.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, May 11, 1853.

¹⁶⁵ Of the approximately 18,000 North Carolinians who signed the prohibition memorial in 1852, 3,268 of them were from the mountains. Of those 3,268 mountain prohibitionists, 1,043 were females. See *ibid.*, January 5, 1853.

¹⁶⁶ *Spirit of the Age*, July 25, 1851, December 15, 1852, May 11, 1853; *Asheville Messenger*, April 21, May 26, 1852; *Asheville News*, January 17, 1856; Memorials from Alexander, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cleveland, Cherokee, Haywood, Henderson, Madison, Rutherford, and Wilkes counties, 1855, all in Box 13, Petitions, General Assembly Session Records, NCDAH; and Memorial from Jackson County, 1855, box 12, Petitions, General Assembly Session Records, NCDAH.

of his slaves, and turn loose upon the land, without a moment's warning, millions of human beings.”¹⁶⁷

Anti-prohibitionists could not have been more pleased. In 1852, Yancey County farmers feared that prohibitionists, much like northern abolitionists, were a “minority” group “attempting to control a majority.” “What good can result from any law forced on an unwilling people,” they asked the General Assembly in a petition. “Majorities should govern.” Like Gouge and other mountain distillers, these Yancey County residents also believed that prohibition would increase alcohol consumption. “Pass this law,” they warned, “and ... the unhappy Ireland will soon be ours that is; that our whole country will soon be covered with illicit stills and every community filled with spies and informers.”¹⁶⁸ For many western North Carolinians, especially those being “persecuted” by anti-liquor agitators, the Sons of Temperance became a radical group on the fringes of society. Its call for prohibition had backfired in the mountain region, allowing anti-prohibitionists to link the Sons with abolitionism. Denounced as “a society of Infidels,” the Sons of Temperance, although it continued to exist, would never again receive the mountain support that it had enjoyed in the late 1840s and early 1850s.¹⁶⁹ In this case, Appalachia was not an exception. The forces conspiring against the Sons elsewhere in the South – Anti-Missionism, farmers’ continued dependence on distilling, and rural residents’ acceptance of “traditional” drinking mores – encouraged a majority of western North Carolinians to reject the anti-alcohol crusade.

¹⁶⁷ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 41-47.

¹⁶⁸ To the Honorable, the General Assembly of North Carolina, 1852, Petitions, General Assembly Session Records, NCDAH; and Crayon, “A Winter in the South,” 732.

¹⁶⁹ Western North Carolinians also denounced the Sons as a “company of mid-night revelers,” an “arm of Romanism,” a “branch of Masons,” “Wolves in Sheeps’ Clothing,” “followers of false Prophets,” and “a set of men conspiring against the liberties of the country.” See *Spirit of the Age*, July 25, 1851.

On November 22, 1855, the *Asheville News* announced that S.F. Cary, a “distinguished temperance lecturer,” would deliver a series of speeches in Rutherford, Henderson, Buncombe, and Burke counties during the month of December. In times past, the *News* would have reported Cary’s every move and word as he traveled throughout the region. But this year was different. The newspaper failed to give its readers even a weekly update on Cary’s whereabouts. Finally, on January 17, 1856, a month after Cary visited Buncombe County, the *News* broke its silence. Issuing an apology, the editors explained that the “paper was pre-occupied with other matter[s], and our engagements prevented us from attending and hearing his [speeches].”

Like other newspapers in the South, the *Asheville News* had become preoccupied with national events. The conflict between the North and South over the issue of extending slavery into the territories was not subsiding. In such uncertain times, why advocate for legislation that threatened to divide white mountain society? After advising readers not to make state-wide prohibition “a party test, paramount to all others,” the editors of the *News* put the issue to rest, never again mentioning it.¹⁷⁰ Many churches also welcomed the end of prohibition agitation. To weather the storm ahead, southern Baptists and Methodists had to remain united and avoid issues that had divided congregations for decades. As historian Gordon McKinney has discovered, however, these churches were unable to maintain social order during the Civil War.¹⁷¹ The congregations remained divided along class, geographical, and theological lines that the temperance movement had helped to create.

The cultural values of western North Carolinians also conspired against alcohol reformers before the Civil War. As in other parts of the South, the mountain region remained predominantly rural, and farmers continued to adhere to a preindustrial ideology that tolerated

¹⁷⁰ *Asheville News*, November 22, 1855, January 17, 1856.

¹⁷¹ McKinney, “Economy and Community in Western North Carolina,” in *Appalachia in the Making*, 177-178.

alcohol consumption both during and after work. Urban businessmen and professionals, the group from which the temperance cause received its strongest support, were not yet a culturally important force in rural mountain society. Reformers would have to wait until the late nineteenth century, when the region began to feel the full impact of industrialization and urbanization, before they could gain the support of rural communities on this issue. Nonetheless, distillers and their clientele could not yet breathe a sigh of relief, for they would once again become labeled as miscreants during the Civil War.

PART 2:

THE GOLDEN AGE OF MOONSHINING, 1861-1876

CHAPTER 3

“IS THERE ANY WAY TO GET AT THE DISTILLERS?”: THE FALL AND RISE OF THE MOONSHINERS, 1861-1868

There was an old Mountaineer
Who loved his Moon Shine dear.
He spent night and day
Thinking of a way,
To improve his moon shine still.¹

On March 18, 1862, several women marched down the streets of Newton in Catawba County. Their destination was a train depot, where distillers from Catawba and nearby mountain counties had transported large quantities of homemade alcohol. The distillers sat astride their barrels of whiskey as the women approached them. Two weeks earlier, these “Ladies of Catawba” had warned them to stop manufacturing alcohol, arguing that it deprived the “poor” of corn. Those who ignored this warning now faced an angry crowd of women, armed and equipped with short-range axes. Some distillers, as they had done throughout the antebellum period, tried to diffuse the situation by pointing out that they had an inalienable right to manufacture alcohol. The “Ladies of Catawba” remained unconvinced. “While you are crying, ‘law,’” one woman responded, “our little ones will cry, ‘bread’ – ‘bread.’” Fighting ensued. The women shoved the distillers away and began to hit the barrels with their axes. Whiskey

¹ “Moon Shine,” poem recorded in *Wolfery: A Collection of Burke County Folklore assembled by the Southern Folklore Class*, Fall 1977.

poured from the containers onto the ground. When the dust had settled, the “Ladies of Catawba,” standing ankle-deep in whiskey, raised their hands in celebration.²

The “Ladies of Catawba” were not the only western North Carolinians persecuting distillers during the Civil War. Whereas viewing alcohol producers as legitimate entrepreneurs in the antebellum period, many mountain residents, most of whom were poor and resided in the countryside, had changed their opinion because they believed that distillers were draining the region’s food supply. These men and women, struggling to feed their families, embraced state-wide prohibition as an economic necessity, and allied with urban reformers, who continued to argue that alcohol manufacturers were “soulless scoundrels.” Distillers, however, would soon find rescue, when a new federal agency, the Bureau of Internal Revenue, arrived in western North Carolina during Congressional Reconstruction. As food became more available during the late 1860s, many rural and town mountain residents who did not distill alcohol condemned the Bureau of Internal Revenue and its “infernal” liquor tax as tools used by the federal government to expand its authority. They would join forces with the moonshiners in their fight against federal liquor law enforcement. The golden age of moonshining had begun.

Civil War Liquor Distillation and Prohibition

When North Carolina seceded from the Union on May 20, 1861, most mountain residents embraced the Confederate cause. Many of them had longed for this day. “You ought to hear us girls talk about fighting,” Amelia Gwyn of McDowell County told her sister that April, “I believe we have all concluded to fight to the last and die before we’ll give up to a Yankee.”³ Young men eagerly enlisted in the Confederate army or state militia, believing that the conflict would not last long. “I have not brought myself to believe that there will be much fighting,”

² *Greensboro Patriot*, March 27, 1862.

³ Amelia Gwyn to Sister Sallie, April 15, 1861, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

Caldwell County resident Edmund Jones wrote in May. “The courage of the North will evaporate after awhile, and the Southern States permitted to go in peace.”⁴ Bands serenaded troops as they passed from town to town. Women encouraged their husbands and sons to join the military. Most were ready to fight and die for the Confederacy. “Death or victory is our motto,” James Gentry from Ashe County informed his father-in-law on May 6, 1861.⁵

This euphoria would soon give way to a harsh reality. Food shortages, largely due to the departure of males for military service, and subsequent rising prices resulted in economic hardship for most Carolina highlanders during the Civil War. As early as October 1861, Jackson County resident Elizabeth Watson complained that “times in our county is hard for the poor class of people for every thing is giting so deer that they cant by hardly a noughf to live on.” “Salt,” she continued, “is from nine to ten dollars a sack her and evry other thing in proportion. Thier is good crops in our county I think corn can be bought at 50 cts. all through the winter and now the people is ... halling off thier meet. I don’t now how we will git our nessaryes for money is scarce here.”⁶

By 1862, the problems that Watson described – food shortages, the scarcity of cash, speculation, and the disruption of the market economy – became widespread in western North Carolina. That December, a Waynesville woman complained to her aunt: “When the war broke out all I thought about was our friends going off & getting killed. I did not think about the small pox and evry kind of disease getting all over the country, and people starving to death and all that ... As I heard an old woman say the other day, ‘seems like this country is might nigh tore

⁴ Edmund W. Jones to S. F. Patterson, May 20, 1861, quoted in Inscoe and McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 62.

⁵ James M. Gentry to Jonathan Faw, May 6, 1861, quoted in Inscoe and McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 60.

⁶ Elizabeth Watson to James Watson, October 29, 1861, James Watson Papers, Special Collections, Western Carolina University.

up!”⁷ Others wrote to Governors Henry T. Clark and then Zebulon B. Vance, begging for economic relief. Many of them expressed the sentiments of Burke County resident Robert L. Abernathy, who explained to Vance in November 1862: “If it is Constitutional, and if your position as Governor of N. Carolina gives you the power to do so, in the name of God, of suffering humanity, of the cries of widows and orphans, do put down the Speculation and extortion in this part of the State.”⁸

Raleigh and local officials scrambled to meet the growing needs of the poor. Governor Clark and later Vance, hoping to reduce speculation and conserve scarce items, issued proclamations forbidding the interstate trade of made food and domestic goods. The state legislature passed “An Act for the Purchase of Provisions” in December 1862, which appropriated \$400,000 to buy corn and other provisions to feed the poor. By the spring of 1863, several mountain counties, like those elsewhere in North Carolina, had appointed commissioners and subcommissioners to oversee the distribution of these funds to indigent residents.⁹ Local elites also lent a helping hand by giving donations and lowering their rents. Joseph C. Norwood of Caldwell County was one such landlord, who noted in the fall of 1863: “The women begged to retain their rent, expecting to get it at a low rate. I thought it was best to give it to them, as a low price in Confedte money woulnt amt. to nothing—& we find it necessary here to be very liberal with the soldier’s families.”¹⁰

⁷ [Niece] to Lizzie Lenoir, December 26, 1862, quoted in Inscoe and McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 168-169.

⁸ R.L. Abernathy to Z.B. Vance, November 4, 1862, quoted in W. Buck Yearns and John G. Barrett, eds., *North Carolina Civil War Documentary* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 217-218.

⁹ “When the Confederacy introduced the tax-in-kind in 1863, some of the supplies collected were distributed at home rather than being sent to the front.” See McKinney, “Moonshiners, Law Enforcement, and Violence,” 5; and Paul D. Escott, “Poverty and Government Aid for the Poor in Confederate North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 61 (October 1984): 462-480.

¹⁰ Joseph C. Norwood to Walter Lenoir, November 17, 1863, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC. For more examples on poor relief in western and other parts of North Carolina, see Inscoe and McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 169-171; Deyton, “Toe River Valley to 1865,” 463; J. Kent Coward, “The Community in Crisis,” in

Another option for reducing economic distress was to curtail the distillation of corn and fruit into alcohol. By 1862, many mountain residents, like others throughout the state, had begun to pressure Raleigh officials to suppress whiskey and brandy manufacturing, arguing that it deprived them of corn and other foodstuffs. In February, James Gwyn of Wilkes County revealed that distilling was one of the leading causes for “the great scarcity of corn” in the region. “What will the poor who have no money to buy grain do,” he asked.¹¹ One month later, Catawba County residents complained that alcohol manufacturing not only hurt the poor, but also threatened to destroy the Confederacy. “Stop the stills, or ruin is our certain doom,” they demanded. “We must make our bread, or perish for the want of it. A bountiful Providence has given us enough for man and beast; but distillers have already converted so much corn into poison, that prices look like famine ahead.”¹² Many mountain churches also no longer approved of alcohol production. In the spring of 1862, for instance, the King’s Mountain Baptist Association voted to once again expel any member who continued to make or sell distilled spirits.¹³

On February 21, 1862, North Carolina legislators unanimously passed the state’s first tax on alcohol manufacturing, believing that it would relieve the economic stress of their constituents by forcing distillers to cut back on production. Alcohol makers, regardless of the size of their stills, now had to pay a tax of thirty cents on each gallon of liquor they produced.

History of Jackson County, edited by Max Williams (Sylva, NC: Jackson County Historical Association, 1987): 439; Escott, “Poverty and Governmental Aid for the Poor”; and William F. Entrekin, Jr., “Poor Relief in North Carolina” (M.A. thesis, Duke University, 1947). On efforts elsewhere in the Confederacy, see Mary Elizabeth Massey, “Food and Drink Shortages on the Confederate Homefront,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 26 (July 1949): 306-334; Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Ersatz in the Confederacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952); Paul D. Escott, “‘Cry of the Sufferers’: The Problem of Welfare in the Confederacy,” *Civil War History* 23 (September 1977): 228-240; and William M. Robinson, Jr., “Prohibition in the Confederacy,” *American Historical Review* 37 (October 1931): 50-58.

¹¹ James Gwyn to Joseph C. Norwood, February 12, 1862, James Gwyn Papers, SHC.

¹² *Greensboro Patriot*, March 27, 1862.

¹³ Logan, *Sketches, Historical and Biographical, of the Broad River and King’s Mountain Baptist Associations*, 188.

Careful not to overstep its legal authority and potentially provoke cries of governmental oppression, the General Assembly made sure that the local community retained control of alcohol production. On May 2, it enacted an ordinance that gave sheriffs the power to enforce and collect the tax. Before operating their stills, alcohol makers had to sign an oath to the sheriff, specifying the quantity of alcohol they planned to manufacture. Upon conviction by local juries, violators of the ordinance would have to pay a double tax and additional fines, the amounts of which the county court judge determined.¹⁴

This tax, however, failed to alleviate opposition to alcohol manufacturing, especially among members of the Sons of Temperance. Having declined in popularity during the late 1850s, this organization capitalized on the economic stresses of the war to resume its fight against “King Alcohol.” In 1861, reformers in the Carolina highlands and other parts of the state, hoping to disassociate the Sons from its northern roots, had embraced the Confederacy and assured worried citizens that they were doing everything possible to aid the cause. “Nearly all of our officers have laid aside their badges and put on soldier’s uniform,” the Swannanoa Sons of Temperance in Buncombe County proclaimed that June. “[They] have left their pens to corrode in the ink till they would dip their swords in tyrants’ blood to write freedom for the sunny South.”¹⁵ The Sons did not stop there. It also attempted to garner support by linking Confederate victory with alcohol reform. “The whole Southern Confederacy,” the *Spirit of the Age* explained in 1862, “is sustaining heavier damage from whiskey, than will ever be inflicted by the whole northern army, who come to subjugate and enslave us.” To defeat the North, the southern populace had to embrace sobriety.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Ordinances of the State Convention: Published in Pursuance of a Resolution of the General Assembly [Ratified 11th February 1863]* (Raleigh: W.W. Holden, 1863), 70-71.

¹⁵ *Spirit of the Age*, June 12, 1861. See also *Spirit of the Age*, August 28, 1861, July 28, December 22, 1862.

¹⁶ Quoted in *Marion Western Enterprise*, March 14, 1862.

In 1862, the Sons of Temperance launched a campaign against the proposed state liquor tax, arguing that it would not discourage distillers from manufacturing alcohol. “We fear, nay, we know,” Alexander Gorman, editor of *The Spirit of the Age*, explained two weeks before state legislators enacted the tax, “that the love of money is so strong in the minds of many men, that they will disregard the most wholesome admonitions of the press, the pulpit, and betray their country to destruction for filthy lucre.” According to Gorman, the state liquor tax was a compromise, one that “will be found futile and fail to accomplish the end designed.” To stop the “absolute destitution and suffering” of the poor, he suggested that the General Assembly prohibit the making of whiskey out of corn and wheat. Gorman knew that the economic stresses of the war provided reformers with an opportunity to once again advocate for state-wide prohibition. Not only would prohibition reduce the “sufferings” of many North Carolinians, it also promised to aid the Confederacy in its fight for independence. Prohibition, Gorman insisted, “is emphatically ‘a military necessity,’ because unless some relief of the kind is afforded, our soldiers, and those who are dearer to them than life itself – their families at home – must suffer for the necessities of life.”¹⁷ Many mountain Confederates, especially those living in economically depressed areas, would find Gorman’s and other reformers’ call for state-wide prohibition appealing during the Civil War. The survival of their families and of the Confederacy was more important to them than distilling alcohol.

On December 7, 1862, state legislators responded to the demands of their constituents by enacting a law prohibiting the distillation of corn into whiskey until the conclusion of the Civil War. This legislation also outlawed distillers from using wheat, oats, peas, peanuts, rice,

¹⁷ *The Spirit of the Age*, January 8, February 5, 12, 19, March 10, 1862.

potatoes, sugar cane, dried fruit, and syrup to manufacture alcohol.¹⁸ Like the state liquor tax, county officials enforced the prohibition ordinance, thereby allowing the local community to retain control of alcohol production. Upon conviction in county courts, violators of the law would have to pay a \$100 fine or serve thirty days in prison. Moreover, the General Assembly unanimously voted to prohibit farmers from manufacturing alcohol for the Confederate government, fearing that this would further raise the price of foodstuffs.¹⁹ Although state legislators passed the law for economic rather than moral or social reasons, Gorman and other antebellum reformers would have been pleased. Never before had the state imposed such stringent ordinances against alcohol and those who distilled it.

Despite a long tradition of resistance to alcohol reform, many Carolina highlanders would ultimately support state-wide prohibition, and for good reason. By 1863, food shortages and subsequent rising prices continued to plague the region. That February, Rutherford County resident E.D. Hawkins complained that corn could “hardly be had at all.” “Grain,” he continued, “is badly needed for the support of the wives and children of the soldiers who are in the field.”²⁰ Not only was food scarce, it was also becoming more expensive. In 1863, according to one study of the impact inflation had on the mountain region, “the price of eggs increased 1666%, ... bacon 2272%, flour 2777%, ... and corn and potatoes shot up 3000%.”²¹ The extraordinary cost of these essential items continued to make it difficult for most highlanders to subsist. In many sections of western North Carolina, the threat of starvation became quite real. “Thare will have

¹⁸ The General Assembly added several amendments during the course of the war. “In order to enable the government better to ferret out the law breakers, it was provided in 1863 that one-half of the fine collected should be paid to the informer. Buckwheat and barley were added to the prohibited materials in 1864. In December of the same year another amendment was added which made it unlawful to use any material in the making of spirituous liquors.” See Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 49-52.

¹⁹ *Spirit of the Age*, December 8, 1862. See also *Public Laws of North Carolina, 1862-1863*, 20-21.

²⁰ E.D. Hawkins to ZBV, February 15, 1863, reel 16, Gordon B. McKinney and Richard McMurry, eds., *The Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance* (Frederick: University Publications of America, 1987). Hereafter cited as *Vance Papers*.

²¹ Phillip G. Davis, “Mountain Heritage, Mountain Promise under Siege: The Origin and Devastation of Confederate Sympathy in the North Carolina Mountains during the Civil War” (M.A. thesis, Wake Forest University, 1994), 135.

to be something don for us or we will all perish to death,” Maryann Arrowood from Henderson County informed Governor Vance in November 1863.²²

In this atmosphere of scarcity, mountain residents increasingly blamed alcohol manufacturing for draining the food supply and embraced state-wide prohibition as an economic necessity. Whereas viewing distillers as legitimate entrepreneurs during the antebellum period, these men and women, many of whom were poor and resided in the countryside, had changed their opinion. In February 1863, Hawkins chastised whiskey makers in Rutherford County, arguing that they were depriving the local community of grain.²³ J.F. Eller agreed. That March, he noted that several Wilkes County farmers continued to manufacture whiskey, despite the General Assembly’s recent enactment of the prohibition law. “These men have so far went unmolested,” he complained, “and are getting rich selling whiskey at \$3 per quart, while they are also raising the price of corn so that if the poor class could obtain any they are not able to follow the prices.”²⁴ Two months later, Wilkes County farmer T.J. Bicknell denounced distillers as “greedy” men and “lowdown females” who were “not responsible for any thing.” He also asked Zebulon Vance to add an amendment to the prohibition law that would fine farmers who sold their corn to distillers.²⁵ These complaints against alcohol manufacturing continued until the end of the Civil War.²⁶

Nonetheless, mountain residents realized that at least some preparation of alcohol was required during the war. As noted in Chapter 1, alcohol was an important medical item used by most Carolina highlanders to cure colds, consumption, snakebites, and other ailments.

²² Maryann Arrowood to Zebulon Vance, November 26, 1862, reel 20, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*.

²³ E.D. Hawkins to ZBV, February 15, 1863, reel 16, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*.

²⁴ *Spirit of the Age*, March 16, 1863.

²⁵ T.J. Bicknell to ZBV, May 7, 1863, reel 63, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*.

²⁶ Jas. O. Simmons to ZBV, April 18, 1864, reel 23; M.W. Simmons to ZBV, April 18, 1864, reel 23; E.R. Norton to ZBV, September 27, 1864, reel 24; James Sloan to ZBV, January 17, 1865, reel 26; and Tod R. Caldwell, et al, to ZBV, February 4, 1865, reel 26, all in *Vance Papers*.

Moreover, by 1863, the Richmond government desperately needed whiskey to treat Confederate soldiers wounded in battle. Despite this shortage of alcohol for medical purposes, however, many mountain residents remained hesitant to distill it, suggesting that they had accepted the prohibition law. Even with the blessing of the local community, these men often sought permission from state authorities before making alcohol. Mountain farmers and physicians in Rutherford, Cherokee, Jackson, and Burke counties asked Vance to allow them to distill or purchase whiskey. “We can not get any kind of spirits here for medical purposes,” doctors J.A. Goode and J.W. Harris from Rutherford County explained to Vance in March 1863, “but [we] can get it done if you will give [us] a permit to do so.” One month later, Goode and Harris again wrote the governor, pointing out that “not one drop [of the alcohol] will be used as a beverage.”²⁷ Although wanting to distill and use alcohol for legitimate reasons, these men were unwilling to do so without the approval of Vance and other state authorities. Nor did they dare offend members of the local community, especially those poorer residents, who deemed prohibition to be an economic necessity.

Perhaps the most ardent mountain prohibitionist was Governor Vance, a Buncombe County native who was fully aware of the economic difficulties that highlanders faced. Throughout the Civil War, Vance vehemently supported the prohibition law, much to the dismay of Confederate Secretary of War James A. Seddon. In 1863, the War Department, combatting the shortage of alcohol for medical purposes, began to operate distilleries in North Carolina,

²⁷ J.A. Goode and J.W. Harris to ZBV, March 28, April 10, 1863, reel 16, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*. See also Petition from Caldwell County residents to the General Assembly, January 23, 1863, “Petitions,” General Assembly State Records, NCDAH; Wm. Enloe, et al to [Zebulon Baird Vance], May 22, 1863, reel 17, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*; Jessie R. Combs to ZBV, November 24, 1863, reel 20, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*; Peter Johnson to ZBV, February 22, 1864, reel 22, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*; Memorial from Cleveland County residents to the General Assembly, December 2, 1864, General Assembly State Records, NCDAH; and S.P. Brittain to ZBV, December 5, 1864, reel 25, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*.

sparking a states' rights battle between Vance and Seddon.²⁸ That December, upon learning that the Richmond government was attempting to use tax-in-kind grain to manufacture liquor in Salisbury, Vance lashed out at Seddon and the War Department. He pointed out that state laws "positively forbid the distillation of any kind of grain within its borders under heavy penalties." Vance then threatened to arrest the operators of the still. "It seems to me," he wrote to Seddon, "if spirits are so absolutely requisite for the Medical Department, that grain sufficient might be found in remote and plentiful districts, and leave for the use of the people every grain which is accessible. Be this as it may, I am sure you will agree with me in saying that no person can under authority of the Confederate Government violate State laws with impunity."²⁹

Although Seddon agreed to move the distillery at Salisbury out of the state, the War Department continued to hire North Carolinians to manufacture alcohol for medical purposes and argued that the Richmond government had the constitutional authority to "raise and support armies." Confederate Attorney General S.H. Rogers, Seddon reminded Vance in 1864, had ruled that "a State has no power to interfere with the Confederate government in the manufacture or even contracting for such supplies."³⁰ This practice came to a head in February 1865, when the War Department employed several farmers in Burke County to make whiskey. Outraged, Vance informed Seddon that the distillery was depleting the region's food surpluses and that he would use the state militia to uphold the prohibition law. "Knowing as I do the wants of the community

²⁸ For a discussion on prohibition in the South during the Civil War, see Robinson, "Prohibition in the Confederacy," 50-58.

²⁹ ZBV to James Seddon, December 31, 1863, reel 13, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*.

³⁰ James Seddon to ZBV, January 12, 1864, reel 13, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*. See also ZBV to S.H. Rogers, January 22, 1864; and J. Jarratt to ZBV, October 12, 1864, all on reel 13, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*.

whose interest is there to be effected,” Vance concluded, “I must earnestly insist that if such permission has been granted [which it was] that it be immediately revoked.”³¹

Vance was not the only western North Carolinian who feared that the War Department’s attempt to distill alcohol would deplete the region’s foodstuffs. Even mountain residents who received a Confederate contract were reluctant to manufacture alcohol without first receiving the consent of state authorities. A.D. Childs of Mitchell County was one such man, a distiller who had obtained a Confederate contract to distill 2,000 gallons of rye whiskey in April 1863. Before making it, however, he explained to Vance that the rye was “so much injured in the stocks that it cant be Eaten for Bread & only useful for stock Whisky.” Although this grain would be distilled for nationally required purposes, Childs remained hesitant to break the prohibition law because he believed that most members of the local community supported it. “I do not wish to violate any law with an object in view to make money,” he assured the governor.³² Nearly two years later, in January 1865, James Sloan threatened to resign as “Chief Commissary” if Richmond officials ordered him to allow “certain parties in the western counties of the state” to distill alcohol. “I most respectfully request that you advise me what course I should follow,” he wrote to Vance. “Shall I resign my position as Chief Commissary, or shall I obey orders which are repugnant to my better judgment and injurious alike to the best interest of the State and Confederate Governments?”³³ That following month, when the War Department hired several farmers to distill whiskey in Burke County, many residents there were appalled. In a petition to Vance, they complained: “We respectfully protest against this for the reason, that grain is very

³¹ ZBV to James Seddon, February 6, 1865, reel 13, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*. See also ZBV to S.H. Rogers, January 16, 1865; and S.H. Rogers to ZBV, January 18, 1865, Tod Caldwell, et al to ZBV, February 4, 1865, all on reel 13, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*.

³² A.D. Childs to ZBV, April 10, 1863, reel 17, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*.

³³ James Sloan to ZBV, January 17, 1865, reel 26, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*.

scarce in this community and the families of soldiers and the poor & needy will require all the surplus which can be spared from the army, for their maintenance and support.”³⁴

But not all Carolina highlanders complied with the prohibitory law during the Civil War. These illicit distillers, who would become popularly known as moonshiners in the 1870s, argued that they had the right to make a living unmolested by the state government and refused to adhere to the local community’s new standards. In February 1863, illicit distiller Jesse M. Scruggs from Cleveland County, when confronted by his brother-in-law, explained that he was doing nothing wrong. “Hit is,” he said, “no harm for no won to make money when tha can if ... whiskey is selling for the most profit of every thing.”³⁵ As Scruggs had informed his brother-in-law, farmers also broke the law because distilling remained a profitable enterprise. In 1863, for instance, a farmer in Wilkes County could earn a profit of \$2.00 if he distilled his corn into five gallons of alcohol.³⁶ Merchants also quickly took advantage of the lucrative illegal trade. In February 1863, Macon County resident Alfred W. Bell reported that H.W. Nolen, a Massachusetts native who had migrated to the region just before the war, was transporting “some 2 or 3 hundred bushels of dried fruit across state lines into Ga. to be distilled into brandy.”³⁷ These illegal practices not only drained the food supply, but also helped to raise inflation. By May 1863, according to an angry T.J. Bicknell, moonshining had caused the price of corn in Wilkes County to increase from \$2.00 that March to \$10.00 a bushel.³⁸

Illicit distillers found various ways to market their product. Although most continued to sell it to neighbors, some farmers like Alexander England from Transylvania County may have shipped their whiskey outside of the region, where the price of alcohol was sometimes more

³⁴ Tod R. Calwell, et al. to ZBV, February 4, 1865, reel 26, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*.

³⁵ E.D. Hawkins to ZBV, February 15, 1863, reel 16, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*.

³⁶ *Spirit of the Age*, March 16, 1863.

³⁷ Alfred W. Bell to ZBV, reel 26, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*.

³⁸ T.J. Bicknell to ZBV, reel 17, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*; and *Spirit of the Age*, March 16, 1863.

expensive.³⁹ Other moonshiners discovered that Confederate soldiers stationed in the Carolina highlands were eager to buy alcohol from them. This easy access to and heavy consumption of alcohol sometimes led to violence, further intensifying the local community's disapproval of illicit distilling. According to Robert L. Abernathy in February 1863, soldiers in Burke County were "frequently breaking open granaries, drinking ... insulting citizens, and making themselves a terror to the whole population."⁴⁰ Nine months later, complaining about the drunken behavior of several members of the 56th North Carolina Regiment in Wilkes County, Calvin Cowles wrote to Vance: "There is too much Brandy in the county for them and not enough corn."⁴¹ Soldiers were not the only military personnel whom moonshiners relied upon to make money. At the Asheville Armory, for instance, Captain Benjamin Sloan often cited Confederate employees there for drinking too heavily. More likely than not, these workers had purchased alcohol from local distilleries.⁴²

Many mountain residents, struggling to feed their families, attempted to eradicate this subversive trade. Some assisted state and county law enforcement officials by informing on moonshiners. In February 1863, for instance, E.D. Hawkins asked Vance to arrest his brother-in-law, Jesse Scruggs. "I dont rite this to you because I have any harm at the man at all for he is my brother in law," he wrote to the governor. "[But] thare is famileys that cant git bread to eat hardly and he is not [caring] for hit."⁴³ One month later, Wilkes County residents published the names of several local distillers in *The Spirit of the Age* and demanded that the state government

³⁹ William W. England to Alexander England, December 7, 1862, quoted in Inscoc and McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 174.

⁴⁰ R.L. Abernathy to ZBV, February 20, 1863, quoted in John G. Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 188.

⁴¹ Calvin J. Cowles to ZBV, November 23, 1863, quoted in Inscoc and McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 134.

⁴² McKinney, "Moonshiners, Law Enforcement, and Violence," 7.

⁴³ E.D. Hawkins to ZBV, February 15, 1863, Reel 16, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*.

prosecute these men to the fullest extent of the law.⁴⁴ Other mountain officials conducted raids on suspected moonshine enclaves. In April 1864, James Simmons of Rutherford County, accompanied by several home guardsmen, seized fifteen illegal stills. Simmons, however, was unable to apprehend the perpetrators, who had fled to South Carolina. “I ernistly pray ... that we may have the right to take all the Stills we can find in operation and put them under lock,” he explained to Vance. “[U]nless that is dun ... tha [moonshiners] will still not respecting the Law nor the wants of the poor.”⁴⁵ Later that same year, E.R. Norton of Horse Cove in Transylvania County confiscated a still and some fixtures hidden in a hollow tree from a South Carolina moonshiner.⁴⁶

Surviving reports from state and local officials reveal that illicit distilling did not become widespread in western North Carolina until late in the war. By 1865, many farmers in Surry, Rutherford, McDowell, Yancey, Watauga, and Wilkes counties had resumed their prewar practices. “These are not the times to convert [grain] into [whiskey],” James Sloan complained to Vance that January. “The hand of providence has withdrawn its assistance in this hour of our national struggle for life and liberty.” Another official reported that a Surry County farmer had “offered a certain number of gallons of ‘Nick Williams’ new whiskey in trade for a negro.”⁴⁷ William Stringfield and other local Confederates continued to enforce the law, but to no avail.⁴⁸ As several historians have demonstrated, community ties in western North Carolina by that time had unraveled under the stresses of four years of war. Lawlessness increased as mountain residents became divided along political, racial, and class lines. The market for alcohol also

⁴⁴ *Spirit of the Age*, March 16, 1863.

⁴⁵ M.W. Simmons to ZBV, April 18, 1864, reel 23, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*; and Jas. O. Simons to ZBV, April 18, 1864, quoted in Yearn and Barrett, *North Carolina Civil War Documentary*, 178.

⁴⁶ E.R. Norton to ZBV, September 27, 1864, reel 24, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*.

⁴⁷ James Sloan to ZBV, January 17, 1865, reel 26, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*.

⁴⁸ I.W. Hennega to ZBV, February 17, 1865, reel 4, McKinney and McMurry, *Vance Papers*.

grew as civilian morale declined, encouraging farmers to manufacture whiskey illegally.

Mountain residents could no longer apply the full weight of the local community on farmers to stop illicit distilling.⁴⁹

Nonetheless, the Civil War experience demonstrated that government officials could limit and control illegal distillation when local communities deemed it necessary. As Vance remembered in 1886, most western North Carolinians complied with the prohibition policy during the Civil War. “‘Old Rye’ grew to be worth its weight in silver, and ‘Mountain Dew’ became as the nectar of the gods,” Vance bragged. “Yet, true to their character as the most law abiding people on the continent, all respected the act of Assembly.”⁵⁰ Whereas viewing distillers as legitimate entrepreneurs during the antebellum period, many Carolina highlanders, most of whom were poor and resided in the countryside, had changed their opinion because they feared that alcohol manufacturing deprived the community of food. The General Assembly further encouraged compliance to prohibition by allowing the local community to enforce it. Temporarily siding with middle-class town reformers, who had argued for decades that alcohol makers were “soulless scoundrels,” many rural Carolina highlanders accepted prohibition as an economic necessity.⁵¹ That support would prove short-lived, however.

Post-Civil War Reactions to State Liquor Taxation and Prohibition

Western North Carolinians struggled to rebuild their shattered communities following the Civil War. Soldiers returned home to find untilled fields, starvation, and hardship. Most of them quickly discovered that the poverty of wartime would not quickly disappear. Food shortages and

⁴⁹ Paul D. Escott, *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985): 59-84; McKinney, “Economy and Community in Western North Carolina,” in *Appalachia in the Making*, 163-184; Crawford, *Ashe County’s Civil War*, 125-147; and Inscoc and McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 237.

⁵⁰ Quote in Glenn Tucker, *Zeb Vance: Champion of Personal Freedom* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965), 175.

⁵¹ *The Spirit of the Age*, March 16, 1863.

speculation continued to plague the region. The depreciation of state bonds and labor shortages further exacerbated the economic situation by forcing mountain residents to depend on an inflationary open market to buy food.⁵² To make matters worse, violence stemming from wartime personal vendettas continued in many mountain counties long after Confederate defeat in April 1865.⁵³ Survival was on everyone's mind. "What a humiliated and degraded people we are," William Tate, a prominent planter, businessman, and former slaveholder from Morganton, wrote to his daughter in August 1865. "It is as much as I can do to get enough for us to eat. We are living from hand to mouth."⁵⁴ These food shortages convinced many Carolina highlanders and others throughout the state to once again regulate liquor production.

On October 18, 1865, state legislators unanimously agreed to levy a tax on alcohol manufacturing, believing that it would increase food supplies by forcing distillers to cut back on production. Regardless of the size of their stills, liquor manufacturers now had to pay a twenty-five cent tax on each gallon of alcohol they produced. Like its predecessor during the Civil War, the new state liquor tax allowed the local community to retain control of alcohol production, which helps to explain why many mountain residents supported it. The law required distillers to first obtain a license from the Clerk of the County Court. The local sheriff would then collect the tax and arrest violators of the law. Upon conviction in county courts, distillers paid a fine of ten dollars for every day that they had unlawfully manufactured alcohol. If the moonshiner refused to disclose the length of time in which he/she produced whiskey, the sheriff had the authority to confiscate the still, fixtures, and "any other personal property" of the distiller.⁵⁵

⁵² Blackmun, *Western North Carolina*, 356-357.

⁵³ These counties included Rutherford, Wilkes, Madison, Yancey, Watauga, Buncombe, and Clay. See Inscoe and McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 269-270.

⁵⁴ W.C. Tate to "My Dear Daughter," August 27, 1865, Miscellaneous Letters, SHC.

⁵⁵ *Ordinances of the State Convention*, 1865-1866, 11; and *Revenue Law of North Carolina*, 1866, 15.

Perhaps the most ardent supporters of this law in North Carolina were temperance activists, who initially believed that state liquor taxation would raise the price of liquor and reduce consumption. Immediately following the Civil War, these reformers had become convinced that alcohol consumption was on the rise throughout the state. According to the North Carolina Methodist Conference in 1866, four years of war had ruined “the morals and piety of the land.” “Many old men pressed with their increased burdens have sought relief in the insensibility of drunkenness,” the Conference’s Committee on Temperance complained, “while the young men, amid the strange associations incident to disrupted society, have formed habits of dissipation ruinous to their usefulness and the good of society.”⁵⁶ Although it is impossible to determine whether or not alcohol consumption actually increased in North Carolina, some indigent residents probably turned to liquor after the Civil War. More likely than not, many Union and Confederate veterans, hoping to forget the bloodshed that they had just witnessed, also began to drink heavily.

The demand for temperance reform remained strongest in county seat towns, whose residents noted an increase of men engaged in binge drinking and criminal activity. In February 1866, Franklin residents in Macon County protested distiller D.A. McConnell’s decision to convert his new home into a tavern. Writing to William Holland Thomas, who had just sold the house to McConnell, they asked that he revoke the contract: “Now Col. [Thomas], you know what a blight it is on any civil community to have such an establishment among them ... where our children would be constantly in contact with all the incivilities and obscene and degrading language so often practiced at such an establishment.”⁵⁷ One month later, residents in Lenoir

⁵⁶ Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Journal of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the M.E. Church, South* (North Carolina: The Conference, 1883-1939), 16-17.

⁵⁷ J.R. Siler, et al to William H. Thomas, February 1866, William Holland Thomas Papers, Special Collections, Duke University.

petitioned the General Assembly to enact a law prohibiting retailers from selling liquor in quantities less than five gallons within corporate limits. “We are impelled to petition for this amendment,” they wrote, “because ... vicious persons ... [are] making our village the scene of brawling and drunkenness.”⁵⁸ Many of these Lenoir reformers soon joined the Friends of Temperance, a new reform society founded in Virginia shortly after the Civil War. In fact, largely due to its southern origins, this organization would become more popular than the Sons of Temperance, which disbanded in 1867. Like the Sons of Temperance, most of its lodges were located in county seat towns, suggesting that the temperance movement remained a largely urban phenomenon in western North Carolina during the mid 1860s.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, support for state liquor taxation proved fleeting, as many reformers and other North Carolinians increasingly believed that it had neither curtailed liquor manufacturing nor reduced drunkenness. As early as December 1865, the *Raleigh Sentinel* complained that alcohol distillers continued to consume a “very large quantity of grain” and sell their product to neighbors. That following month, the *Sentinel*, arguing that it deprived North Carolinians of foodstuffs, launched a series of attacks on alcohol manufacturing and suggested that the General Assembly reenact state-wide prohibition, which had ended upon Confederate defeat in April 1865. “The Legislature can attain no higher position,” the editors declared, “than when it rises above the clamors of personal interest, to guard society against a positive evil, and to protect the masses of the people from absolute want suffering.” Moreover, the newspaper appealed to temperance reformers by pointing out that prohibition would reduce alcoholism. “The moral

⁵⁸ Petition from Lenoir Residents to the General Assembly, Petitions, January-March 1866, General Assembly State Records, NCDAH.

⁵⁹ By 1868, the Friends of Temperance had organized seventeen lodges in western North Carolina. Ten of those lodges (or 59 percent) were located in county seat towns. See Levi Branson, ed., *Branson's North Carolina Business Directory* (Raleigh, NC: Branson & Jones, 1869), 165. For more on the Friends of Temperance in North Carolina, see Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 54-55.

aspects of this question are alarming,” it concluded. “One half or one third of this whiskey, instead of being eaten up in the form of bread by our people, will be drank by them, until many are made drunkards.” In the eyes of the *Sentinel*, alcohol distilling remained an “evil,” and state liquor taxation had failed to curtail it.⁶⁰

In late January 1866, responding to the demands of the *Sentinel* and other North Carolinians, the General Assembly debated the passage of a bill that would outlaw farmers from distilling grain into alcohol. Unlike during the Civil War, however, unified support for prohibition failed to develop in the Carolina highlands and other parts of the state. Opposition to the bill centered in mountain counties that had either a long tradition of alcohol manufacturing or limited access to major transportation routes. In the region’s top four antebellum whiskey producing counties (Surry, Burke, Wilkes, and Ashe), for instance, representatives rejected prohibition because they feared that it would destroy an important local industry (see table 1.2). Legislators in Cherokee, Macon, Jackson, and Haywood counties also opposed the bill, and for good reason. Unlike those residing in the French Broad Valley, where politicians supported the bill, farmers in these counties continued to find it difficult to transport their crops to market, largely due to the absence of railroads and other major trade arteries. After the Civil War, many of them had resumed the practice of distilling alcohol, believing that it was the quickest way to earn money, and pressured their representatives to reject the bill. These farmers must have been pleased when the Senate, on February 7, 1866, voted against prohibition.⁶¹

Undaunted, many western North Carolinians continued to insist that the General Assembly needed to somehow curtail liquor production. The most prominent among these mountain residents was Leander S. Gash, a state senator representing the counties of Buncombe,

⁶⁰ *Raleigh Sentinel*, December 18, 1865; January 25, 26, 29, February 9, 1866.

⁶¹ *Journal of the House*, 1866, 42-43; and *Journal of the Senate*, 1866, 69.

Henderson, Madison, Transylvania, Yancey, and Mitchell. In March, Gash introduced a bill raising the state liquor tax from twenty-five to fifty cents a gallon. He also proposed a double tax on imported liquors and heavier fines for violators. While the additional tax would initially raise money to build a state penitentiary, food shortages in Henderson and nearby counties had prompted Gash to propose the bill. A tax increase to relieve the economic stress felt by his constituents, the senator believed, would force distillers to cut back on production and subsequently lower the price of corn.⁶²

Nonetheless, with the exception of Gash, mountain legislators opposed the bill and helped to secure its defeat in the Senate.⁶³ Gash must have been surprised by his colleagues' refusal to support a higher tax on alcohol manufacturing. Just five months earlier, in October 1865, they had unanimously agreed to enact state liquor taxation, believing that it would increase food supplies. By 1866, however, it appears that many Carolina highlanders living in regions where food was becoming more available had begun to tolerate alcohol distilling. That spring, for instance, the King's Mountain Baptist Association overturned its 1859 and 1862 resolutions prohibiting members from manufacturing alcohol. More likely than not, many congregates concluded that distilling would allow them to make extra money and had pressured the association to change its policy.⁶⁴ The proposed bill also garnered support for alcohol producers by reigniting intrastate sectional tensions. According to Gash in March 1867, mountain politicians had opposed the tax increase because it placed an "unequal" financial burden on their constituents. Because western North Carolina supposedly had a higher percentage of alcohol

⁶² Otto H. Olsen and Ellen Z. McGrew, eds., "Prelude to Reconstruction: The Correspondence of State Senator Leander Sams Gash, 1866-1867, Part I," *North Carolina Historical Review* 60 (January 1983), 86.

⁶³ *Journal of the Senate*, 1866, 191-198.

⁶⁴ Logan, *Sketches, Historical and Biographical, of the Broad River and King's Mountain Baptist Associations*, 208.

manufacturers than in other parts of the state, they reasoned, the General Assembly had to find an alternative way to raise revenue and increase food supplies.⁶⁵

Despite their reluctance to reenact prohibition or raise the state liquor tax, many Carolina highlanders continued to support the original excise of twenty-five cents per gallon. First, this tax did not significantly reduce the distiller's profit margin, which helps to explain why state newspapers failed to report an increase in moonshining. In fact, by 1866, the price for a bushel of corn had dropped to \$1.50, while a gallon of whiskey retailed at \$3.00. Even if taxed, a farmer distilling five gallons of whiskey could earn a profit of \$10.75.⁶⁶ Perhaps more importantly, the General Assembly allowed the local community to retain control of alcohol production. Sheriffs and other county officials enforced the state liquor tax, thereby reducing cries of governmental oppression. Federal liquor taxation, however, proved to be a different story.

The Administrative Structure of the Bureau of Internal Revenue

During the Civil War, the U.S. Congress levied duties on liquor, tobacco, and other "luxuries" to raise revenue. Under the Tax Act of 1862, the government established the Office of the Commissioner of Internal Revenue (commonly known as the Bureau of Internal Revenue) and divided each Union state into several collection districts.⁶⁷ The Commissioner of Internal Revenue, a political appointee who headed the bureau, presided over this patronage empire that employed hundreds of federal workers. A collector headed each district and appointed subordinates to monitor the output of distilleries and to apprehend violators of the liquor law. Assessors levied the tax in each district, while inspectors ensured that residents' complied with

⁶⁵ Olsen and McGrew, "Prelude to Reconstruction: The Correspondence of State Senator Leander Sams Gash, 1866-1867, Part II," *North Carolina Historical Review* 60 (April 1983), 363.

⁶⁶ Account Book of Isaac Jarratt, 1866, Jarratt-Puryear Family Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University.

⁶⁷ In 1953, the U.S. Congress renamed this agency the Internal Revenue Service.

the law. In 1863, the bureau began to hire Internal Revenue agents (or revenueurs) to aid collectors in the North and Midwest by enforcing liquor taxation and supervising local agents.⁶⁸

Northern congressmen initially believed that liquor taxation was an effective and “painless” way to raise revenue for the Union war effort. According to Representative Justin Morrill of Vermont in March 1862, “a tax dependent upon the habits or vices of men is the most reliable of all taxes, as it takes centuries to change or eradicate one or the other.”⁶⁹ Nor did Morrill and other legislators anticipate widespread resistance to the liquor law. “There is a considerable quantity of apple and peach brandy or whiskey manufactured in the State of New Jersey,” Representative Stratton declared, “and neither the Representatives of that State nor the people of that State are disposed to ask that they shall be relieved from the payment of their fair share of the taxes necessary for the support of the Government.”⁷⁰ Congressmen from the Northwest, however, whose constituents produced the Union’s largest corn crops, rejected the proposed annual tax of \$100 upon each distillery because they feared that it would drive small producers out of business. Led by Illinois Republican William Kellogg, these legislators convinced the U.S. Congress to levy a liquor tax of sixty cents per gallon on all alcohol manufacturers.⁷¹

By 1864, it appeared, as Morrill had predicted, that northern distillers and their clientele were “patriotic on the subject of taxation, and [would] never quarrel about the price of the article.”⁷² That year, the liquor tax raised \$28,431,797.83 in revenue and Commissioner of Internal Revenue Joseph Lewis reported that resistance to the law was minimal. Then, at the end

⁶⁸ Wilbur R. Miller, *Revenueurs & Moonshiners: Enforcing Federal Liquor Law in the Mountain South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 6-7, 44, 61-62.

⁶⁹ *Congressional Globe*, 37th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1194.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1306.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1304-1313.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1195.

of 1864, the U.S. Congress, hoping to generate more revenue, raised the tax from sixty cents to \$2.00 a gallon.⁷³ Congressmen who had believed that liquor taxation would cause little stir now faced many Midwesterners opposed to the revenue law, arguing that it was “unfair” to small farmers who relied upon alcohol distillation to make extra money. Ohio Democrat S.S. Cox was livid. “New England manufacturers are getting richer every day,” he complained. “They ... are becoming the owners of this country ... They are getting all the protection of the Government ... I claim for the farmers of the West, in absolute self-defense, some little regard.”⁷⁴ Opposition to the tax increase was not confined to the Midwest. By 1865, illicit distillers in Brooklyn and other New England cities opted not to pay it.⁷⁵ Commissioner of Internal Revenue Joseph Lewis remembered in 1866:

Great numbers of small stills, for the illicit manufacture of rum for molasses, were secreted in the garrets and cellars of the most populous cities, while many of the recognized and licensed distilleries were run by night, their proprietors keeping fraudulent accounts of their consumption of grain and other vegetable substances, and their production of spirits and the sale or removal thereof to bonded warehouses.

To the dismay of congressmen, revenues dropped from \$28,431,797.83 in 1864 to \$15,995,701.66 in 1865, as high taxes encouraged evasion.⁷⁶ This resistance to federal liquor taxation foreshadowed events to come in the Carolina highlands and other parts of southern Appalachia.

⁷³ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Internal Revenue*, 1866, viii. David A. Wells, head of the special revenue commission, complained in 1865 about Congress’s decision to raise the liquor tax: “The immediate effect of the enactment of the first and successive rates of duty was to cause an almost entire suspension of the business of distilling which was resumed again with great activity as soon as an advance in the rate of tax in each instance became probable. The stock of whiskey and high-wines accumulated in the country under this course of procedure was without precedent; and Congress, by its refusal to make the advance in taxation, in any instance, retroactive, virtually legislated for the benefit of distillers and speculators rather than for the treasury and the government.” See Herbert Ferleger, *David A. Wells and the American Revenue System* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1977), 67.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Heather Cox Richardson, *The Greatest Nation of the Earth: Republican Economic Policies during the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 133.

⁷⁵ *New York Times*, June 19, July 2, 1865.

⁷⁶ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Internal Revenue*, 1866, viii, xiv.

In the summer of 1865, the U.S. Congress divided each former Confederate state into several collection districts. North Carolina was separated into seven districts. Alexander, Catawba, Surry, and Wilkes counties constituted part of the state's Sixth Collection District, while the remaining mountain counties fell within what was North Carolina's Seventh Collection District.⁷⁷ That following year, congressmen attempted to improve liquor law enforcement by creating additional positions in the Bureau of Internal Revenue. The bureau, having relied on Treasury Department clerks, received its own clerical staff. Moreover, the U.S. Congress created the Office of Solicitor of Internal Revenue to oversee legal cases in each district. In 1868, the Bureau of Internal Revenue began to employ supervisors to prevent fraud by monitoring the work of local officials. These supervisors appointed "detectives," who conducted special investigations to uncover frauds.⁷⁸ The Tax Act of 1868 further systemized the inspection of distillers by creating gaugers and storekeepers. Gaugers were responsible for testing and recording "the amount and proof of each barrel of liquor distilled," while storekeepers "measured and recorded other phases of the distillery's production."⁷⁹ Although these changes increased efficiency and weeded out incompetent officials, they would fail to prevent conflicts between revenue agents and illicit distillers.

The Bureau of Internal Revenue also relied heavily upon district attorneys, marshals, and federal soldiers to enforce the liquor law at the local level. Many white southerners would detest these officials, most of whom were former Unionists and responsible for enforcing civil rights laws. Facing ostracism, physical danger, and hostile juries, district attorneys prosecuted illicit

⁷⁷ These counties were Alleghany, Ashe, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Cleveland, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, and Yancey.

⁷⁸ In 1872, the U.S. Congress changed the name of detectives to agents, merging "them with the previously appointed agents. Calling them detectives had suggested spies and informers." See Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 62-63.

⁷⁹ Storekeepers "were paid a flat fee per day," while gaugers "were paid according to the amount of liquor they measured." See *Ibid.*

distillers and retailers in the federal courts. Marshals, who arrested the violators, confronted similar obstacles and often lacked funds to compensate deputies or informers. Until 1878, district attorneys and marshals could request federal troops to assist them in the capture of illegal stills and moonshiners. The use of troops, however, evoked “cries of oppression or ‘bayonet rule’ that received sympathy among northerners weary of Reconstruction.”⁸⁰ Underpaid and overworked, these local officials faced the daunting task of enforcing the federal liquor tax in southern Appalachia.

Beginnings of Moonshiner Resistance

Widespread opposition to federal liquor taxation failed to develop in western North Carolina (and other parts of southern Appalachia) until 1867. When the Tar Heel State reentered the Union at war’s end, President Andrew Johnson took few steps to implement federal liquor law enforcement in the South. According to Wilbur Miller, “Johnson, seeking to build a power base among federal officeholders, was more concerned with placing his friends in the revenue service than suppressing illicit distilling.”⁸¹ The Bureau of Internal Revenue, lacking the manpower and support of Johnson, found it difficult to enforce liquor taxation in North Carolina and most other former Confederate states during Presidential Reconstruction. In 1866, for instance, Commissioner of Internal Revenue Joseph Lewis reported that agents had collected \$25,654.67 from Tar Heel distillers.⁸² When compared to tax receipts during the remainder of the 1860s, this number was exceedingly low (see table 3.1). In March 1867, however, the U.S.

⁸⁰ Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 11.

⁸¹ Wilbur R. Miller, “The Revenue: Federal Law Enforcement in the Mountain South, 1870-1900,” *Journal of Southern History* 55 (May 1989), 197.

⁸² *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Internal Revenue, 1866-1867*, 39th Cong., 2nd Sess., 28.

Table 3.1. Liquor Tax Revenue Collected by the Bureau of Internal Revenue in the State of North Carolina, 1866-1869 (in Dollars)

Year	Revenue Collected
1866	25,654.67
1867	172,255.34
1868	225,632.13
1869	180,519.36

Source: *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Internal Revenue*, 1866-1867, 39th Congress, 2nd Sess., 28, Ibid, 1867-1868, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess., 81; Ibid, 1868, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess., 69; Ibid, 1870, 41st Cong., 3rd Sess., 40

Congress passed the first Reconstruction Act, restoring military rule in the South, and directed agents to collect the federal liquor tax.⁸³

One of the first Carolina highlanders to whom these revenueurs paid an unwelcome visit was Mitchell County farmer Zack McHone. “I got married in ’67 to Ann Liza Dixon and I got to studying how to get hold of some money,” he recalled years later. “Hit seemed like stillin’ would be about the best I could, so I rigged me out an outfit. I didn’t think I was breakin’ the law because there wa’n’t no law ... Then after awhile talk riz about a Revenue and sure enough they come on me, just as I was workin’ in a place I’d picked below the house, and carried me down to Raleigh to be tried.”⁸⁴ To the dismay of McHone and other moonshiners, revenueurs, who, by the 1870s would number around 325, had arrived in western North Carolina.⁸⁵

⁸³ When North Carolina and other southern states voted against the Fourteenth Amendment (granting African American citizenship) in late 1866, Congressional Republicans, believing that harder measures were needed, passed as series of laws known as the Reconstruction Acts. The first of these acts, passed on March 2, 1867, divided the South into five military districts and assigned to each district a military commander to register voters (defined as all adult black males and those whites who had not supported the Confederacy). These voters would then elect a convention to adopt a new state constitution, which had to support African American suffrage and the Fourteenth Amendment. After the constitution was ratified, voters could hold state elections. From March 1867 to July 1868, North Carolina was placed in the Second Military District under the command of General Daniel E. Sickles and later General Edwin R.S. Canby. See Richard L. Zuber, *North Carolina during Reconstruction* (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1969), 6-20.

⁸⁴ Muriel Earley Sheppard, *Cabins in the Laurel* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), 192.

⁸⁵ Miller, *Revenueurs & Moonshiners*, 44.

Unlike McHone, however, many of these illicit distillers refused to surrender without a fight, believing that they had an inalienable right to manufacture alcohol. On April 8, nine weeks after the passage of the first Reconstruction Act, Seventh District collector J.B. Weaver reported that moonshiners had threatened him and other revenueurs with violence.⁸⁶ Unable to stop illicit distilling, a frustrated collector in Wilkes County wrote to the Second Military District Headquarters: “Is there any way to get at the distillers?”⁸⁷ In late April, newly appointed Commissioner of Internal Revenue E.A. Rollins summed up the situation in the Carolina highlands:

It appears that a large number of distilleries in that section are being operated in violation of the revenue laws, that others which conformed to the requirements of the law when the stills were put in operation have since utterly disregarded its provisions by removing and selling distilled spirits without payment of the tax.

Acting on the advice of Weaver, Rollins then wrote to Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Sickles, commander of the Second Military District, requesting that he send federal troops to protect and aid revenue agents enforcing the liquor law in the region.⁸⁸ Sickles acquiesced by deploying a company of the Fifth U.S. Calvary Regiment, stationed in Morganton, to the counties west of the Blue Ridge. Shortly thereafter, he permitted Bureau agents to carry firearms when conducting raids on suspected moonshine enclaves.⁸⁹

These federal officials quickly discovered that they faced a formidable opponent, one that had the support of many local residents. In May 1867, J.B. Weaver complained that he could not hire anyone in Caldwell County to enforce the liquor law. “The disposition of the community was such that I could not find any person willing to accept the position of distraining officer,” he

⁸⁶ Second Military District to J.B. Weaver, April 8, 1867, Second Military District, 1867-68, Records of Military (Reconstruction) Districts, Records of the U.S. Army Continental Commands, Record Group 393, National Archives, Washington, D.C., hereinafter cited as Records of the Second Military District.

⁸⁷ Thomas H. Adams to “Colonel,” April 18, 1867, Records of the Second Military District.

⁸⁸ E.A. Rollins to Daniel Sickles, April 17, 1867, Records of the Second Military District. See also J.B. Weaver to Second Military District, March 30, 1867, Records of the Second Military District.

⁸⁹ Second Military District to James H. Wiley, May 10, 1867, Records of the Second Military District.

wrote to Rollins.⁹⁰ That same month, the *New York Times* confirmed that moonshiners enjoyed a broad base of support in western North Carolina and other parts of the state. According to its editors, even when illicit distillers were captured, agents found it difficult to find residents willing to indict or convict them. “The officers of the Internal Revenue service” the *Times* read, “are frequently treated with disrespect ... and that when offenders are prosecuted in the civil Courts and violations of the internal revenue laws indisputably proved, juries fail to convict the parties.”⁹¹

From the beginning, many mountain residents who did not manufacture alcohol challenged the legitimacy of the Bureau of Internal Revenue. Like most illicit distillers, these Carolina highlanders insisted that the federal liquor tax (which remained at \$2.00 a gallon) placed a heavy burden on small producers. This complaint was valid. In 1867, a bushel of corn sold for \$1.00 and whiskey retailed at \$3.00 a gallon. Without paying a tax, mountain farmers who manufactured two bushels of corn into five gallons of alcohol earned a \$13.00 profit. On the other hand, legal distillers netted \$5.00.⁹² Hoping to increase revenue, the federal government had levied a tax that many small liquor manufacturers argued they could barely afford. “We venture to say there will be but few distilleries continued in this State,” the *Hendersonville Pioneer* reported in May 1867, predicting that liquor taxation would drive small farmers out of the distilling business.⁹³ Some of these men and women, however, opted to manufacture alcohol illegally and would gain the sympathy of local residents who believed that distilling was an essential cottage industry.

⁹⁰ J.B. Weaver to E.A. Rollins, May 20, 1867, Records of the Second Military District.

⁹¹ *New York Times*, May 25, 1867.

⁹² Account Book of Isaac Jarratt, 1867, Jarratt-Puryear Papers, Special Collections, Duke University.

⁹³ *Hendersonville Pioneer*, May 8, 1867.

Other western North Carolinians embraced the moonshiners' fight against the Bureau of Internal Revenue because they feared that it threatened to reduce local control of liquor production. Unlike before 1867, the federal government was now the agency driving policy on the distillation of alcohol in the Carolina highlands. This resistance was not an isolated historical development. The federal government had levied taxes on imported and domestically manufactured alcohol in 1791 and in 1814. Western North Carolinians vehemently opposed these duties during the early 1790s and ignored the law. Because of this resistance, Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton in 1793 considered military action against western Carolina farmers. President George Washington, however, opted to suppress illicit distillers in western Pennsylvania. In the end, the federal government, largely because of opposition in the Carolina highlands and other backcountry regions, retreated from its first attempt to collect the liquor tax.⁹⁴

The Confederate tax-in-kind (or tithe tax) had also left a bitter taste in the mouths of many mountain residents. Levied in 1863, this "national" tax required farmers to give 10 percent of their produce to Confederate authorities. Many subsistence farmers denounced the Confederate tax-in-kind, arguing that it placed too heavy a burden on food surpluses. Mountain resistance to the tithe tax intensified when Confederate authorities used force to collect the tax. Several farmers soon armed themselves and attacked tax collectors, while others agreed not to support any politician who endorsed this tax. Mountain whites would remember their recent

⁹⁴ Crow, "The Whiskey Rebellion in North Carolina," 1-28; and Ferleger, *Wells and the American Revenue System*, 112. For a discussion on whiskey rebellions in other parts of the United States, see Kevin T. Barksdale, "Our Rebellious Neighbors: Virginia's Border Counties during Pennsylvania's Whiskey Rebellion," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 111 (January 2003), 5-32; Mary K. Tachau, "The Whiskey Rebellion in Kentucky: A Forgotten Episode of Civil Disobedience," *Journal of the Early Republic* 2 (July 1982), 239-259; Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and Steven R. Boyd, ed., *The Whiskey Rebellion: Past and Present Perspectives* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985).

experience with the Confederate tax-in-kind and remain suspicious of any new direct tax imposed by the national government.⁹⁵

Moreover, revenue agents faced a mountain populace suspicious of their racial and political beliefs. As Gordon McKinney argued, many of these men were responsible for enforcing Civil Rights laws.⁹⁶ Western North Carolinians, most of whom had supported the Confederacy, also associated revenue agents with former Unionists during the Civil War, and for good reason. Wartime Unionism was often a prerequisite for southerners hired by the Bureau of Internal Revenue. A revenuer in North Carolina's Seventh Collection District, William Dedman, for instance, had edited a Unionist newspaper, the *Hendersonville Times*, during the Civil War.⁹⁷ When applying for a position in North Carolina's Sixth Collection District, another bureau agent Jesse Wheeler revealed that he had supported the Republican Party before the Civil War. In fact, Guilford County residents had forced Wheeler to relocate to Indiana after he had circulated copies of Hinton Rowan Helper's subversive antislavery tract, *The Impending Crisis of the South*, in 1859.⁹⁸ Other agents angered Confederate sympathizers by protesting the hiring of men of questionable Union loyalty. After W.J. Henderson replaced him as assessor in North Carolina's Sixth Collection District, Hardie Hogan Helper, the brother of Hinton Rowan Helper,

⁹⁵ Inscoc and McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 153; and McKinney, "Moonshiners, Law Enforcement, and Violence," 10.

⁹⁶ McKinney, "Moonshiners, Law Enforcement, and Violence," 9.

⁹⁷ In 1864, Dedman sold the newspaper when local Confederates "threatened to conscript him unless he did so." See McKinney and Inscoc, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 155-156, 163; and *The Spirit of the Age*, March 10, 1863.

⁹⁸ Jesse Wheeler to Bureau of Internal Revenue, June 25, 1868, Very Miscellaneous, 1865-1870, Bureau of Internal Revenue Records, Record Group 58, National Archives, College Park Maryland, hereinafter cited as Internal Revenue Records.

was furious because “he, a good and reliable union man” had been fired.⁹⁹ Unquestionably, former mountain Confederates developed a deep hatred for revenue agents who were Unionists.

But not all western North Carolinians joined forces with the moonshiners in their fight against the Bureau of Internal Revenue. During the spring and summer of 1867, food shortages continued to plague the region, and many mountain residents, town and rural, blamed alcohol distillers. According to E.A. Rollins in April, moonshine stills were consuming most of the corn in the Carolina highlands. “There is every reason to believe that if the illicit distilleries are closed,” he wrote to Maj. Gen. Sickles, “those parties now holding the grain will put it upon the market at such prices as will bring it within the reach of many who are now suffering for want of bread.”¹⁰⁰ Sickles agreed. On May 20, 1867, he issued General Order Number 25, making it illegal for residents in the Second Military District to manufacture alcohol from grain. This order, which remained in effect until January 1868, drastically enhanced the federal government’s authority to combat distilling. Alcohol manufacturers, who had often relied on local juries to acquit them, were now tried before a military tribunal.¹⁰¹

Despite this expansion of federal power, many mountain residents believed that alcohol distilling was draining the region’s food supply and embraced General Order Number 25. Survival was more important to these Carolina highlanders than manufacturing whiskey. In September 1867, for instance, several Polk County farmers testified against moonshiner John Huntzinger, who was subsequently fined one hundred dollars and sentenced to four months in prison by the commanding officer at Morganton, Bvt. Col. William Bedford Royall. Three

⁹⁹ Helper, an abolitionist and Union soldier, fled to Illinois before the Civil War to escape fallout from his brother’s controversial book, *The Impending Crisis*. See H.H. Helper to Commissioner J.W. Douglass, August 25, 1869, Very Miscellaneous, 1865-1870, Internal Revenue Records.

¹⁰⁰ E.A. Rollins to General Canby, April 17, 1868, Records of the Second Military District. See also J.B. Weaver to Headquarters Second Military District, April 9, 1867, Records of the Second Military District; J.B. Weaver to E.A. Rollins, May 20, 1867, Internal Revenue Records; and J.B. Weaver to Captain J.W. [Clouis], May 23, 1867, Records of the Second Military District.

¹⁰¹ *New York Times*, May 25, 1867.

months later, Wilkes County residents willingly enforced the law by informing military officials that William Aiken was distilling corn into whiskey.¹⁰² The cooperation of these mountain residents helped to make General Order Number 25 a success. According to newly appointed Second Military District commander Edward R.S. Canby in September, this decree had forced many distillers to cease manufacturing alcohol and subsequently reduced the price of corn by 50 percent in western North Carolina.¹⁰³

Most supporters of General Order Number 25 resided in mountain communities where moonshining continued to diminish food supplies. Evidence suggests that these communities ultimately succeeded in pressuring local distillers to stop manufacturing alcohol. Based on extant reports from revenueurs and other federal officials in 1867 and early 1868, moonshiners operated frequently in the counties of Ashe, Burke, Caldwell, Cleveland, Haywood, Jackson, Macon and Wilkes.¹⁰⁴ Five of these counties had experienced the lowest percentage decreases in corn production between 1860 and 1870, revealing that widespread opposition to federal alcohol control occurred most often in communities where food was more available (see table 3.2). Residents there sympathized with the moonshiners, who no longer posed a threat to the local community's survival, and increasingly resented the federal government's attempt to regulate liquor production.

Support for General Order Number 25 ultimately proved short-lived. By the fall of 1867, improving economic conditions had prompted many western North Carolinians to resume the practice of distilling alcohol and demand that Sickles revoke the prohibition decree. In

¹⁰² General Sickles to Headquarters Second Military District, August 22, 1867; and W.B. Royal to Lt. L.V. Caziaro, January 20, 1868, both in Records of the Second Military District.

¹⁰³ Headquarters Second Military District to E.A. Rollins, September 17, 1867, Records of the Second Military District.

¹⁰⁴ J.B. Weaver to E.A. Rollins, May 20, 1867; Jones & Payrow Detective Officers to Colonel E.W. Hinks, July 1, 1867; Thomas H. Adams, July 1867; Thomas H. Adams to "Colonel," August 12, 1867; Pinkney Rollins to Lt. Louis Caziaro, November 12, 1867; Edward B. Jennings to General Canby, December 27, 1867; and John Mulby, March 22, 1868, all in Records of the Second Military District.

Table 3.2. Percentage Decrease of Corn Production in Western North Carolina between 1860 and 1870 (in Bushels)

County	1860	1870	%
Watauga	530,789	75,944	-86
Polk	388,428	117,060	-70
McDowell	550,235	176,364	-68
Catawba	403,213	142,876	-65
Yancey	245,051	113,683	-54
Cherokee	343,984	162,529	-53
Rutherford	482,378	272,485	-44
Allegheny	72,995	43,369	-41
Cleveland	379,985	236,252	-38
Surry	298,661	190,171	-36
Henderson	326,110	212,914	-35
Alexander	209,182	137,207	-34
Macon	248,202	162,199	-34
Wilkes	305,899	202,590	-34
Buncombe	462,190	324,566	-30
Madison	235,276	167,971	-29
Jackson	203,269	156,050	-23
Caldwell	259,457	207,731	-20
Burke	254,650	217,049	-15
Haywood	229,001	206,998	-10
Ashe	122,080	120,545	-1
Average	312,002	173,693	-44

Source: *Agriculture of the United States in 1860 ... The Eighth Census* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), 105, 109; and *A Compendium of the Ninth Census: 1870* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 766-769.

November, residents in Yancey and Madison counties argued that there was now “an abundance of grain” in their communities and asked the federal government to allow them to manufacture whiskey.¹⁰⁵ That same month, thirty-two farmers from Wilkes County sent a petition to the Second Military District Headquarters requesting that Sickles void General Order Number 25. “The only way that we have ever been able to get money to pay our taxes,” they complained, “has been by distilling our corn into whiskey, and thus making it portable to market.” Although living forty miles from a rail line in Wilkesboro, these farmers explained that it cost fifty cents per bushel to transport their corn to the depot, making it impossible for them to earn a profit.

¹⁰⁵ Pinkney Rollins to Lt. Louis Caziaro, November 12, 1867, Records of the Second Military District.

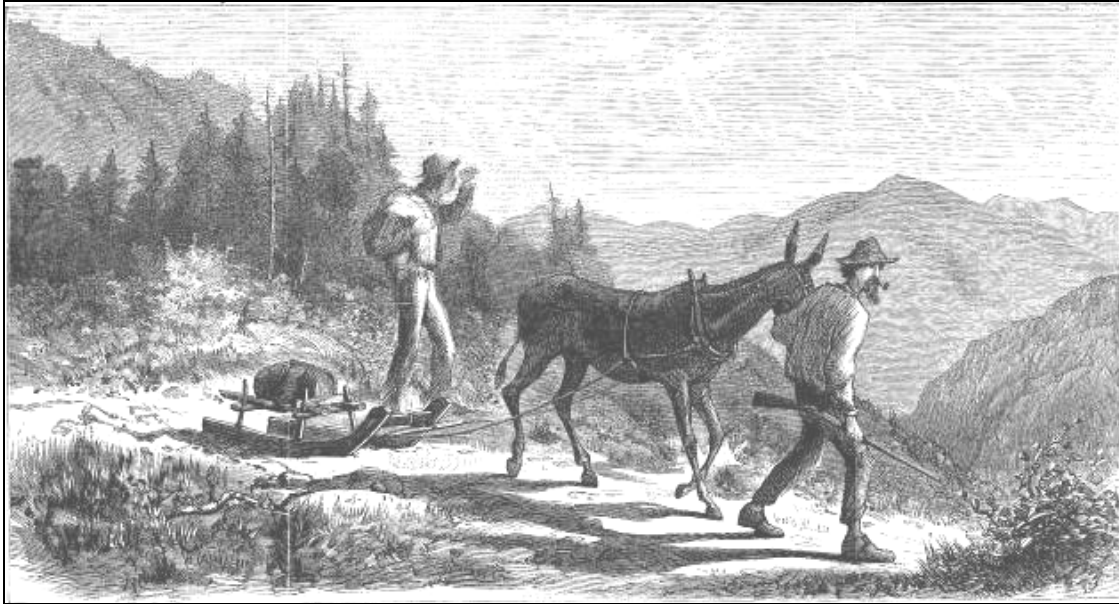


Figure 3.1. Engraving of “Illicit Distilling of Liquors – Southern Mode of Making Whiskey” from *Harper’s Weekly* 11 (December 7, 1867), 733.

“Unless distilling is allowed,” they concluded, “it will be impossible for the People to pay their taxes without bringing their Lands under the hammer.”¹⁰⁶

By the winter of 1867, many mountain residents stopped asking for permission to distill their corn into alcohol, and started to manufacture it illegally. In December, *New York Times* correspondent A.H. Guernsey reported that moonshining in western North Carolina had increased. “The stills are located in unfrequented districts, sometimes in the midst of an impenetrable jungle, and carefully concealed when not in operation,” he wrote. “The liquor is stored in kegs, and carried down the mountains on sleds; as there are no roads ... After reaching the confines of civilization – if the region where it is vended and consumed can be called civilization – it is sold in small quantities to the country grocers.”¹⁰⁷ Later that same month, agent Edward Jennings summed up the situation in Cleveland and Burke counties:

¹⁰⁶ E.A. Rollins to General Canby, November 15, 1867, Records of the Second Military District.

¹⁰⁷ A.H. Guernsey, “Illicit Distilling of Liquors – Southern Mode of Making Whiskey,” *Harper’s Weekly* 11 (December 7, 1867), 733.

Despite all I can do as an official, who exercise himself at all times, it seems to be impossible to stop the distillation of grain into whiskey ... My division being a rural one of large scope of course I cannot be omnipresent, when in one county, the citizens of the other, fabricate a rumor that the restrictions are withdrawn so as to allow distillers to manufacture whiskey. Upon no one am I able to [capture] because no one directly can be found whom I can force as a witness. There is ... under ground work going on that no expert can detect.¹⁰⁸

Even after Canby revoked General Order Number 25 in January 1868, mountain distillers continued to evade Bureau agents because they believed that the federal liquor tax threatened to reduce their profit margin. To combat them, Jennings and other revenueurs requested that Canby deploy more troops into region. The use of troops, however, escalated the potential for violence, as former mountain Confederates who distilled alcohol argued that the Bureau of Internal Revenue was using excessive force and condemned the agency for allowing “bayonet rule” to continue. Many of them soon retaliated. On March 12, the first documented gun fight between moonshiners and revenueurs in western North Carolina occurred in Macon County. Three days earlier, six federal soldiers had reported to agent E.R. Hampton in Webster in Jackson County. Hampton and these men immediately conducted raids on suspected moonshine enclaves in nearby Deep Creek, seizing two stills and capturing one moonshiner. The party then ventured into Macon County, where they arrested another illicit distiller. On the morning of the 12th, Hampton and his men marched to Cowee Creek, confiscating one still and twenty-five gallons of brandy. That night, the party set up camp. Sergeant John Mulby, one of the soldiers who had escorted Hampton into Macon County, recalled what happened next: “At about Twelve O’clock ... we were attacked by a party of thirteen men who fired into the camp. We returned their fire until our ammunition was almost exhausted when by advice of [Hampton] we destroyed the Still

¹⁰⁸ Edward Jennings to General Canby, December 27, 1867, Records of the Second Military District.

and emptied the liquor which we had seized upon and abandoned the Camp.”¹⁰⁹ Similar violent clashes between revenueurs and moonshiners would multiply in the future.

By early 1868, most distillers (licit and illicit) must have felt fortunate. Condemned by many mountain residents as “soulless scoundrels” during the Civil War, their reputation had improved considerably. As food became more available, highlanders no longer feared that alcohol manufacturing was a threat to their community’s survival, and rejected reformers’ call for state-wide prohibition. Viewed once again as legitimate entrepreneurs, distillers increasingly garnered the support of mountain residents who resented the Bureau of Internal Revenue, an agency that promoted the expansion of federal authority. This was only a sign of things to come, however. To the delight of illicit distillers, mountain Conservatives soon followed suit by linking the issue of liquor taxation with opposition to broader Reconstruction policies. As a result, the moonshiner emerged as a celebrated figure in western North Carolina, a “hero” who valiantly fought against what many mountain whites believed was an “oppressive” federal government.

¹⁰⁹ John Mulby to Second District Military Headquarters, March 22, 1868, Records of the Second Military District.

CHAPTER 4

“THEY TAX US AND GIVE US NEGRO CIVIL RIGHTS”: MOONSHINER VIOLENCE AND THE POLITICS OF FEDERAL LIQUOR TAXATION, 1868-1876

Come, all you booze-fighters, if you want to hear,
About the kind o' booze that they sell around here.
It's made a-way back in the lonesome hills
Where there's plenty of moonshine stills.¹

Conservative Zebulon B. Vance from Buncombe County smiled when news reached him of his triumph over Republican Thomas Settle in the 1876 November gubernatorial election. For the first time since the war's end, a Conservative was governor of North Carolina. Throughout the state, Conservatives, who shortly thereafter renamed themselves Democrats, celebrated Vance's victory and the end of Reconstruction. One Conservative newspaper declared that North Carolina was “now a white man's state and white men intend to govern it hereafter.”² Vance supporters also thanked western North Carolinians. Without their support, Settle would have defeated Vance.

North Carolina Republicans were livid over the news. Hamilton Ewart from Henderson County complained that “had the gain in the West been proportional to that in the East, the Republican victory would have been a magnificent one.”³ Republican O.H. Dockery observed

¹ Excerpt from “Moonshine Still,” sung by Frank Proffit and Pick Britches on Beaver Dam in Sugar Grove, North Carolina, August 14, 1937. See Edna Lucille Miller, “A Study of Folklore in Watauga County, North Carolina” (M.A. Thesis, Georgia Peabody of College for Teachers, 1938), 178.

² Gordon B. McKinney, *Zeb Vance: North Carolina's Civil War Governor and Gilded Age Political Leader* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 322.

³ Hamilton G. Ewart to Charles Devens, May 29, 1877 (microfilm, reel 2, M1345), Letters Received from the State of North Carolina, 1871-1884, Records of the Attorney General, General Records of the Department of Justice,

that “western counties that had voted solidly Republican in 1868 were Democratic by 1877.”⁴

What had gone wrong? Many Republicans argued that their national party’s support of African American political equality had forced mountain whites to vote Conservative. Others disagreed. Ewart posited that “the direct cause” of Republican defeat in western North Carolina “was the odium which existed against the Internal Revenue law, and the hatred and contempt entertained by the people for its execution.” He noted that Conservatives had capitalized on mountain whites’ opposition to federal liquor taxation by “saddling the responsibility of its passage upon the Republican Party.” Ewart believed that mountain Republicans did little to refute this charge, resulting in a political failure that crushed the local party in 1876.⁵

Historians have overlooked Ewart’s explanation for Republican defeat in western North Carolina during Reconstruction. In *Southern Mountain Republicans*, Gordon B. McKinney argued that the local leadership’s association with Radical Republicanism drove thousands of mountain voters, resentful of African American suffrage, from the party.⁶ Other historians have also emphasized racism as the defining characteristic among whites in southern Appalachia. Eric J. Olsen posited that the black experience in Asheville, North Carolina differed little from elsewhere in the South, while John C. Inscoe asserted that western North Carolina adhered to the racial sentiment of the South during Reconstruction.⁷

Record Group 60 (RG 60), National Archives, College Park, Maryland, hereinafter cited as Letters Received, Department of Justice Records.

⁴ O.H. Dockery to Carl Schurz, November 22, 1877, in James Padgett, ed., “Reconstruction Letters from North Carolina, Part III,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 19 (July 1942), 299.

⁵ Hamilton G. Ewart to Charles Devens, May 29, 1877 (microfilm, reel 2, M1345), RG 60, Letters Received, Department of Justice Records.

⁶ McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 7, 44-50.

⁷ Eric J. Olson, “Race Relations in Asheville, North Carolina: Three Incidents, 1868-1906,” in *The Appalachian Experience: Proceedings of the 6th Annual Appalachian Studies Conference*, ed. Barry Buxton (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1983), 153-156, 163-164; and John C. Inscoe, “Race and Racism in Nineteenth-Century Southern Appalachia,” in *Appalachia in the Making*, 122-123.

While these scholars stress mountain racism as the key to understanding the Republican Party's decline in western North Carolina, they often do so at the neglect of other factors. In his 1991 book *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, Wilbur Miller has discovered that the issue of liquor taxation, along with African American civil rights, energized mountain politics. He observed that mountain whites, whether Republican or Conservative, opposed liquor taxation because it increased federal authority and threatened to reduce local distillers' profit margin. Miller concluded that mountain politicians sensed this growing hostility and attempted to garner support by protesting the liquor law. McKinney has also conceded that the reintroduction of the liquor tax and the expansion of the Bureau of Internal Revenue following the Civil War intensified mountain whites' opposition to the Republican Party. Like Miller, he argued that many Carolina highlanders believed that the federal government used revenue enforcement to extend its authority.⁸

Despite this more recent scholarship, however, historians have inadequately addressed how liquor taxation affected party politics in western North Carolina during Reconstruction. Miller and McKinney, for instance, focused most of their attention on violence between revenuers and moonshiners, arguing that mountain whites resorted to extralegal retribution because they perceived revenue enforcement as a federal intrusion into their private lives. Both studies are devoid of any thorough research concerning the partisan politics of liquor taxation. The failure to examine the political implications of liquor taxation more closely has made it impossible to understand the varied responses of regional communities to the rise of the nation state after the Civil War.

Although national Republicans' promotion of black political equality explains why many western Carolinians left the party, federal liquor taxation also undermined the party's credibility

⁸ Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 41-44; and McKinney, "Moonshiners, Law Enforcement, and Violence," 15.

as the region's economic protector. Between 1868 and 1876, many mountain voters increasingly opposed liquor law enforcement, arguing that it threatened to undermine local autonomy, and joined forces with the moonshiners in their fight to "make a little lick." Consequently, the illicit distiller became a folk hero, an outlaw who supposedly killed in self-defense and for a noble cause: to protect his community from an "oppressive" federal government. In this atmosphere, urban reformers found it more difficult to promote anti-alcohol reform and condemn liquor manufacturers for encouraging violence and crime. Meanwhile, North Carolina politicians appeased mountain voters by protesting the revenue law. Conservatives linked liquor taxation with Radical Republicanism and the question of "home rule."⁹ Republicans counterattacked by dissociating themselves from their national party's support of the liquor law. In the end, Republicans failed, never able to change the public's negative perception of liquor taxation and its association with the party of Lincoln.

The Emergence of Mountain Republicanism

Following the Civil War, North Carolina politics changed dramatically. The U.S. Congress's adoption of the Reconstruction Acts in March 1867, restoring military rule in the South and giving African American males the right to vote, convinced William W. Holden, the leader of the state's peace movement during the Civil War, and his followers that the Republican Party represented their most direct avenue to political power. That month, Holden allied with African Americans, white Unionists, and carpetbaggers to organize the North Carolina Republican Party. Most Republicans supported black suffrage, internal improvements, and free enterprise. Opponents of the Republicans joined the Conservative Party, a reconfigured version

⁹ Republican Radicalism represented what Conservatives/Democrats believed were the evils of Congressional Reconstruction: black suffrage, taxation, and the expansion of federal authority. "Home rule" meant Democratic control of state governments in the South.

of what had been the Democratic Party.¹⁰ Conservatives, mostly former slaveholders and white Confederates, denounced African American political equality and portrayed themselves as the defenders of states' rights.¹¹

Western North Carolina Republicans found themselves in a precarious situation. Unionists did not control the region. Unlike eastern Tennessee, the majority of Carolina highlanders had supported the Confederacy and were inclined to join the Conservative Party. Many of these mountain men associated the Republican Party with Holden and other former peace movement leaders. The national party's promotion of black political equality further hampered mountain Republicans' attempts at recruiting native whites. Most mountain whites were racists who opposed African American suffrage and feared that emancipation would lead to racial amalgamation.¹² The unwillingness of white highlanders to accept black equality sometimes led to violence, as evident in a race riot that erupted in Asheville on the day of the 1868 presidential election, resulting in the death of an African American.¹³

Despite these setbacks, the party of Lincoln established itself in western North Carolina. For one, it appealed to blacks, who, although constituting 14 percent of the region's populace, were an important political ally. In the 1868 gubernatorial election, for instance, all five mountain counties with the highest percentage of African Americans (Burke, McDowell, Polk,

¹⁰ The Conservative Party was renamed the Democratic Party after the 1876 election. During Reconstruction, North Carolina Conservatives supported the national Democratic Party, and their opponents called them Democrats in an attempt to capitalize on state Unionists' hatred for that party.

¹¹ For more information on Republicans and Conservatives in North Carolina, see Joseph G. de Roulhac, *Reconstruction in North Carolina* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1914); Otto H. Olsen, "Reconsidering the Scalawags," *Civil War History* 12 (December 1966), 304-315; and Zuber, *North Carolina during Reconstruction* (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1969); and Inscoc and McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*.

¹² McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 44-50.

¹³ Inscoc and McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 271-272.

Rutherford, and Henderson) went Republican.¹⁴ More likely than not, white Republicans in these counties found it easier to tolerate their national party's alliance with blacks. Meanwhile, in other parts of western North Carolina, the relative absence of African Americans freed many white highlanders from the fear of "Negro domination" and allowed Republicans to retain their loyalty.¹⁵ Of the five mountain counties with the lowest percentage of blacks, four (Cherokee, Madison, Watauga, and Mitchell) voted Republican in the 1868 gubernatorial election.¹⁶

Black Republicans further deflated racial fears by deferring their efforts at political activism to white party leaders. Madison County African Americans, for instance, thanked Republican William L. Scott for the "gratifying and praise worthy way" he had treated them. "Having so lately escaped from slavery," they wrote in 1871, "we know that our state and condition are backward, yet we are not so far back as to be ungrateful for kindness. We hope that 'ere long we may rise upward and testify to the friends of the colored man we are and have improved sufficiently to merit their praise." From all outward appearances, these blacks posed little threat to the white leadership of the mountain Republican Party.¹⁷

Republicans in western North Carolina attempted to recruit native whites by adjusting their party's platform to local conditions. Many mountain residents, struggling to gain equal political footing with the eastern part of the state, embraced Republicans' call for democratic reform. Republicans' endorsement of internal improvements also appealed to Carolina highlanders, who, since the antebellum period, had demanded that the state government build a

¹⁴ For election returns in these counties, see Donald R. Matthews, *North Carolina Votes: General Election Returns* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962).

¹⁵ For a discussion on the role that demographics played in allowing mountain Republicans to overlook their prejudice and work with blacks politically, see Gordon B. McKinney, "Southern Mountain Republicanism and the Negro, 1865-1900," in *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation*, ed. John C. Inscoe (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 205.

¹⁶ Jackson County, where blacks constituted .05 percent of the total populace, voted Conservative. For election returns in these counties, see Donald R. Matthews, *North Carolina Votes*.

¹⁷ Alexander et al. to William L. Scott, May 31, 1871, Scott Papers, Special Collections, Duke University, quoted in Inscoe and McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 272.

railroad in the region.¹⁸ Mountain Republicans capitalized on these issues by portraying themselves as the region's economic protectors. The national party's support of federal liquor taxation, however, would tarnish this image and drive hundreds of mountain whites from the party.

The Politicization of Federal Liquor Taxation

The gubernatorial election of April 1868 was the first test for Republicans in North Carolina. Running under the Republican ticket, Holden supported the passage of a new constitution that promised to revolutionize North Carolina's aristocratic social and political system. The constitution would abolish property qualifications for the governor and legislators, guarantee manhood suffrage, and provide for the election of judges by the people for terms of eight years.¹⁹ Conservatives were outraged. Portraying themselves as the "white man's party," they nominated Samuel S. Ashe for governor and denounced the Republican-sponsored constitution.²⁰

As the April gubernatorial election approached, Conservatives and Republicans scrambled to gain support in western North Carolina. Conservatives, hoping to benefit from mountain racism, "appealed to the white people to stand up for their race."²¹ The *Asheville News* warned Buncombe County residents that black suffrage would ultimately lead to racial amalgamation. "If you would save your State from Negro rule, the DAUGHTERS of our poor white people [would not be] forced into social equality with Negro BOYS at School," the *News*

¹⁸ *Raleigh Sentinel*, November 23, 1866, November 9, 1867; *Asheville Pioneer*, September 21, 1867; and Inscoc, *Mountain Masters*, 152.

¹⁹ "Even more significant," historian Paul Escott has argued, "in terms of the daily lives of most North Carolinians, was the fact that the constitution abolished the old county courts and their lifetime 'squirarchy,' replacing them with five commissioners in each county elected by the people." See Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 142-144.

²⁰ Conservatives insisted that the people should not elect judges and wanted the senate based on wealth instead of numbers of people. See Zuber, *North Carolina during Reconstruction*, 18.

²¹ R. B. Bogle to Tod Caldwell, November 16, 1868, Tod Caldwell Papers, SHC.

read. “WHITE MEN OF BUNCOMBE, your political and social rights are invaded.”²² In March, an estimated 2,000 whites gathered in Rutherford County denouncing “the negro vote.” Former governor Zebulon Vance addressed the crowd, telling them to “stand up for their birth right, and crush this negro equality doctrine with the force of an avalanche.”²³ Meanwhile, Republicans attempted to appease mountain voters by nominating Tod Caldwell, a prominent Burke County politician, for lieutenant governor and by promoting the construction of railroads in the western part of the state.²⁴ The Republican *Asheville Pioneer* warned mountain whites of the “insidious” Conservative Party:

Under cover of an outcry against high taxes, oppression, corruption and unconstitutional appropriations, the principal property holders of the middle and eastern counties who have taxed us for twenty years to furnish themselves with the conveniences of railroads and canals, are determined ... to annihilate all hope of an extension of railroad facilities to the West.²⁵

Carolina highlanders favored the state Republican platform, casting a majority of their votes for Holden in the April election. Fifty-three percent of mountain voters also agreed to adopt the new state constitution.²⁶ For these men, having been shut out of political decision making for generations, the Republican Party offered a new and vibrant democracy.²⁷ Conservatives were shocked. Despite their call for white supremacy, they had failed to recruit mountain whites who desired economic and political reform. Turning their attention to the November presidential election between Republican Ulysses S. Grant and Democrat Horatio Seymour, Conservatives realized that they had to stress other local issues, besides race, to gain western Carolinians’ allegiance.

²² *Asheville News*, March 12, 1868.

²³ *Rutherfordton Western Vindicator*, March 28, 1868.

²⁴ *Asheville Pioneer*, May 20, 1867; and McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 46.

²⁵ *Asheville Pioneer*, September 21, 1867.

²⁶ Holden received 53 percent of the mountain vote, winning in Buncombe, Burke, Cherokee, Henderson, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Surry, Watauga, and Wilkes counties. Computed from Matthews, *North Carolina Votes*. For 1868 North Carolina constitution results, see *Tribune Almanac*, 1869, 76-77.

²⁷ Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 145.

Conservatives, who lost using the race card, capitalized on mountain whites' opposition to federal liquor taxation before the 1868 presidential election. The *Raleigh Sentinel* blamed Republicans for the supposedly oppressive law, asserting in September 1868 that Congressional Radicals enforced liquor taxation "to prevent poorer citizens from distilling and to create a *monopoly*, for the benefit of *wealthy capitalists*, who make distilling spirits a *great business*." This so-called "whiskey ring" threatened to destroy western Carolinians who relied on whiskey distillation for a living. "All this partial and oppressive legislation," the *Sentinel* concluded, "is the fruits of corrupt Radicalism, and let the people hold the 'Carpet-bag,' 'scalawag' members of Congress from this state, to a strict account about this oppressive and unjust way of building up the 'Whiskey Ring.'" Conservatives' demand for the liquor law's repeal represented a shift from their previous support of whiskey and brandy taxation. Sensing growing hostility among "*the Western people*," Conservatives hoped to link revenue taxation with charges of Republican corruption.²⁸

Mountain Conservatives also held Republicans accountable for federal liquor taxation. Buncombe County lawyer and politician Thomas Clingman reiterated Conservatives' charge of Radical corruption in a letter to the *Asheville News*: "The recent charge in the tax on spirits shows the motive which governs the Radical Party now controlling both branches of Congress."²⁹ Conservative James Gwyn from Wilkes County argued that corrupt whiskey rings controlled the national government. Gwyn also believed that Ulysses S. Grant "was not the man to break them." "This country has no great man engaged in politics," he complained in February 1868, "no second rate great man, no third rate great man, no fourth rate great man."³⁰ For Gwyn

²⁸ *Raleigh Sentinel*, September 9, 14, 17, 28, 1868.

²⁹ Quoted in *ibid*, September 23, 1868.

³⁰ James Gwyn to Jamie [Gwyn], February 16, 1868, James Gwyn Papers, SHC.

and other mountain Conservatives, liquor taxation and Reconstruction had become inseparable issues.

Hoping to retain the support of western North Carolinians, state Republicans defended Congress by placing blame on President Andrew Johnson. The Republican *Raleigh Standard* argued that Johnson was “the head and the heart of the whiskey ring.” Though acknowledging that the liquor tax was so great that many distillers in the Carolina highlands were “forced to close up,” the *Standard* promised its readers that Congress would “review the revenue laws.” It reminded mountain voters that Republicans had always supported the poor man’s interest, and that “the rebel secession Democracy was responsible” for the liquor law. “By giving the vote of the State to Grant,” the *Standard* read in September 1868, “the people of North Carolina will be far more likely to receive favorable legislation at the hands of Congress than by electing secessionists and rebels.”³¹

Mountain Republicans also retaliated by blaming national Democrats for the federal liquor tax. The Republican *Asheville Pioneer* argued in October 1868 that Conservatives were “endeavoring to make capital; just now, out of the revenue tax upon distilled spirits.” Moreover, the newspaper pointed out that it was Secretary of Treasury Hugh McCulloch, a Democrat, who prevented Republican governor Holden and Bureau of Internal Revenue Commissioner E.A. Rollins from reducing the federal liquor tax in 1868. The *Pioneer* explained that the Republican Party had always protected the poor man’s regional economic interests.³² Through such rhetoric, state and mountain Republicans attempted to disassociate themselves from the “Whiskey Ring” by shifting responsibility to the Conservatives.

³¹ *Raleigh Standard*, September 15, 21, 1868.

³² Quoted in *Raleigh Daily Standard*, October 10, 1868.

On the eve of the 1868 presidential election in November, many mountain Republicans feared that the issue of federal liquor taxation would damage the party. Lawyers from Rowan County expressed the concerns of nearby mountain residents by suggesting that it would be “a wise policy for the Republicans to allow what few distillers who have complied with the law of Congress to continue the business.”³³ Republican William L. Scott from Madison County noted that federal liquor taxation was “generally believed as a sham.”³⁴ Meanwhile, Republicans in Burke County faced a political crisis. Party members there protested the arraignment of eight Republican illicit distillers. Writing to Lieutenant Governor Tod Caldwell, a Burke County Republican observed that Conservatives had “made capital out of the affair by making our friends believe that their arraignment and probable ruin is owing to Radical rule.” The Burke resident explained that these moonshiners and their supporters would “never cash another Republican vote if the present liquor law is not modified.” He then warned Caldwell that state Republicans should “not have an election at this time for State Senator; for it would be impossible to elect a Republican member in the present state of feeling.” Caldwell, however, was unable to have the charges dropped, which further infuriated Burke County Republicans.³⁵

Election results reveal that mountain Conservatives gained considerable ground from the Republicans. Democratic presidential candidate Horatio Seymour won a majority of the mountain votes, while both Republican incumbents running for Congress in the region lost.³⁶ Conservatives had hit mountain Republicans where it hurt. Having lost using the race card, they

³³ Blackmer and McCarkle to General Canby, March 5, 1868, Records of the Second Military District.

³⁴ William L. Scott to Rufus [Scott], November 3, 1868, William Lafayette Papers, Special Collections, Duke University.

³⁵ These men arrested for illicit distilling were Wesley Walker, Ephraim Abee, W.C. Good, John Robinson, Lewis Robinson, Amos Huffman, R.R. Caswell, and William Brittain. See J.B. Kincaid to Tod Caldwell, November 27, 1868; Tod Caldwell, November 29, 1868; D.H. Starbuck to Tod Caldwell, November 12, 1868; and Pinkney Rollins to Tod Caldwell, September 1, 1870, all in Tod Caldwell Papers, SHC.

³⁶ Seymour received 51 percent of the mountain vote, winning in Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Buncombe, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Transylvania, Watauga, and Yancey counties. Computed from Matthews, *North Carolina Votes*. For U.S. Senate results, see *Tribune Almanac*, 1869, 76.

portrayed themselves as the region's economic protectors by denouncing the federal liquor tax. Meanwhile, mountain Republicans were unable to solve the riddle of the party's relationship to the national government. Like the issue of African American political equality, they failed to disassociate themselves from their national party's support of federal liquor taxation. Republicans had learned a bitter political lesson. Moonshiners, however, could not have been more pleased. As long as Reconstruction and federal liquor taxation remained inseparable issues, they enjoyed a broad base of mountain support in their fight against the Bureau of Internal Revenue, one that would soon take a violent turn.

The Anti-Liquor Tax Argument

In June 1868, David A. Wells, head of the special revenue committee, Commissioner of Internal Revenue E.A. Rollins, and U.S. Secretary of Treasury Hugh McCulloch met in Washington, D.C. to discuss ways of improving federal liquor law enforcement. These officials "pointed out two causes as operating to reduce revenue: an excessively high rate, and the inefficiency and corruption of officials." While Rollins and McCulloch focused their attention on hiring more "honest and capable revenue men," Wells convinced Congress to lower the liquor tax from \$2.00 to fifty cents a gallon, hoping that this would encourage moonshiners to become legitimate. "It is part of a civilized government," Wells explained, "in framing laws for the assessment and collection of taxes, to know when the maximum revenue point in the case of each tax is reached, and to recognize that beyond that point the government 'overreaches itself.'"³⁷

Aided by this tax cut, newly elected President Ulysses S. Grant, hoping to reduce the national debt, intensified federal regulation of liquor production by sending more military aid to

³⁷ Ferleger, *David A. Wells and the American Revenue System*, 112-114; Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 40, 63; and Frederic C. Howe, *Taxation and Taxes in the United States Under the Internal Revenue System, 1791-1895* (New York: Thomas T. Crowell & Company, 1896), 139-151.

bureau agents. Grant's enforcement efforts, however, would come at an inopportune time for many Carolina highlanders. By 1869, growing food surpluses in Rutherford, Buncombe, and other mountain counties provided farmers with the means to once again participate in the larger market economy and alleviated their fear that alcohol manufacturing deprived the local community of corn.³⁸ In Surry County, for instance, corn became so abundant that its value dropped from \$1.50 a bushel in 1868 to fifty cents a year later. As a result, many mountain residents, especially those living in more remote areas, increasingly opted to distill their crops into alcohol, and for good reason. While the price of corn declined, whiskey remained at \$4.00 a gallon in 1869, thereby allowing a farmer to increase his profit margin twenty-fold.³⁹ A problem emerged, however. The federal government demanded that these farmers pay a fifty-cent tax on each gallon of liquor they produced. Mountain distillers and their communities, believing that this tax promoted the expansion of federal power and threatened an important local industry, joined forces in the fight to "make a little lick."⁴⁰

These highlanders quickly discovered that the Bureau of Internal Revenue was a formidable opponent. By 1870, both the Fifth and Seventh U.S. Cavalries, stationed in Morganton, Asheville, and Shelby, and the Fourth U.S. Artillery, headquartered in Rutherfordton, protected bureau agents conducting raids in western North Carolina.⁴¹ Revenuers' authority to summon federal soldiers increased with the passage of the Force Act of 1871. Aimed at combatting the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) by giving federal officials power to use

³⁸ *Rutherfordton Western Vindicator*, November 8, 1869.

³⁹ Most farmers in western North Carolina had five gallon stills. It took two bushels of corn to make five gallons of whiskey. Thus, a farmer could earn \$20.00 if he distilled two bushels of corn into whiskey. See Account Book of Isaac Jarratt, 1868-1869, Jarratt-Puryear Family Papers, Special Collections, Duke University.

⁴⁰ Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 40.

⁴¹ William T. Sherman to General G.G. Meade, March 21, 1871 (microfilm, reel 14, 1723 AGO 1871); C.H. Morgan to the Adjutant General, October 22, 1871 (microfilm, reel 12, M666); Mr. Shelton, report, 1871; Secretary of War [William Worth Belknap] to Secretary of the Treasury [George S. Boutwell], June 30, 1871 (microfilm, reel 12, M666), all in Letters Received, Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C., hereinafter cited as Letters Received, Adjutant General's Office Records.

troops for protection when making arrests, this act also granted Internal Revenue agents the same authority.⁴² The use of troops soon evoked cries of “bayonet rule” among mountain whites.

The “language of natural rights” and “localistic republicanism” garnered political support for the moonshiners following the 1868 election. As long as distillation did not deprive their communities of foodstuffs, mountain residents who did not distill alcohol regarded liquor manufacturing as an inalienable right. Moonshiners gained sympathy among these residents by claiming that they had the right, just as their fathers did, to make a living unmolested by the federal government. “Those people [illicit distillers],” revenue agent D.C. Pearson from Burke County remembered in 1882, “had been in the habit of making whisky all their lives; from after the war they thought they could do as heretofore.”⁴³ Georgian Alexander Stephens expressed the views of many western Carolina residents, who believed that “a farmer should have the same right to boil his corn into ‘sweet mash’ as to boil it into hominy.”⁴⁴ The ideal of republican virtue further helped moonshiners win support in their fight against the Bureau of Internal Revenue. As they had insisted during the antebellum period, alcohol distillers and their supporters argued that a republican government had no right to interfere with the rights of law-abiding citizens. Federal revenue enforcement, they strongly believed, had violated this pact.⁴⁵

Supporters of the moonshiners also viewed liquor taxation as a tool used by the federal government to prevent them from restoring “home rule.” For many former mountain Confederates, liquor taxation reaffirmed their fears of Yankee centralization. A moonshiner and ex-Confederate from Rutherford County, Amos Owens, vowed never to pay the liquor tax.

⁴² Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 70.

⁴³ “Testimony Before the Senate Special Committee to Investigate the Administration of the Collection of Internal Revenue in the Sixth District of North Carolina, Appointed April 21, 1882: *Senate Miscellaneous Documents*, No. 116, 47th Congress, 1st Session (hereinafter cited as “Sixth District of North Carolina”), testimony of D.C. Pearson, 323.

⁴⁴ *Atlanta Constitution*, May 19, 1880, quoted in Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 41.

⁴⁵ Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 262.

“Why in tarnation,” he questioned, “should he share the yield from his blockading labors with Washington?”⁴⁶ After 1868, the Republican *Raleigh Standard*, hoping to gain the allegiance of mountain voters, reiterated this fear of federal tyranny by comparing the liquor tax with taxes imposed on American colonists by the English Crown during the 1770s. “Taxation without representation,” the *Standard* explained, “is not carrying out in good faith, the policy inaugurated by the Revolutionists. The genius of our government has become wholly deformed.”⁴⁷ Clearly, many felt that liquor taxation signaled the beginning of an abusive federal government that could impose dominance over its citizens at will.

These complaints were only the tip of the iceberg. Farmers who had just recently turned to distillation argued that this tax reduced their profit margin. Regardless of the amount of liquor produced, all distillers were required to purchase licenses and pay a fifty-cent tax on each gallon. By 1869, however, this tax was probably not as burdensome to alcohol manufacturers as the critics of the Bureau of Internal Revenue portrayed it. Even when the price of whiskey dropped from \$4.00 a gallon in 1869 to \$2.00 in 1871, a farmer could still make a profit of \$5.50 by legally distilling his corn into whiskey.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, many mountain residents who did not manufacture alcohol believed that this tax placed a heavy burden on small local producers. One Caldwell County farmer, who had never “made a drop of liquor” and drunk only a “wee bit,” protested “the unjust and oppressive operation of the internal revenue laws of the national government.” Since fruit distillers in the mountain counties had little means and lived in one of the “most inaccessible regions,” this resident believed that their crops would ruin before getting

⁴⁶ White, M.L., *A History in the Life of Amos Owens, the Noted Blockader, of Cherry Mountain, N.C.* (Shelby, NC: Cleveland Star Job Print, 1901), 32.

⁴⁷ *Raleigh Daily Standard*, February 3, 1870, quoted in Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 41.

⁴⁸ In 1871, the price for a bushel of corn was \$1.00. If a farmer legally distilled two bushels of corn into five gallons of whiskey, he could earn \$7.50. See Account Book of Isaac Jarratt, 1871, Jarratt-Puryear Family Papers, Special Collections, Duke University.

to market if not distilled. With the burden of paying a liquor tax, the “plain countrymen” would be unable to provide for their families.⁴⁹

Moreover, supporters of the moonshiners insisted that liquor taxation drove local producers out of business. Several western North Carolinians concluded that the liquor tax benefited wealthy distillers who produced alcohol in bulk, while hurting smaller distillers unable to pay the tax. One mountain resident complained in September 1869 that this tax made “no distinction between the man who simply distills for his own use and the distiller who makes thousands of barrels for sale.” How could these farmers regain economic prosperity, the author questioned, “if every dollar they make is wrung from them by the tax-collectors?”⁵⁰ That same month, the Conservative *Raleigh Sentinel* argued that the liquor tax created “a *monopoly*, for the benefit of *wealthy capitalists*, who make distilling spirits a *great business*.”⁵¹ Many Carolina highlanders, aware of the local liquor industry’s economic importance, sympathized with small distillers and demanded the liquor tax’s repeal.

The Rise of Moonshiner Violence

Moonshiner resistance to federal liquor law enforcement occurred sporadically during the late 1860s. Conservatives and Republicans played a vital role in minimizing this violence by asking alcohol distillers and their supporters to remain patient for the liquor tax’s repeal. “In accepting Reconstruction,” the Conservative *Asheville News* explained in 1869, “we have accepted its concomitant evils, and shall bear with them until the conservative people all over the land shall become strong enough to abolish them by that sure but peaceful remedy – the ballot-box.”⁵² Republicans joined the chorus by urging moonshiners not to resist the liquor tax, “but

⁴⁹ *Raleigh Weekly Standard*, October 20, 1869.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, September 8, 1869.

⁵¹ *Raleigh Sentinel*, September 9, 14, 28, 1868.

⁵² *Asheville News*, June 24, 1869.

[to] ask for its repeal.” “Let petition after petition be drawn up and sent to our representatives in Congress,” the Republican *Raleigh Standard* advised North Carolinians opposed to the revenue law.⁵³ These hopes for a peaceful resolution soon shattered when the Grant administration intensified federal regulation of alcohol production.

Most historians have explained moonshiner violence against the Bureau of Internal Revenue as the result of geographic isolation or the product of the ethnic origins of the mountain people.⁵⁴ This lawlessness, however, reflected a number of grievances that certain elements in western North Carolina society had against the federal government during Reconstruction. Former mountain Confederates resented the presence of federal troops in the region, while others perceived revenueurs – many of whom were former mountain Unionists – as enemies settling wartime personal vendettas. As previously discussed, Carolina highlanders who did not manufacture alcohol also believed that the federal government used the Bureau of Internal Revenue to expand its authority. Liquor law enforcement and Reconstruction had become inseparable issues, thereby producing a climate in which community opposition to revenueurs took a violent turn.⁵⁵

Most moonshiners used their wits rather than a Winchester rifle when evading revenueurs.⁵⁶ Instead of fighting, illicit distillers, wanting to avoid a fine and a possible prison term, eluded agents by locating their stills “in unfrequented districts, sometimes in the midst of

⁵³ *Raleigh Standard*, October 20, 1869, June 1, 1870.

⁵⁴ See William G. Frost, “Our Contemporary Ancestors in the South Mountains,” *Atlantic Monthly* (March 1899), 311-319; Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders* (New York: Outing, 1913); Morley, *The Carolina Mountains*; John C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1921); Jack E. Weller, *Yesterday’s People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1965); and Fischer, *Albion’s Seed*.

⁵⁵ McKinney, “Moonshiners, Law Enforcement, and Violence,” 2, 15.

⁵⁶ Miller, *Revenueurs & Moonshiners*, 45.

an impenetrable jungle or laurel brake, and carefully concealed when not in operation.”⁵⁷ Others devised more elaborate hiding places for their operations. North Carolina moonshiner Charles Folias evaded revenuers by digging “a tunnel leading to the cave where his still was hidden.”⁵⁸ During the early 1870s, another moonshiner, Arthur Rathbone from Haywood County, hid his illegal cargo in a nearby pond. “Back when I was distillin,” Rathbone recalled years later, “that Fern Pond was all swampy and sort of like quick-sand. I hid a lot of likker there. Kept the revenooers from gettin’ it when they come a-easin’ around. Trouble was, that swamp just sucked up them cans and I couldn’t reclaim them.”⁵⁹ Moonshiners also avoided violent confrontation by posting pickets to give ample warning of a posse’s approach. Agents hunting down illicit stills in Ashe County, for instance, often heard “the blowing of horns and the peculiar hoots employed as signals of coming danger.” “Throughout the sections where these violations of the law take place, the whole country is patrolled and picketed,” revenuer William Ball complained in 1878. “So complete is the system of signals that no stranger can be seen without instantaneous alarm being given all through the neighborhood.”⁶⁰

Mountain residents sometimes discouraged revenuers from collecting the liquor tax by threatening their lives. Several men stopped revenuer J.H. Deaver outside his office in Marshal in Madison County on March 25, 1871. Deaver remembered: “They asked me if I knew the way to Asheville [in Buncombe County]. I told them I did. They pointed the road out to me and said it was only so many miles, and for me to take it, and get out of this county with my damned Revenue.”⁶¹ Cleveland and Rutherford county residents greeted John B. Eaves with similar

⁵⁷ A.H. Guernsey, “Illicit Distilling of Liquors – Southern Mode of Making Whiskey,” *Harper’s Weekly* 11 (December 7, 1867), 733.

⁵⁸ Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 31.

⁵⁹ John Parris, *Mountain Bred* (Asheville, NC: Citizen-Times Publishing Company, 1967), 4-6.

⁶⁰ William S. Ball to C. Devens, February 23, 1878 (microfilm, reel 2, M1345), Letters Received, Department of Justice Records.

⁶¹ W.H. Deaver to Pinkney Rollins, March 26, 1871, Adjutant General’s Office Records.

threats. “I felt that in some localities there I would be unsafe,” Eaves explained in 1872, “because of my position as a revenue officer.”⁶² These revenueurs knew why mountain whites wanted them to leave. They were working for an agency that promoted the expansion of federal power.

When the threat of violence failed, moonshiners tried to kill troublesome federal agents. In 1871, Deaver cheated death when his assailant’s rifle misfired. The attempted murderer, whom Deaver managed to kill in the gun fight, was Joseph A. Thompson from McDowell County, a Republican moonshiner who had complained “that his own *Party* had turned against him and intended to kill some of them.”⁶³ Other Internal Revenue agents were not as fortunate. In 1872, moonshiners from Cherokee and Clay counties fatally wounded revenueur C.C. Vest in Union County, Georgia.⁶⁴ Two years later, the *Asheville Pioneer* reported a shooting affray between illicit distiller William R. Dills and federal agent N.H. Burns in Swain County:

On Sunday, the 15th, as [Burns] was traveling on the road 12 miles from Charleston on the Tennessee border, he was shot through the heart and killed instantly by William R. Dills. The shooting was done with a rifle-gun, and at such close quarters that the patching of the bullet was found in the hole where the ball penetrated the body ... The section of the country in which the killing was done, is cursed with some wild and lawless men.⁶⁵

These assaults often received the support of communities in the immediate vicinity. In 1870, for instance, a “group of forty to fifty armed men” forced revenueurs to release a Rutherford

⁶² *Report of the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States*, 13 Vols. (Washington, 1872), *House Reports*, 42d Congress, 2d session, No. 22 (cited hereafter as *KKK Report*), North Carolina, 179.

⁶³ *Charlotte Western Democrat*, July 25, 1871.

⁶⁴ *Asheville Pioneer*, January 4, 1872.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, February 21, 28, 1874. For brevity’s sake, I have only included a few examples of moonshiners attacking revenueurs. For additional cases, see Pinkney Rollins to P.W. Perry, June 17, 1871; R.F. Frank, June 23, 1870; N.M. Manchester to Pinkney Rollins, April 1, 1871, all in Adjutant General’s Office Records; *Raleigh Daily Standard*, June 3, 1869; *Rutherford Star*, January 29, 1870; *Asheville Pioneer*, April 4, 1872, February 21, March 28, April 18, 1874; J.J. Mott to S.F. Phillips, November 30, 1877; V.S. Lusk to George Williams, December 23, 1873; Robert Dick to George Williams, November 21, 1874, all in Department of Justice Records; Jacob Wagner to Green R. Raum, February 9, 1877; Jacob Wagner to Green R. Raum, April 5, 1877, all in Bureau of Internal Revenue Records.

County moonshiner from jail.⁶⁶ During the shooting barrage that killed revenuer Vest two years later, moonshiners “received large additions to their Party from the neighborhood.”⁶⁷ Moreover, Conservatives defended illicit distillers by downplaying the level of violence directed at Internal Revenue agents. After hearing rumors that moonshiners had killed two revenuers in western North Carolina, the Conservative *Asheville News* responded: “We dare say that when these *reports* come to be investigated they will be found to consist of more fuss than fire.”⁶⁸ Moonshiners enjoyed a broad base of support in the mountains in their fight against the federal government.

When moonshiners were shot or killed, revenuers and soldiers also faced prosecution in state courts. Many agents believed that these courts with local juries were not as forgiving to them as they were to the moonshiners, and for good reason. Illicit distillers had the community’s support and often found sanctuary in local courts.⁶⁹ In 1874, for instance, a mountain jury acquitted several Swain County moonshiners charged with the murder of federal agent N.H. Burns.⁷⁰ Upon hearing the verdict, North Carolina’s Western District Judge Robert Dick was shocked that the jury had exonerated these men “from a clear case of murder.” Due to the “great prejudice against the Government,” Dick concluded that mountain juries would convict revenuers if tried in state courts.⁷¹ Federal agents in western North Carolina agreed. U.S. Marshall W.H. Deaver, indicted for murder and assault in Madison County in 1873, asked Attorney General Charles Devens to transfer his case to federal court. “I am safe in saying,”

⁶⁶ *Rutherford Star*, January 29, 1870.

⁶⁷ *Asheville Pioneer*, January 4, 1872.

⁶⁸ *Asheville News*, June 3, 1869.

⁶⁹ As General William T. Sherman had feared in the late 1860s, soldiers who fired upon moonshiners were arrested and tried “for murder in state courts before justices composed of the very men against whom they [were] called upon to act.” Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 70. 74.

⁷⁰ *Asheville Pioneer*, February 21, 28, October 24, 1874.

⁷¹ Robert Dick to George Williams, November 21, 1874 (microfilm, reel 2, M1345), Letters Received, Department of Justice Records.

Deaver pleaded, “that no officer of Internal Revenue or Marshal could obtain a fair and impartial trial in the state courts.”⁷² District Attorney and Republican Virgil Lusk from Asheville, who had the authority to transfer cases by a writ of habeas corpus, sometimes complied with Deaver’s and other mountain agents’ requests to remove their cases from state courts.⁷³ Supporters of the moonshiners were appalled and insisted that revenue officials had become immune from punishment.⁷⁴

The Reconstruction-era Ku Klux Klan also supported the moonshiners’ fight against the Bureau of Internal Revenue and its “infernal” liquor tax.⁷⁵ In 1868, Hamilton C. Jones, Col. William L. Saunders, and other leading Conservatives, hoping to launch a violent counteroffensive against the party of Lincoln, organized the KKK in North Carolina following Republican William W. Holden’s victory in the April gubernatorial election.⁷⁶ Like those elsewhere in the state, Klansmen in western North Carolina sought to restore “home rule” and white supremacy by assaulting white Republicans and African Americans.⁷⁷ Believing that they

⁷² W.H. Deaver to the Attorney General, June 21, 1877 (microfilm, reel 3, M1345), Letters Received, Department of Justice Records.

⁷³ V.S. Lusk to George Williams, December 23, 1873; V.S. Lusk to US District Attorney, June 21, 1875; W.A. Ross and T.H. Lindsay to the Attorney General, September 29, 1875; U.S. Marshall to the Attorney General, November 11, 1875, all in (microfilm, reel 2, M1345), Letters Received, Department of Justice Records; and *Asheville Pioneer*, September 9, October 3, 1874.

⁷⁴ Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 109-110.

⁷⁵ Two works mention the connection between the Ku Klux Klan and moonshiners during Reconstruction but do not provide a detailed study of this relationship. See Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), xlviii, 185, 189, 190, 239, 282, 305, 331, 340-341, 345, 357; and Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 43-44, 53-54. For scholarship on the Reconstruction-era Ku Klux Klan, see John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction: After the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Olsen, “The Ku Klux Klan, 340-62; William Peirce Randel, *The Ku Klux Klan: A Century of Infamy* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1965); Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965); Trelease, *White Terror*; George C. Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984); and Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

⁷⁶ Trelease, *White Terror*, 189-225; and Olsen, “The Ku Klux Klan,” 340-362. See also Carole Watterson Troxler, “‘To Look More Closely at the Man’: Wyatt Outlaw, a Nexus of National, Local, and Personal History,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 77 (October 2000), 403-433.

⁷⁷ For a discussion on Klan violence against white Republicans and African Americans in western North Carolina, see Bruce E. Stewart, “‘When Darkness Reigns Then is the Hour to Strike’: Moonshining, Federal Liquor Taxation,

were protecting the local community from “outsiders,” mountain Klansmen also targeted Internal Revenue agents. In April 1868, for instance, collector William Dedman returned to his hotel room in Waynesville in Haywood County to find a coffin-shaped letter pinned to his door.

Observing the letter “K.K.K.” inscribed on top, a startled Dedman read the warning:

Baker’s Tomb – Western Division – Windy Month – Cloudy Day – Bloody Hour. Ku Klux Klan, the hour approacheth. Shake up dry bones and meet on the Mysterious Circle of the Hollow Sphere. From East and West, from North and South, we come to measure justice for the traitor’s doom. When darkness reigns then is the hour to strike.

Dedman took the letter down and discovered a white mask resting on a post near his door.⁷⁸ The letter’s message was clear: leave Haywood County immediately.

Klan violence in western North Carolina intensified during the early 1870s.

Conservatives’ attempt in the spring of 1871 to call a constitutional convention and end suffrage restriction may have prompted this sudden surge of Klan activity.⁷⁹ That spring, Klansmen, having already established themselves in Buncombe, Rutherford, Madison, and Cleveland counties, organized two dens in Polk and McDowell counties, and three in Burke.⁸⁰ The KKK also emerged in Catawba, Clay, Haywood, and Yancey counties.⁸¹ Extralegal retribution in these mountain counties was brutal. In Yancey County, a “band of Kuklux” ransacked the house of W.C. Brackins in 1871. The Republican *Asheville Pioneer* did not indicate why Brackins was targeted but reported, “They seized Mr. Brackins and dragged him out into the yard, stripping off his clothing, and beat him upon his naked back and over the head with pistols until he was covered with blood from head to foot.” The assailants were not satisfied. They re-entered the

and Klan Violence in Western North Carolina, 1868-1872,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 80 (October 2003), 455-456.

⁷⁸ The Klan also left the same warning on the door of a local African American carpenter that night. See Bureau B.F. and A.L. to Lt. Col. George H. William, April 17, 1868, Records of the Second Military District.

⁷⁹ McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 47.

⁸⁰ Trelease, *White Terror*, 338, 340-342; and J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina* (New York: Columbia University, 1914), 462.

⁸¹ *Asheville Pioneer*, August 10, November 9, 1871; and Bureau B.F. and A.L. to Lt. Col. George H. Williams, April 17, 1868, Records of the Second Military District.

house, hurled Mr. Brackins's baby "across the room," and raped his wife."⁸² Nor were mountain African Americans immune from Klan brutality. Republican lawyer Nicholas W. Woodfin reported in 1871 that the Yancey County den had attacked many blacks.⁸³

While assaulting African Americans and white Republicans, mountain Klansmen continued to intimidate revenue officials. In 1871, collector Pinkney Rollins reported that illicit distillers in Polk, Burke, and other mountain counties were "under a kind of protectorship of that secret organization called 'the Ku Klux Klan.'"⁸⁴ That same year, agent C.C. Vest recalled that "squads of men claiming to be the K.K.'s" in Cherokee and Macon counties had avowed that the law shall not be executed in this county, that they will make whiskey, sell whiskey whenever they please and in defiance of the revenue authority of the United States."⁸⁵ Cleveland County revenue M.H. Berry agreed, adding that "he dare not attempt to collect any taxes" for fear of being "Ku-kluxed."⁸⁶ Berry was afraid to work in Cleveland County, and for good reason. In 1871, Klansmen from that county attacked several bureau agents who had confiscated several barrels of whiskey. Berry remembered, "They inquired where those damned Yankee revenue officers were. They swore they were going to have them out and kill the last son of a bitch . . . I have fought Indians on the plains, and heard them give many a war-hoop, but those Kuklux that night left Mr. Indian in the shade."⁸⁷ Like the issue of black suffrage, Klan members used the liquor tax as a rallying point to unify mountain whites against the Republican Party and

⁸² *Asheville Pioneer*, November 9, 1871.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, August 10, 1871. For more examples of Klansmen attacking white Republicans and African Americans in western North Carolina during the early 1870s, see Stewart, "'When Darkness Reigns Then is the Hour to Strike,'" 457-458.

⁸⁴ Pinkney Rollins to P.W. Perry, April 26, 1871 (microfilm, reel 14, 1723 AGO 1871), Letters Received, Adjutant General's Office Records. See also Pleasonton to the Secretary of War [William Worth Belknap], May 16, 1871 (microfilm, reel 14, 1723 AGO 1871), Letters Received, Adjutant General's Office Records.

⁸⁵ C.C. Vest to Pinkney Rollins, May 9, 1871, M.M. Manchester to Pinkney Rollins, April, 1871, C.C. Vest to Pinkney Rollins, April 19, 1871, Pinkney Rollins to P.W. Perry, June 17, 1871, all in (microfilm reel 14, 1723 AGO 1871), Letters Received, Adjutant General's Office Records; and *KKK Report*, 137.

⁸⁶ J.B. Eaves to Pinkney Rollins, April 20, 1871 (microfilm, reel 14, 1723 AGO 1871), Letters Received, Adjutant General's Office Records.

⁸⁷ *Asheville Pioneer*, August 24, 1871. See also *Raleigh Daily Standard*, January 11, 1870.

Congressional Reconstruction. Their goal was to defeat the agency as a means of restoring “home rule.”

Moonshiners, many of whom belonged to this terrorist organization, often used it to assault suspected informants, whether Republican or Conservative. In Cleveland County, for instance, illicit distiller Amos Owens and other Klansmen ransacked Mr. McGahey’s house on a cold February night in 1870. McGahey was a Republican who had told revenue agents the names of several moonshiners. This den also whipped a white Conservative, Almon Owens (no relationship to Amos Owens), that same night. One year later, Congressmen Luke P. Poland asked Klansman Julius Fortune why he and others had attacked Owens. Fortune answered, “Because he talked too much and worked too little.” “Reported some distillery, did he not,” Poland then inquired. “Yes, sir,” Fortune replied, “I think he did.”⁸⁸ Klansmen believed that these men betrayed the local community by helping the Bureau of Internal Revenue, and in their eyes, McGahey and Owens had committed the worst of crimes.

The KKK also protected moonshiners by intimidating mountain whites who did not manufacture alcohol. In 1871, Rollins pointed out that fear of physical retribution from the Klan operated as the leading culprit responsible for the community’s reluctance to collaborate with revenue agents. “The doings of this Klan,” he wrote, “have filled many people with such terror that they are afraid to say or do anything that might bring its vengeance upon them.”⁸⁹ Revenuer J.B. Eaves from Cleveland County agreed. “It is nearly impossible,” he explained, “to get any positive information as to where these distilleries are located. Citizens are afraid to reveal

⁸⁸ *KKK Report*, 105, 440-441, 443.

⁸⁹ Pinkney Rollins to P.W. Perry, April 26, 1871 (microfilm, reel 14, 1723 AGO 1871), Letters Received, Adjutant General’s Office Records.

anything they may know, for fear they will be visited by the K.K.K.”⁹⁰ Frightened residents refused to cooperate with IRS officials. As a result, revenueurs found it harder to capture, let alone convict, illicit distillers.

Conservatives were not the only illicit distillers who filled the ranks of the Ku Klux Klan. Republican moonshiners also joined this organization for protection. One Conservative Klansmen from Rutherford County, James L. Grant, testified that many Republican distillers who opposed the liquor tax supported the Klan. “They consider that they can run their stills without paying taxes, if the Ku-Klux Party would be in power;” Grant stated, “that they would put down the revenue, so that they could just run their stills publicly.”⁹¹ Conservative Marcus M. Wells from Cleveland County revealed that Republican moonshiner Mr. Hambrick had also joined the Klan to “protect him in distilling.” Wells concluded that the Ku Klux Klan and the moonshining business “seemed to cooperate together.”⁹²

The Klan courted this type of support by assisting Republican moonshiners in retrieving property confiscated by the Bureau of Internal Revenue. For Joseph Thornburg, a Republican moonshiner from Gaston County, the KKK in nearby Cleveland County was a blessing. In August 1871, Klansmen from this den surrounded agent S.H. Wiley and other revenueurs after they had confiscated Thornburg’s whiskey. Wiley remembered: “About two o’clock we were aroused by one of the clerks, who stated that about fifty masked men, all armed with muskets and rifles, had surrounded the premises, demanding that both the liquor and the revenue officers should be delivered to them.” Wiley feared that these Klansmen would attack his group and

⁹⁰ J.B. Eaves to Pinkney Rollins, April 20, 1871 (microfilm, reel 14, 1723 AGO 1871), Letters Received, Adjutant General’s Office Records.

⁹¹ *KKK Report*, 234.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 222.

turned the whiskey over to them.⁹³ Unquestionably, many Republican distillers supported the Klan's fight against the Bureau of Internal Revenue.

State Conservative leaders, however, became worried when Klan violence intensified in western North Carolina during the early 1870s. Although organizing the KKK in 1868, they believed that it had become a political liability. Many Conservatives feared that this violence would provoke the federal government to send in more troops and reassured Republican Governor Tod Caldwell that they did not support these outlaws. Former Governor Vance and other mountain Conservatives were also appalled. Unlike before, these Conservatives aided Republicans by making no effort to protect Klansmen.⁹⁴ The terrorist organization deteriorated as arrests mounted and Klansmen testified in court against one another.⁹⁵ As elsewhere in the South, Klan activity ceased in western North Carolina by 1872. Nonetheless, Conservatives were not yet ready to abandon the moonshiners. Both continued to share a common enemy, the Bureau of Internal Revenue, a federal agency that prevented them from achieving "home rule."

Politics and Federal Liquor Taxation

While moonshiners and Klansmen battled revenueurs, the issue of federal liquor taxation remained a major issue in mountain politics. Following the 1868 elections, North Carolina Conservatives, resentful that the Bureau of Internal Revenue provided Republicans with over three hundred patronage jobs, resumed their attack on liquor law enforcement by linking it with Radicalism and the question of "home rule."⁹⁶ In 1869, the *Raleigh Sentinel* pointed out that Radical congressmen were responsible for this "oppressive, difficult, and costly" tax on small

⁹³ Ibid., 403, 405; and "Outlawry in North Carolina," newspaper clipping, August 14, 1871 (microfilm, reel 12, M666), Letters Received, Adjutant General's Office Records.

⁹⁴ *Asheville Pioneer*, June 22, 1871; and *Charlotte Democrat*, June 20, October 17, 1871.

⁹⁵ Trelease, *White Terror*, 348.

⁹⁶ Wilbur R. Miller, "The Revenue: Federal Law Enforcement in the Mountain South, 1870-1900," *Journal of Southern History* (May 1989), 201.

local producers. “We call upon the plain, honest, hardworking men of the country, to remember what persons and what party have inflicted these wrongs upon them,” the *Sentinel* concluded.⁹⁷ Mountain Conservatives agreed. The *Asheville News* continued to protest the federal government’s use of troops to enforce the revenue law, a painful reminder of their failure to overthrow Congressional Reconstruction. The newspaper warned its readers in June 1869: “When Federal taxes are collected at the point of the bayonet, then our people will witness what has not occurred in our State since the days King George was master here.”⁹⁸ Two months later, another Conservative mountain newspaper, the *Rutherfordton Western Vindicator*, joked that the Bureau of Internal Revenue would soon overstep its legal bounds even more. “All Englishmen by the name of Hale,” the newspaper read, “who are engaged in the business of pronouncing the name without the H shall be considered manufacturers of ’ale and must pay the license required of all brewers and distillers.”⁹⁹ Through such rhetoric, Conservatives hoped to profit from mountain whites’ fear that the federal government would impose stringent controls over their communities via revenue enforcement.

Mountain Republicans felt cornered. In 1870, Klan violence on African American and white Republicans in piedmont North Carolina had become so extensive that Governor Holden was forced to create a militia to protect citizens and arrest Klan suspects. Holden’s decision to raise this militia provoked a popular outcry against the Republican Party in the Carolina highlands and other parts of the state. Yancey County residents considered Holden’s use of the militia as “a declaration of war.” The governor’s selection of George W. Kirk, a former Union colonel remembered by mountain residents for his raids on western North Carolina during the Civil War, to lead the militia also drove many former Confederates from the Republican Party.

⁹⁷ *Raleigh Sentinel*, September 2, 1869.

⁹⁸ *Asheville News*, June 24, September 3, 1869.

⁹⁹ *Rutherfordton Western Vindicator*, October 11, 1869.

Editors of the Republican *Rutherford Star*, for instance, viewed the so-called Kirk-Holden War as evidence of the governor's "tyranny, usurpation, treachery, and corruption."¹⁰⁰

Attacked for its support of black political equality and Holden's creation of a state militia to combat the KKK in 1870, the party fell further in the eyes of many western Carolinians with President Grant's endorsement of federal liquor law enforcement. Republicans had to somehow convince mountain voters that the local party was not responsible for these "outrages." In 1869, the Republican controlled General Assembly approved a resolution that exempted all distillers who manufactured less than 300 gallons of alcohol annually.¹⁰¹ By doing so, Republicans attempted to appeal to small producers, the group most vehemently opposed to liquor taxation. One year later, Senator Alexander H. Jones from Henderson County, which was one of the state's largest peach and apple producers, requested that Congress modify the tax on fruit brandy. Jones's proposal appealed to many mountain residents. One Polk County farmer observed that Jones, who would be reelected to office, was "gaining friends daily" due to his "recent activity and energy, in having the Brandy distilling modified so that all can still."¹⁰²

No matter how hard local Republicans tried to distance themselves from liquor taxation, however, mountain whites typically saw them as the purveyors of big government, the agents of radical change. In 1869, a Caldwell County farmer pointed out that the Republican Party was in power nationally and "responsible for all laws good, bad, and indifferent." Because the national party had failed to modify or repeal the tax, this farmer concluded that mountain Republicans would suffer politically.¹⁰³ Other mountain whites focused their discontent on the local Republican Party. A Wilkes County distiller believed that Republican politicians had betrayed

¹⁰⁰ *Raleigh Sentinel*, July 1, 1870; *Rutherford Star*, March 5, 1870; and McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 47.

¹⁰¹ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 53.

¹⁰² *Rutherford Star*, July 2; July 6, 1870.

¹⁰³ *Raleigh Standard*, October 20, 1869.

him. “Republicans speakers,” he wrote in August 1869, “for party purposes and to carry the election, stated that the revenue laws had been repealed. Under their influence and word, poor men stilled their fruit and will now be sold out of house and home.”¹⁰⁴

By the early 1870s, mountain Republicans conceded that their constituency resented the national party’s support of the Bureau of Internal Revenue. In 1871, a federal official admitted that “hostility to revenue laws [was] not confined to [Conservatives] but [was] general.”¹⁰⁵ One year later, Republican Hardie Hogan Helper argued that President Grant and Governor Holden should “remove every Internal Revenue officer in the State.”¹⁰⁶ Burke County Republicans agreed. Writing to Grant in September 1872, they asked him “to banish from its service the officials that had charge of the Collection of the Revenue in this District.”¹⁰⁷ After the U.S. Congress raised the liquor tax from fifty to seventy cents a gallon in December 1872, mountain Republican C.R. Thomas feared that the party of Lincoln was in serious trouble. “Our people,” he explained to James Ramsey, “do not wish to be annoyed any longer with both Federal and State tax gatherers.”¹⁰⁸

North Carolina Conservatives could not have been more pleased, and continued to link liquor law enforcement with opposition to broader Reconstruction policies. In 1872, the *Raleigh Sentinel* charged that the Republican Party had manufactured stories about moonshiners attacking revenueurs for political gain. According to the *Sentinel*, Republicans used these stories as an excuse to send more troops into the state, thereby securing their political dominance.¹⁰⁹

Mountain residents joined this chorus of opposition by accusing revenueurs of carrying blank

¹⁰⁴ *Raleigh Sentinel*, August 17, 1869.

¹⁰⁵ Maj. C.H. Morgan, 4th Artillery, Report, June 9, 1871 (microfilm, reel 14, 1723 AGO 1871), Letters Received, Adjutant General’s Office Records.

¹⁰⁶ *Raleigh Sentinel*, February 29, 1872.

¹⁰⁷ *Asheville Citizen*, September 25, 1872.

¹⁰⁸ C.R. Thomas to James Ramsey, December 12, 1872, James G. Ramsey Papers, SHC; and Howe, *Taxation and Taxes*, 219-220.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, March 26, April 3, July 8, 1872.

search warrants, which were “filled in whenever they found a property they wanted to search.”¹¹⁰

The Conservative *Asheville Citizen* and *Rutherfordton Western Vindicator* singled out federal official W.H. Deaver, accusing him of “persecuting *good* and *law-abiding* citizens.”¹¹¹

Conservatives also promised mountain voters that they would do everything possible to end revenue corruption and liquor taxation. In April 1872, they introduced a bill to Congress calling for the brandy tax’s repeal and a tax decrease on whiskey manufacturing.¹¹² Later that year, the Conservative state platform demanded that the federal government should abolish immediately the “inequitable, vexatious, and tyrannical” revenue system.¹¹³

In 1873, the Bureau of Internal Revenue’s reputation further plummeted when reporters exposed a massive scandal involving large distillers and revenue officials in the Midwest. These revenueurs had allegedly allowed several distillers to evade the liquor tax in exchange for bribes used to finance Grant’s 1872 reelection campaign.¹¹⁴ For many mountain whites, this scandal confirmed Conservatives’ charge of revenue corruption. One Buncombe County resident explained, “It is now thought there is a combined ring to harass and distress the people and it is thought that a majority of the officials are concerned, hence their retention in office.”¹¹⁵ To add insult to injury, many of these alleged corrupt agents were Republican. Several Conservative moonshiners argued that these revenueurs treated them more harshly than their Republican

¹¹⁰ “Sixth District of North Carolina,” testimony of W.M. Walker, 177.

¹¹¹ *Asheville Pioneer*, February 15, March 7, March 21, 1872.

¹¹² *Raleigh Sentinel*, April 20, 1872.

¹¹³ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 53

¹¹⁴ “Congress responded to the crisis by reforming the revenue system. In 1872, the office of assessor was abolished, and its duties were transferred to the collectors. In the same year, a law provided that gaugers would be paid by the government instead of by distillers’ fees. In 1876, the supervisors were abolished, with most of their duties going to the collectors and the agents. The agents were made directly responsible to the commissioner and soon became the backbone of the system, checking up on local officials and often organizing large-scale raids on illicit distillers.” See Miller, *Revenueurs & Moonshiners*, 64-64; and Foner, *Reconstruction*, 566.

¹¹⁵ Theodore Davidson, February 14, 1875, Theodore Davidson Papers, NCDAH.

counterparts. “Should Conservatives be persecuted and shot at,” one Wilkes County farmer complained in 1873, “because they are not the supporters of such dogs [Republicans]?”¹¹⁶

To make matters worse, mountain Republicans split into two contending factions in 1873, when agent James G. Ramsay, hoping to gain control of revenue patronage in western North Carolina, charged Sixth District collector John J. Mott with malfeasance.¹¹⁷ Mott fought back by writing an angry letter to his adversary: “I understand information is volunteered to you upon which it is expected that charges of mal-administration in office are to be prepared against me with a view of ousting me and your taking my place.” “Men,” he continued, “have enough to bear holding like public stations to this, without receiving assault at the hands of those who ought to be their friends.”¹¹⁸ Undeterred, Ramsay wrote to newly appointed Commissioner of Internal Revenue J.W. Douglas, insisting that the federal government appoint him collector of North Carolina’s Sixth Collection District. “I beg leave to say that [Mott] has never done or effected more for the Republican cause, than I have,” he assured Douglas.¹¹⁹

While prominent Republicans endorsed Ramsay, Mott gained the support of the party’s rank-and-file, largely due to his ability to cooperate with illicit distillers.¹²⁰ In January 1873, A.C. Bryan from Wilkes County pointed out that Mott, “in a quiet and gentlemanly way, has started quite a number of lawful distilleries in this district which have proved a success, thus convincing the peoples, that the Law can be complied with and more money made than could be

¹¹⁶ *Raleigh Sentinel*, March 1, 26, 1873.

¹¹⁷ “The vast majority of federal appointees in western North Carolina were employed in the Internal Revenue Service, with the man who was the head or collector in the region usually controlling the party organization.” See McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 49.

¹¹⁸ J.J. Mott to J.G. Ramsay, April 9, 1874, James G. Ramsay Papers, SHC.

¹¹⁹ J.G. Ramsay to J.W. Douglas, December 4, 1874, James G. Ramsay Papers, SHC.

¹²⁰ Ramsay received the support of Governor Tod Caldwell, Thomas Settle, D.H. Starbuck, Robert Dick, and other prominent Republicans. See Tod Caldwell to U.S. Grant, January 17, 1872; D.H. Starbuck and Thomas Settle, November 1872; Robert Dick to U.S. Grant, December 10, 1872; Richmond Pearson, November 21, 1872; Robert Dick, September 1874; and James G. Ramsay to J.W. Douglas, March 28, 1874, all in James G. Ramsay Papers, SHC.

otherwise.” “In my opinion,” Bryan continued, “we will be able to carry the district in August next unless Mott should be thrown out, or superseded by someone obnoxious to these mountain peoples.”¹²¹ George H. Brown, secretary of the Union Republican Executive Committee in Wilkes County, agreed. “Dr. Mott,” Brown insisted in 1874, “is certainly the strongest stake in the Republican Party in this district, he has done more than any other man to keep up the party, and for him to be thrown over board it looks like giving up every thing.”¹²² Despite opposition from rank-and-file Republicans, Grant appointed Ramsay as head of North Carolina’s Sixth Collection District in November 1874.¹²³ After hearing the news, a disappointed Mott wrote to Judge Thomas Settle: “It is not because I am involved that I say so, but the party in North Carolina is receiving injury in this removal and the appointment of R[amsay] that it cannot recover from.”¹²⁴

Meanwhile, mountain Conservatives continued to hit Republicans where it hurt. In 1874, Robert Vance, member of the Friends of Temperance and brother of Zebulon Vance, ran for Congress in western North Carolina’s Eight District denouncing African American suffrage and the Bureau of Internal Revenue.¹²⁵ Insisting that federal liquor taxation violated mountain whites’ inalienable rights, Vance proposed a bill to the U.S. Congress making penalties against moonshiners less stringent.¹²⁶ Mountain Republicans responded by calling for lower whiskey taxes, but to no avail.¹²⁷ Vance defeated the incumbent Republican, receiving 62 percent of the

¹²¹ A.C. Bryan to Thomas Settle, January 1, 1873, Thomas Settle Papers, SHC.

¹²² George H. Brown to Thomas Settle, November 18, 1874, Thomas Settle Papers, SHC.

¹²³ For more examples of rank-and-file Republicans supporting Mott, see A.C. Bryan to Thomas Settle, January 1, 1873; F.J. Dula to Thomas Settle, June 9, 1873, all in Thomas Settle Papers, SHC; and George H. Brown to W.F. Henderson, April 10, 1873; James G. Ramsay to Samuel F. Phillips, August 17, 1874; James G. Ramsey to J.W. Douglas, December 4, 1874, all in James G. Ramsay Papers, SHC.

¹²⁴ J.J. Mott to Thomas Settle, November 12, 1874, Thomas Settle Papers, SHC.

¹²⁵ *Asheville Pioneer*, June 27, 1874.

¹²⁶ *Asheville Citizen*, February 26, 1874.

¹²⁷ *Asheville Pioneer*, February 14, 1874; and *Raleigh Sentinel*, June 20, 1874.

vote.¹²⁸ With such widespread hostility towards federal liquor taxation and black political equality, the stage was set for Zebulon Vance's triumph in 1876.

The End of Reconstruction

As the 1876 gubernatorial election approached, Conservatives first attacked local Republicans for their national party's support of African American political equality. In 1875, Republican congressmen had proposed a civil rights bill to safeguard what remained of blacks' rights and Reconstruction. Furious Conservatives pledged to save the state "from the thralldom of niggerism."¹²⁹ Zebulon Vance immediately toured the western counties denouncing the bill.¹³⁰ Meanwhile, local Republicans scrambled to alleviate mountain whites' fear of racial amalgamation by arguing that the bill only called for separate but equal facilities. Others took a more traditional approach, opting to ignore the civil rights controversy altogether. Mountain whites, however, were unconvinced and cast the majority of their votes in favor of a new Conservative-sponsored state constitution that discriminated against blacks.¹³¹

To make matters worse, the issue of federal liquor taxation continued to plague the Republicans. When Vance toured the western counties denouncing the Civil Rights bill in 1875, for instance, he also attacked the Bureau of Internal Revenue. Mountain Conservatives embraced the former governor. The Conservative *Asheville Citizen* wrote that Vance had defended mountain whites by addressing the "great issues involved in the present – the interests of the people contrasting with the selfish conduct of the Grant Revenue office-holders." Moreover, the newspaper agreed with Vance that revenueurs controlled the Republican Party. It warned mountain voters that "revenue office holders" worked "only for their big offices." "Such

¹²⁸ Ibid., August 22, 1874; and *Asheville Citizen*, August 13, 1874.

¹²⁹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 313.

¹³⁰ *Asheville Citizen*, July 22, August 5, 1875. See also McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, 299-300, 312-313.

¹³¹ McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 49.

is radical revenueism,” the *Citizen* concluded.¹³² Through such rhetoric, Conservatives attempted to capitalize on mountain whites’ fear that revenueurs were political agents promoting Radicalism.

The incompetence and poor judgment of some federal agents further discredited the Bureau of Internal Revenue by confirming Conservatives’ charge of revenue corruption.¹³³ In 1875, the North Carolina Western District Federal Court contemplated prosecuting agent William S. Pearson of Buncombe County and five gaugers from North Carolina’s Sixth Collection District for falsely recording the amount of whiskey distilled at several stills, an illegal practice known as “spreading the account.”¹³⁴ To make matters worse, Pearson and some of the other gaugers were members of prominent mountain Republican families.¹³⁵ Many feared the political repercussions that the trials would have on the mountain party in the upcoming 1876 gubernatorial election. Republican North Carolina Governor Curtis H. Brogden and other high-ranking state officials asked U.S. Attorney General George Williams not to prosecute Pearson. “We are satisfied,” they wrote, “that you will not allow the character of a young man of so much promise and one who has so ably defended the principles of our party ... to be ruined.”¹³⁶ District Attorney Virgil Lusk from Asheville, who the Commissioner of Internal Revenue and U.S. Attorney General had directed to consider criminal proceedings against the other accused

¹³² *Asheville Citizen*, April 29, July 15, 22, August 5, 1875.

¹³³ Evidence suggests that most revenueurs in western North Carolina were competent and honest. Nonetheless, Conservatives seized upon isolated cases of fraud to criticize the Bureau of Internal Revenue. Whether or not there was a massive amount of corruption is irrelevant, however. Mountain whites who opposed to the expansion of federal authority perceived revenue corruption as pervasive, thereby uniting them with the moonshiners.

¹³⁴ These gaugers had only visited these stills once, while reporting that they had visited them on several occasions over a period of days.

¹³⁵ P.W. Perry to P.P Pratt, June 28, 1875 (microfilm, reel 2, M1345); W.W. Holden, Governor Brogden, D.A. Jenkins to Edward Pierrepoint, June 14, 1875 (microfilm, reel 2, M1345); J.M. Orr, June 2, 1875 (microfilm, reel 2, M1345); V.S. Lusk, report, July 1, 1875 (microfilm, reel 2, M1345); J.J. Mott to George Williams, 1875 (microfilm, reel 2, M1345); Thomas Settle to George Williams, February 23, 1875 (microfilm, reel 2, M1345); W.A. Smith to George Williams, February 26, 1875 (microfilm, reel 2, M1345); Governor C.H. Brogden to George Williams, January 31, 1875 (microfilm, reel 2, M1345); V.S. Lusk to George Williams, March 15, 1875 (microfilm, reel 2, M1345), all in Letters Received, Department of Justice Records.

¹³⁶ C.H. Brogden et al to Geo. H. Williams, January 31, 1875 (microfilm, reel 2, M1345), Letters Received, Department of Justice Records.

men, agreed. “I would respectfully suggest,” Lusk wrote to the Attorney General, “that no further good would result to the government by a continuation of these prosecutions.”¹³⁷ The federal court’s failure to convict Pearson and the other agents heightened mountain whites’ fear that Republicans had conspired to undermine local autonomy via revenue enforcement.

Meanwhile, Vance’s assault on the Bureau of Internal Revenue continued during his 1876 gubernatorial campaign. He condemned the entire revenue system as corrupt and called revenue agents “red-legged grasshoppers.” Holding up to his mountain audience a grasshopper preserved in alcohol, Vance proclaimed: “This fellow ... eats up every green thing that God ever gave to man, and he only serves the universal dissolution. The time has come when an honest man can’t take an honest drink without having a gang of revenue officers after him.”¹³⁸

Conservatives rallied behind Vance, merging the issue of federal liquor taxation with African American political equality. “They tax us,” the *Asheville Citizen* read in February 1876, “and give us Negro civil rights.” This newspaper also charged that “corrupt” revenue agents in Buncombe County were “determined to rule the party, and keep all the big offices, and all funds in the family.” In the eyes of the *Citizen*, revenueurs had monopolized political office.¹³⁹

As the 1876 election approached, mountain Republicans feared that the issue of federal liquor taxation threatened to destroy the party. Western Carolinians, they argued, associated the local party with Radicalism, largely due to President Grant’s support of the Bureau of Internal Revenue. Mountain Republicans realized that a universal perception had developed among highlanders that Grant was using “corrupt” revenueurs to expand federal power. In June 1876, W.S. Tate complained: “The management of the Internal Revenue service in this district,

¹³⁷ V.S. Lusk to Atty. Gen. Edwards Pierrepont, July 14, 1875 (microfilm, reel 2, M1345), Letters Received, Department of Justice Records.

¹³⁸ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 79.

¹³⁹ *Asheville Citizen*, February 25, 1876. See also *Blue Ridge Blade* (Burke County), May 9, August 8, 1876.

Republicans tell me, is not only odious but infamous and many have become lukewarm.”¹⁴⁰

Republican Robert Dick sided with Tate, pointing out that he “had heard from some counties in the mountains that some of the [Internal Revenue officials] are doing damage by an improper execution of the Revenue Laws.”¹⁴¹

Nor did national Republicans improve the situation. In 1873, Republican A.C. Bryan from Wilkes County believed “that an overwhelmingly majority of the people” in the Carolina mountains were “fittingly opposed” to any increase in liquor taxation. “If Congress does increase the tax,” he predicted to Judge Thomas Settle, “it will be a heavy load for us [Republicans] to carry.”¹⁴² In March 1875, however, the Republican-controlled U.S. Congress raised the federal liquor tax from seventy to ninety cents a gallon.¹⁴³ This tax increase could not have come at a worse time for small legal distillers in western North Carolina, whose product had fallen to \$1.50 a gallon that same year.¹⁴⁴ While earning a \$5.50 profit on every five gallons of alcohol they produced in 1871, legal whiskey makers now netted only one dollar. As Bryan had warned, many of these distillers blamed the Republican Party. Some may have also turned to moonshining, thereby escalating to potential for violence.¹⁴⁵ Either way, this tax increase encouraged both legal and illegal distillers to become more receptive to Vance’s political rhetoric.

Republicans did attempt to improve the federal agency’s reputation in the Carolina highlands before the gubernatorial election. Judge Dick, for instance, “put deputy marshals on notice that they would be dismissed for excessive rudeness, force, or obtaining confessions by

¹⁴⁰ W.S. Tate to Thomas Settle, June 14, 1876, Thomas Settle Papers, SHC.

¹⁴¹ Robert Dick to Thomas Settle, September 7, 1876, Thomas Settle Papers, SHC.

¹⁴² A.C. Bryan to Thomas Settle, January 1, 1873, Thomas Settle Papers, SHC.

¹⁴³ *Asheville Citizen*, July 8, 1875; and Howe, *Taxation and Taxes*, 220-221.

¹⁴⁴ A bushel of corn sold for \$1.00 in 1875. See Account Book of Isaac Jarratt, 1875, Jarratt-Puryear Family Papers, Special Collections, Duke University.

¹⁴⁵ Moonshiners in 1875 continued to earn a \$5.50 profit on every five gallons of alcohol they produced.

promise or threat.”¹⁴⁶ J.J. Mott, who President Grant had recently reinstated as collector of the Sixth Collection District, implemented a more radical policy.¹⁴⁷ He refused to collect the liquor tax before the gubernatorial election. “It would have been a hardship upon the distillers,” Mott explained in October 1876, “to have made payment before this time [because it] would have caused bad feeling and injury to us [Republicans] politically.”¹⁴⁸ The Republican *New Regime* in Rutherford County suggested that the federal government stop prosecuting Amos Owens and other small local illicit distillers “for some little irregularity concerning the revenue law.” Instead, the newspaper argued, national authorities should focus their attention on convicting revenue officials and large distillers in the Midwest who had participated in the Whiskey Ring scandal of 1873.¹⁴⁹ These efforts to alleviate mountain opposition to federal liquor taxation, however, arrived too late to save the Republicans. Vance defeated Republican Thomas Settle in the 1876 gubernatorial election, receiving 63 percent of mountain votes.¹⁵⁰

Disgruntled Republicans admitted that Conservatives had capitalized on local issues to gain mountain whites’ allegiance following the 1876 election. “I have no doubt,” agent D.C. Pearson from Burke County recalled in 1882, “that many men who voted for the Republican ticket prior to that time were induced to vote the Democratic Party, thinking they would be relieved of the [federal liquor] law and its operations by the Democratic administration coming into power.”¹⁵¹ J.J. Mott agreed. Testifying before a congressional inquiry on revenue corruption in western North Carolina, he argued in 1882:

¹⁴⁶ Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 121.

¹⁴⁷ McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 97.

¹⁴⁸ J.J. Mott to F.A. Sewell, October 11, 1876, Bureau of Internal Revenue Records.

¹⁴⁹ *The New Regime*, February 12, 1876.

¹⁵⁰ Vance won in nineteen of the twenty-three mountain counties (votes for Ashe, Catawba, Swain were not listed). Western North Carolinians also gave 64 percent of their votes to Democratic presidential candidate Samuel Tilden. Computed from Matthews, *North Carolina Votes*.

¹⁵¹ “Sixth District of North Carolina,” testimony of D.C. Pearson, 323.

The purpose of the Democratic Party, as I understood it and felt it, was to make capital by traduction of the Revenue laws and officers. This was done by the public speakers and newspapers throughout the State. That system of abuse and traduction grew, and was taken from the speakers and the press by the populace ... It subjected the officers to insult and suspicion, and incensed those who were engaged in illicit distilling, and encouraged them to stand out against the law, and to go on in the face of the law.¹⁵²

Like the issue of African American political equality, Conservatives had successfully used federal liquor taxation as a rallying point to unify mountain whites against the party of Lincoln and Congressional Reconstruction. Mountain whites increasingly believed that the road to redemption lay not only with the eradication of black political equality, but also with the destruction of the Bureau of Internal Revenue, an agency promoting the expansion of federal power. Mountain Republicans, unable to distance themselves from the national party's support of liquor law enforcement, could do nothing but watch their support slip away. Ironically, however, Vance's victory in 1876 would mark the beginning of the end for the moonshiners in western North Carolina.

¹⁵² Ibid., testimony of J.J. Mott, 366.

PART 3:

THE ROAD TO PROHIBITION, 1870-1908

CHAPTER 5

CIVILIZATION REQUIRES PROHIBITION: THE BEGINNING OF THE END FOR THE MOONSHINERS, 1870-1882

All the drunkards will never be dead,
I can tell you the reason why;
The young ones always grow up
Before the old ones die.¹

In 1882, Randolph Abbott Shotwell of Rutherford County described the socio-economic status of the moonshiners in western North Carolina. He believed that these distillers were a “distinct” branch of lower class whites, “ignorant of even the first rudiments of education and wholly unable to give any account of the outside world.” According to Shotwell, most of them had betrayed the South during Reconstruction by joining the Union League and bribing Bureau of Internal Revenue agents. “The distillers,” he wrote, “were desperate characters ... and the wealthy class, living in isolated farm houses, somewhat feared to incur their enmity.” Even more disturbing, Shotwell insisted that these moonshiners promoted the continued widespread use of alcohol in rural mountain society, flooding “the country with liquor – ‘cheap as dirt,’ and quite as filthy.”²

Shotwell’s remarks must have disturbed many illicit distillers in the Carolina highlands. As head of the Ku Klux Klan in Rutherford, Cleveland, and Polk counties during Reconstruction, Shotwell had embraced the moonshiners’ fight against the Bureau of Internal Revenue because

¹ *Blue Ridge Blade*, February 26, 1881.

² J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, ed., *The Papers of Randolph Abbott Shotwell*, 3 vols. (Raleigh: North Carolina Historical Commission, 1929-1936), 2: 286-287, 405.

he believed that this agency promoted the expansion of federal authority. In fact, Shotwell was a friend of Amos Owens and other illicit distillers who had joined this terrorist organization to protect their economic interests. Nonetheless, Shotwell refused to allow the memory of the KKK to be associated with such uncivilized and violent men. Celebrated as heroes during Reconstruction, the moonshiners, by the 1880s, found themselves under attack from Shotwell and other former allies. The broad base of support that they had enjoyed in western North Carolina was slowly diminishing. What had gone wrong?

The next two chapters will address this overlooked, but important question: one that sheds further light on the impact economic modernization had on mountain society during the late nineteenth century. This chapter examines the re-emergence of prohibition sentiment among urban middle-class highlanders in the 1870s, while Chapter 7 chronicles the creation of violent Appalachia during the 1880s. Both demonstrate that the reputation of moonshiners (and legal distillers) declined as western North Carolina experienced an unprecedented era of industrial and urban growth. The arrival of the railroad, and along with it “civilization,” encouraged many mountain townspeople to embrace the amenities and philosophies of urban America. These men and women increasingly feared that alcohol consumption, among other “traditional” practices, threatened to stymie the region’s economic and moral potential. Many of them would embrace the so-called uplift movement of the 1890s, hoping to once and for all eradicate “King Alcohol” in the Carolina highlands. The moonshiner played a central role in this drama by epitomizing what was wrong with southern Appalachia. He was an unwanted remnant of the colonial past, a rugged individualist who rejected modernity and promoted intemperance. Like other “traditional” rural mountain residents, the alcohol distiller (licit and illicit) had no place in the new industrial social order.

The Beginnings of Western North Carolina's Industrial Revolution

In 1868, Asheville resident and former congressman Thomas Clingman wrote a pamphlet published by the American Agricultural and Mineral Land Company, an organization owned jointly by northern capitalists and local entrepreneurs. In it, Clingman attempted to attract northerners with capital to invest and settle in western North Carolina by extolled the region's scenic beauty and fertile soils. "The air," he wrote, "is almost always bracing and exhilarating in a high degree, while no country is more healthy, being not only free from all miasmatic diseases, but favorable even in winter." The region's vast timber resources, abundant minerals, plentiful waterways, and "industrious" white population, Clingman also argued, made it ideal for manufacturing. In short, there was "no country more inviting to industrious emigrants."³

Following the Civil War, Clingman and other local boosters, most of whom resided in commercial centers, increasingly believed that the future of western North Carolina (and the South) lay in northern investment and economic modernization. Prominent among these men was physician H.P. Gatchell, owner of a tuberculosis sanitarium at Forest Hill, just south of Asheville. Arguing that tourism would serve as a catalyst for other forms of economic development, Gatchell in 1870 penned the first of many promotional pamphlets celebrating the region's healthful climate. According to Gatchell, only in western North Carolina could a "Northern man, who wishes to rear a healthful, industrious, and energetic family," find a "desirable home." "There can the white race maintain the health and vigor which are essential to preserving labor and to great results," he concluded.⁴

³ Thomas L. Clingman, *Selections from the Speeches and Writings of Hon. Thomas L. Clingman of North Carolina* (Raleigh: J. Nichols, printer, 1877), 124-126. See also Thomas E. Jeffrey, *Thomas Lanier Clingman: Fire Eater from the North Carolina Mountains* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 222-224.

⁴ H.P. Gatchell, *Western North Carolina, Its Resources, Mineral Wealth, Climate, Salubriety, and Scenery* (Asheville: E.J. Aston, 1870), quoted in Richard D. Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 25-26.

Whether promoting the region's climate, agricultural potential, or untapped mineral resources, local boosters like Gatchell insisted that "capital and enterprise" would allow western North Carolina to become "one of the most prosperous sections of the country."⁵ They also realized that economic development depended upon the completion of the Western North Carolina Railroad (WNCRR), and, as many mountain residents had done since the 1840s, argued for its extension into the counties west of the Blue Ridge.⁶ The WCNRR and other railroads promised to link the region to other parts of the South, increase commercial traffic, and advance tourism. "I am willing to be taxed well on my little property to have a railroad in the county," wrote a Hendersonville African American in 1873, demanding that state legislators fund the construction of the Spartanburg-Asheville Railroad, which would run through Henderson County. "We want a railroad – we need one, as everybody knows. And I believe if we all knew our interests and go to work, like we ought to do, we will have one, and that soon." The *Asheville Citizen* agreed. "Our old colored friend," the newspaper read, "... knows that his property will more than double in value if a railroad goes to his place, besides bringing numberless new ways for the people to make money."⁷

Internal scandals and mountain topography, however, hampered railroad construction during the mid 1870s, much to the dismay of local boosters. Work on the WNCRR stopped at Old Fort in McDowell County in 1873 after directors Milton S. Littlefield and George Swepson embezzled one million dollars in bond proceeds that were meant to extend the railroad to Asheville. To make matters worse, rugged terrain in Polk County slowed construction of the Asheville-Spartanburg Railroad. Many western North Carolinians became alarmed.

⁵ Ibid., 26.

⁶ For a discussion on antebellum western North Carolinians' demands for a railroad, see Inscow, *Mountain Masters*, 152.

⁷ *Asheville Citizen*, July 10, 1873.

“Enterprising men will not remain in a section remote from railroad and telegraphic communication,” Caldwell County’s *Lenoir Topic* feared in 1878. “They find no market for their produce, and become disheartened at the prices they are compelled to sell the same for – and receive their pay in merchandise.”⁸ By 1879, Old Fort remained the western terminus of WNCRR, while work on the Asheville-Spartanburg Railroad continued to lag in Polk County.⁹

Nonetheless, mountain residents’ attempts to entice outside investment during the 1870s were successful. In 1870, the Cooper Institute in New York purchased 1,500 acres of land in Madison County and sold it to a group of northern settlers, who founded the Western North Carolina Manufacturing and Agricultural Association.¹⁰ Two years later, B.B. Babington, Sr. from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, along with Massachusetts inventor M.S. Worthington, hoping to capitalize on cheap labor, moved to Shelby in Cleveland County, where they formed the Carolina Sewing Machine Company.¹¹ Intending to float timber down the Yadkin and Pee Dee Rivers to South Carolina, a Canadian-based company purchased large tracts of land in Watauga and Wilkes counties in 1873.¹² That same year, capitalists S.S. and J.E. Clayton from Baltimore, Maryland bought the Ore Knob copper mine in Ashe County. Their business venture was a huge success. By 1878, the mine employed over 700 workers and had become the leading producer of

⁸ *Lenoir Topic*, March 9, 1878.

⁹ By 1879, the Asheville-Spartanburg Railroad reached Saluda in western Polk County. See Anne Osborne and Charlene Pace, *Saluda, N.C.: One Hundred Years, 1881-1981* (Saluda, NC: Holly Hill Publishers, 1981). For a detailed discussion on the construction of the WNCRR and Asheville-Spartanburg Railroad, see William H. Abrams, Jr., “The Western North Carolina Railroad, 1855-1894” (MA thesis, Western Carolina University, 1976), 1-32; Allen W. Trelease, *The North Carolina Railroad, 1849-1871, and the Modernization of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 122-126; William D. Cotton, “Appalachian North Carolina: A Political Study” (PhD Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1954), 36-44; Blackmun, *Western North Carolina to 1880*, 377-379, 391-397; Van Noppen, *Western North Carolina Since the Civil War*; and Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 24.

¹⁰ Cotton, “Appalachia North Carolina,” 22-23.

¹¹ Lee B. Weathers, *The Living Past of Cleveland County: A History* (Spartanburg, SC: Reprint Company, Publishers, 1980), 181; and James D. Marler, *Heritage of Cleveland County* (Shelby, NC: Cleveland County Historical Association, 1982), 162.

¹² Cotton, “Appalachian North Carolina,” 56-57.

copper in the United States.¹³ In 1879, northerner John Wilder, owner of the famous Cloudland Hotel on Roan Mountain in Mitchell County near the Tennessee-North Carolina border, acquired a portion of the Cranberry Mica Mine in Watauga County.¹⁴

Most northern capitalists, however, remained hesitant to invest in the region during the 1870s, largely due to the absence of railroads west of the Blue Ridge. Local entrepreneurs, most of whom had belonged to the antebellum elite and urban middle-class, seized the opportunity to make money. As Martin Crawford has discovered, former slaveholding families in Ashe County retained their position at the head of that county's economic elite in the 1870s by turning away from agriculture to pursue industrial enterprise, investing mostly in copper mines.¹⁵ The same was true of local leaders elsewhere in western North Carolina. Jackson County entrepreneurs in Webster scabbled to acquire lands rich in copper, corundum, mica, and gold deposits, while Thomas Clingman, practicing what he preached, purchased a mica mine on Beech Creek in Watauga County.¹⁶ Other local residents opted to invest in the region's vast timber resources. Even without having access to a railroad line, a Madison County lumberman reported that in nine months of operation, "he had spent \$4,000 and had reaped \$10,000 worth of marketable lumber" during the late 1870s.¹⁷ East of the Blue Ridge, in Catawba, Cleveland, Burke, Surry, and Rutherford counties, mountain town entrepreneurs founded several textile plants and iron forges, hoping that these manufacturing industries would stimulate economic growth.¹⁸

¹³ Crawford, *Ashe County's Civil War*, 165; and Fletcher, *Ashe County*, 224-225.

¹⁴ Jennifer Bauer Wilson, *Roan Mountain: A Passage of Time* (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, Publisher, 1991), 75-77.

¹⁵ Crawford, *Ashe County's Civil War*, 164-165.

¹⁶ Williams, *The History of Jackson County*, 614-615; and John Preston Arthur, *A History of Watauga County, North Carolina* (Richmond: Everett Waddey Co., 1915), 267.

¹⁷ Hayes, *The Kingdom of Madison*, 112

¹⁸ Weathers, *The Living Past of Cleveland County*, 174-176; Marler, *Heritage of Cleveland County*, 162; J.G. Hollingsworth, *History of Surry County, or Annals of Northwest North Carolina* (J.G. Hollingsworth, 1935), 158-159; Phifer, *Burke*, 244; Charles Pleslar, Jr., *A History of Catawba County* (Salisbury, NC: Rowan Printing Co., 1954), 184-186.

Table 5.1. Capital Invested in Manufacturing between 1870 and 1880 (in Dollars)

County	1870	1880	%
Alexander	8,500	69,072	+713
Yancey	2,600	18,940	+629
Haywood	6,950	30,160	+334
Cherokee	8,425	29,420	+249
Caldwell	38,450	98,025	+155
Jackson	6,125	14,900	+143
Madison	8,150	17,500	+115
Catawba	78,900	168,865	+114
McDowell	20,880	41,300	+98
Wilkes	19,375	35,500	+83
Burke	42,200	61,485	+46
Buncombe	111,675	156,035	+40
Rutherford	46,575	56,850	+22
Surry	191,450	218,050	+14
Cleveland	124,900	133,200	+7
Henderson	26,348	18,925	-28.2
Alleghany	13,100	7,000	-46.6
Polk	12,400	5,800	-52.2
Average	42,611	65,613	+54

Source: Counties where census enumerators did not record capital invested in manufacturing in 1870 and 1880 were Ashe, Clay, Macon, Mitchell, Graham, Swain, Transylvania, and Watauga. See *The Statistics of the Wealth and Industry ... Ninth Census: 1870* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872); and 554-555; and *Report on the Manufacturers ... Tenth Census: 1880* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 159-160.

Although western North Carolinians would not feel industrialization's full impact until the 1880s, local entrepreneurs and boosters laid the groundwork for it in the 1870s. Census records reveal that capital invested in manufacturing increased dramatically in the region during this decade. Out of the eighteen mountain counties where census enumerators recorded manufacturing investment in 1870 and 1880, fifteen of them had an increased industrial product (see table 5.1). Topping that list were counties that had invested little capital in manufacturing before the Civil War. Alexander, Yancey, Haywood, and Cherokee (the later three having vast quantities of timber and mineral resources) experienced the highest percentage increase of capital invested in manufacturing between 1870 and 1880. Industrial development was slowly expanding beyond the dominant antebellum commercial centers located in Buncombe, Caldwell,

Catawba, Cleveland, and Surry counties.¹⁹ The advance of modernization, however, would widen the cultural gap between town and countryside during the 1870s.

Temperance, Local Option, and the Creation of a New Social Order

For local boosters, economic progress went hand in hand with cultural reform. Mountain residents had to conform to the demands of a new industrialized social order. Only then could the capitalist experiment succeed. “Let us teach the rising generations that industry and frugality are better than riches,” Thomas Clingman explained in 1873. “If every one of us would, for five years, labor as earnestly as we generally did during the war, and live as economically, we should be, at the end of that period, far advanced of what we now are.”²⁰ Young men and women, most of whom had lived on farms before migrating to towns and factories, would have to learn how to work on the clock and embrace the Victorian middle-class virtues of sobriety, self-restraint, and industry. Rural farmers would also have to change. According to Clingman, the “two vices yet to overcome” in rural society were “ignorance and laziness.”²¹ To increase agricultural productivity, mountain residents would have to embrace scientific farming and participate more in the market economy. Above all, they would have to stop drinking alcohol, a tradition that threatened to impede the region’s economic as well as moral prosperity.

During the early 1870s, local missionary Baptists, most of whom had remained silent on the issue for nearly a decade, resumed their campaign against intemperance because they feared that mountain society was in moral decline. In 1871, members of the Broad River Association charged that crime and violence had multiplied in western North Carolina since the end of the Civil War. According to J.R. Logan, chairman of the Broad River Association, increased alcohol

¹⁹ See *Manufacturers of the United States ... Eighth Census: 1860* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1865), 420-435.

²⁰ Thomas L. Clingman, “Address Delivered At Davidson College, North Carolina,” June 25, 1873, in Clingman, *Selections from the Speeches and Writings of Hon. Thomas L. Clingman of North Carolina*, 45.

²¹ *Raleigh Observer*, October 17, 1877, quoted in Jeffery, *Thomas Lanier Clingman*, 224.

consumption, especially among young men, was the leading culprit responsible for this apparent breakdown in law and order. “[W]e often witness with sadness,” he explained, “the evil genius of intemperance in many things, disturbing the peace and quiet of the churches, and even whole communities, poisoning the very foundation of morality.” The King’s Mountain Baptist Association agreed. In 1872, it called upon members “to arouse from their slumbers and try to do their whole duty [to eradicate the excessive use of alcohol].” “We see very many of our young men and old men too alike steeped in the foul sinks of intemperance, perverting the cause of Christian progress.”²²

It is impossible to determine whether or not alcohol consumption was actually increasing in western North Carolina during the 1870s. In more remote parts of the region, temperance agitators complained that farmers continued to drink whiskey at barn-raising, dances, and other social events. Although illegal, the antebellum practice of treating also persisted in Alexander and other mountain counties during the decade.²³ But the continuance of these traditions does not mean that rural mountain residents were drinking more alcohol than they had in the past. Declining economic prosperity may have led to a rise in alcohol consumption by the early 1870s, particularly in mountain towns. The average size of a farm in western North Carolina, for instance, had shrunk from 365 acres in 1860 to 139 in 1880.²⁴ Hardest hit were young men, who, unable to inherit enough land to sustain a livelihood, migrated to towns. Unemployed and disheartened, some of these men probably turned to alcohol.

²² Logan, *Sketches, Historical and Biographical, of the Broad River and King’s Mountain Baptist Associations*, 130, 218.

²³ William Cowles to the North Carolina Superior Court, 1874, 1875, Alexander County Records, NCDAH.

²⁴ *Agriculture of the United States in 1860 ... The Eighth Census* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), 105-109; and *Report of the Productions of Agriculture ... Tenth Census: 1850* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 128-129.

Although questionable, many town residents believed that alcohol consumption had increased, noting the appearance of “dangerous” young men who allegedly engaged in drunken brawls and criminal activity. The enactment of town ordinances for the first time prohibiting the retail of alcohol supports this analysis. In 1871, the county seat of Marshall forbade the sale of alcohol within one mile of corporate limits, while Asheville politicians prohibited retailers from vending liquor on Sundays. Both of these ordinances also included clauses that made it illegal for residents to fight and “curse” within corporate limits.²⁵ Two years later, commissioners in Wilkesboro, citing that drunkenness had become “a source of annoyance to the citizens,” declared that they would no longer grant alcohol licenses to venders operating within one mile of the town.²⁶

Blaming alcohol for crime and violence, mountain townspeople revived the temperance crusade during the early 1870s. Many of these reformers joined the Independent Order of Good Templars. Introduced from New York in 1872, the Good Templars was a fraternal order in which members pledged total abstinence from alcohol.²⁷ Like the Sons of Temperance before the Civil War and the Friends of Temperance during the mid 1860s, the Good Templars organized most of its lodges in mountain villages and towns, suggesting that the temperance movement remained a largely urban phenomenon. In 1875, for instance, nineteen of its twenty-nine mountain councils were located in county seats.²⁸ Of those ten lodges not situated in county seats, however, three were located in burgeoning commercial centers. Residents in Nebo, a busy depot on the WNCRR in McDowell County, organized one of these councils, while Mount Airy

²⁵ *Asheville Pioneer*, June 15, 29, 1871.

²⁶ Hayes, *The Land of Wilkes*, 180-181.

²⁷ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 54-55.

²⁸ These county seats were Bakersville, Brevard, Charleston, Franklin, Hendersonville, Hickory, Jefferson, Lenoir, Marion, Marshall, Murphy, Robbinsville, Waynesville, Webster, and Wilkesboro. See *Spirit of the Age*, October 9, 1875.

in Surry County, which was quickly becoming a major center in textile manufacturing, housed the other two.²⁹

County seat inhabitants embraced the Good Templars, and for good reason. Beginning in the early 1870s, industrialization, combined with deteriorating economic conditions in the countryside, encouraged many western North Carolinians to migrate to urban areas. More so than other mountain settlements, county seats, possessing a larger number of businesses and job opportunities, experienced rapid population growth during this decade. These community centers, most of which had been hamlets during the antebellum period, were quickly becoming towns, housing hundreds of residents. In fact, by 1880, with the exception of Robbinsville in Graham County and Dodson in Surry County, every mountain county seat had a population of at least 100.³⁰

While aiding economic development in western North Carolina, urbanization also brought social disruption. To the dismay of many townspeople, violence had apparently increased, and alcohol was to blame. “Intemperance is growing in our midst to an alarming extent,” Shelby residents in Cleveland County complained in 1873, “and has a very bad effect upon the men.”³¹ Morganton reformers in Burke County agreed. “The sale, use, and traffic of spirituous liquor is a growing evil in our community,” they explained. “To such extent does this evil abound, especially on all public times, that our females cannot walk on the street without the fear of insults and molestations from the intemperate, that are to be found staggering on our streets ... and indulging in language so revolting to decency.”³² Fearing that increased alcohol

²⁹ Hollingsworth, *History of Surry County*, 158-160.

³⁰ Robbinsville had a population of 61, while Dodson had 95 residents. See *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 278-285.

³¹ Petition from Shelby Residents to the General Assembly, 1873, Petitions, General Assembly Session Records, NCDAH.

³² Petition from Morganton Residents to the General Assembly, 1873, Petitions, General Assembly Session Records, NCDAH.

consumption was detrimental to the peace and order of their communities, many townspeople embraced the Good Templars, along with its rival, the Friends of Temperance, which continued to garner support among residents in the French Broad Valley.

Anti-alcohol sentiment in western North Carolina, however, was more than just a reaction to perceived increases in crime and violence during the early 1870s. As historian Charles Israel has demonstrated, the re-emergence of temperance reform within evangelical churches constituted “part of a larger Lost Cause effort to sanctify society and re-create the antebellum southern apologists’ notion of the especially religious South.”³³ In 1872, for instance, the King’s Mountain Baptist Association insisted that antebellum southerners were a sober people chosen by God to lead the nation. “It was once our boast that we could sit under our own vine and fig tree and worship our Maker according to the dictates of conscience,” the Association claimed. “How changed now is our condition at the present day!”

The King’s Mountain Association and other religious groups also increasingly blamed intemperance on Congressional Reconstruction, arguing that “the Carpet Bag Government had failed to regulate the liquor evil.”³⁴ According to J.R. Logan, chairman of the Broad River Baptist Association, northern “military domination or despotism” had supplanted “the great bulwark of civil liberty” by bringing into power an “intemperate administration of secular authority.” “The instrumentalities used to carry out this vile system,” he concluded, “are often of the lowest classes of society.”³⁵ By remaining temperate, Logan and other mountain evangelicals argued, the South would remain God’s chosen region.

³³ Charles A. Israel, *Before Scopes: Evangelicalism, Education, and Evolution in Tennessee, 1870-1925* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 79-81.

³⁴ *William Wilson Memoir*, 76.

³⁵ Logan, *Sketches, Historical and Biographical, of the Broad River and King’s Mountain Baptist Associations*, 218.

More importantly, temperance agitation reflected the growing interests of middle-class mountain townspeople who wanted economic as well as moral progress. Prominent among these reformers was Methodist preacher Robert L. Abernethy. Born in Lincoln County in 1822, Abernethy moved to Burke County in 1853, where he founded Rutherford College and served as its president until his death in 1894.³⁶ During the early 1870s, he joined the Friends of Temperance and quickly emerged as one of the region's most outspoken proponents of temperance reform, stressing the middle-class virtues of industry, self-discipline, and sobriety. Like many reformers, Abernethy soon became disgusted by the drinking habits of rural mountain residents, and chastised churches for not supporting temperance reform. "The outside world about Rutherford College," he complained in 1873, "does not believe much in Temperance Societies." The economic and moral future of western North Carolina was at stake, and rural churches were not helping to improve the situation. Abernethy concluded:

I take these broad grounds upon the Temperance question, that in these days of progress and advanced education and development, the preacher, layman or Christian, who stands silently outside of the Temperance organization, is claimed upon the side of drunkenness; and the preacher, layman or Christian who openly opposes the Temperance organization, is guilty of making drunkards.³⁷

Abernethy was not alone in his fight against "King Alcohol." Beginning in 1872, thousands of western North Carolinians, most of whom resided in county seat townships, joined the state-wide movement calling for the enactment of local-option laws that would prohibit the sale of alcohol near courthouses, churches, schools, and manufacturing facilities. Some of these reformers had a more ambitious goal, however. In 1855, the General Assembly had allowed the residents of Salisbury in Rowan County to hold an election to determine if retailers could sell liquor in quantities less than five gallons within corporate limits. Since the enactment of this so-

³⁶ *Friend of Temperance*, August 20, 1873; York, *The Autobiography of Brantley York*, 57; and J. Alex Mull, *Tales of Old Burke* (Morganton, NC: News Herald Press, 1975), 101-105.

³⁷ *Friend of Temperance*, September 24, 1873.

called Five-Gallon Law, mountain townspeople had largely remained silent on the issue of local prohibition, fearing that it would divide the white community in times of political distress.³⁸ By 1872, however, faced with a perceived increase in alcohol consumption and wanting economic development, they demanded the passage of a more radical law, one that would prohibit the sale of alcohol within entire townships.

Abernathy must have been pleased with these developments. In his home county of Burke in 1873, Morganton residents insisted that the General Assembly enact a law allowing voters to decide whether or not to prohibit the sale of alcohol in their township. Like Abernathy, they believed that economic and moral progress depended upon the eradication of intemperance.³⁹ Asheville residents agreed. Intemperance, they complained that same year, “is detrimental to the peace, prosperity, good order, and good name of the community in which it is done.”⁴⁰ Jefferson resident R.H. Gresham said it best, however. “I wish you may drive the sin of intemperance from Western North Carolina,” he pleaded to the *Asheville Citizen* in February 1874, “then you will prosper more than now.”⁴¹

Remembering their failed attempts to enact state-wide prohibition during the 1850s, reformers insisted that the so-called People’s Law and other local-option legislation would not infringe upon the rights of North Carolinians.⁴² The *Friend of Temperance*, the state organ of the Friends of Temperance, reassured worried citizens by pointing out that it was not advocating an “arbitrary prohibitory law – one that would unconditionally prohibit the traffic of the liquor in

³⁸ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 59.

³⁹ Petition from Morganton Residents to the General Assembly, 1873, Petitions, General Assembly Session Records, NCDAH.

⁴⁰ Petition from Asheville Residents to the General Assembly, 1873, Petitions, General Assembly Session Records, NCDAH.

⁴¹ *Asheville Pioneer*, February 28, 1874.

⁴² As during the 1850s, anti-prohibitionists in Ashe, Rutherford, and Henderson insisted that prohibition would “take the rights and privileges from the said citizens.” See Petition from Ashe County Residents to the General Assembly, 1873; Petition from Henderson County Residents to the General Assembly, 1874; and Petition from Rutherfordton Residents to the General Assembly, 1874, all in Petitions, General Assembly Session Records, NCDAH.

the state.” The People’s Law, because it allowed voters to decide whether or not to enact prohibition within their own townships, was neither unconstitutional nor tyrannical.⁴³ Petitioners in Morganton agreed. “[We do not] disavow any disposition to hinder the trade and occupation of those engaged in the traffic and sale of spirituous liquors in our midst ... yet such demoralization as connects with their trade demands legislation.”⁴⁴ These reformers also tried to defuse Conservatives’ fear that the People’s Law would divide the party by arguing that it would remain apolitical.⁴⁵

The General Assembly’s enactment of the People’s Law in February 1874 further ushered in the beginnings of local-option in western North Carolina history. In fact, by 1880, seventy-two churches, twenty-five towns, fifteen schools, and two manufacturing plants had enacted prohibition.⁴⁶ Of these 106 locales, sixty-one (or 58 percent) of them were situated in county seat townships, suggesting that prohibition, much like temperance reform, remained largely an urban phenomenon.⁴⁷ Local-option laws, however, were also passed in other mountain communities undergoing rapid economic and population growth. Of the thirty-five churches not situated in county seats, nine were located near the Buncombe Turnpike or the WNCRR.⁴⁸ Another church, Towns Creek operated in Mount Airy in Surry County, which was

⁴³ *Friend of Temperance*, December 6, 1873.

⁴⁴ Petition from Morganton Residents to the General Assembly, 1873, Petitions, General Assembly Session Records, NCDAH.

⁴⁵ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 58-60.

⁴⁶ The exact locale of eight places where local-option was passed could not be found. Thus, I have subtracting these places, thereby bringing the total to 106, instead of 114. See *Laws of North Carolina* (1872-1873), 60-61, 108-109, 285-289; *Laws of North Carolina* (1873-1874), 216-225; *Laws of North Carolina* (1874-1875), 125-126, 184-185, 319-321; *Laws of North Carolina* (1876-1877), 179-180, 481-483; and *Laws of North Carolina* (1878-1879), 314-318.

⁴⁷ County seat towns that enacted local-option laws were Asheville, Bakersville, Boone, Brevard, Burnsville, Charleston, Dobson, Franklin, Hendersonville, Jefferson, Lenoir, Marshall, Morganton, Robbinsville, Rutherfordton, Shelby, Sparta, Taylorsville, Waynesville, Webster, and Wilkesboro.

⁴⁸ Five of the churches on the Buncombe Turnpike were located in Hominy Creek, Weaverville, Leicester, all of which were in Buncombe County. Another church was located in Swannanoa in Buncombe County, which served as a major stage line connecting Asheville to the eastern part of the state. The remaining three churches were located in McDowell County, all of which were situated along the WNRCC.

becoming a major manufacturing center. Moreover, the burgeoning villages of Old Fort, Sulphur Springs, King's Mountain, and Snow Hill, along with the Hazel Green Factory in Buncombe County and the Ore Knob Copper Mine in Ashe County, enacted prohibition. In all, of the 106 places where residents passed local-option laws, seventy-seven (or 73 percent) of them were in county seats or in communities experiencing rapid economic development.

To the delight of reformers, local-option seemed to have quickly reduced alcohol consumption in western North Carolina. Touring the mountains in August 1874, M.M. McKenzie, a state lecturer for the Friends of Temperance, was amazed at the progress that had been made in such a short period of time. "Most of the western towns," he proudly wrote, "have prohibitory laws to protect them from the curse of grog shops, as the result of such laws you find but little drinking among the citizens."⁴⁹ That same year, journalist Edward King believed that Waynesville was "as orderly as a Quaker community." "No liquor is sold within a mile of the town's boundary," he observed. "Some lonely and disreputable shanty, with the words 'BAR-ROOM' on a clearing along the highway, is the only resort for those who drink 'spirits.'"⁵⁰

Many reformers also thanked mountain women, who played an important role in the enforcement of local-option laws. Continuing to embrace their status as "representatives of virtue" in the public sphere, they had quickly endorsed temperance reform during the early 1870s. In fact, women had been instrumental in building grassroots support for local prohibition, sending petitions to the state legislature that it pass the People's Law and other local-option legislation.⁵¹ Their work did not end there, however. When a township, church, or school enacted local-option, women reformers made sure that it was promptly enforced by the local

⁴⁹ *Friend of Temperance*, August 20, 1874.

⁵⁰ Edward King, "The Great South: Among the Mountains of Western North Carolina," *Scribner's Monthly* 7 (March 1874), 524-525.

⁵¹ See Petition from Morganton Ladies to the General Assembly, 1873; and Petition from Shelby Ladies to the General Assembly, 1873, both in Petitions, General Assembly Session Records, NCDAH.

sheriff. Edwin Chandler from Asheville revealed in 1873 that “ladies [there] will take the matter in hand [and] aid the law very much in preventing violations and protecting society.”⁵²

According to R.H. Gresham a year later, women in Jefferson informed on residents who continued to sale alcohol illegally. “The ladies,” he explained, “say that they have engaged in the war for life, that is to put down the evil traffic ... and to keep it down.”⁵³ In April 1874, the *Raleigh Sentinel* noted that alcohol consumption had declined in western North Carolina “under the crusades of the woman.”⁵⁴ Excluded from the political process, the temperance movement continued to give women a sense of self-worth and a public voice.

The enactment of local-option laws, however, sparked conflict between local prohibitionists and illicit (and licit) distillers. During Reconstruction, alcohol reformers, knowing that moonshiners had the support of the Conservative Party and were considered by many western North Carolinians as heroes, made it clear that local-option laws would not prohibit the manufacturing of distilled spirits. They insisted that farmers had an inalienable right to distill alcohol. Instead, most prohibitionists sought to close down taverns, or grog shops, believing that these “places of sin” encouraged men (and women) to drink whiskey.⁵⁵ But, when communities began to enact prohibition during the mid 1870s, many alcohol distillers remained more than willing to sell their product to local residents. In 1876, *The New Regime* complained that intemperance was increasing in Rutherfordton, largely due to “mean men” who were “peddling whiskey through the country in a secret way.”⁵⁶ Three years later, the *Blue Ridge Blade* revealed that nearby distillers continued to smuggle whiskey into the prohibition town of

⁵² *Asheville Citizen*, November 27, 1873. See also *Friend of Temperance*, July 2, 1873.

⁵³ *Asheville Pioneer*, February 28, 1874.

⁵⁴ *Raleigh Sentinel*, April 16, 1874.

⁵⁵ *Rutherfordton Star and Record*, January 16, 1875.

⁵⁶ *The New Regime* (Rutherford County), February 19, 1876.

Morganton, making “a good many drunk” and causing “disorder and fights.”⁵⁷ Attempting to enforce local-option laws, mountain reformers increasingly blamed moonshiners for the continued use of alcohol in their communities.

This change in sentiment was made easier due to two important developments during the late 1870s. By then, town boosters had begun to intensify their efforts to reform rural farmers, whom they believed had not overcome “ignorance and laziness,” largely due to “traditional” drinking mores.⁵⁸ Blaming it for encouraging the continued use of alcohol in mountain society, urban middle-class residents argued that whiskey distilling had become a harmful practice that impeded economic growth. The *Webster Spectator* in Jackson County believed that liquor manufacturing was “a curse of the country.” “Let it be put down,” the editors wrote in 1878.⁵⁹ Waynesville resident W.W. Stringfield agreed. If farmers stopped distilling whiskey, he explained in 1879, “our beautiful mountain country will ‘blossom as the rose,’ and our mothers, wives, sweethearts and sisters, will sing anthems of praise.”⁶⁰ “Let the good work go,” the *Hendersonville Independent Herald* read in 1882, praising the federal court’s conviction of several moonshiners. “There is no necessity for a single violation by illicit distilling in any of our mountain sections.”⁶¹

As they had done in the antebellum period, these urban reformers viewed the distiller as a symbol of rural “backwardness.” Moonshiners were no longer valiant southerners protecting the local community from “outsiders,” but were, according to an anonymous Franklin resident in Macon County in 1878, unchurched and uncivilized.⁶² One year later, W.W. Stringfield believed

⁵⁷ *Blue Ridge Blade*, February 8, 1879.

⁵⁸ *Lenoir Topic*, November 24, 1877; *Hickory Piedmont Press*, December 15, 1877; and *Asheville Citizen* January 2, 1879.

⁵⁹ Quoted in *Asheville Citizen*, December 12, 1878.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, April 13, 1879.

⁶¹ *Hendersonville Independent Herald*, May 18, 1882.

⁶² *Asheville Citizen*, December 5, 1878.

that illicit distillers were “willing to endanger their own and their neighbors’ souls and bodies to get a little of this ‘hellfire’ for ‘campfire’ or for sickness.”⁶³ Meanwhile, Rutherfordton resident Robert Shotwell, who introduced this chapter, characterized moonshiners as “thriftless, uneducated, unthinking beings, who live little better than negroes.”⁶⁴ Perhaps the most damaging remarks came in 1882, when Democrat A.T. Davidson from Asheville, an opponent of federal liquor law enforcement, insisted that illicit distillers had become “the worst part of the community.”⁶⁵ Celebrated as heroes during Reconstruction, moonshiners now found themselves under attack from Davidson and other former allies, who, while embracing anti-alcohol sentiment, had also changed their opinion about the Bureau of Internal Revenue and its “infernal” whiskey tax.

The Bureau of Internal Revenue Strikes Back

In 1876, President Grant appointed Green B. Raum as Commissioner of Internal Revenue. Raum, a former Union officer and staunch Republican, found himself heading a federal agency with an uncertain future. Throughout the mountain South, Raum estimated in his first report to the U.S. Congress, moonshiners were operating over 2,000 stills, costing the Treasury \$2,500,000 annually.⁶⁶ One region where illicit distilling continued was North Carolina’s Sixth Collection District, which encompassed nearly all of the mountain counties in the state.⁶⁷ “I found [this] district filled with illicit distillers,” the revenue commissioner remembered in 1882. “There seemed to be a spirit of opposition to the laws and to their enforcement. The illicit

⁶³ Ibid., April 3, 1879.

⁶⁴ Hamilton, *The Papers of Randolph Abbott Shotwell*, 2: 284.

⁶⁵ “Sixth District of North Carolina,” testimony of A.T. Davidson, 434. See also *ibid.*, testimony of A.H. Brooks, 145, and testimony of W.J. Coite, 235.

⁶⁶ Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 97-100.

⁶⁷ In 1876, the federal government consolidated the Seventh Collection District with the Sixth Collection District of North Carolina. The newly formed Sixth Collection District included the mountain counties of Wilkes, Alexander, Catawba, Ashe, Alleghany, Watauga, Yancey, Mitchell, McDowell, Burke, Caldwell, Rutherford, Cleveland, Polk, Henderson, Transylvania, Buncombe, Madison, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Cherokee, and Clay. Surry County remained in the Fifth Collection District of North Carolina.

distillers were particularly difficult to handle, as they combined from time to time to resist the officers and to prevent them from enforcing the laws.”⁶⁸ Raum was not intimidated, however. Between 1878 and 1882, he launched a campaign against illicit distillers that would ultimately reduce moonshiner resistance to liquor law enforcement and increase mountain residents’ tolerance for the Bureau of Internal Revenue.

Raum first had to convince the moonshiners that resistance to the federal liquor law was dangerous. Effective enforcement, he believed, required “a force of deputies, armed when necessary, as will demonstrate the ability and determination of the government to collect its revenues and enforce its laws.”⁶⁹ More so than any other commissioner before him, Raum relied heavily on civilian raiding parties, arguing correctly that the use of federal troops “was a constant irritation to the people” and “should not be long continued.”⁷⁰ These civilian posses usually consisted of twelve to twenty well-armed and equipped men. A deputy collector, appointed by the collector of the district and paid a salary, led the posse. These men, whose base of operations were often in county seat towns, recruited local citizens to serve as special deputies. Each posse also had a deputy marshal, who issued warrants and could arrest without a warrant any moonshiner they caught in the act.⁷¹

With these civilian posses, Raum and North Carolina’s Sixth District Collector J.J. Mott coordinated the first of many seasonal sweeps throughout the region in 1878, focusing on moonshine strongholds located in Burke, Wilkes, and Polk counties.⁷² In February 1878, a posse

⁶⁸ “Sixth District of North Carolina,” testimony of Green Raum, 291-292.

⁶⁹ *Annual Report, Commissioner of Internal Revenue*, 1879, *HED*, 46th Cong., 2d sess., iv.

⁷⁰ The use of federal troops to enforce the liquor law officially ended in 1879, when the Democratic-controlled Congress passed the Posse Comitatus Act. See Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 80-81.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 102-104.

⁷² “Enforcement of Internal Revenue Laws ... Report of the Commissioner of Internal Revenue to the Secretary of the Treasury, in Reply to House Resolution of February 10, 1880, Making Inquiry for Information Tending to Explain the Necessity for Employment of Armed Men in Enforcement of the Internal Revenue Laws,” *HED* 62, 46th Cong., 2d sess. (hereafter cited as “Enforcement of Internal Revenue Laws”), 102-107; *Lenoir Topic*, January 12,

consisting of thirty men captured three stills and arrested seven moonshiners in the infamous South Mountains of Burke County.⁷³ Eight months later, revenuer A.C. Bryan and his raiding party confiscated 1,000 gallons of whiskey and brandy, while destroying 4,000 gallons of mash in Burke and neighboring counties.⁷⁴ To combat illicit distilling in the so-called “Dark Corners” region, located in Polk, Henderson, and Transylvania counties, agents from South Carolina and Georgia would drive moonshiners, who had fled from North Carolina to evade capture, back into that state, where revenuers were waiting to arrest them.⁷⁵ These raids proved successful. In 1877, revenue agents captured 122 illegal stills in western North Carolina. Two years later, that figure had jumped to 274. The number of moonshiners arrested in western North Carolina also increased from 43 in 1877 to 343 in 1879.⁷⁶ Raum must have been pleased.

Illicit distillers were not intimidated, however. As elsewhere in southern Appalachia, moonshiner resistance to federal liquor law enforcement increased in western North Carolina during the first years of Raum’s crackdown.⁷⁷ Though most opted to hide themselves and their stills, some illicit distillers assaulted raiding parties in carefully planned ambushes. In March 1878, a group of “concealed” moonshiners fired upon three revenuers, who had recently destroyed the stills of two men connected with a gang operating in the Brushy Mountains of Wilkes County. Although “bullets cut the trees and struck in the ground around the deputies,

1878; *Asheville Citizen*, July 4, 1878, February 13, 1879; *Blue Ridge Blade*, September 7, December 14, 1878, April 12, May 30, September 20, 1879; *Asheville Semi-Weekly Journal*, April 2, 1879.

⁷³ *Asheville Citizen*, February 14, 1878.

⁷⁴ *Lenoir Topic*, October 19, 1878.

⁷⁵ Robert Dick, March 1, 1878, Source Chronological Files: Letters Received by the Department of Justice from North Carolina, RG 60, Department of Justice Records, National Archives, College Park, Maryland (hereinafter cited as CF 60); and Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 104-105.

⁷⁶ *Annual Report, Commissioner of Internal Revenue*, 1878, *HED*, 42nd Cong., 2d sess., xxxiii; and *ibid.*, 1880, *HED*, 46th Cong., 2d sess., xiii.

⁷⁷ For a discussion on violence elsewhere in southern Appalachia during this period, see Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 106.

neither of them was injured,” a relieved Mott informed Raum weeks after the ambush.⁷⁸ In a Burke County incident that same year, twelve local men fired upon, but missed revenue agents raiding the property of James York. Later testimony revealed that York and his supporters were Republicans, suggesting that violence directed at Bureau of Internal Revenue officials was not confined to the Democrats.⁷⁹ Other revenueurs were not so lucky. One year earlier, in March 1877, a “band of armed men” from Polk County, “who seemed to rise up simultaneously from concealment in the woods,” rushed upon the courthouse near Hendersonville, attempting to free a fellow moonshiner from custody. Revenueurs were able to drive the moonshiners away, but not before the “mob” had shot, stabbed, and beaten to death a deputy marshal.⁸⁰

Most moonshiners probably did not want confrontations to end in the death or wounding of a revenueur. Throughout the mountain South, historian Wilbur Miller has discovered, agents often reported that illicit distillers often aimed too high when shooting at them, thereby missing their target. Because many moonshiners were experienced hunters, their poor marksmanship suggests that they intended to only intimidate federal officials. When compared to the death rates of deputy marshals in the Wild West, which averaged twenty per year, those in southern Appalachia were low.⁸¹ Between 1876 and 1880, when moonshine violence against the Bureau of Internal Revenue reached its climax, twenty-five agents were killed in the line of duty, an average of nearly eight per year. The total number of casualties in North Carolina’s Sixth Collection District was five (one killed and four wounded), making it the fourth most dangerous region for revenueurs to enforce liquor taxation during the late 1870s (see table 5.2).

⁷⁸ J.J. Mott to G.B. Raum, June 17, 1878, “Enforcement of Internal Revenue Laws,” 105.

⁷⁹ “Sixth District of North Carolina,” testimony of T.K. Davis, 285.

⁸⁰ Robert Dick, March 1, 1878, CF 60. For more examples of moonshine violence during the late 1870s, see J.J. Mott to G.B. Raum, October 8, December 30, 1877, July 5, 1878, April 12, 1879, all in “Enforcement of Internal Revenue Laws,” 102, 103, 106, 108; *Lenoir Topic*, October 13, 1877; *Asheville Citizen*, April 25, July 4, 1878; *Blue Ridge Blade*, September 7, 1878, April 12, May 30, 1879; “Sixth District of North Carolina,” 285, 469, 472, 476, 478, 538.

⁸¹ Miller, *Revenueurs & Moonshiners*, 107.

Table 5.2. Officers Killed and Wounded in the Suppression of Illicit Distillation between 1876 and 1880

District	Officers Killed	Officers Wounded
Arkansas	1	0
Second Georgia	5	12
Third Georgia	1	3
Second Kentucky	0	3
Fifth Kentucky	2	1
Eight Kentucky	0	1
Fourth North Carolina	1	2
Fifth North Carolina	0	2
Sixth North Carolina	1	4
South Carolina	5	10
Second Tennessee	5	3
Fifth Tennessee	2	4
Eighth Tennessee	1	0
Fifth Virginia	1	3
First West Virginia	0	1
Total	25	49

Source: "Enforcement of Internal Revenue Laws," 210.

More often than not, moonshiners opted to accost members of the local community cooperating with revenue agents. These informers, residents who had revealed the names of illicit distillers, served as guides during raids, testified against moonshiners, or given revenuers directions to stills, were considered as "Judases" by many mountain people and subject to extralegal violence.⁸² In Burke County, an angry distiller knocked down a suspected informer, Mr. Ramsey, with a rock "and then stamped him in the face." "These fellows accuse Ramsey of reporting them," Deputy A.C. Bryan reported to Mott in June 1878. "They killed his horse some weeks past; Ramsey then borrowed a mule from Amos Huffman to tend his crop, and last Tuesday night they shot the mule dead in Ramsey's stable."⁸³ In January 1879, an Alexander County resident, who had been "both active and useful in breaking up" stills, was "dragged from

⁸² Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*, 263; and Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 52-53.

⁸³ J.J. Mott to G.B. Raum, June 17, 1878, in "Enforcement of Internal Revenue Laws," 105.

his house at night and severely beaten by six disguised men.”⁸⁴ Nor were legal distillers immune from the moonshiners’ wrath. In Macon County, revenuer George Smathers revealed that “blockaders” had assaulted several legitimate distillers, forcing them out of business.⁸⁵ Although successful in the short run, violence against community members ultimately undermined the local support necessary for moonshiners to continue their fight against the Bureau of Internal Revenue.

Having demonstrated that the federal government was determined and able to enforce the liquor law, Raum instituted the second phase of his campaign against the moonshiners. “The plan,” Raum remembered in 1882, “was ... to force violators of the law to the wall, so to speak, and then after they had become satisfied of the determination of the government and its ability to enforce the laws ... to extend to them leniency, on such conditions as should appeal to the best side of their nature, so as to induce them to cease committing frauds and resisting the officers.”⁸⁶ In 1878, Raum, while insisting that revenuers continue their “operations with increased vigor,” granted amnesty to moonshiners if they pleaded guilty in federal court and pledged not to distill alcohol illegally again.⁸⁷ Many western North Carolinians approved of the amnesty order. In August, editors of the Democratic *Lenoir Topic* in Caldwell County felt confident that distillers were “anxious to accept the terms which” the federal government had offered.⁸⁸ Two months later, the Grand Jury for the Western District of North Carolina “express[ed] our gratification ... and most earnestly recommend[ed] fellow citizens to accept the clemency extended.”⁸⁹ In November, the *Asheville Citizen*, a strong supporter of the moonshiners, reluctantly conceded

⁸⁴ W.H. Chapman to J.J. Mott, April 18, 1879, in *ibid.*, 108.

⁸⁵ “Sixth District of North Carolina,” testimony of George Smathers, 475.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, testimony of Raum Green, 292.

⁸⁷ H.C. Rogers to J.J. Mott, October 26, 1878, “Enforcement of Internal Revenue Laws,” 106-107; and *Asheville Citizen*, October 31, 1878.

⁸⁸ *Lenoir Topic*, August 31, 1878.

⁸⁹ *Asheville Citizen*, October 31, 1878.

Table 5.3. Total Number of Cases Involving Moonshining in North Carolina’s Western District Court between 1873 and 1879

Year	Convictions	Acquittals	Discontinued	Total
1873	205	25	73	303
1875	297	63	160	520
1877	308	67	152	527
1879	801	48	82	931

Source: *Annual Report, Attorney General*, 1874, 1876, 1878, 1880.

that the federal government was now addressing “the gross injustice done [to] the people of North Carolina.”⁹⁰ Hundreds of moonshiners agreed and turned themselves into federal and state authorities. The number of convictions for evading federal liquor taxation more than doubled in North Carolina’s Western District Court, increasing from 308 in 1877 to 801 in 1879 (see table 5.3).

Raum was not solely responsible for this change of events. At the local level, officials had been working for years to improve the Bureau of Internal Revenue’s reputation in western North Carolina. Most prominent among these men were District Judge Robert Dick and J.J. Mott. During the early 1870s, Dick had fired deputy marshals engaged in fraud, while also threatening to dismiss them for “excessive rudeness, force, or obtaining confessions by promise or threat.”⁹¹ In 1877, Dick, now known for his “kindly temper,” notified marshals that arrests “must be made in accordance with law, and only upon warrants duly issued.” Mountain Democrats were pleased. “A little law judiciously applied to these revenue officers,” the *Asheville Citizen* commented on Dick’s decree, “might have a happy effect, for that they have trampled upon justice with a lordly air is a notorious fact.”⁹² More importantly, Judge Dick,

⁹⁰ Ibid., November 14, 1878.

⁹¹ Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 121.

⁹² Robert Dick to Attorney General Charles Devens, September 22, 1877, CF 60; “Sixth District of North Carolina,” testimony of A.T. Davidson, 426; and *Asheville Citizen*, April 19, 1877.

believing that leniency would reduce mountain opposition to federal liquor taxation and make revenue collection less of a political issue, often suspended sentences for petty violators, “who paid reduced fines averaging about \$20 instead of the minimum of \$100 and a thirty-day jail term prescribed by law.”⁹³

As head collector of North Carolina’s Sixth Collection District, Mott played a more instrumental role in improving the Bureau’s performance as well as its reputation during the late 1870s. He first addressed complaints from local residents that most agents were dishonest and “ignorant.”⁹⁴ In 1876, Mott issued an order that he would fire any agent who drank alcohol excessively. Several revenueurs soon discovered that Mott was not bluffing, and were dismissed after local citizens complained that they had become “addicted to drinking.”⁹⁵ Shortly thereafter, Mott began to appoint several highly qualified Democrats, thereby reducing partisanship in the federal agency.⁹⁶ Finally, responding to Democrats’ charge that resistance to revenue enforcement would continue until he appointed “men of character and honesty,” Mott heightened qualifications for employment.⁹⁷ By the late 1870s, he required that all applicants had to receive an “endorsement from the citizens and well-known people of the neighborhood.”⁹⁸

Some, if not most, of these applicants became efficient and well-respected revenueurs in western North Carolina. Agent T.K. Bruner, who claimed that most local residents supported him, explained the secret to his success: “I took the oldest clothes I had, and colored shirts, and looked as ordinary as any countryman. I made my habits conform to theirs, and was generally

⁹³ Miller, *Revenueurs & Moonshiners*, 139, 181.

⁹⁴ *Blue Ridge Blade*, May 9, August 8, 1876; *Lenoir Topic*, October 13, 1877; *Asheville Citizen*, January 17, January 31, 1878, July 4, 1878, November 13, November 20, 1879; and *Asheville Semi-Weekly Journal*, April 2, 1879.

⁹⁵ “Sixth District of North Carolina,” testimony of J.A. Ramsey, 100, testimony of Tyre Green, 127.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, testimony of M.G. Campbell, 114; testimony of Tyre Green, 124; testimony of A.H. Brooks, 150; testimony of D.C. Pearson, 323; and testimony of J.J. Mott, 367.

⁹⁷ *Asheville Semi-Weekly Journal*, April 2, 1879.

⁹⁸ “Sixth District of North Carolina,” testimony of W.J. Coite, 232.

liked in the neighborhood.”⁹⁹ A revenueur from Burke County, Tom Davis also fit within the local community. “[I] would,” Davis remembered in 1882, “shake hands with the people and be very friendly with them.” Davis’s refusal to arrest moonshiners or seize stills without a search warrant also gained him the sympathy of mountain residents.¹⁰⁰ Republicans and Democrats alike agreed that Davis was a model officer. A.C. Avery, a Democrat and critic of the Bureau of Internal Revenue, testified in 1882 that Davis was “a very prudent sort of man, and after arresting them [illicit distillers] he would treat them with great kindness and consideration. If he had confidence in them he would let them off to go and hunt their bondsmen and never used rough or disagreeable language to them.”¹⁰¹

In 1878, Mott also convinced Raum to reduce the legal minimum capacity of distilleries from six to three and a half bushels of corn in western North Carolina, hoping to encourage moonshiners to become legitimate.¹⁰² Many illicit distillers took advantage of Mott’s new policy, and for good reason. For a farmer with a small still, the largest profits in manufacturing alcohol were in livestock rather than in the whiskey itself. These distillers would fatten their livestock (mostly hogs) on corn mash, popularly known as “still slops,” throughout the year and sell them to neighbors or merchants.¹⁰³ “A man that has a good farm and so on,” revenueur W.M. Walker from North Carolina’s Sixth Collection District explained in 1882, “can pasture his stock for a month on his wheat pasture and oats. Outside of that they have to keep up the distillery, or the stock goes down.”¹⁰⁴ Even if taxed, poorer farmers, unable to purchase a large still, could

⁹⁹ Ibid., testimony of T.K. Bruner, 215.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., testimony of T.K. Davis, 286, 289.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., testimony of A.C. Avery, 441.

¹⁰² Ibid., testimony of J.J. Mott, 367; and testimony of Green Raum, 295-296.

¹⁰³ Miller, *Revenueurs & Moonshiners*, 19-20.

¹⁰⁴ “Sixth District of North Carolina,” testimony of W.M. Walker, 161.

now afford to become legitimate because their main source of income was in livestock. North Carolina revenuer Tyre Green recalled in 1882:

I know the man I storekept for has made money; he had machinery and a good ordered distillery, and sold the whisky from \$1.35 and \$1.50 a gallon. The distiller told me he was making money at it, not making a large amount, but a living at it. He had a great many hogs and cattle.¹⁰⁵

To Mott's delight, the number of legal distilleries in North Carolina's Sixth Collection District rose from 42 in 1878 to 198 in 1879, an increase of 371 percent. Of those 198 legal distilleries, 154 had a capacity of five gallons or less, suggesting that Mott's policy, along with Raum's carrot and stick approach, was convincing small distillers to become legitimate.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the amount of revenue collected in the region grew from \$259,076.24 in 1877 to 336,238.72 in 1879.¹⁰⁷ "The old 'moonshiners' are nearly all at work under the law," Mott bragged to Raum in January 1880, "and those who are not are intimidated and kept out by those who are."¹⁰⁸

These policies may have significantly reduced moonshining, but they failed to eliminate it. Many Carolina highlanders, especially those without livestock who could not benefit from the legalization of small distilleries, continued to manufacture illegal whiskey out of economic necessity. By 1880, a bushel of corn sold for \$1.00 and a gallon of whiskey was \$1.40.¹⁰⁹ If a farmer decided to distill illegally, he earned a five dollar profit on every five gallons of alcohol. On the other hand, legal distillers netted only 50 cents. Although forcing many farmers to pursue another means of making extra money, the federal liquor tax encouraged others to become moonshiners.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., testimony of Tyre Green, 128. See also *ibid.*, testimony of J.J. Mott, 367-369; and testimony of D.C. Pearson, 322.

¹⁰⁶ "Enforcement of the Internal Revenue Laws," 211; and *Annual Report, Commissioner of Internal Revenue*, 1880, *HED*, 42nd Cong., 2d sess., p. xxiv.

¹⁰⁷ *Annual Report, Commissioner of Internal Revenue*, 1880, *HED*, 42nd Cong., 2d sess., p. x.

¹⁰⁸ J.J. Mott to G.B. Raum, January 16, 1880, "Enforcement of Internal Revenue Laws," 109.

¹⁰⁹ "Sixth District of North Carolina," testimony of M.L. McCorkle, 457.

Based on the testimony of agents during a congressional inquiry on revenue corruption in 1882, there were three major moonshine pockets in western North Carolina during the late 1870s. The first centered on the Brushy Mountain region in Wilkes County, where, according to former revenuer James A. Ramsay, “the mountains were so steep that you had to get down and lead your horse.”¹¹⁰ Another moonshine enclave lay in the South Mountains, situated in southern Burke and northern Rutherford counties.¹¹¹ Polk, Henderson, and Transylvania counties fell within what was known as the “Dark Corners,” considered by revenuers as the most active moonshine region in the state.¹¹² Here, illicit distillers could easily avoid capture by retreating into South Carolina or Georgia.

While providing moonshiners with numerous places to hide their cargo and evade capture, these regions also contained some of the poorest areas in western North Carolina, suggesting that economic necessity drove many mountain residents to distill alcohol illegally. As elsewhere in southern Appalachia, “traditional” inheritance practices, land speculation, population growth, and a decrease in soil fertility began to undermine farmers’ quest for economic independence during the 1870s.¹¹³ In western North Carolina, the average size of a farm shrunk from 190 acres in 1870 to 139 in 1880. Hardest hit were farmers living the “Dark Corners” region, which helps explain why revenuers considered it as the most active moonshine enclave. Transylvania County farms fell from 282 acres in 1870 to 137 in 1880, a decrease of 51 percent, while those in Polk County shrank 37 percent. Henderson County farmers were more fortunate, but still experienced a 28 percent decline in farm acreage. The same was true for

¹¹⁰ Ibid., testimony of J.A. Ramsay, 99; testimony of J.R. Henderson, 351.

¹¹¹ Ibid., testimony of M.G. Campbell, 115; testimony of T.K. Davis, 286.

¹¹² Ibid., testimony of T.K. Davis, 286. See also J.J. Mott, to G.B. Raum, January 16, 1880, “Enforcement of Internal Revenue Laws,” 109.

¹¹³ For scholarship chronicling the decline of economic prosperity in southern Appalachia after the Civil War, see Altina Waller, *Feud*; Dunn, *Cades Cove*; Wiese, *Grasping at Independence*; Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*; and McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*.

Table 5.4. Percentage Decrease or Increase of Farm Size in Western North Carolina between 1870 and 1880 (in Acres)

County	1870	1880	%
Transylvania	282	137	-51
Mitchell	202	104	-49
Macon	324	184	-43
Burke	185	112	-39
Polk	246	155	-37
Madison	214	137	-36
Rutherford	182	120	-34
Ashe	217	148	-32
Catawba	183	127	-31
Cleveland	169	117	-31
Jackson	234	159	-30
Buncombe	191	133	-30
Henderson	169	121	-28
Alexander	143	108	-24
Wilkes	165	131	-21
Clay	205	165	-19
Alleghany	201	164	-18
Watauga	191	156	-18
Surry	154	131	-15
Cherokee	218	190	-13
Caldwell	153	144	-6
Yancey	132	135	+2
Haywood	110	126	+15
McDowell	82	122	+49
Average	190	139	-27

Source: Graham and Swain counties were not included in these census reports. See *The Statistics of the Wealth and Industry ... Ninth Census: 1870* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 359-360; and *Report on the Productions of Agriculture ... Tenth Census: 1880* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 128-129.

farmers living in Burke, Rutherford, and Wilkes counties (see table 5.4). To make matters worse, while the cash values of farms in western North Carolina rose 11 percent during the decade, residents living in the three moonshine centers experienced economic decline. Heading the list of counties where the cash value of farms decreased the most percentage wise was Transylvania, followed closely behind by Polk, Henderson, Burke, and Rutherford. Wilkes County ranked ninth on the list (see table 5.5).

Table 5.5. Percentage Decrease or Increase of the Cash Value of Farms in Western North Carolina between 1870 and 1880 (in Dollars)

County	1870	1880	%
Transylvania	931.35	588.02	-37
Polk	1,001.75	655.30	-35
Henderson	1,017.23	722.48	-29
Burke	670.15	492.81	-26
Rutherford	663.59	509.24	-23
McDowell	808.52	634.59	-22
Madison	733.26	636.34	-13
Mitchell	563.77	502.36	-11
Wilkes	529.58	498.26	-6
Clay	782.52	741.44	-5
Alexander	533.69	514.88	-4
Buncombe	1,048.07	1,011.67	-3
Surry	598.59	621.79	+4
Ashe	839.99	899.77	+7
Alleghany	804.37	905.72	+12
Cherokee	519.34	587.90	+13
Catawba	870.23	999.10	+15
Macon	490.99	598.87	+23
Caldwell	658.65	820.68	+25
Haywood	545.84	803.71	+47
Watauga	314.49	589.57	+87
Yancey	277.12	523.15	+89
Cleveland	544.64	1,087.70	+100
Jackson	417.82	1,949.38	+367
Average	673.56	745.61	+11

Source: Graham and Swain counties were not included in these census reports. See *The Statistics of Wealth and Industry ... Ninth Census: 1870* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 214, 218; and *Report on the Production of Agriculture ... Tenth Census: 1880* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 300-302

To the dismay of the moonshiners, however, mountain residents' tolerance for revenue enforcement was increasing during the late 1870s. Along with his use of force, Raum's amnesty order played an important role in this reversal of public opinion. In December 1878, District Attorney Virgil S. Lusk from Asheville heard "frequent expressions extolling the Government for its liberality ... coming from sources, a month since in sympathy with the violators of the law and condemning the Government for enforcing it."¹¹⁴ Revenuer W.M. Walker would have agreed. "It was very hard there a few years back," he remembered in 1882. "In fact, up to the

¹¹⁴ V.S. Lusk to Attorney General, December 3, 1878, CF 60.

amnesty we had no showing at all; since the amnesty we have been countenanced by the better part of the people of district.”¹¹⁵ Webster residents in Jackson County confirmed that many highlanders, especially townspeople, believed that the revenue service was acting fairly and that distillers should obey the law. “Well,” they wrote to the *Asheville Citizen* in 1878, “the Government offered an amnesty, to clear up old offenses, and those who go at it now, after having had fair warning, out to be taught to ‘stand from under.’”¹¹⁶

Moonshiners, who had often used violence and intimidation to insure local solidarity against revenue agents, further helped to spark this change in public opinion. After illicit distillers assaulted an Asheville preacher in Watauga County, whom they believed was a revenuer, the *Bakersville Republican* in Mitchell County and the *Lenoir Topic*, which had been strong critics of the Bureau of Internal Revenue, were outraged. “It is high time that these violators of the law were brought to justice,” both newspapers read in June 1879. “When a peaceable citizen cannot travel the public road without being stopped by a desperado with pistol in hand, the law should be enforced with the utmost rigor.”¹¹⁷ Legal distillers, whose numbers had increased almost fivefold by 1879, also insisted that the federal government enforce the law, largely to protect their operations from moonshiners. Moreover, moonshining made it harder for them to make a profit by driving up the price of grain. These legal distillers, Mott believed, acted as “a sort of police in the neighborhood against illegal ones,” informing on moonshiners and sometimes breaking up illicit stills themselves.¹¹⁸

Town reformers increasingly embraced the Bureau of Internal Revenue because they believed that the federal liquor tax would reduce consumption by raising the price of alcohol.

¹¹⁵ “Sixth District of North Carolina,” testimony of W.M. Walker, 158-159.

¹¹⁶ *Asheville Citizen*, December 12, 1878.

¹¹⁷ *Lenoir Topic*, June 12, 1879.

¹¹⁸ “Sixth District of North Carolina,” testimony of J.J. Mott, 367-368; and J.J. Mott to G.B. Raum, January 31, 1879, “Enforcement of Internal Revenue Laws,” 107.

W.W. Stringfield from Waynesville encouraged his fellow mountain residents to support revenueurs in the enforcement of the federal liquor law. “With the State [local-option] laws we have,” he wrote in April 1879, “and with the aid and cooperation of the present U.S. revenue laws, enforced ... by honest, faithful and vigilant officers, there is no reason why this vile monster [alcohol] may not be trampled beneath the feet.”¹¹⁹ To the delight of other reformers, the legalization of small distilleries in 1878 seemed to have improved public order by discouraging drunkenness. Revenuer Tyre Green explained in 1882:

I will just tell you my opinion. Where there were so many of those blockading distilleries running, they [moonshiners] were always afraid of being reported, and the consequence was, the people around the neighborhood, the men disposed to drink, would lie around those distilleries and drink all the time. These distillers were afraid to drive them off, for fear they would report them. But now with these small distilleries, running according to law, these men can’t get anything to drink there, and the distillers are at perfect liberty to order them off, and they can’t report them. That has been my idea.¹²⁰

Although the revenue service received most of its support from townspeople, rural western Carolinians were also becoming more hostile towards the moonshiners. In 1880, Cleveland County residents, many of whom resided in the countryside, signed a petition to the federal government to offer a reward for the capture of Jake Mull, a “notorious blockader” who had “thousands of gallons of Whiskey hid in the fastnesses of these mountains.”¹²¹ Revenuers believed that public opinion was improving in more remote parts of the region. W.M. Walker recalled that when traveling in the countryside during the early 1870s, “it was very difficult for a raiding force to get anywhere to stay or anything to eat in our district.” Like other revenueurs, he had to purchase supplies in towns, the only place where mountain residents would conduct business with them. On one raid, Walker’s force ran out of supplies and had “to hire a negro boy” to purchase “some chickens, flour, and bacon.” By 1882, however, Walker observed that

¹¹⁹ *Asheville Citizen*, April 3, 1879.

¹²⁰ “Sixth District of North Carolina,” testimony of Tyre Green, 130.

¹²¹ *Blue Ridge Blade*, May 8, 1880.

“the people [who] a few years ago would not give you anything to eat” were now willing to sell agents food. “[Revenuers] are treated now something like white folks, mostly, wherever we go,” he concluded.¹²²

Even mountain Democrats admitted that the Bureau of Internal Revenue’s reputation had improved. Testifying before a congressional inquiry on revenue corruption in 1882, Democrat A.T. Davidson conceded that opposition to federal liquor law enforcement had declined. “I will say, in justice to the service that the trouble has not been so great in the last two or three years,” he explained. “It has quieted down somewhat, and the criminal dockets of the Federal courts have been much lessened within that time.” What were the reasons behind this change of public opinion? According to Davidson, “familiarity with the law and a returning sense of right on the subject with the officers and the citizens ... produced the better state of things now.”¹²³ Unlike during Reconstruction, Democrats also insisted that most revenuers had become honest and efficient. “Up to 1876,” lawyer J.M. Leach explained, “... the system commenced badly, with improper, and in some instances, bad and corrupt men in office as subordinates, but it gradually grew better year by year.”¹²⁴ A.C. Avery agreed. “Just after the war, a majority of the officers, collectors and deputy marshals, were thought to be imprudent and indiscreet men,” Avery remembered in 1882. “At a later period, within the last eight or ten years, we have had some deputy marshals and deputy collectors against who I have heard no charge.”¹²⁵ Losing the support of Avery and other Democrats, illicit distillers found themselves in retreat by the end of the 1870s. The worse was yet to come, however. In 1881, mountain reformers launched a

¹²² “Sixth District of North Carolina,” testimony of W.M. Walker, 159-160.

¹²³ Ibid., testimony of A.T. Davidson, 430.

¹²⁴ Ibid., testimony of J.M. Leach, 276.

¹²⁵ Ibid., testimony of A.C. Avery, 438. See also Ibid., testimony of M.L. McCorkle, 453.

campaign for state-wide prohibition, which would further alienate moonshiners from the Democratic Party.

The Politicalization of Prohibition

During the summer of 1881, the *New York Times* and other national newspapers closely followed political events unfolding in North Carolina. In March, the Democratic-controlled state legislature had ordered a general election to take place on the first Thursday of August. On that day, voters would decide whether or not to enact state-wide prohibition, forbidding both the sale and manufacture of alcohol. As the August referendum approached, the issue of prohibition was on everyone's mind in North Carolina. "The campaign has been in progress for more than two months," a *New York Times* correspondent wrote in late July, "and in every considerable town there are daily meetings of 'wets' and 'drys' – as the anti-prohibitionists and prohibitionists are laconically dubbed by some of the papers ... Sitting at table in hotels your neighbors discuss nothing but the all-engrossing topic of whiskey or no whiskey, the arguments of enthusiastic editors, and the points made by the latest speakers in the neighborhood."¹²⁶ This election was gaining national exposure, and for good reason. Unlike during the 1850s and early 1870s, prohibition had become a partisan issue, one that threatened to destroy the Democratic Party in North Carolina.

Believing that local-option laws had improved social order in hundreds of communities, religious groups and temperance organizations began to advocate for state-wide prohibition during the late 1870s. In December 1879, the State Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South issued a decree demanding that the state legislature prohibit the sale of "ardent spirits" in North Carolina. The following year, the North Carolina Methodist Conference and the Baptist State Convention urged its followers to sign petitions asking the legislature to pass state-

¹²⁶ *New York Times*, August 1, 1881.

wide prohibition, arguing that alcohol produced “poverty and crime throughout the country.” By February 1881, more than 100,000 voters, along with 50,000 women and children, had done so.¹²⁷ “The movement in favor of prohibition in North Carolina,” the *Asheville Citizen* reported that February, “has proceeded until its proportions are beyond any reasonable anticipations. Similar exertions in behalf of temperance have been made elsewhere, but in no other state have we known such monstrous petitions to be presented to the legislature.”¹²⁸

Despite the demands of these state and mountain reformers, however, Democrats remained hesitant to pass state-wide prohibition. During the late 1870s, the Readjusters, an independent political movement led by William Mahone, had threatened to undermine the Democratic Party in Virginia. Mahone and his followers, wanting to scale down the state’s enormous debt, found their path blocked within the Democratic Party and opted to form an alliance with local Republicans in 1879. This alliance was a success. Republicans gained control of the state legislature in 1880 and elected Mahone to the U.S Senate. Mahone then appointed his supporters and Republicans to important committee assignments and offices. Consequently, the Democratic Party in Virginia lay in shambles.¹²⁹

Many North Carolina Democrats feared that state-wide prohibition would spark the creation of a similar independent movement.¹³⁰ In March 1881, the *Asheville Citizen* warned that the issue of prohibition had generated “great excitement” in the Carolina highlands, and that if passed, enforcement would evoke “the same indignation as accorded” to the Bureau of Internal Revenue and Republican Party during Reconstruction.¹³¹ Moreover, lawmakers realized that western North Carolinians, many of whom continued to regard alcohol as an integral part of their

¹²⁷ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 61-66.

¹²⁸ *Asheville Citizen*, February 18, 1881.

¹²⁹ McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 99-108.

¹³⁰ *New York Times*, February 22, March 8, 1881.

¹³¹ *Asheville Weekly Citizen*, March 10, 1881.

social existence and economies, would blame the Democratic-controlled state legislature for the law and become Republican.¹³² Senator Zebulon Vance realized the potential political repercussions of prohibition on the Democratic Party, and refused to endorse the bill. A letter to Theodore Davidson in 1887, concerning the rise of the Prohibition Party that year in North Carolina, sheds light on why Vance may have chosen this course of action. Although “determined never to stand one moment in the way of the moral welfare of the state,” he insisted that there were “considerations here that zealots [were] likely to overlook if not disregard.” The issue of state-wide prohibition included “so many legal rights involved, so much capital invested in the trafficking and the change proposed [was] so radical” that Vance could not give his consent to it. Nor would he publicly denounce it, arguing that the issue was a “purely social question.”¹³³

Mountain prohibitionists tried to reassure Democratic politicians that prohibition would not harm the party. In January 1881, Augustus Merrimon, a former member of the Asheville Sons of Temperance during the 1850s, speaking in front of the prohibition convention in Raleigh, insisted that the question would remain apolitical.¹³⁴ Writing to Burke County representative Samuel Tate, who feared that the issue of prohibition would divide the Democratic Party, Rev. S.V. Doyle of Morganton suggested that legislators could make it apolitical by calling for a general election and allow voters to make the final decision.¹³⁵ Democratic lawyer W.S. Pearson of Morganton agreed. “[Prohibition],” he informed Tate in February, “will not as I am told you think injure the Democratic Party.” Moreover, prohibition would eliminate the Bureau of Internal Revenue, thereby further weakening the Republican Party in the mountain

¹³² *New York Times*, March 8, 1881.

¹³³ Zebulon Vance to Theodore Davidson, January 13, 1887, *Vance Papers*.

¹³⁴ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 64.

¹³⁵ S.V. Hoyle to Samuel Tate, January 13, 1881, Tate Papers, SHC.

region. “This whiskey,” Pearson explained to Tate, “has played the devil with all of our people on both sides of the fence – the Revenue officers whose business will now be taken from them have played the devil with our State.”¹³⁶

In March, state legislators, without the support of Tate, agreed upon a prohibition bill. The proposed law would prohibit entirely the sale and manufacture of alcohol (cider and wines excepted) within North Carolina. After obtaining a license from a county commissioner, only druggists, physicians, and apothecaries could vend alcohol for medical, mechanical, and chemical purposes. These men and women could not sell more than one gallon to a customer, who had to present a certificate from a practicing physician before purchasing the alcohol. Violators of the law would have to pay a fine of \$100 or \$500. Hoping to make the act apolitical, state legislators also agreed to hold a general election on the first Thursday of August, thereby allowing voters to decide whether or not to enact prohibition. If a majority of voters favored prohibition, the law would go into effect on October 1, 1881.¹³⁷

J.J. Mott, then chairman of the Republican state executive committee, could not have been more pleased. In May, he allied the Republican Party with anti-prohibition forces, hoping to gain the support of Democrats who resented government intrusion into their private affairs.¹³⁸ Sensing that Republican prohibitionists may rebel against the party, Mott justified his position with the following announcement:

Republicans in every township must organize and poll a full vote against this bill as the only means of condemning class legislation and to prevent the creation of a powerful monopoly of druggists, apothecaries and physicians, which is always dangerous in a government like ours ... When this has been done, Republicans will be ready to aid in regulating the sale of liquor in such manner as will remedy and correct as many abuses growing out of the use of liquor, as can be remedied and corrected by legislation.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ W.S. Pearson to Samuel Tate, February 2, 1881, Tate Papers, SHC.

¹³⁷ *Laws of North Carolina* (1881), 554-558.

¹³⁸ *New York Times*, June 2, 10, 1881.

¹³⁹ *Statesville American*, July 2, 1881.

Most Republicans in western North Carolina, whatever their views on temperance, accepted the party's alliance with anti-prohibitionists because their political survival depended upon it. Prohibition threatened to destroy the Bureau of Internal Revenue and the hundreds of patronage jobs that it provided them.¹⁴⁰

Ironically, many mountain distillers, legal and illegal, also joined the ranks of anti-prohibitionists, conveniently overlooking the fact that revenue officials were leading the movement. Although some “cynically calculated how much it would improve their business,” according to historian Wilbur Miller, “moonshiners themselves were not likely to vote for prohibition.”¹⁴¹ They agreed with revenueurs like Mott, who argued that prohibition was more oppressive than taxation. “[Prohibition],” Mott explained to Raum in July 1881, “strikes at the industry of manufacturing spirits in North Carolina, and ... would [break] up the business of distilling to the great injury of a people who have engaged in that business ... for more than a hundred years.”¹⁴² Moreover, state-wide prohibition would have made it harder for the moonshiners to evade the law by adding another set of officials attempting to break up stills and haul people into court.¹⁴³ By allying with the Republican-led anti-prohibition campaign, however, distillers risked further alienating themselves from local Democrats.

Meanwhile, during the summer of 1881, “wet” and “dry” forces scrambled to gain the support of Carolina highlanders. In every mountain county, both groups organized barbecues, rallies, and meetings, where members of the community would discuss the reasons for or against

¹⁴⁰ McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, 355.

¹⁴¹ Miller, *Revenueurs & Moonshiners*, 172.

¹⁴² J.J. Mott to Green B. Raum, July 1, 1881, Miscellaneous Official Letters Received by the Commissioner of Internal Revenue, RG 58, Bureau of Internal Revenue, National Archives, College Park, Maryland (hereafter cited as MLR).

¹⁴³ Miller, *Revenueurs & Moonshiners*, 171.

prohibition.¹⁴⁴ At these public gatherings and in newspaper editorials, “wets,” as they had done during the 1850s and early 1870s, argued that prohibition was a “radical” piece of legislation that threatened to deprive citizens of their “personal liberties.” Anti-prohibitionists did not stop there, however. Many insisted that the August referendum was also unconstitutional. According to an unnamed “law student” from Caldwell County in June, the North Carolina and U.S. Constitutions stated that legislators had the sole responsibility of passing all laws. “This government,” he explained, “is a democracy, but it is a representative democracy in which the people by their construction have divested themselves of the power to make laws, and transferred it to their agents in legislature assembled.”¹⁴⁵

Hoping to appeal to temperance supporters, “wets” broadened their critique of prohibition beyond the “personal liberties” argument. Prohibition, they warned, would ultimately promote disorder and intemperance. “I fully believe,” a Caldwell County man explained in July, “if [prohibition] should become the law of the state it will result in bitterness and constant litigation to the great prejudice of the country.”¹⁴⁶ When speaking at a rally in Watauga County that same month, local farmer Christian Moretz cautioned reformers that prohibition would encourage moonshining and resistance to state authority. If prohibition became a law, he warned, “there would be a blockade still at the head of every branch, and that whiskey would be brought here from Tennessee in abundance.”¹⁴⁷ A McDowell County resident agreed, adding that the law would weaken public schools that had been largely funded by a state tax on alcohol retail licenses.¹⁴⁸ Anti-prohibitionists also capitalized on intrastate sectionalism by arguing that

¹⁴⁴ *Newton Enterprise*, July 23, 1881; *Marion Lamp Post*, July 20, 1881; *Lenoir Topic*, May 19, June 2, 9, 16, 30, July 7, 21, 1881; *Asheville Citizen*, July 21, 1881.

¹⁴⁵ *Lenoir Topic*, June 30, 1881.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, July 21, 1881.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, July 7, 1881.

¹⁴⁸ *Marion Lamp Post*, July 20, 1881.

prohibition would benefit wine makers in eastern North Carolina. According to Moretz, “eastern men” had originated “the bill in order to force us to buy their wines [which would have been exempt from the prohibition law].”¹⁴⁹

Mountain prohibitionists were not intimidated, however. Responding to the Caldwell County “law student,” a Mr. “Lex” pointed out that he “was too young to know the fact that eight millions of dollars are carried out of the State yearly to enrich northern liquor dealers, while our poor suffer for bread, and their children grow up in ignorance.”¹⁵⁰ Another Caldwell County resident confronted the “personal liberties” argument more directly:

Let us come nearer home and examine the law against carrying concealed deadly weapons. Is it not generally admitted to be a good one? But it infringes upon our rights and liberties, and it must be done away with! Then, to be “free as the air we breathe,” we must allow drunken bullies to go at large, armed to the teeth, and a big canteen of whiskey strapped to their backs.

This man also rebuked anti-prohibitionists’ assertion that the law would create a monopoly of druggists who would sell liquor at exorbitant prices, thereby making it harder for the “common people” to obtain alcohol for snake bites and other medicinal purposes. According to him, this charge was “too absurd to credit.” “Which places the most venom in the bodies of our race,” he concluded, “the teeth of poisonous serpents or the worm of the still?”¹⁵¹

Other prohibitionists continued to reassure mountain Democrats that the issue would not divide the party. “It [prohibition] is not a political movement,” a Macon County resident explained, “but is the combined wisdom of the best men of all political creeds, and deserves the hearty co-operation of every citizen of North Carolina.”¹⁵² Robert Abernathy from Burke County claimed that prominent mountain Democratic politicians, including Zebulon Vance,

¹⁴⁹ *Lenoir Topic*, July 7, 1881.

¹⁵⁰ *Lenoir Topic*, July 21, 1881.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, July 7, 1881.

¹⁵² *Asheville Weekly Citizen*, July 21, 1881.

supported the passage of the bill. Abernathy urged voters not to support the anti-prohibitionist coalition, which he believed was a “morally stunted breed” composed of revenueurs, large distillers from the North, and African Americans. “Such men as the Vances, Merrimons, and others who have been produced amid the cloud-capped mountains of North Carolina,” he assumed, “can never condescend so low as to affiliate with such a dirty, filthy set of men.”¹⁵³

More importantly, prohibitionists argued that the law would help bring order, industry, and economic growth to western North Carolina. “Let me ask,” a Caldwell County resident wrote in July, “what branch of human industry would not be advanced by abstinence from spirituous liquors?” Prohibition, he answered, would force farmers to grow commercial crops and raise livestock, thereby “enabling those who have not enough of the ‘staff of life’ to live in much more comfort.” It would also “be a powerful stimulus towards railroad building in order to dispose of the surplus grain.”¹⁵⁴ Many mountain residents agreed. The Executive Committee of Prohibition in Caldwell County insisted in June that prohibition would “promote the best interests of society and increase the prosperity and happiness of the whole country.”¹⁵⁵ One month later, a Macon County resident exclaimed that “civilization requires it [prohibition]!”¹⁵⁶ Meanwhile, editors of the *Asheville Citizen* charged that anti-prohibitionists, for the love of money, were hindering the region’s “moral and social advancement.” “You should vote for prohibition,” they pleaded to readers, “because of the results upon the coming generation, to whom we are to look for the preservation of our institutions, and the perpetuation of our liberties. In these the hopes of our Country are centered.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ *State Journal*, July 6, 1881.

¹⁵⁴ *Lenoir Topic*, July 7, 1881.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, June 9, 1881.

¹⁵⁶ *Asheville Weekly Citizen*, July 21, 1881.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Table 5.6. Percentage of Votes For and Against Prohibition in the Mountain Region Compared to North Carolina as a Whole in 1881

	For	Against	% For	% Against
WNC	10,804	22,262	.33	.67
Rest of NC	37,466	144,063	.21	.79

Source: Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, appendix.

As the August referendum approached, highlanders remained uncertain which side would prevail. In Watauga County, a farmer reported in June that “our people seem divided on this great question.”¹⁵⁸ “Next to the Normal school in point of interest to the people of Macon County,” another mountain resident wrote in July, “is the subject of prohibition.” Macon County, he continued, was “about equally enough divided to make matters interesting.”¹⁵⁹ According to the *Newton Enterprise*, public opinion in Catawba County seemed in favor of prohibition.¹⁶⁰ Nonetheless, many prohibitionists feared that they had not gained the support of many rural mountain residents. “The farmers of the mountains and coves have up their minds how they will vote,” a Buncombe County man wrote in July, “and most of them ... propose to worship under their own vines and fruit trees.” “All that [we] can say to [prohibitionists] is to keep cool and not trifle with our liberties,” he concluded. “[We] will do like Putnam of old at the battle of Bunker Hill.”¹⁶¹

Results from the August election reveal that most North Carolina voters were not yet ready to embrace state-wide prohibition, as 166,325 (or 71 percent) of them rejected the bill.¹⁶² “Dry” forces were able to garner a higher percentage of the vote in western North Carolina than elsewhere in the state (see table 5.6). As historian Daniel Whitener has demonstrated, this was

¹⁵⁸ *Lenoir Topic*, June 30, 1881.

¹⁵⁹ *Asheville Weekly Citizen*, July 21, 1881.

¹⁶⁰ *Newton Enterprise*, July 23, 1881.

¹⁶¹ *Asheville Weekly Citizen*, July 21, 1881.

¹⁶² 48,370 North Carolina voters favored the bill. See Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 73.

Table 5.7. Vote on Prohibition in Western North Carolina in 1881

County	For	Against	% For	% Against
Yancey	502	329	.60	.40
Transylvania	230	202	.53	.47
Clay	149	133	.53	.47
Cherokee	270	262	.51	.49
Cleveland	1,142	1,144	.49	.51
Haywood	655	676	.49	.51
Mitchell	366	381	.49	.51
Buncombe	1,606	1,745	.48	.52
Madison	719	917	.44	.56
Catawba	876	1,305	.40	.60
Graham	79	125	.41	.61
Swain	116	204	.36	.64
Jackson	258	476	.35	.65
Alexander	337	652	.34	.66
McDowell	383	786	.33	.67
Macon	257	558	.32	.68
Henderson	328	824	.28	.72
Rutherford	602	1,699	.26	.74
Polk	142	460	.24	.76
Watauga	228	731	.24	.76
Burke	348	1,238	.22	.78
Caldwell	245	871	.22	.78
Ashe	266	1,328	.17	.83
Surry	314	2,067	.13	.87
Wilkes	337	2,429	.12	.88
Alleghany	49	720	.06	.94
WNC Total	10,804	22,262	.67	.33

Source: Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, appendix.

largely due to the fact that the piedmont and coastal regions had a larger African American population, most of whom voted against the bill.¹⁶³ Support for prohibition appears to have been strongest in mountain counties undergoing rapid industrial change during the 1870s. In western North Carolina, prohibitionists won in four counties, while receiving over 48 percent of the vote in four others (see table 5.7). Two of the mountain counties that favored prohibition, Yancey and Cherokee ranked second and fourth on the list of mountain counties that had experienced the highest percentage increase of capital invested in manufacturing between 1870 and 1880 (see

¹⁶³ Ibid., 73.

Table 5.8. Top Five Mountain Counties Investing Capital in Manufacturing in 1880 (in Dollars)

County	Total Dollars Invested
Surry	218,050
Mitchell	169,200
Catawba	168,865
Buncombe	156,035
Cleveland	133,200

Source: *Report on the Manufacturers ... Tenth Census: 1880* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 159-160.

5.1). Unfortunately, census enumerators in 1870 failed to record the amount of capital invested in the other two counties that had voted for prohibition (Transylvania and Clay), making it impossible to determine whether or not industrialization played a role in encouraging residents there to support the bill. The high rate of moonshiner violence in Transylvania County, however, may explain why highlanders there voted for prohibition. Confronting lawlessness as well as economic decline, these residents may have accepted the “dry” propaganda that prohibition would bring security and financial gain.

An analysis of the four mountain counties where 48 percent of voters favored prohibition (Cleveland, Haywood, Mitchell, and Buncombe) also suggests that industrialization played an important role in shaping attitudes on alcohol reform. Haywood County, for instance, had the third highest percentage increase of capital invested in manufacturing between 1870 and 1880 (see table 5.1). Meanwhile, Buncombe, Cleveland, and Mitchell counties remained the region’s leaders in the total amount of money invested in industry during the decade (see table 5.8).

Despite losing the election, mountain prohibitionists would remain optimistic about the future. After all, a third of highlanders had voted in favor of prohibition. Chastised as “radicals” during the antebellum period, they were slowing garnering the support of thousands of western North Carolinians, most of whom resided in communities experiencing industrial and urban

development. Their popularity would continue to increase during the 1880s, when the region underwent an unprecedented era of rapid economic expansion. The arrival of the Western North Carolina Railroad, and along with it “civilization,” would transform mountain society by encouraging many highlanders to further embrace the amenities and philosophies of urban America. These townspeople continued to argue that alcohol had no place in the new industrial social order. Nor did the moonshiners, whose illicit product impeded economic prosperity and “irrational” behavior threatened to destroy the region’s “progressive” reputation.

CHAPTER 6

“THESE BIG-BONED, SEMI-BARBARIAN PEOPLE”: THE CREATION OF VIOLENT APPALACHIA AND ITS CONSEQUENCES, 1878-1890

I'll tune up my fiddle and rosin my bow,
And make myself welcome wherever I go.
I'll buy my own whiskey and make my own stew;
If it does make me drunk it is nothing to you.¹

“It is a good deal the fashion to ascribe to this transmontane country an undue share of that moral and intellectual darkness ... characteristic of the back woods settlement.” So wrote an anonymous mountain resident to the *Asheville Citizen* in 1883, angry over the media’s portrayal of western North Carolina as a violent and uneducated region, cursed by the evil of illicit distilling. “The error begins with ignorance of facts,” the writer pleaded. “The mountain people are neither so ignorant nor so irreligious as careless persons pronounce them.” Nor were most of them violent moonshiners. “While there is occasional violence,” the Carolina highlander explained, “it is so exceptional as to justify the assertion that there is no more peaceful, law abiding and moral people than those of Western North Carolina.”² This plea, however, ultimately fell on deaf ears. Captivated by national newspapers’ and magazines’ coverage of the so-called Moonshine Wars in the late 1870s, Victorian middle-class Americans had already

¹ Western North Carolina folksong, quoted in Emma Bell Miles, *The Spirit of the Mountains* (New York: J. Pott, 1905), 148.

² *Asheville Semi-Weekly Citizen*, January 4, 1883.

accepted the stereotype that western North Carolina was “the home of the hunter, the moonshiner, and the beasts of the forest.”³

As noted in Chapter 2, journalists, travelers, and urban reformers constructed the first negative images of southern Appalachia and its people during the antebellum period. Blaming the region’s “frontier” environment, they often characterized mountain folk as “lazy,” “drunken,” and “uncivilized.” Nonetheless, it was not until after the Civil War that these misconceptions gained widespread acceptance among northern and southern urbanites, largely due to the emergence of “local color” writing in the 1870s and 1880s. This literary genre grew out of new American literary magazines that catered to a burgeoning urban middle-class readership.⁴ Editors’ goal in publishing local color writings was to increase magazine sales by stressing “the peculiarities of life” in southern Appalachia. Focusing on the dialect and customs of mountain residents, they “discovered” a people who were “our contemporary ancestors,” a distinct, but noble white “race” that was out of step with modern society.⁵ Beginning in the late 1870s, however, many local colorists (and journalists) forged a different conception of mountain whites, one that portrayed them as a race of violent savages. The Appalachian moonshiner played an important role in the creation of this stereotype by epitomizing a mountain populace whom middle-class Americans believed was a threat to civilization.

³ *Asheville Weekly Citizen*, November 13, 1889.

⁴ The most popular of these magazines were *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, *Lippincott’s*, *Scribner’s*, *The Living Age*, *The Century*, *Lippincott’s*, and *Appleton’s Journal*. On the rise of these magazines, see Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978); and Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso, 1996).

⁵ For more on the local color “movement,” see Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*; Anne Rowe, *The Enchanted Country: Northern Writers in the South, 1865-1910* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); David E. Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); and Kevin E. O’Donnell and Helen Hollingsworth, eds., *Seekers of Scenery: Travel Writing from Southern Appalachia, 1840-1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004).

Since the 1970s, historians have devoted considerable attention to the images that local color novelists, journalists, and missionaries produced of mountain residents during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They have demonstrated conclusively that negative stereotypes about the region often reflected middle-class America's desire to stress the benefits of industrialization and "progress." "In an age of faith in American, and more generally Western, intellectual, cultural, and social superiority over the other 'races' of the world," historian Anthony Harkins has explained, "these [stereotypes] were designed to show not cultural difference so much as cultural hierarchy – to celebrate modernity and 'mainstream' progress."⁶ Perceived by urban middle-class whites as a remnant of the colonial era, southern Appalachia became a "strange" and backward place. In short, outside observers believed that the region and its people were economically, geographically, and culturally at odds with modern America.

Hoping to reaffirm their cultural superiority, among other reasons, Victorian whites depicted Appalachia as a region where lawlessness and violence prevailed. Most historians have emphasized the role that feuding played in the construction of this so-called violent Appalachia. During the late 1880s, they agree, the national media's coverage of the Hatfield-McCoy and other feuds convinced middle-class citizens that mountain whites were inherently more violent than other Americans.⁷ Although correct, these scholars have underestimated the impact that moonshiner violence had on the formation of such misconceptions. Published nearly a decade before the emergence of Victorian America's fascination with feuding, local color and newspaper accounts of illicit distilling, whether sympathetic to the moonshiners or not, portrayed

⁶ Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 29.

⁷ For a discussion on feuding and the creation of violent Appalachia, see Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*; Batteau, *The Invention of Appalachia*; and Waller, "Feuding in Appalachia: Evolution of a Cultural Stereotype," in *Appalachia in the Making*, 347-376.

southern Appalachia as a lawless region that needed civilizing. According to these writings, illicit distillers, like most mountain residents, were the products of a “frontier” environment. They were rugged individualists who rejected modernity and were willing to use violence to preserve their way of life. Many middle-class Americans embraced these stereotypes, making illicit distilling synonymous with Appalachia and its people. More importantly, moonshiner stories convinced urban Victorians, when reading about feuding in the late 1880s and 1890s, to accept the image of violent Appalachia and intervene in the lives of mountain residents, whom they already believed were crude and uncivilized.⁸

Many urban highlanders in western North Carolina (and other parts of southern Appalachia) responded unfavorably to the negative images that journalists and local colorists popularized about the region. During the 1880s, the arrival of the WNCRR and other transportation arteries ushered in an era of rapid industrial growth in the Carolina highlands. Outside and local entrepreneurs increasingly built textile factories, mines, and lumber camps, while residents in Asheville and other communities further embraced the amenities and philosophies of urban middle-class America. Priding themselves as civilized and cultivated, these townspeople, who were becoming a politically and culturally powerful force in the region, rejected the notion of violent Appalachia. Nonetheless, they ultimately reinforced and perpetuated this stereotype by insisting that many rural residents continued to live in ignorance, consume large amounts of alcohol, and engage in illicit distilling. Like “outsiders,” these men and women believed that the “traditional” culture of country folk required reforming and would embrace the so-called uplift movement of the 1890s.

⁸ J.W. Williamson and Anthony Harkins have shown the role that moonshining played in the making of the term “hillbilly.” Both, however, focus mostly on media images of illicit distillers in the twentieth-century. See J. W. Williamson, *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains Did to the Movies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); and Harkins, *Hillbilly*.

Moonshining and the Creation of Violent Western North Carolina

In October 1869, *Appleton's Journal* published a three-part series called "Novelties of Southern Scenery" by landscape artist and travel writer Charles Lanman. This illustrated work re-introduced middle-class Americans to western North Carolina (and other parts of southern Appalachia), portraying it as a land of "grand and beautiful scenery." According to Lanman, the Civil War had prevented "modern civilization" from "rapidly developing" in the region. Untouched by "cumbersome coaches and the railway trains," western North Carolina's landscape remained pristine. The region's abundant resources, blue skies, and diverse wildlife were "glories beyond compare." Most spectacular of all were its mountains, whose peaks were higher than those of Mount Washington in New York, "the king of the North." "The Roan and the Bald, the Grandfather, and the Whiteside Mountains, each and all of them, and hundreds of others," Lanman explained, "afford charms and delightful association without member."⁹

"Novelties of Southern Scenery" was the first of several illustrated works on North Carolina's mountain landscape published in *Appleton's*, *Harper's*, and other literary magazines during the late 1860s and early 1870s. Spurred by technological advances in the mass production of images, increasing literacy, and the growth of advertising, these articles appealed to urban middle-class northerners, who, adopting British aesthetics, wanted to view "picturesque" scenes that contained elements both beautiful and sublime.¹⁰ These illustrated

⁹ Charles Lanman, "Novelties of Southern Scenery," *Appleton's Journal* (October 16 – October 30, 1869), 257-261, 296-297, 327-329.

¹⁰ "Nineteenth-century landscape viewing in America has roots in British aristocratic traditions. The term 'picturesque' originated in eighteenth-century British aesthetic discourse. Edmund Burke's widely circulated *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) helped to set the stage, by establishing the meanings of two related terms: 'sublime' and 'beautiful.' According to Burke, scenery that is wild, untamed, disordered, and terrifying is sublime. Scenery that is pastoral, lush, ordered, and serene is beautiful. A third term, 'picturesque,' was coined by a British cleric, William Gilpin, after Burke's treatise had circulated. In Gilpin's view, a picturesque scene contains elements both sublime and beautiful. Gilpin popularized the use of all three terms, roaming the countryside and using 'sublime,' 'beautiful', and 'picturesque' in a series of essays to

works further served to reunite the North with the South. “In this period of peace and renewed optimism following the wrenching turmoil of the Civil War,” historian Sue Rainey writes, “images of the ‘most unfamiliar and novel feature of American scenery’ held great appeal.”¹¹ War-weary northern urbanites were eager to reconcile with their former adversaries, learn about the southern landscape, and invest in its unexploited raw materials.¹² *Appleton’s* and other urban-based magazines met this demand by providing their readership with a glimpse of a “strange and peculiar” world.

Like “Novelties of Southern Scenery,” subsequent illustrated works portrayed western North Carolina’s landscape as pristine and untamed. According to Henry E. Colton, who penned a series of short features on the region for *Appleton’s* in 1870 and 1871, it was “Nature’s gallery of the queer, the beautiful and grand.” Set amid “lofty mountains, majestic and fatherly, standing with a saintly presence like a benediction over the gentle valley,” he insisted that the Carolina highlands had not yet been disturbed by modern society.¹³ In *The Land of the Sky; or Adventures in Mountain By-Ways*, Frances Fisher Tiernan, using the pen name Christian Reid, continued where Colton had left off. This novel, serialized in *Appleton’s* during the autumn of 1875 and based on an actual trip that Reid had made to the region, chronicles the adventures of four young northerners spending a summer in western North Carolina. These Victorians encounter a land “so boundless and so beautiful, that the imagination is for a time overwhelmed.” Like Colton, they also discover a mountain landscape untouched by modernity.

categorize specific landscape views. To Gilpin and his late eighteenth-century British adherents, a picturesque landscape was the most desirable.” See O’Donnell and Hollingsworth, *Seekers of Scenery*, 12.

¹¹ Sue Rainey, *Creating Picturesque America: Monument to the Natural and Cultural Landscape* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1994), 22.

¹² Paul Herman Buck, *The Road to Reunion, 1865-1900* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1937); Rowe, *The Enchanted Country*; and O’Donnell and Hollingsworth, *Seekers of Scenery*.

¹³ H.E. Colton, “A Farm on the French Broad,” *Appleton’s Journal* 4 (December 17, 1870), 737-738; Colton, “Mountain Island,” *Appleton’s Journal* 5 (January 17, 1871), 15-18; Colton, “Reems’s Creek and the Old Mill,” *Appleton’s Journal* 5 (February 4, 1871), 135-137.

When traveling from Asheville to Warm Springs, these urbanites felt that they “were leaving civilization altogether behind, plunging deeper and deeper into the heart of primeval Nature.” “[The mountains] rise over our heads hundreds of feet ... in every interstice of which great pines grow, and thickets of rhododendron flourish,” the narrator explains. “In the dark shade, ferns, flowers, and mosses abound, together with trees of every variety, while down the hill-sides and over the rocks countless streams come leaping in foam and spray.”¹⁴

Focusing on the “curiosities” of the landscape, Colton, Tiernan, and other so-called scenic entrepreneurs mostly ignored mountain inhabitants.¹⁵ In *The Land of the Sky*, for instance, Tiernan mentioned only one Carolina highlander by name: John Pence, “a spare, sinewy man, dark as an Indian, with the eyes of a hawk, who wears a pair of the brownest and dirtiest corduroy trousers.”¹⁶ When included in the narrative, writers often portrayed mountain residents as the product of a “frontier” environment. In 1872, David Hunter Strother wrote that the highlander was “born and nurtured in poverty and seclusion. He [had] no set pattern to grow up by, with none of the slop-shops of civilization at hand to furnish him ready-made clothing, manners, or opinions.”¹⁷ Two years later, Edward King described western North Carolinians as a distinct, but noble people out of step with modern society. “They were neatly dressed in home-made clothes, and their hair was combed straight down over their cheeks and knotted into ‘pugs’ behind,” King explained. “There were none of the modern conventionalities of dress visible about them. The men were cavalier enough; their jean trousers were thrust into their boots, and

¹⁴ Christian Reid, *The Land of the Sky; or Adventures in Mountain By-Ways* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1890), 22, 33-40.

¹⁵ For additional “scenic entrepreneur” works on the Carolina highlands, see Jehu Lewis, “The Grandfather of North Carolina,” *Lakeside Monthly* 10 (September 1873), 218-224; Constance Fenimore Woolson, “The French Broad,” *Harper’s Monthly* 50 (April 1875), 617-636; George Dimmock, “A Trip to Mt. Mitchell in North Carolina,” 1 *Appalachia* (June 1877), 141-151.

¹⁶ Reid, *The Land of the Sky*, 7.

¹⁷ David Hunter Strother, “The Mountains,” *Harper’s Magazine* XLIV (May 1872), 800.

their slouch hats cocked on their heads with bravado air.”¹⁸ For King and other “scenic entrepreneurs,” however, the mountain landscape remained the central character in their narratives. It was a land different from the world in which they and their urban readership lived, an unspoiled wilderness devoid of civilization.

Beginning in the mid 1870s, a new literary genre emerged that would further shape how “outsiders” perceived of southern Appalachia and its people. More so than those before them, Rebecca Harding Davis, Constance Fenimore Woolson, and other local colorists, hoping to increase magazine sales, focused considerable attention on the dialect and culture of mountain residents. These authors ultimately “discovered” not only a “strange” land, but also a “peculiar” people. Building on the works of Lanman, Strother, and King, they initially portrayed mountain white inhabitants as a noble “race” uncorrupted by the evils of civilization. In “Qualla,” for instance, Davis praised Carolina highlanders for their primitive lifestyle, writing in 1875:

They were not cumbered with dishes, knives, forks, beds, or any other impediments of civilization: they slept in hollow logs or in a hole filled with straw under loose boards of the floor. But they were contented and good-natured: they took life, leaky roof, opossum, and all, as a huge joke, and were honest gentlefolk despite their dirty and bedless condition ... Money, indeed, appeared throughout this region to be one of the unknown luxuries of civilization; and its startling (if anything could be starting up yonder) to find how easily and comfortably life resolves itself to its primitive conditions without.¹⁹

In “The French Broad,” published in *Harper’s Monthly* that same year, Woolson expressed a similar admiration for mountain residents. “There are noble hearts under those gaunt, ungraceful exteriors that excite your mirth,” one of Woolson’s characters in the story explains. “Those very women will come over the mountains from miles away, when you are ill, and nurse you tenderly

¹⁸ Edward King, “The Great South: Among the Mountains of Western North Carolina,” *Scribner’s Monthly* VII (March 1874), 521.

¹⁹ Rebecca Harding Davis, “Qualla,” *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine* 16 (November 1875), 577. See also Davis, “The Rose of Carolina,” *Scribner’s Monthly* 8 (October 1874), 723-726; Davis, “The Yares of the Black Mountains,” *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine* 16 (July 1875), 35-47; and Davis, “A Night in the Mountains,” *Appleton’s Journal* 3 (July-December 1877), 505-510.

for pure charity's sake ... They will spin their wool and dye and weave, and make you clothes from the cloth."²⁰ As Henry Shapiro, James Klotter, and other scholars have demonstrated, these characterizations (or stereotypes) of mountain folk served to differentiate middle-class townspeople from the rural, primitive "other" and helped to satisfy urbanites' longing for a simpler past. Southern Appalachia became a refuge, a place where these Victorians could escape from the hustle and bustle of modern society.²¹

By the late 1870s, another perception of southern Appalachia and its people emerged. Journalists and local color novelists increasingly depicted the region as a place where ignorance and lawlessness prevailed. According to Louise Coffin Jones in 1879, for instance, most Carolina highlanders belonged to "the lower class, composed of 'poor white trash':

The civilities, courtesies, even some of the decencies, of life were dispensed with; and as a relapse from culture is always more degrading in its influence and tendencies than a corresponding state of ignorance among a people who have never been elevated, so these degenerate Anglo-Saxons compared unfavorably with the native Indians, a few of whom still lingered in the mountains.²²

For Jones and other "outsiders," the mountain white was no longer a noble savage, but a primitive and violent individualist who rejected modernity. The moonshiner played an important role in this creation of violent Appalachia. Although it persisted in many northern cities and in other parts of the South, illicit distilling became synonymous with the mountain region during the late 1870s, largely due to the national media's coverage of the so-called Moonshine Wars. Newspaper and magazine accounts of moonshining helped to convince many "outsiders" that mountain residents were inherently more ignorant and violent than other Americans. More importantly, these stories encouraged urban Victorians to intervene in the lives of white

²⁰ Constance Fenimore Woolson, "The French Broad," *Harper's Monthly* (April 1875), 630.

²¹ James Klotter, "The Black South and White Appalachia," *Journal of American History* 66 (March 1980), 832-849; Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*; and Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine*.

²² Louise Coffin Jones, "In the Backwoods of Carolina," *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* 24 (December 1879), 756.

Appalachians. Like most highlanders, they argued, moonshiners were the products of a “frontier” environment: “big-boned, semi-barbarian people” who needed civilizing.

Although conflicts between illicit distillers and revenue agents were reported as early as 1867, it was not until the late 1870s that northern newspapers and magazines depicted moonshining as one of the “peculiarities” of southern Appalachia.²³ By 1877, the *New York Times* began extensive coverage on the Moonshine Wars, noting that illicit distilling occurred most frequently in the mountains of Tennessee, Georgia, and the Carolinas. At first, the *Times* blamed the Democratic Party for encouraging “densely, ignorant men of the up-country” to evade the federal liquor law. It complained in July 1878:

At one time, during the rule of Republican Governors ... an earnest and what promised to be a successful effort the break up the rapidly-growing traffic was made by the Federal officers, aided by United States troops. The return of the Democracy to power brought other methods, however; the State courts did everything in their power to shield the still-owners against the officers of the National Government, until, some time after the inauguration of the present Administration, the distillers in many cases began to openly defy the Marshals, and to publicly break the laws which they had previously violated in secret.²⁴

By 1880, however, the newspaper, influenced by local color literature, downplayed this political explanation by arguing that isolation was the main cause for moonshine violence. “They [illicit distillers] live in districts remote from railroads and from markets, where they could sell surplus grain,” the *Times* explained. Like most highlanders, these moonshiners “were illiterate and ignorant. They scarcely ever read a book or a newspaper, and know very little of what is going on in the world.” To make matters worse, mountain residents’ natural fondness for whiskey and distrust of federal authority (in the guise of the Bureau of Internal Revenue) encouraged farmers to manufacture alcohol illegally. The best way to end illicit distilling and improve the region,

²³ A.H. Guernsey, “Illicit Distilling of Liquors,” *Harper’s Weekly* 11 (December 7, 1867), 733; and Guernsey, “Hunting for Stills,” *Harper’s Weekly* 11 (December 21, 1867), 811.

²⁴ *New York Times*, July 21, 1878. See also *New York Times*, March 15, July 19, October 27, 1877, July 19, December 22, 1878.

then, was to “civilize” mountain inhabitants by building “free schools” and “railroads.” “So long as they remain isolated,” the *Times* concluded, “they will defy the laws.”²⁵

This news coverage captured the imagination of middle-class urbanites and encouraged them to associate illicit distilling with southern Appalachia. More influential in shaping this stereotype, however, were moonshiner stories published in *Harper’s*, *Appleton’s*, and other national magazines during the late 1870s and 1880s. In fact, during those years, illicit distilling became virtually a requirement in descriptive pieces dealing with the region. These works, mostly written by local colorists, portrayed the moonshiner as a symbol of what was wrong with Appalachia. Like the *New York Times* and other newspapers, these stories further suggested that only industrialization could change the behavior of mountain residents and subsequently paved the way for the uplift movement of the 1890s.

In 1877, *Harper’s* published “The Moonshine Man: A Peep into His Haunts and Hiding Places,” the first of several pieces making illicit distilling synonymous with southern Appalachia. This work contained two themes that journalists and local colorists would build upon when developing the image of both moonshiners and highlanders. First, it characterizes illicit distilling as the product of geographical isolation. Cut off from the outside world, the anonymous author claimed that mountain residents had remained “ignorant.” Unable to read or write, many of them refused to alter their traditional way of life and continued to manufacture alcohol. Second, it uses the illicit distiller to epitomize tensions between urban America and savage Appalachia. Like most mountain residents, moonshiners supposedly felt out of place when venturing out of the “dreary and desolate” forest:

The moonshiner in a large city is as mild-looking a man as is ever seen. The sudden change from horseback to a seat in the [train] cars, on which nine-tenths of them have never ridden until captured, and the startling effect produced by sudden entry into a city

²⁵ Ibid., February 2, 1880.

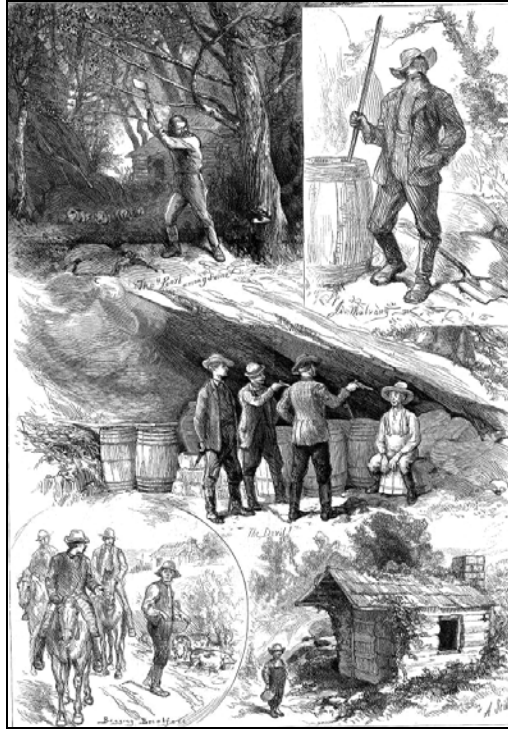


Figure 6.1. “The Moonshine Man: A Peep into His Haunts and Hiding Places,” *Harper’s Weekly* XXI (October 20, 1877), 820.

after long years of life in rural regions, so overcome the illicit distiller that his appearance on the streets would picture him to the observer as meek and mild-mannered in the extreme.

According to the story, illicit distillers were not only unable, but also unwilling to adapt to civilization. Members of “the poorest and most ignorant classes,” they were unwanted remnants of the colonial past.²⁶

These themes were further developed in Constance Fenimore Woolson’s “Up in the Blue Ridge,” published in *Appleton’s* in 1878. In it, Woolson, who had celebrated Carolina highlanders for their simplicity just four year earlier in “The French Broad,” feared that most of them would never adapt to modern society. The story chronicles the adventures of Stephen Wainwright, a northerner who visits the mountains of North Carolina and falls in love with a

²⁶ [unsigned], “The Moonshine Man: A Peep into His Haunts and Hiding Places,” *Harper’s Weekly* XXI (October 20, 1877), 821-822.

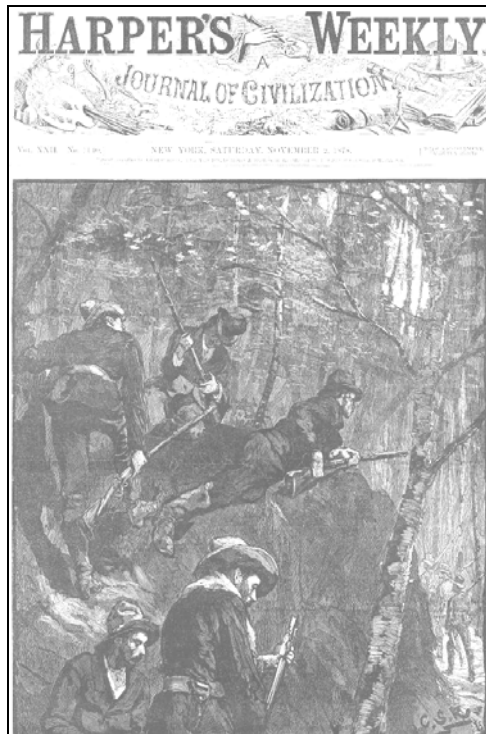


Figure 6.2. “Moonshiners,” *Harper’s Weekly* XXII (November 2, 1878), 875.

“mountain girl.” Wainwright, however, soon discovers that his life is in danger, as many local residents, including a Baptist preacher, believe he is a revenue agent attempting to capture the notorious moonshiner, Richard Eliot. Eliot, Woolson explains, was a typical highlander, who, unable to “adapt” to modern society and find a “civilized” profession, became an illicit distiller. Although Wainwright convinces locals that he is not a revenuer, his cousin and fellow New Yorker, John Royce, pledges to capture Eliot, who had murdered a bureau agent named Allison. The story ultimately pits the civilized against the savage, as Royce and Eliot square off in a gun fight. After wounding Royce, Eliot escapes and vows to continue his illegal profession. “The moonlight-whiskey is made up in the mountain, and still the revenue-detectives are shot,” Woolson concludes. “The wild, beautiful region is not yet conquered.”²⁷

²⁷ Constance Fenimore Woolson, “Up in the Blue Ridge,” *Appleton’s Journal* 5 (July-December 1878), 104-125.

Following the publication of “Up in the Blue Ridge” in 1878, journalists and local colorists devoted considerable attention to illicit distilling in the Carolina highlands, which, along with north Georgia and eastern Tennessee, was considered the most dangerous moonshine enclave in the United States.²⁸ Edward Crittenden’s 1879 dime novel about Lewis Redmond, an actual moonshiner whose exploits against revenueurs in South Carolina had gained him national notoriety, helped to solidify this perception.²⁹ Published in Philadelphia, this tale of romance, betrayal, and murder must have thrilled its Victorian audience. In it, Redmond kidnaps and falls in love with the angelic Gabrielle Austin, who had the misfortune of riding in a carriage attacked by Redmond’s gang. The young captive soon discovers that Redmond is a tormented man. Although educated and refined, he lives only to avenge his father’s death at the hands of Internal Revenue agents. “One night a body of Federal troops surrounded our house, and demanded my father’s surrender,” he explains to Gabrielle. “Like a brave man he refused, and gave up his life rather than sacrifice his liberty. The shock of that terrible night’s occurrence killed my mother, and I, a boy in years and in experience with the rugged side of life’s journey, was an orphan.” Unable to shed innocent blood, Redmond ultimately allows Gabrielle and her fiancé, who attempted to rescue her, to leave unscathed. Nonetheless, he refuses to reform himself. “Redmond the outlaw,” Crittenden concludes, “still defies the authority of the law, daily commits crimes unparalleled in history, has startling adventures and hairbreadth escapes.”³⁰

²⁸ *New York Times*, July 19, July 21, December 22, 1878, February 2, July 5, 1880, May 25, 1881, July 23, 1881, July 25, 1881.

²⁹ *Washington Post*, May 8, July 29, September 3, 1878; *National Police Gazette*, July 20, September 21, November 2, 1878; *Christian Union*, November 27, 1878; *Atlanta Daily Constitution*, August 3, 11, 17, 27, October 1, 1878; and *New York Times*, March 14, 15, 16, 19, July 15, 27, August 18, 20, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, September 3, 29, November 2, 20, 27, 1878.

³⁰ Edward B. Crittenden, *The Entwined Lives of Miss Gabrielle Austin, Daughter of the Late Rev. Ellis C. Austin, and of Redmond, the Outlaw, Leader of the North Carolina “Moonshiners”* (Philadelphia: Barclay & Co., 1879): 58, 63. In 1881, Redmond refuted the contents of this story. See R. A. Cobb, *The True Life of Maj. Lewis Richard Redmond, the Notorious and Famous Moonshiner, of Western North Carolina, who was Born in Swain County, N.C., in the Year 1855, and Arrested April 7th, 1881* (Raleigh, NC: Edwards, Broughton, and Co., 1881).



Figure 6.3. Cover of Edward Crittenden's dime novel *The Entwined Lives of Miss Gabrielle Austin, Daughter of the Late Rev. Ellis C. Austin, and of Redmond, the Outlaw, Leader of the North Carolina "Moonshiners"* (Philadelphia: Barclay & Co., 1879).

In August 1879, *Harper's*, perhaps attempting to capitalize on the popularity of Crittenden's fictional work, printed "Law and Moonshine," an expose on illicit distillers in western North Carolina. Like "The Moonshine Man" and "Up in the Blue Ridge," this work argued that moonshiners were the products of geographical isolation. However, it added a new theme, suggesting that moonshiner violence was also the result of genetics. According to the anonymous author, most mountain whites were not only illicit distillers, but also naturally "wild" and "grotesque." Predisposed to reject authority and to commit violence, they were stubborn individualists who remained loyal to kinfolk and neighbors. "It is impossible," the author explains, "to convince these big-boned, semi-barbarian people that the revenue official who comes with an armed posse into their haunts, searching for and destroying their stills, is not an

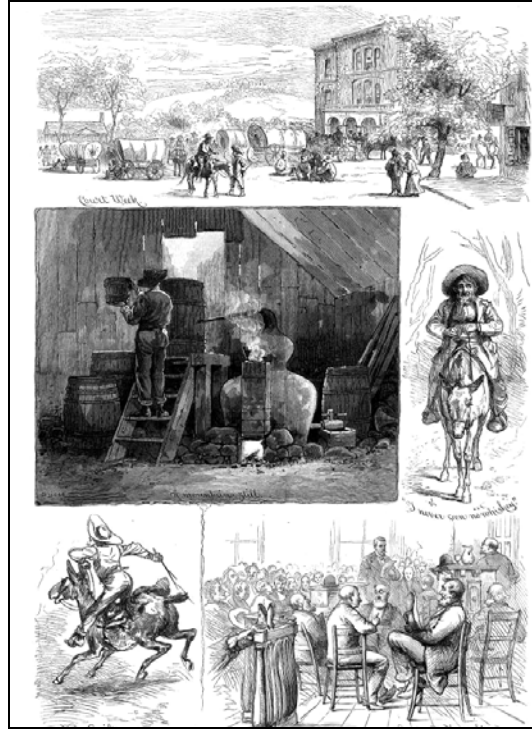


Figure 6.4. “Law and Moonshine,” *Harper’s Weekly* XXIV (August 23, 1879), 667.

emissary of a tyrannical and unjust government, for whom the sly bullet is but too good a welcome.”³¹ “Law and Moonshine” ultimately portrays highlanders as the sole cause for moonshiner violence. Previous works such as “Up in the Blue Ridge” tended to sympathize with the illicit distillers, pointing out that they were sometimes provoked by corrupt agents to commit violence. “Law and Moonshine,” however, places blame squarely on the shoulders of highlanders, whose culture and genetic makeup encourages them to act irrationally and commit violence.

By the 1880s, many journalists and local colorists agreed that moonshining was largely the result of both geographical isolation and genetics. In short, it was one of the “peculiarities” of southern Appalachia. Like other mountain residents, illicit distillers, living “far from all

³¹ [unsigned], “Law and Moonshine,” *Harper’s Weekly* XXIV (August 23, 1879), 667. See also [unsigned], “Moonshiners,” *Harper’s Weekly* XXII (November 2, 1878), 875; and [unsigned], “Moonshiners,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 59 (March 1879), 380-390.



Figure 6.5. “The Moonshiner’s Home,” *Harper’s Weekly* XXX (October 23, 1886), 687.

railroads or civilization of any kind,” remained ignorant and refused to embrace “change.”³² The *Atlantic Monthly* reported in 1882 that moonshining was “partly a feature of the old warfare of the mountaineers against the civilization and the people of the towns.” These “tall, finely-built, powerful, loose-jointed” men were also a breed apart, a distinct, racialized “other” genetically and culturally predisposed to break the law.³³ According to Donald Baines in “Among the Moonshiners” in 1885, illicit distillers in Macon County, North Carolina remained “semi-barbarians,” and as such, knew “no law of right and justice.”³⁴ Inevitably, Baines and other writers pointed out, these traits, along with a fondness for alcohol, made moonshiners and other

³² Louise Coffin Jones, “In the Highlands of North Carolina,” *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine* 32 (October 1883), 385.

³³ “Studies in the South,” *Atlantic Monthly* XLIX (January 1882), 90.

³⁴ Donald Baines, “Among the Moonshiners,” *Dixie* I (August 1885), 10.

“backward” highlanders prone to commit violence.³⁵ To make matters worse, these writers believed that illicit distilling, among other reasons, had encouraged white Appalachians to embrace feuding, a practice that would become synonymous with the region and its people during the late 1880s. Kentucky journalist James Lane Allen explained in 1886:

The special origins of [feuding] are various: blood heated and temper lost under the influence of “moonshine”; reporting on the places and manufacturers of this; local politics; the survival of resentment engendered during the civil war – these, together with all causes that lie in the passions of the human heart and spring from the constitution of all human society, often make the remote and insulated life of these people turbulent, reckless, and distressing.³⁶

Journalists and local colorists, however, argued that mountain residents could find salvation. They insisted that industrialization was the antidote to the region’s economic and social ills. Once again, the moonshiner served as a symbol of what was wrong with southern Appalachia. Like other highlanders, he was the product of a “frontier” environment, one that promoted ignorance, idleness, and violence. But the moonshiner also became a prime example of how “outsiders” could improve mountain society. Education, religion, and above all, economic modernization promised to bring an end to illicit distilling and other “backward” practices that plagued the region. Railroads, factories, and other industrial projects would usher

³⁵ See also Rebecca Harding Davis, “By-Paths in the Mountains, III,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 61 (September 1880), 532-547; Sherwood Bonner, “Jack and the Mountain Pink,” *Harper’s Weekly* (January 29, 1881), 75-77; Sherwood Bonner, “The Case of Eliza Bleylock,” *Harper’s Weekly* (March 5, 1881), 155-157; George W. Atkinson, *After the Moonshiners. By One of the Raiders. A Book of Thrilling* (Wheeling, WV: Frew & Campbell, Steam Book and Job Printers, 1881); Charles Dudley Warner, “On Horseback,” *Atlantic Monthly* XLXI (July 1885), 195-196; Morgan Bates and Elwyn A. Barron, *A Mountain Pink: Realistic Description Among the Moonshiners of North Carolina, a Romantic Drama* (Milwaukee: Riverside Printing Co., 1885); [unsigned], “Home of the Moonshiners,” *Harper’s Weekly* XXX (October 23, 1886), 687-688; and Charles Dudley Warner, “Comments on Kentucky,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 78 (January 1889), 269-271.

³⁶ James Lane Allen, “Through Cumberland Gap on Horseback,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 81 (September 1886), 60.

in a new era of “progress” by discouraging highlanders from engaging in illicit distilling, binge drinking, and violence.³⁷ As Donald Baines concludes in “Among the Moonshiners”:

In a few more years, when the march of progress shall have sounded through these woods and dales the “moonshiners” occupation will be gone, and in his stead we shall find industrious, hard-working farmers, cultivating the rich soil that is now running to waste; the hum of the spindle shall succeed the bubbling of the still, and where now is nought but desolation, squalor and ignorance, there shall be cultivation and plenty, happiness and wealth, education and intelligence.³⁸

In short, Baines and other writers believed that moonshiners and mountain residents alike could become civilized.

While providing capitalists with an excuse to industrialize the region, the creation and acceptance of violent Appalachia during the 1880s also fulfilled middle-class Americans’ need to project their own fears about the future onto a people perceived as different. Although sometimes romanticized, the illicit distiller reminded these Victorians why they had embraced industrialization and “progress.” Isolated from the outside world, he, like most mountain residents, was ignorant, uncivilized, and irrational, all of which had made Appalachia “a community of lawlessness.” Moreover, as historian Jim Klotter has discovered, northerners’ embrace of violent Appalachia allowed them to reunite with the South following Reconstruction. By focusing their attention on moonshining and later feuding in the mountains, middle-class northerners were able to overlook the racial violence that accompanied “redemption” elsewhere in South, thereby making it easier for them to reconcile with their former adversaries.³⁹

It is important to not overstate the postmodern aspect of these arguments. When compared to other parts of the United States, southern Appalachia was more remote and often

³⁷ See Atkinson, *After the Moonshiners*, 15, 28, 32; Davis, “By-Paths in the Mountains, III,” 533; [unsigned], “Home of the Moonshiners,” 687-688; [unsigned], “Studies in the South,” 91; Warner, “Comments on Kentucky,” 270-271; Allen, “Through Cumberland Gap on Horseback,” 66; and *New York Times*, February 2, 1880.

³⁸ Baines, “Among the Moonshiners,” 14.

³⁹ Klotter, “The Black South and White Appalachia,” 832-849. See also Waller, “Feuding in Appalachia,” in *Appalachia in the Making*, 349, 361.

lacked access to railroads. As noted in Chapter 5, moonshiner violence also increased in the region, largely due to Commissioner of Internal Revenue Green Raum's crackdown on illicit distilling during the late 1870s. In other words, journalists and local color novelists did not invent the notion of Appalachian "otherness" and violent Appalachia out of whole cloth. Nonetheless, as Kevin O'Donnell and Helen Hollingsworth have explained, "it is also true that the meaning of the region, in the national consciousness, emerged and was defined in the national magazines."⁴⁰

More significantly, urban middle-class Americans, acting on these images or misconceptions, would embrace the uplift movement of the 1890s. These men and women, mostly northern evangelicals, wanted to improve the economic and moral lives of mountain residents. Klotter and historian Nina Silber argue that this was made possible because of northerners' belief that white mountaineers were "Americans-in-the-making." Disappointed over their failure to uplift African Americans in the South during Reconstruction and concerned about increasing Gilded Age immigration, northern reformers turned their attention to southern Appalachia, a place that they had just recently "discovered." Although primitive, these white mountaineers possessed "qualities which made them capable of uplift and improvement." They had supposedly not only embraced abolitionism and supported the Union during the Civil War, but were also racially pure, the embodiment of "Anglo-Saxonism." "These myths of southern mountain life," Silber concludes, "opened a new path for northern humanitarianism that was far removed from the disturbing racial and social conflicts that held the South in its grip during this troubling period of economic and political turmoil."⁴¹ As Chapter 7 will explain, this uplift

⁴⁰ O'Donnell and Hollingsworth, *Seekers of Scenery*, 27.

⁴¹ Klotter, "The Black South and White Appalachia"; and Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 143-158. See also Nina Silber, "'What Does America Need So Much as Americans?': Race and Northern Reconciliation with Southern Appalachia,

movement, in part a reaction to middle-class Americans' embrace of violent Appalachia, would play an integral role in promoting local prohibition during the 1890s. Of more immediate importance, however, many mountain townspeople, responding to these images, continued to shape perceptions about the region's rural population. These local reformers ultimately joined forces with "outsiders," hoping to rid their communities of alcohol distilling, a "backward" practice that had no place in the burgeoning industrial social order.

Industrialization, Full Speed Ahead

On March 11, 1879, an enthusiastic James W. Wilson, chief engineer and president of the Western North Carolina Railroad (WNCRR), wired Governor Thomas J. Jarvis: "Daylight has entered Buncombe County today: grade and center met exactly."⁴² Wilson and other leaders of the WNCRR had just conquered their greatest challenge: traversing the steep Blue Ridge in order to reach Buncombe and other counties in southwestern North Carolina. After two long years and the loss of some four hundred lives, laborers, mostly convicts using shovel, pick, dynamite, and mule-drawn carts, had finally completed the eleven mile stretch of railroad over and through the mountain from Old Fort to Swannanoa, a village nestled along the western slopes of the Blue Ridge in Buncombe County. Nearly nineteen months later, on October 3, 1880, the WNCRR reached Asheville, where the next phase of construction carried track in two directions, west toward Waynesville in Haywood County and northward to Marshall in Madison County.

The arrival of the WNCRR ushered in an unprecedented era of rapid economic growth in the Carolina highlands. Mountain tourism was the first industry to profit from the railroad. Coinciding with the emergence of a leisured-based Victorian consumer culture in the 1880s, the railroad made it easier for northern and southern middle-class Americans to vacation at mountain

1870-1890," in *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation*, edited by John C. Inscoe (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky), 245-258.

⁴² Van Noppen, *Western North Carolina Since the Civil War*, 251.

resorts. Thousands of wealthy tourists, including George Washington Vanderbilt, the grandson of industrial tycoon Cornelius Vanderbilt, journeyed to the region, where they vacationed and sometimes purchased lands for the construction of large country estates. New resort communities such as Cashiers in Jackson County and Highlands in Macon County sprung up throughout western North Carolina.⁴³ Asheville benefited most from the burgeoning tourist industry. Between 1800 and 1885, the city's population increased from 2,610 to 5,000, while its property values more than quadrupled from \$904,428 in 1880 to \$4,453,234 nine years later.⁴⁴

Like those elsewhere in the South, Ashevilleans and other Carolina highlanders continued to embrace railroad development because they believed that it would promote economic prosperity. According to a Haywood County entrepreneur in 1882, the completion of the WNCRR would allow Waynesville to "compete with Asheville in this unmistakable herald of civilization and sign of progress."⁴⁵ Railroads promised to create what most local boosters now called a New South, one in which tourism, industry, and cheap labor would become the backbone of the region's economy.⁴⁶ "When these lines are completed," a Jackson County resident explained in 1882, "the attention of Northern capitalists will be attracted, and I predict that in twenty five years millions of capital will be invested in Western North Carolina in manufacturing enterprises."⁴⁷ Other mountain residents believed that the railroad was a panacea for their communities' economic woes. In the rural Burke County township of Lower Fork,

⁴³ Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 34.

⁴⁴ *Asheville Citizen*, November 15, 1883, November 13, 1889; and Joan Langley and Wright Langley, *Yesterday's Asheville* (Miami, FL: E.A. Seemann Publishing Inc., 1975), 34.

⁴⁵ *Asheville Semi-Weekly Citizen*, March 18, 1882.

⁴⁶ For more on the New South, see Galvin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy since the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); James C. Cobb, *Industrialization and Southern Society, 1877-1984* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984); Dwight B. Billings, *Planters and the Making of the "New South": Class, Politics, and Development in North Carolina, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970); and C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, September 6, 1882.

farmer N.L. Chapman insisted that “all we need is a railroad through this part of the county, to ship our lumber to market, to make the South Mountain section second to none for its moneyed productions.”⁴⁸

Many western North Carolinians would not be disappointed. By 1890, the western branch of the WNCRR traveled through parts of Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Swain, Graham, and Cherokee counties, while its northern branch extended from Asheville through Marshall in Madison County, ending at Paint Rock on the North Carolina-Tennessee border. In 1886, Polk, Henderson, and Buncombe County residents celebrated the completion of the Spartanburg-Asheville railroad that further linked the region to Columbia, South Carolina. Meanwhile, east of the Blue Ridge, subsidiary railroads reached into the mountain counties of Rutherford, Caldwell, Alexander, Mitchell, Surry, and Wilkes, connecting them to important commercial centers such as Lincolnton, Statesville, Charlotte, and Winston in the piedmont.⁴⁹ The completion of these railways, according to the *Charleston News and Courier* in 1886, had fulfilled the “dream of the dwellers by the seaside and of their friends by the snow line.”⁵⁰ Industrialization, and with it “civilization,” would at last permeate the mountain countryside.

Local boosters once again enticed outsiders to invest capital by insisting that the region abounded in timber and mineral resources. “I will say we have good mountain country,” a Graham County entrepreneur explained in 1882, “well timbered and watered of all countries ... Our lands will produce almost anything that is common to a mountain country.”⁵¹ Two years later, a real estate agent wrote that “Ashe County [was] near the centre of a region rich in

⁴⁸ *Morganton Mountaineer*, July 9, 1884.

⁴⁹ For a discussion on the WNCRR and other railways, see Van Noppen, *Western North Since the Civil War*, 253-268; Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 24-25; Abrams, “The Western North Carolina Railroad, 1855-1894.”

⁵⁰ *Charleston News and Courier*, July 21, 1886.

⁵¹ *Asheville Semi-Weekly Citizen*, July 1, 1882.

minerals – especially mica, copper and silver – timber and water power.”⁵² Perhaps more importantly, manufacturing would prove profitable due to the “abundance and cheapness of white labor” in western North Carolina.⁵³ “Our water power is unlimited, fuel for the steam engine, both wood and coal, are cheap, the cost of living is small and wages, consequently, low – the very conditions necessary to a thriving manufacturing community,” editors of the *Morganton Mountaineer* argued in 1883.⁵⁴ Local boosters agreed that now was the time for outside capitalists to invest their money and resources into the region. “Today,” the *Highlands Blue Ridge Enterprise* read in 1883, “the earnest desire of the residents of every southern town and city is that Northern people may settle among them ... [M]en and capital are wanted to develop the great resources of the country.”⁵⁵ “Manufacturing in ... Western North Carolina is no longer an experiment,” the *Morganton Mountaineer* exclaimed that same year. “Numerous examples of large returns from the capital invested are to be had in neighboring towns and counties, and the capitalist may now enter the manufacturing field with every confidence of success.”⁵⁶

These efforts were successful, largely due to the extension of the WNCRR west of the Blue Ridge. Whereas capital invested in manufacturing increased 54 percent between 1870 and 1880, it rose 186 percent in western North Carolina during the 1880s (see table 6.1). Mountain counties having access to rail lines before or during the early 1880s were the chief beneficiaries of this industrial boom. Out of the sixteen counties that experienced an increase in capital invested in manufacturing, fourteen of them had a railroad before 1886. On the other hand, six

⁵² *Morganton Mountaineer*, July 2, 1884.

⁵³ *Lenoir Topic*, April 18, 1883, quoted in Cotton, “Appalachian North Carolina,” 64.

⁵⁴ *Morganton Mountaineer*, March 31, 1883.

⁵⁵ *Highlands Blue Ridge Enterprise*, March 15, 1883, quoted in Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 31.

⁵⁶ *Morganton Mountaineer*, March 31, 1883.

Table 6.1. Capital Invested in Manufacturing between 1880 and 1890 (in Dollars)

County	1880	1890	%
Rutherford	56,850	513,957	+804
Buncombe	156,035	1,044,316	+569
Macon	15,240	59,380	+290
Cleveland	133,200	517,290	+288
Haywood	30,160	115,335	+282
Clay	4,500	13,173	+193
Caldwell	98,025	280,245	+186
Catawba	168,865	468,079	+177
Alleghany	7,000	18,465	+164
Surry	218,050	525,387	+141
Transylvania	10,000	23,065	+131
Madison	17,500	35,873	+105
Jackson	14,900	27,943	+88
McDowell	41,300	70,592	+71
Burke	61,485	99,982	+63
Henderson	18,925	28,886	+53
Ashe	49,810	47,323	-5
Watauga	23,550	21,970	-6.6
Wilkes	3,550	30,067	-15.3
Alexander	69,072	57,740	-16.4
Mitchell	169,200	134,458	-20.5
Polk	5,800	4,303	-25.8
Yancey	18,940	9,835	-48.1
Cherokee	29,420	11,625	-60.5
Average	60,555	173,303	+186

Source: Swain and Graham not included. *Report on the Manufacturers ... Tenth Census: 1880* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 159-160; and *Report on the Manufacturing Industries ... Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1895), 540-543.

of the eight mountain counties where industrial output declined were without rail service until the late 1880s or 1890s.⁵⁷

More so than those before them, investors from New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and other states built manufacturing facilities and purchased (sometimes illegally) mineral and land rights from mountain residents. Many of these entrepreneurs had become

⁵⁷ The two counties that experienced an increase in capital invested in manufacturing, but did not have access to a rail line were Alleghany and Transylvania. The two counties that experienced a decrease in capital invested in manufacturing, but had access to a rail line were Mitchell and Polk. See State Board of Agriculture, *Hand-Book of North Carolina, with Map of the State* (Raleigh, NC: P.M. Hale, State Printer and Binder, 1886); and State Board of Agriculture, *North Carolina and its Resources* (Winston, NC: M.I. & J.C. Stewart, Public Printers and Binders, 1896).

impressed by the region's economic potential when vacationing at local resorts. Others decided to invest their capital in western North Carolina after reading promotional pamphlets.⁵⁸ West of the Blue Ridge, these men attempted to profit from the area's rich mineral and timber resources by purchasing thousands of acres of land in Jackson, Mitchell, Yancey, Swain, and other counties.⁵⁹ In 1886, for instance, the Scottish Carolina Timber and Land Company, headquartered in Newport, Tennessee, bought over 120,000 acres in Haywood and Madison counties.⁶⁰ East of the Blue Ridge, in Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cleveland, Rutherford, and Surry counties, textile and tobacco factories multiplied as entrepreneurs scrambled to capitalize on the region's cheap labor.⁶¹

The arrival of the railroad and, along with it industrialization, transformed the lives of western North Carolinians, rural and urban alike. The expansion of industrial jobs increasingly drew mountain residents from the countryside to towns, factories, and lumber camps. In 1889, for instance, the textile manufacture Belmont Mills in Shelby boasted over 120 employees, most of whom had lived on farms.⁶² Although becoming dependent on the company that hired them, many of these men and women were eager to leave the countryside. During the 1880s, the average size of mountain farms continued to drop, making it difficult for rural residents, especially young men unable to inherit a sizable amount of land, to achieve economic independence (see table 6.2). Factory, mine, and lumber work promised to give them a steady

⁵⁸ Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 42-53.

⁵⁹ *Asheville Citizen*, March 18, 1882, November 22, 1883; February 23, 1884; *Asheville Semi-Weekly Citizen*, July 1, 1882, September 6, 13, 1882; and *Lenoir Topic*, July 4, 1883.

⁶⁰ Cotton, "Appalachian North Carolina," 57.

⁶¹ Charles J. Presler, Jr., ed., *A History of Catawba County* (Salisbury, NC: Rowan Printing Company, 1954), 359; Lee B. Weathers, *The Living Past of Cleveland County: A History* (Shelby, NC: Star Publishing Co., 1956), 175-177, 182-183; J.G. Hollingsworth, *History of Surry County, or Annals of Northwest North Carolina* (J.G. Hollingsworth, 1935), 159-160; Edward W. Phifer, Jr., *Burke: The History of a North Carolina County, 1777-1920* (Morganton, NC: By Author, 1977), 238-245, 250; *Asheville Citizen*, September 18, 1881, February 15, 1882, *Lenoir Topic*, January 17, 1883, July 4, 1883, September 17, 1884; and *Morganton Mountaineer*, August 11, 1883, November 14, 1883, April 30, July 9, 1884;

⁶² James D. Marler, *Heritage of Cleveland County* (Shelby NC: Cleveland County Historical Association, 1982), 158.

Table 6.2. Percentage Decrease or Increase of Farm Size in Western North Carolina between 1880 and 1890 (in Acres)

County	1880	1890	%
Watauga	156	105	-33
Madison	137	93	-31
Buncombe	133	96	-28
Graham	200	151	-24
Polk	155	121	-22
Cleveland	117	93	-21
Ashe	148	121	-18
Cherokee	190	155	-18
Henderson	121	101	-17
Yancey	135	114	-16
Clay	165	140	-15
Alleghany	164	141	-14
Jackson	159	137	-14
Catawba	127	112	-12
Rutherford	120	106	-12
Surry	131	117	-11
Wilkes	131	116	-11
Caldwell	144	130	-10
Mitchell	104	96	-8
Swain	188	173	-8
Alexander	108	102	-6
Macon	184	173	-6
Burke	112	109	-3
Haywood	126	122	-3
McDowell	122	140	+15
Transylvania	137	194	+42
Average	143	125	-13

Source: *Report on the Productions of Agriculture ... Tenth Census: 1880* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 128-129; and *Report on the Statistics of Agriculture... Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1895), 168, 170.

wage. In fact, by the mid 1880s, this movement away from the countryside had become so prevalent that many highlanders feared for the decline of farming. “[T]oo many of our farmers ... are ... all the time looking for an opening into some other occupation however insignificant,” editors of the *Morganton Star* bemoaned in 1885. “How many of our fathers’ sons ... are willing and eager to leave home and take a little humble position in town for about what they can

eat and wear.”⁶³ A Caldwell County farmer agreed. “There are too many bread eaters growing up and too few farmers,” he complained to the *Lenoir Topic* that same year. “Too many want to [move to towns] and teach school, study law, go around where somebody has the headache and tell them, ‘I’m a doctor and will cure you for so much.’”⁶⁴

County seat towns were the chief beneficiaries of internal migration. Population in these communities rose 101 percent between 1880 and 1890 (see table 6.3). Urban growth was not confined to county seats, however. By 1890, sixty other communities had at least 100 residents. Moreover, these towns were no longer concentrated in the foothills east of the Blue Ridge. In the French Broad Valley, Buncombe, Henderson, and Madison counties boasted eight non-county seat towns with a population of 100 or more residents. Meanwhile, counties north and west of the French Broad Valley supported nineteen towns with at least 100 residents. Overall, by the end of the 1880s, 17 percent of western North Carolinians lived in county seats and other communities with a population of 100 or more residents.⁶⁵

Like those elsewhere in the South, these townspeople continued to adopt the amenities and philosophies of urban America. With the railroad came telegraph and telephone lines, technologies that enhanced existing businesses and kept town folk attuned to national cultural trends. Boosters from Asheville, Waynesville, Jefferson, Lenoir, and other commercial centers scrambled to build paved roads and improve sanitation. Power lines and electric street cars became the symbols of “civilization,” amenities that separated townspeople from their rural neighbors. Nor would hogs and other livestock inhabit the modern landscape. These animals

⁶³ Quoted in Phifer, *Burke*, 225-226.

⁶⁴ *Lenoir Topic*, February 25, 1885.

⁶⁵ Population of non-county seat towns can be found in Branson and Branson, *Branson’s North Carolina Business Directory*, 1889.

Table 6.3. Percentage Increase or Decrease in County Seat Population in Western North Carolina between 1880 and 1890

County Seat	1880	1890	%
Murphy (Cherokee)	170	803	+372
Charleston (Swain)	100	450	+350
Asheville (Buncombe)	2,616	10,235	+291
Hendersonville (Henderson)	554	1216	+119
Marion (McDowell)	372	799	+115
Jefferson (Ashe)	196	413	+111
Waynesville (Haywood)	225	455	+102
Webster (Jackson)	107	209	+95
Columbus (Polk)	131	256	+95
Dodson (Surry)	95	175	+84
Morganton (Burke)	861	1,557	+81
Burnsville (Yancey)	250	450	+80
Taylorsville (Alexander)	167	300	+80
Newton (Catawba)	583	1,038	+78
Wilkesboro (Wilkes)	200	336	+68
Rutherfordton (Rutherford)	512	800	+56
Sparta (Alleghany)	100	148	+48
Brevard (Transylvania)	223	327	+47
Franklin (Macon)	207	281	+36
Boone (Watauga)	325	425	+31
Lenoir (Caldwell)	206	257	+25
Marshall (Madison)	175	203	+16
Hayesville (Clay)	270	311	+15
Bakersville (Mitchell)	815	815	+0
Robbinsville (Graham)	61	60	-2
Shelby (Cleveland)	990	825	-17
Total	11,511	23,144	+101

Source: Whenever possible, I derived the population statistics from the 1880 and 1890 U.S. Censuses. However, to formulate statistics for all of the county seat towns, I had to also use Branson's North Carolina Business Directory. I derived the population figures for Hayesville, Robbinsville, Columbus, Charleston, Boone, Burnsville, Bakersville, and Dodson from the 1884 and 1890 editions of Branson's North Carolina Business Directory. I formulated the population statistics for Taylorsville and Rutherfordton from the 1878 and 1890 editions of Branson's North Carolina Business Directory. I derived the population figures for Sparta from the 1884 edition of Branson's North Carolina Business Directory and the 1890 U.S. Census. I formulated the population statistics for Shelby from the 1880 U.S. Census and the 1890 edition of Branson's North Carolina Business Directory. See Levi Branson, *Branson's North Carolina Business Directory, 1877-1878* (Raleigh, NC: J.A. Jones, 1878); Levi Branson, *Branson's North Carolina Business Directory, 1884* (Raleigh, NC: L. Branson, 1884); and Levi Branson and Myrtle C. Branson, *Branson's North Carolina Business Directory, 1890, Volume VII* (Raleigh, NC: Levi Branson, 1889).

had no place in towns, many businessmen agreed, because they posed a health risk and spoiled “the appearance of our streets.” In 1886, for instance, Buncombe County politicians passed an

ordinance prohibiting free-range livestock in Asheville, hoping, among other reasons, to further rid the city of its rural character.⁶⁶

Priding themselves as refined and cultivated, mountain townspeople also responded unfavorably to the stereotypes that journalists and local color writers had popularized about the region. By the early 1880s, many, if not most, “outsiders” believed that Appalachia and its people were economically, geographically, and culturally at odds with modern America. These misconceptions, according to an Asheville resident in 1882, could not have been farther from the truth. “In the towns,” he pointed out, “is a highly educated and intelligent class, some foreigners, some from other parts of the United States, and some the improved native stock.” That same year, editors of the *Asheville Semi-Weekly Citizen* proudly published a letter from an “intelligent visitor,” who chastised “yankees” for comparing Carolina highlanders to “illiterate” Africans. “I have been surprised to find a people,” he wrote to the newspaper, “shut out from the world as they have been ... so intelligent and intellectual. Many of them are brainy, and their faces would furnish as fine a picture of the Caucasian race ... as can be found anywhere.” Other townspeople fought back by insisting that the region was neither unchurched nor uncivilized. “We venture to say ... that among no people with whom we have had intercourse is the religious element so strong,” the *Asheville Semi-Weekly Citizen* read in 1883. “The mountain people are neither so ignorant nor so irreligious as careless persons pronounce them.”⁶⁷ T.K. Brown from Black Mountain in Buncombe County agreed. “We have a civilized community, we have churches, occasional preaching, and some refined Christian people.”⁶⁸ “Old Hal” from Boone said it best,

⁶⁶ Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 74.

⁶⁷ *Asheville Semi-Weekly Citizen*, April 8, September 6, 1882, January 4, 1883.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, October 25, 1884.

however. “The Watauga people are so quiet and civil,” he wrote to the *Lenoir Topic* in 1885.

“Who would not be proud of our country and her people?”⁶⁹

Moreover, these townspeople rejected the notion of violent Appalachia. As early as 1878, the *Asheville Citizen* criticized the *Cincinnati Enquirer* and other northern newspapers for printing “lies” about the violent nature of mountain residents. Nor did the *Citizen* accept the burgeoning misconception that most Carolina highlanders were moonshiners. In 1879, it scolded *Harper’s Weekly* for printing “Law and Moonshine,” an expose that portrayed both highlanders and moonshiners “as big-boned, semi-barbarian people.” “We want the ignorant Republican moonshiners of our mountains,” the *Citizen* concluded, “to know what their party friends up North think of them.”⁷⁰ Two years later, R.A. Cobb from Morganton chastised Crittenden’s dime novel *The Entwined Lives of Miss Gabrielle Austin and of Redmond* for “grossly libel[ing] the people of my native mountains.” He believed (correctly) that Crittenden’s characterization of Redmond and other mountain residents as blood-thirsty murderers was a “fraudulent hoax.”⁷¹ Upon reading *The Heart of the Alleghenies; or, Western North Carolina* in 1884, Franklin resident J.F. Ray expressed a similar disgust at travel writers Wilbur Zeigler’s and Ben Grosscup’s negative portrayal of mountain residents as ignorant “hillbillies” and moonshiners. “The authors themselves are continually getting in to the habit of expression supposed to be peculiar to the mountain people, such as ‘riled,’ ‘biled,’ ‘toted,’ ‘jined,’ ‘shootin-irons,’ &c,” Ray concluded. “The only hope at present that I can see for the book is in the possibility that it may never be read and therefore never condemned.”⁷²

⁶⁹ *Lenoir Topic*, January 21, 1885. See also *Hendersonville Independent Herald*, May 18, 1882.

⁷⁰ *Asheville Citizen*, November 14, 1878, August 30, 1879. See also *Asheville Citizen*, February 19, 27, 1879.

⁷¹ R.A. Cobb, *The True Life of Maj. Richard Redmond, the Notorious Outlaw and Famous Moonshiner of Western North Carolina: Who was Born in Swain County, N.C., in the Year 1855, and Arrested April 7th, 1881* (Raleigh, NC: Edwards, Broughton & Co., 1881), iv. See also Crittenden, *Entwined Lives*.

⁷² *Asheville Citizen*, February 28, 1884. See also Wilbur G. Zeigler and Ben Grosscup, *The Heart of the Alleghenies; or, Western North Carolina* (Raleigh: A. Williams and Co., 1883).

Although rebuffing negative stereotypes about the region, mountain townspeople helped to perpetuate them. They often admitted that not all Carolina highlanders had conformed to the demands of the new industrialized social order. As the *Asheville Citizen* explained in 1880, “the rural population” continued to spend “the spring and summer months in partial idleness working only to produce enough for their own consumption.”⁷³ According to the *Rutherford Mountain Banner* in 1881, farmers, reluctant to embrace the larger market economy, had failed “to take advantage of and improve the opportunities that are before them.”⁷⁴ The same was true of townspeople. In 1886, a Lenoir resident noted that many denizens there lacked the “energy” necessary to capitalize on the opportunities that industrialization afforded them. “Our young men are growing up in idleness,” he complained. “We, who should be setting before them a more worthy example, are alone to blame.” Nor did he believe that railroads and modern amenities alone would create prosperity.

If we wish to earn a reputation for being wide-awake, progressive citizens, we must do better than we have been doing. By means of the railroad, we have been brought into communication with the outside world, and before many months we shall have added another great factor, in the way of a telegraph line. But all these aids will do us no good if we do not support them.⁷⁵

In short, western North Carolina needed “a population of intelligence, industry, and morality that honor their county and add to its wealth in their character as good and useful citizens.”⁷⁶ Its residents, rural and urban alike, had to accept the values of self-control and hard work.

During the 1880s, local boosters, mostly urban middle-class professionals, continued to argue that alcohol was the leading culprit responsible for highlanders’ apparent inability to adapt to the new economic order. They feared that the “young generation” had fallen victim to

⁷³ *Asheville Citizen*, January 2, 1879.

⁷⁴ *Rutherford Mountain Banner*, August 12, 1881.

⁷⁵ *Lenoir Topic*, March 17, 1886.

⁷⁶ *Asheville Citizen*, November 22, 1883.

“traditional” drinking mores of mountain society, resulting in a rise in crime and violence.⁷⁷ To make matters worse, alcohol consumption discouraged these men and women from embracing the virtues of hard work and frugality. “When [young men] should be at work,” a Lenoir resident complained in 1886, “they spend their time on the street corners, and very often are engaged in disreputable attempts at disturbing the public peace.”⁷⁸ Many local residents warned that the future of western North Carolina (and the United States) was in peril. “Let everyone remember,” the *Blue Ridge Enterprise* read in 1884, “that the hope of the country rests on the rising generation; that its moral and intellectual culture is necessary to preservation of liberty; [and] that liquor is an open enemy to every virtue.”⁷⁹ As Chapter 7 will discuss in more detail, these critiques on alcohol consumption ultimately reflected town boosters’ belief that the “traditional” culture of rural mountain residents impeded economic modernization.

Like “outsiders,” local reformers feared that alcohol manufacturing disrupted social harmony and prevented the region from becoming “civilized.” Many of them argued that legal and illegal distillers encouraged intemperance and lawlessness by defying local-option laws. In 1885, for instance, Samuel T. Kelsey from the resort community of Highlands complained that Macon County moonshiners “come in and sell out their whiskey on the sly, make some of our people drunk, pick quarrels, yell and shoot around the streets after night.” “Highlands,” he continued, “is the best town in the state west of Waynesville and has bright prospects unless the Govt. allows these ‘moonshiners’ to control the country and run good citizens off.”⁸⁰ Two years later, Bakersville residents demanded that “respectable” folk unite and combat illicit distilling, a

⁷⁷ See *Asheville Citizen*, November 4, 1885; *Hickory Western Carolinian*, September 30, 1887; *Highlands Blue Ridge Enterprise*, December 4, 1884; *Morganton Star*, March 27, 1885, August 15, August 22, 1889; and *Lenoir Topic*, October 24, 1883, March 12, 1884, December 9, 1885.

⁷⁸ *Lenoir Topic*, March 17, 1886.

⁷⁹ *Highlands Blue Ridge Enterprise*, December 4, 1884.

⁸⁰ S.T. Kelsey to D.D. Davies, February 26, 1885, Box 97, Year Files, Department of Justice Records.

“curse” which threatened to destroy the community.⁸¹ An unnamed Morganton denizen voiced a similar discontent for the moonshiners. “To say that there are no nuisances in our town and everybody is doing their utmost to build up and improve both its financial and moral condition would be saying an untruth,” he admitted in 1889. “We are sorry to say there are some who take a delight in tearing down and removing every measure that tends to the elevation of our people.” These “evil” men were illicit distillers, who “entrap our young men and draw them down to a drunkard’s grave.”⁸² Morganton minister Robert Abernethy said it best, however. He chastised moonshiners as “low graded, unprincipled radicals [whom] decent, clean, white [men] should consider outside the pale of the human race.”⁸³

By the mid 1880s, the *Lenoir Topic* and *Morganton Star*, both of whom had opposed the Bureau of Internal Revenue and federal liquor taxation, launched a crusade against the moonshiners, blaming them for promoting violence and impeding the region’s economic potential. According to W.W. Scott, editor of the *Topic*, in 1885, moonshiners in Alexander County, ruling “with an iron first” and intimidating local residents, had “ruined and debauched” the community of Duck Creek. “Good people and good citizens,” he continued, “protest and recognize the injury done not only to them and their surroundings but also to the reputation of the locality in which they live.”⁸⁴ Nor were legal distillers immune from the wrath of urban reformers. They also allegedly discouraged capitalists from investing money in a region where intemperance prevailed. The *Morganton Star* explained in 1889: “We talk about developing the great resources of our grand old North State and invite capitalists to come into our midst and tell

⁸¹ *Hickory Western Carolinian*, September 30, 1887.

⁸² *Morganton Star*, July 18, 1889.

⁸³ Quoted in Cotton, “Appalachian North Carolina,” 517.

⁸⁴ *Lenoir Topic*, July 8, July 22, 1885.

them all things are ready, yet when we take a calm survey of our State and find in nearly every locality a 'hell hole' [distillery] ... we find that the ground is not fully prepared.”⁸⁵

For many local reformers, conflict in western North Carolina was not the result of industrialization or the social alterations that accompanied it, but a product of the “traditional” culture of mountain residents. It was the alcohol distiller who emerged as a symbol of what was wrong with Appalachian society. He and other rural highlanders were supposedly the products of isolation and ignorance, “traditionalists” whom urban middle-class residents had to reform. By the end of the 1880s, industrialization, along with the financial backing of northern investors, had allowed these self-proclaimed “respectable” townspeople to become a politically and economically powerful force in mountain society. Like “outsiders,” they soon embraced the uplift movement with the hope that it would eradicate illicit distilling and the “traditional” culture that encouraged it. But the worst was yet to come for liquor manufacturers, who also found themselves under attack from the rural communities that urban reformers (mistakenly) believed supported them.

⁸⁵ Ibid., January 11, 1889.

CHAPTER 7

“AFLOAT ON THE TIDE OF IMPROVEMENT”: THE UPLIFT MOVEMENT AND RISE OF PROHIBITION SENTIMENT IN RURAL COMMUNITIES, 1885-1900

One awful dark and stormy night
I heard and saw an awful sight
Lightening flashed and thunder rolled,
It made me think of my poor soul.
I dashed the drink down and left the place,
And went to seek redeeming grace.¹

Students of alcohol reform have long attempted to explain why a majority of North Carolinians, having rejected it in 1881, embraced state-wide prohibition by the early twentieth century. In 1908, Jesse Boone, editor of the *Waynesville Courier*, offered one of the first explanations. Noting that at least ninety percent of state legislators supported prohibition, he credited this change of opinion to an increase in alcohol consumption. “In 1881, it [prohibition] was before us, it is true,” he explained. “But the drink evil had not reached then the proportions of the present day.”² Other contemporaries in the early 1900s claimed that the rise of prohibition sentiment in North Carolina was largely due to an absence of eastern European immigrants and “the necessity of keeping liquor away from the Negroes.”³ In 1945, historian Daniel Jay Whitener, in the first and only comprehensive study on alcohol reform in the state, argued that most Tar Heels began to favor prohibition as liquor increasingly “flooded” into communities that

¹ “The Drunkard’s Last Drink,” Appalachian folksong, quoted in Florence Cope Bush, *Dorie: Woman of the Mountains* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 17.

² *Waynesville Courier*, April 16, 1908.

³ *Progressive Farmer*, January 23, 1908; *Wilkesboro Chronicle*, March 6, 1908; *Raleigh News and Observer*, January 18, 20, February 9, 23, 1908; and *Presbyterian Standard*, June 3, 1908.

had enacted local-option laws during the late nineteenth century. By 1900, Whitener continued, “prohibition in North Carolina had reached such proportions that the next logical step was to make it state-wide – logical, because a majority of the area and of the people were already under no-license laws and, further, because the licensed traffic was now confined to relatively few places.”⁴

However persuasive these explanations may be, they remain unsatisfying on a number of fronts. First, North Carolina whites had always feared intemperance among African Americans. Nor had a “large drinking foreign element” ever populated the state (if we overlook the arrival of English and Scots-Irish settlers in the region during the eighteenth century). As previously discussed, “native” whites were the leading opponents of anti-alcohol reform throughout the nineteenth century. More importantly, these explanations inadequately demonstrate why rural whites, most of whom had earlier rejected legal prohibition, embraced it by the turn of the twentieth century. Indeed, “dry” forces would not have succeeded without their support. Whitener suggested that rural communities may have accepted prohibition because they believed that it would stop the influx of alcohol coming from “wet towns.” But this is only part of the story.

In his 1990 book *Subduing Satan*, Ted Ownby provided a more complete explanation for the rise of anti-alcohol sentiment in rural or “traditional” communities. He argued that southern evangelicals were responsible for building grassroots support for local and state-wide prohibition during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. According to Ownby, as rural southerners became more connected to the outside world via industrialization, evangelicals feared that the home and church no longer shielded their communities from the “sins” and “impurities” of urban America. They responded to these changes “with a newly aggressive approach to reforming the

⁴ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 154.

sinner of the world.” By embracing local-option, anti-swearing, and gun control laws, rural evangelicals extended their authority over all southerners and stamped out important elements of traditional “male culture” such as drinking, which they feared corrupted the morals of society at large. “The southern male who had once raised his hell, laughing at churchgoers while perhaps fearing occasionally for the state of his soul,” Ownby concluded, “now faced laws prohibiting much of his pursuit of pleasure.”⁵

More recently, William Link, in *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, has argued that the emergence of prohibition sentiment during the late nineteenth century “constituted a fundamental alteration of southern public opinion.” Before 1880, Link posited that southern reformers, mostly middle-class townspeople, emphasized the negative impact that alcohol had on the breakdown of one’s character. “The power and appeal of the temperance movement during the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s lay in its promise of cultural isolation,” he explained. “Mid-nineteenth-century temperance advocates stressed individual redemption, usually of male drinkers.” During the 1880s, however, these reformers, led by northern missionaries, broadened their critique of intemperance by accentuating the dangers that alcohol posed to society as a whole. They also began to condemn the sellers and makers of alcohol for promoting corruption, crime, and disorder. By emphasizing the “wider, systemic consequences” of alcohol culture, Link concluded that reformers ultimately convinced rural southern males to reject moral suasion and embrace legal prohibition as the only means of eradicating “King Alcohol.”⁶

Although persuasive, these analyses also remain unsatisfying. Ownby, for instance, inadequately explains why southern non-evangelicals came to embrace legal prohibition after

⁵ Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 167-193, 207-209.

⁶ William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 37-48.

most had so adamantly opposed it throughout the nineteenth century. Moreover, he neglects to chronicle intrachurch tensions over the issue of anti-alcohol reform. Link's conclusions also warrant reconsideration. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, since at least the 1830s, reformers in western North Carolina had argued that alcohol not only destroyed the individual, but also impeded the community's economic and moral prosperity. Nor had antebellum mountain prohibitionists absolved the sellers and makers of alcohol, blaming them for instigating crime and violence. In other words, the rhetoric of reformers remained consistent between the antebellum and post-bellum periods.

Ownby, Link, and other scholars ultimately downplay the important role that industrialization played in encouraging a majority of rural residents to support local and state-wide prohibition. Beginning in the 1880s, a growing number of "traditional" communities in the Carolina highlands (and other parts of the South) became more connected to the larger market economy, largely due to the rise of industrial capitalism and urbanization. As Ownby pointed out, mountain evangelicals, unable to protect the home and church from the "male culture" in town centers, responded by embracing anti-alcohol reform. But evangelicals' appeal for prohibition would not have gained widespread currency without the emergence of new economic forces. The same is true of northern missionaries' and local reformers' demand for anti-alcohol legislation. Their critique of alcohol culture would become accepted largely because it made practical sense to rural mountain men who, adapting to a changing economic environment, discovered that "traditional" drinking mores made a poor fit with the exigencies of life under the burgeoning industrial order. Unfortunately for the moonshiners, these men ultimately sided with their urban middle-class counterparts.

The Uplift Movement: Anti-Alcohol Reform From Above

“Whether this people shall arise to a level with the rest of our country depends largely upon our efforts.” So wrote Ellen Myers in “The Mountain Whites of the South” in 1885, pleading with members of the American Missionary Association (A.M.A.) to uplift the people of Appalachia. In 1882, Myers and her husband, working as missionaries for the A.M.A., had arrived to eastern Kentucky, where they “discovered” a land of ignorance and violence. “More than half of the adult population cannot read and write,” Ellen explained three years later in the *American Missionary*. “The school-houses are the merest log-cabins, with puncheon benches without backs or desks.” To make matters worse, mountain children were “left to amuse themselves, and listen to idle men bragging about how they can ‘drop [or shoot] their man every time.’ They drink in these tales of brutality, mistaking them for chivalry, till their chief desire is to become the possessor of a revolver.” Nonetheless, Myers remained optimistic about the future. “We hold in our own hands the answer to the problem,” she concluded. “The children must be brought up differently from their parents. Education and practical religion must be gotten to the masses.”⁷

Myers’s description of mountain whites would not have surprised most Victorian Americans. Since the late 1870s, journalists and local color novelists had popularized negative stereotypes about southern Appalachia and its people. Myers simply confirmed these misconceptions by portraying the region as backward and uncivilized. More so than local colorists, however, she and other reformers, mostly northern missionaries and local middle-class townspeople, felt compelled to help assimilate the people of Appalachia into “mainstream” society. These men and women by the 1880s believed that mountain whites, unlike blacks, could

⁷ Ellen Myers, “The Mountain Whites of the South,” *American Missionary* 39 (January 1885), quoted in Richard B. Drake, ed., “Documents Relating to the Mission to Appalachia,” *Appalachian Notes* 3 (3rd Quarter, 1975), 36-38.

be “modernized,” “Christianized,” and “Americanized.” Having (supposedly) remained loyal to the Union during the Civil War and being of “pure Anglo-Saxon stock,” they were worthy of mission work. For Myers and other missionaries, it was their duty to uplift the mountain people through education and social services.

After 1885, northern religious societies increasingly embraced the uplift movement. Along with the A.M.A., the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. played an important role in organizing schools and churches throughout southern Appalachia. In fact, between 1885 and 1895, Presbyterians founded thirty-one missionary schools in the mountain region. Ten years later, that number had increased to sixty-five, with an enrollment of 8,478 students. The Protestant Episcopal Church followed suit in 1889, starting a mission in the Ragged Mountains of Virginia. By 1908, the Episcopal dioceses of North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, and West Virginia had established schools and churches in their highland districts. During the early 1890s, the Methodist Episcopal Church, North, also began mountain mission work.⁸

As elsewhere in southern Appalachia, northern Presbyterians initiated the uplift movement in western North Carolina. In 1877, Rev. L.M. Pease, founder of the Five Points mission in New York City, retired to Asheville. There, he became “interested in the plight of little mountaineer girls” and opened a school for their benefit. In 1887, he donated this school to the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions, which subsequently organized the Home Industrial School in Asheville.⁹ That same year, Ohio native Rev. Luke Donald founded a mission school

⁸ Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 55-56; Richard Drake, “The Mission School Era in Southern Appalachia: 1880-1940” *Appalachian Notes* 6 (1978), 4; Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterian Missions in the Southern United States* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1934), 224-228; Elizabeth R. Hooker, *Religion in the Highlands: Native Churches and Missionary Enterprises in the Southern Appalachian Area* (New York: Home Missions Council, 1933), 199-202; and Samuel H. Thompson, *The Highlanders of the South* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1910), 66-67.

⁹ Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 54-55; Van Noppen, *Western North Carolina Since the Civil War*, 159; John Preston Arthur, *Western North Carolina: A History* (Raleigh, NC: Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1914), 439.

at Hot Springs in Madison County. Donald, who had presided over the Scotia Seminary for African American women in Cabarrus County, North Carolina for twenty years, moved to Hot Springs in 1886, where he “discovered” that “a large portion of the adult population can neither read nor write.” “There are grades of intelligence and refinement from the highest to the lowest, but the stranger passing through wonders how human beings can exist in so low and degraded a state,” Dorland explained to friends in Ohio. “They have no hope and they need light.” With the financial support of the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions, he established the Dorland Institute in 1887 to improve “the low and degraded condition of the mountaineers.”¹⁰

Mission work in western North Carolina (and other parts of southern Appalachia) accelerated during the 1890s. By the end of that decade, the the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. had established churches and schools in Ashe, Buncombe, Henderson, Burke, Transylvania, Haywood, Cherokee, Jackson, Watauga, and Graham counties.¹¹ It also initiated the handicraft revival, hoping to make the lives of mountain women less “dull and monotonous.” In 1895, Frances L. Goodrich, a Presbyterian missionary working at Brittain’s Cove in Madison County received a hand-made coverlet from a local resident. Realizing that these coverlets would appeal to urban consumers, she founded Allenstand Cottage Industries in 1897. This mission, she believed, would not only “save from extinction the old-time crafts,” but also impart the “habits

¹⁰ Jacqueline Burgin Painter, *The Season of Dorland-Bell: History of an Appalachian Mission School* (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1996), 16-17; Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 55; Samuel Tyndale Wilson, *The Southern Mountaineers* (New York: Literary Department, Presbyterian Home Missions, 1906), 130; and *Bryson City Times*, April 3, 1896

¹¹ Conrad Ostwalt and Phoebe Pollitt, “The Salem School and Orphanage: White Missionaries, Black School,” in Inscocoe, *Appalachians and Race*, 235-258; Wellman, *Kingdom of Madison*, 115-117; Clifford R. Lovin, “Religion” in *History of Jackson County*, 261; Van Noppen, *Western North Carolina Since the Civil War*, 80-81; Wilson, *The Southern Mountaineers*, 130-131, 162; Edward Marshall Craig, *Highways and Byways of Appalachia: A Study of the Work of the Synod of Appalachia of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Kingsport, TN: Kingsport Press, 1927), 36-41, 74-78; Fletcher, *Ashe County*, 174-175; H. Paul Douglas, *Christian Reconstruction in the South* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1909), 356-358; and R.P. Smith, *Some Results of the Mission Work in Western North Carolina* (Asheville, NC: Home Mission Committee of the Asheville Presbytery, 1905), 7-14.

of thrift and industry” to mountain women employed in it.¹² Meanwhile, northern Episcopalians, establishing the Missionary District of Asheville in 1895, resumed their antebellum missionary work in the Carolina highlands, founding schools in Buncombe, Watauga, and other counties.¹³ Nondenominational organizations also lent a helping hand. By the early 1890s, the Philadelphia-based Needlework Guild of America and Boston-based Flower Mission Association had begun to operate missions throughout the region.¹⁴

Typical among these northern reformers was Susan Guion Chester. Born in 1868, Susan was the daughter of Charles T. Chester, a warden of the St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Englewood, New Jersey. In 1884, Susan entered Vassar College, located in Poughkeepsie, New York, where she served as president of her class and became active in the YMCA and Students’ Association. Like many middle-class women at Vassar and other colleges, she found employment opportunities in the burgeoning social service movement. Upon graduating in 1888, Susan worked in Bishop Whitaker’s School for Girls in Nevada. She soon became interested in Appalachian mission work, however, having heard of the “plight” of mountain whites. In the early 1890s, Susan moved to western North Carolina, where she labored at an Episcopal mission at Grace in Buncombe County. Shortly thereafter, she joined the “Flower Mission of Asheville” and Needlework Guild, eventually becoming president of both in late 1892.¹⁵

¹² Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 151-152; Jane S. Becker, *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 63-66; Allen H. Eaton, *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1937), 64-68; and Frances Goodrich, *Mountain Homespun* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1931), 21-23.

¹³ David E. Whisnant, “Susan G. Chester and the Log Cabin Settlement: First Social Settlement Institution in the Southern Mountains,” 15-16, David Eugene Whisnant Papers, SHC; Michael C. Hardy, *A Short History of Old Watauga County* (Boone, NC: Parkway Publishers, Inc., 2005), 112; Fletcher, *Ashe County*, 179-180; and *Morganton Herald*, January 5, 1899.

¹⁴ Whisnant, “Susan G. Chester and the Log Cabin Settlement,” 17; and *Asheville Weekly Citizen*, April 14, June 16, July 14, 1892.

¹⁵ Whisnant, “Susan G. Chester and the Log Cabin Settlement,” 7-8.

Like Myers and other northern missionaries, Chester quickly became alarmed at the apparent lack of morals and civility among the rural mountain populace. Writing to the *Philadelphia Church Standard* in 1893, she claimed that over 300,000 Carolina highlanders existed “in total ignorance of all that serves to make life really worth living and seemingly devoid of a desire to rise above the level of the animal.” She continued, “Dark, far darker than I would willingly paint them, are the cabin homes of a vast number of mountaineers, but it is the vice of ignorance, the isolation of generations.” Susan attempted to combat these “dark” conditions by founding the Log Cabin Settlement sometime before 1895. The first of its kind in southern Appalachia, Susan believed that this social settlement would provide education and industrial training to “ignorant” mountain residents. “Let us keep in mind,” she concluded in 1893, “that this [settlement] movement is but one phase of the great awakening of our times to the needs of humanity.”¹⁶

Whether establishing social settlements, missionary churches, or industrial schools, Chester and other reformers sought to alter the “traditional” culture of mountain whites, which they perceived as alien and malleable. Among other things, these missionaries bemoaned Appalachians’ supposed love for alcohol because they believed that it promoted idleness, ignorance, and heathenism. In 1891, for instance, the *American Missionary* claimed that eastern Tennesseans often “ran off preachers” by “cuttin’ up, drinkin’ and shootin’” at evangelical revivals. Nor did mountain residents “correctly” observe Christmas, preferring to celebrate that holiday by becoming intoxicated. Even more disturbing for northern reformers was the negative impact that alcohol had on the mountain family. During the 1890s, missionaries reported that mountain men frequently engaged in binge drinking, encouraged their children to consume

¹⁶ *Philadelphia Church Standard*, June 17, 1893; and Whisnant, “Susan G. Chester and the Log Cabin Settlement,” 7-8, 12-13, 15-26.

alcohol “at a very tender age,” and “unmercifully” beat their wives. According to one social worker, these drunken fathers “did not want their children to go to school lest they themselves would have to do a little work.” “It is wonderful what these women and children can endure and yet live,” the missionary concluded. “All this misery comes from ignorance and whiskey, neither of which could continue to exist if the Christian people of the country knew of these wretched conditions.”¹⁷

Northern missionaries insisted that mountain residents’ inherent fondness for alcohol also encouraged violence and moonshining. As missionary D.L. Pierson described Madison County’s rural populace in 1897, “Extreme poverty and the fact that they look upon whiskey as one of the necessities of life, lead many mountaineers into the illicit and dangerous business of making ‘blockade’ whiskey.” Like other missionaries, Pierson believed that moonshining had destroyed the morals of Appalachian society. “According to their own peculiar criminal code,” she chastised mountain whites, “robbing the government of revenue taxes is a clever trick, and killing a revenue officer is a brave act of self-defense.” Moreover, Pierson insisted that moonshining contributed to feuding, a (supposedly) “traditional” mountain practice that had begun to capture the imagination of Victorian Americans during the late 1880s.¹⁸ “The betrayal of a secret ‘still’ is a heinous crime,” she explained. “Feuds for generations arise from such betrayals.”¹⁹

That Pierson and other reformers focused on alcohol and illicit distilling as cultural causes of mountain whites’ inability to become “civilized” is not surprising. Since the late

¹⁷ “Report from the Mountain Schools,” *American Missionary* 44 (June 1890), 184; “Among the Great Smoky Mountains,” *American Missionary* 45 (March 1891), 96; “Seeking in the Wilderness,” *American Missionary* 45 (March 1891), 99; “From the Mountains,” 48 (June 1894), 235; Miss Kate C. La Grange, “Big Creek Seminary, Tenn.,” *American Missionary* 53 (October 1899), 124; and D.L. Pierson, “The Mountaineers of Madison County, N.C.” *Missionary Review of the World* 10 (November 1897), 825.

¹⁸ See Waller, “Feuding in Appalachia,” 347-376.

¹⁹ Pierson, “The Mountaineers of Madison County, N.C.,” 824-825.

1870s, journalists and local color novelists had popularized southern Appalachia as a land of intemperance and moonshining. These writers continued to shape middle-class America's perception of the region during the 1890s. The publication of Mary N. Murfree's "The Moonshiners at Hoho-Hebee Falls" in 1893 and other moonshiner stories increased urbanites' fascination with illicit distilling and reinforced their belief that most mountain residents were moonshiners.²⁰ Many of these works also served to stimulate the uplift movement. Missionary Margaret Johann's "A Little Moonshiner," published in 1897 in the *Christian Observer*, for instance, chronicles the rescue of a rural mountain girl from poverty and ignorance. Living in a crude cabin, "built of logs, and the branches of trees, and clay," the girl one day accompanies her father, whom revenueurs had arrested for illicit distilling, to the town of Marshall in Madison County. There, she becomes dumbfounded, having never before seen windows, ceiled walls, and trains. Fortunately, a town resident helps the "poor little thing" by convincing the community to construct a new cabin for her father. "The place is a little nearer to civilization than the old cabin, but yet it's wild enough to be homelike to them," the narrator concludes. "As for the father ... he'll go at some legitimate work – tobacco raising perhaps."²¹

Johann's "A Little Moonshiner" reflected northern missionaries' views on the dangers of illicit distilling. Like journalists and local colorists, they feared that this profession, a product of geographical isolation and "traditional" folkways, prevented rural whites from embracing wage

²⁰ Mary F. Murfree, "The Mountaineers at Hoho-Hebee Falls," *Harper's Weekly* (September 23, 30, 1893); Will Allen Dromgoole, *Spurrier with the Wildcats and Moonshiners* (Nashville, Tenn.: University Press, 1892); William M. Brewer, "Moonshining in Georgia," *Cosmopolitan* 12 (June 1897), 127-134; Francis Lynde "The Moonshiners of Fact" *Lippincott's Magazine* 57 (January 1896), 66-76; Emil O. Peterson, "A Glimpse of the Moonshiners," *Chautauquan* 26 (November 1897), 178-182; B. G. McFall, *Among the Moonshiners, or, A Drunkard's Legacy: A Temperance Drama in Three Acts* (Clyde, Ohio: Ames, 1897); Bernard Francis Moore, *The Moonshiner's Daughter: A Play of Mountain Life in Three Acts* (Boston: Walter H. Baker & Co., 1898); Will Allen Dromgoole, *A Moonshiner's Son* (Philadelphia: The Penn Publishing Company, 1898); "North Carolina Romance," *New York Times*, December 25, 1898; C.W. Waite, *Among the Moonshiners* (New York: F.T. Neely, 1899); J.C.L. Harris, "A True Story of Life Among the Moonshiners of the Blue Ridge," *Raleigh News and Observer*, January 19, 1899; Samuel G. Blythe, "Raiding Moonshiners" *Munsey's Magazine* 25 (June 1901), 418-24; and Leonidas Hubbard, Jr., "The Moonshiner at Home" *Atlantic Monthly* 90 (August 1902), 234-41.

²¹ Margaret Johann, "A Little Moonshiner," *Christian Observer* 85 (July 21, 1897), 700-701.

labor, commercial agriculture, and other “civilized” pursuits. Even more distressing, illicit distilling victimized mountain children, who, mired in poverty, remained ignorant of the outside world. But, as Johann emphasized in “A Little Moonshiner,” these unfortunate families could find salvation. With the help of urban philanthropists, moonshiners would receive an education, embrace Christianity, learn new job skills, and ultimately participate in the larger market economy. Above all, they would stop distilling alcohol, a backward practice that had impeded the economic and moral development of mountain society.

With these goals in mind, northern relief societies increasingly sought to uplift Appalachian moonshiners through education, “proper” religious instruction, and coercion. Beginning in the early 1890s, the A.M.A. instructed missionaries to help illicit distillers, most of whom lived in “wickedness” and “semi-barbarism,” by setting up “outposts” and providing them with “spiritual” guidance.²² Members of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. also lent a helping hand. During the late 1890s, Rev. E. Mac Davis, a member of the Asheville Presbytery, traveled throughout western North Carolina, where he asked moonshiners to cease manufacturing alcohol. When these pleas fell on deaf ears, Davis took more drastic measures by accompanying revenue agents on raids and petitioning the General Assembly to ban whiskey distilling.²³

During the 1890s, these northern missionaries also worked with local residents, mostly middle-class townspeople, to promote anti-alcohol reform in southern Appalachia. Although denying claims that the region was “uncivilized,” many urban Carolina highlanders continued to admit that the “majority” of rural residents were not “prosperous and cultured.”²⁴ Like

²² “A Mountain Evangelist,” *American Missionary* 45 (March 1891), 94; “Horse Needed,” *American Missionary* 48 (March 1894), 135; “From the Mountains,” 235; and La Grange, “Big Creek Seminary,” 124.

²³ Mac E. Davis, *Home Mission Experiences in the Mountains of North Carolina* (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, 1903), 9-13; and *Asheville Semi-Weekly Citizen*, February 12, 1901,

²⁴ J.T. Wilds, “The Mountain Whites of the South,” *Missionary Review* 12 (December 1895), 923; *Waynesville Courier*, March 5, 1897; Robert F. Campbell, *Mission Work Among the Mountain Whites in Asheville Presbytery*,

“outsiders,” these reformers argued that geographical isolation and “primitive” agricultural practices had conspired against “this less fortunate class.”²⁵ They also blamed the “traditional” drinking mores of rural mountain whites for promoting ignorance and poverty. In 1892, for instance, Buncombe County native Cornelius Miller Pickens feared that the lack of “refinement” among highlanders was largely due to their inherent love of alcohol. “I don’t believe the whiskey question has ever been talked much here,” he wrote in his diary after delivering a temperance lecture in Polk County. “People need education on the subject ... I don’t understand why people get so far behind.” Nor had rural whites stopped distilling alcohol. “I am sorry to say this,” Pickens complained, “[but] Polk County has seventeen government distilleries in it, and it is the smallest county in the state.”²⁶

Rev. Robert F. Campbell of the First Presbyterian Church of Asheville, who counted himself as a proud “mountain white,” agreed. While defending the region from “sweeping and indiscriminate statements,” Campbell revealed that a large number of rural residents lived in “ignorance, misery, and vice.” “Our evangelists found numbers of homes without a lamp, a candle, a comb, a looking-glass, and similar articles of civilized life,” he admitted in 1899. “Many of the people had never seen a town, and the buggy in which the evangelists traveled was in some places considered a great curiosity.” Campbell chastised the drinking habits of rural whites for encouraging poverty and indolence. He believed that most men lacked any sense of a work ethic, spending their time hunting, fishing, moonshining, and “imbibing the blood of John Barleycorn.” Alcohol had also taken its toll on young men, most of whom had “reached the

North Carolina (Asheville, NC: The Citizen Co., 1899), 1; *Lenoir Topic*, March 23, 1892; and *Morganton Herald*, April 27, 1899.

²⁵ *Waynesville Chronicle*, April 29, 1891, April 14, 1892; *Morganton Herald*, April 28, 1892; *Franklin Press*, March 4, 1891; *Lenoir Topic*, September 17, 1890, September 23, 1891, August 23, 1893; July 24, 1895, January 17, 1898; and *Lenoir Semi-Weekly News*, July 3, 1900.

²⁶ Cornelius Miller Pickens, July 5, 1892, Rev. Cornelius Miller Pickens Diary, 1892-1901, Special Collections, Duke University.

summit of [their] ambition” once they owned a dog and gun, “learned to pick the banjo,” and possessed “a bottle of whiskey.”²⁷

Campbell and other reformers, however, agreed that their rural brethren, although primitive, were good people whose folkways had prevented them from becoming “civilized.” “We cannot fail to love this land of beauty nor to appreciate the high and noble qualities of its dear people,” E.G. Prudden from Blowing Rock in Watauga County reminded missionaries in 1892. “Their patient endurance of deprivation and trial calls forth our warmest sympathies.”²⁸ It was in part for this reason that many urban highlanders embraced the uplift movement of the 1890s. Allying with northern missionaries and philanthropists, local reformers intensified efforts at altering the behavior of rural mountain whites. During the 1890s and early 1900s, they attempted to rid the countryside of lawlessness and vice by supporting gun control and anti-swearing legislation.²⁹ These men and women also sought to eradicate “King Alcohol” because they perceived it as a central cause of poverty, ignorance, and violence.

Many mountain townspeople saw the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) as an important vehicle for promoting anti-alcohol reform throughout the region.³⁰ Founded in Ohio in the mid 1870s, the W.C.T.U. established its first chapter in western North Carolina in

²⁷ Campbell, *Mission Work Among the Mountain Whites in Asheville Presbytery*, 5.

²⁸ *Lenoir Topic*, March 23, 1892.

²⁹ *North Wilkesboro News*, September 19, 1895; *Lenoir Topic*, August 21, October 23, 1895; *Franklin Press*, January 23, 1901; *Raleigh News and Observer*, February 22, 1903; *Lenoir News*, December 6, 1907; *Morganton News-Herald*, November 21, 1907; and *Waynesville Courier*, January 16, May 21, 1908.

³⁰ For more on the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, see Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism*; Jonathan Zimmerman, *Distilling Democracy: Alcohol Education in America’s Public Schools, 1880-1925* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999); Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady from Pedestal to Politics, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Jean F. Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelicalism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University, 1981); Carol Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998); and Ruth Bordin, *Women and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981).

Asheville in 1883.³¹ By the 1890s, mountain women, most of whom were probably members of the urban middle-class, had organized chapters in Dillsboro, Highlands, Newton, Wilkesboro, Waynesville, Hickory, and Morganton. These W.C.T.U. reformers prided themselves as being part of the uplift movement. They allied with the “Flower Mission of Asheville” and other northern-based benevolent societies by co-sponsoring temperance speeches, picnics, and rallies.³² W.C.T.U. workers, often receiving financial support from local businessmen, denounced the drinking habits of mountain whites, blaming them for perpetuating laziness, immorality, and lawlessness. “Having fought intemperance in [Ohio] for 2 years, we sought Highlands for rest, amidst its mountains, to find the peace befitting the grandeur and beauty of its scenery,” northern migrant and W.C.T.U. member Mrs. Hunt explained in 1883. “But alas! The trail of the serpent is over even this sequestered spot, and the holy calm of Nature is rudely disturbed by the ribald song of the drunkard.”³³ A “native” mountain resident and secretary of the Dillsboro W.C.T.U. in Jackson County, Lela Potts, agreed. In 1891, she feared that many local whites were unwilling to part ways with “the greatest evil in our land” and had chosen “vice and immorality” over “a higher and nobler civilization.”³⁴

Like northern missionaries, Potts and other local W.C.T.U. members sought to alter the behavior of mountain whites through education and religion. Believing that it was too late to reform adults, the society focused considerable attention on shaping the “intellectual develop” of young people. In Dillsboro and other communities, it sponsored contests where girls won prizes for writing the best essays on temperance, while encouraging mountain children to join the

³¹ J.D. Eggleston, *Asheville and Vicinity* (Atlanta, GA: Franklin Printing and Publishing Co., 1896), 23.

³² *Blue Ridge Enterprise*, February 15, 1883; *Hickory Press and Carolinian*, November 17, 1887; *Tuckaseige Democrat*, July 16, 1890, September 23, 1891, February 21, April 23, May 30, 1895, *Asheville Weekly Citizen*, December 13, 1891, June 16, July 14, August 18, 1892; *Hickory Western Carolinian*, September 23, 1887; *Wilkesboro Chronicle*, April 30, June 4, 1896; and *Asheville Semi-Weekly Citizen*, April 16, 1901.

³³ *Blue Ridge Enterprise*, February 15, 1883.

³⁴ *Tuckaseige Democrat*, September 23, 1891.

organization's "Loyal Temperance Union" and participate in temperance parades. At one such parade in 1892, 150 boys and girls marched down the streets of Waynesville, wearing temperance badges and carrying banners that read "Tremble king alcohol, for we shall grow up."³⁵ The W.C.T.U. also saw public schools as vehicles for promoting anti-alcohol reform in more rural communities. As early as 1887, Buncombe and Catawba County members petitioned legislators to require schools to teach students about the harmful "effects of alcohol upon the human system."³⁶ Their entreaties were not in vain, and in 1891, the North Carolina General Assembly (without a dissenting vote) passed a law requiring scientific temperance instruction in public schools.³⁷

As Link and other scholars have demonstrated, the W.C.T.U., Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., and other northern-based benevolent societies played an important role in perpetuating anti-alcohol sentiment in the rural South at the turn of the twentieth century. In western North Carolina, these missionaries, working closely with local middle-class townspeople, convinced many rural whites to embrace temperance reform and accept governmental compulsion by emphasizing the negative impact that alcohol had on society as a whole. Local manufacturers also joined the cause and refused to hire men who drank alcohol during and after work.³⁸ Many reformers sincerely wanted to save mountain people from their perceived social ills. Others used anti-alcohol reform as a mechanism of social control, insisting that "traditional" drinking mores encouraged rural whites to resist wage labor and capitalism. Either way, these reformers ultimately downplayed industrialization's negative impact on mountain society. Conflict in

³⁵ *Asheville Weekly Citizen*, July 14, 1892; *Wilkesboro Chronicle*, April 30, 1896; and *Tuckaseige Democrat*, July 16, 1890.

³⁶ Petitions of the W.C.T.U. in regard to regulating instruction in public schools, January-March 1887, Petitions, General Assembly Session Records, NCDAH.

³⁷ *Laws of North Carolina* (1891), 154. The law also stipulated that teachers were required to pass an examination on these subjects, and failure to teach them was cause for dismissal. For a discussion on the WCTU's campaign for scientific temperance instruction, see Zimmerman, *Distilling Democracy*.

³⁸ *Wilkesboro Chronicle*, October 7, 1903.

Table 7.1. Percentage Increase of Population and Churches in Western North Carolina between 1870 and 1890

	1870	1890	%
Population	196,398	336,940	+72
Churches	802	1,634	+104

Source: Robert P. Porter, *Report on Population of the United State at the Eleventh Census: 1890, Part I* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1895), 33-34; Francis A. Walker, *The Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Ninth Census: 1870, Volume I* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 549-550; and Henry K. Carroll, *Report on Statistics of Churches in the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894), 74-75.

southern Appalachia was not the product of economic exploitation, they believed, but rather the result of a “backward” culture that required reforming.

Scholars, however, have overemphasized the influence that the uplift movement had on shaping the anti-alcohol movement in southern Appalachia. Census data suggests that western North Carolina society was already becoming “civilized” before the arrival of most missionaries in the 1890s. Capital invested in manufacturing had increased 186 percent during the 1880s, facilitating the expansion of industrial capitalism and urbanization throughout the Carolina highlands (see table 6.1). The mountain region also experienced a boom in churches before the 1890s. Between 1870 and 1890, for instance, the number of churches in western North Carolina increased 104 percent, while the region’s population rose 72 percent (see table 7.1). When compared to the state as a whole, the mountain region’s aggregate population-church ratio of 296:1 was also slightly lower by 1890 (see table 7.2). Nor did western North Carolina lag behind the rest of the state in education. In fact, the number of children attending common schools in the Carolina highlands increased at a greater rate than elsewhere in the state between 1870 and 1890 (see table 7.3). More importantly, by the end of the 1880s, prohibition sentiment in western North Carolina had shifted from urban centers to the countryside. Between 1881 and 1889, of the 175 known places that enacted local-option laws, 101 (or 58 percent) of them were

in non-county seat townships or in communities with fewer than 100 residents, an increase of 248 percent from the previous decade (see table 7.4).

Table 7.2. Aggregate Population-Church Ratio in the Mountain Region Compared to North Carolina as a Whole in 1890

	Population	Churches	Ratio
WNC	336,940	1,634	206:1
NC	1,281,007	5,190	247:1

Source: Porter, *Report on Population of the United State at the Eleventh Census: 1890*, 33-34; and Carroll, *Report on Statistics of Churches in the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1900*, 74-75.

Table 7.3. Percentage Increase of Children Attending Common Schools in Western North Carolina Compared to the State as a Whole between 1870 and 1890

	1870	1890	%
WNC	13,855	68,313	+393
NC	40,013	138,521	+246

Source: University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, *United States Census Data Browser*, 1870 and 1890 censuses.

Table 7.4. Percentage Increase of Rural Places that Enacted Local-Option in Western North Carolina between 1881 and 1889 Compared to the Previous Decade

	Rural	Urban	% Rural	% Urban
1871-1879	29	77	.27	.73
1881-1889	101	74	.58	.42

Source: In western North Carolina, 255 churches, schools, and industrial facilities enacted local-option between 1881 and 1890. I was unable to determine the exact location of 80 of them. See *Laws of North Carolina* (1872-1873), 60-61, 108-109, 285-289; *Laws of North Carolina* (1873-1874), 216-225; *Laws of North Carolina* (1874-1875), 125-126, 184-185, 319-321; *Laws of North Carolina* (1876-1877), 179-180, 481-483; *Laws of North Carolina* (1881), 442-449; *Laws of North Carolina* (1883), 263-268, 443, 470; *Laws of North Carolina* (1885), 193-194; and *Laws of North Carolina* (1889), 356-360, 442-443.

This data is revealing on a number of fronts. It suggests that northern and local missionaries exaggerated the extent to which most mountain residents were without churches or schools before the 1890s. In other words, these reformers were not solely responsible for “civilizing” the region. Rapid increases in the number of mountain schools and churches had

preceded their arrival. The same is true of prohibition sentiment. With the expansion of the market economy, the rise of urbanization, and the increase of churches and schools, a growing number of rural whites at the turn of the twentieth century discovered that “traditional” drinking mores made a poor fit with the exigencies of life under the new industrial order. In effect, the forces that galvanized middle-class townspeople to support temperance reform had begun to operate in more remote parts of western North Carolina. Adapting to a changing environment, a majority of rural whites ultimately embraced local prohibition by the late 1890s because they believed that alcohol impeded their communities’ economic and moral prosperity. These men and women would also abandon the moonshiners.

The Rise of Anti-Alcohol Reform in Rural Communities

Western North Carolinians witnessed an economic and social revolution during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The arrival of the WNCRR and other railways in the 1880s ushered in an era of unprecedented change. During that decade, capital invested in manufacturing increased 186 percent, while population in county seat towns rose 101 percent (see tables 6.1 and 6.3). These trends continued into the 1890s. By the end of that decade, capital invested in manufacturing had increased an additional 178 percent (see table 7.5). Although population in county seat towns rose 41 percent, 113 other mountain communities had a population of at least 100 residents by 1900, an increase of 88 percent from the previous decade (see table 7.6). These towns were also not concentrated in the eastern foothills of the Blue Ridge. In the French Broad Valley, Buncombe, Henderson, and Madison counties boasted twenty non-county seat urban centers with a population of at least 100. Meanwhile, counties north and west of the French Broad Valley supported thirty-eight towns with 100 or more

residents. Overall, by the end of the 1890s, 22 percent of western North Carolinians lived in county seats and other towns with a population of over 100.³⁹

Table 7.5. Percentage Increase or Decrease of Capital Invested in Manufacturing in Western North Carolina between 1890 and 1900 (in Dollars)

County	1890	1900	%
Wilkes	30,067	683,915	+2175
Madison	35,873	568,955	+1486
Polk	4,303	47,290	+999
Jackson	27,943	272,539	+875
Yancey	9,835	81,003	+724
Cherokee	11,625	84,394	+626
Rutherford	513,957	2,281,835	+344
Burke	99,982	442,683	+343
Caldwell	280,245	1,073,475	+283
Henderson	28,886	94,314	+227
Watauga	21,970	71,329	+225
Haywood	115,335	343,295	+198
Alexander	57,740	167,371	+190
Catawba	468,079	1,300,258	+178
Mitchell	134,458	348,355	+159
Alleghany	18,465	47,546	+157
McDowell	70,592	143,339	+103
Cleveland	517,290	1,030,462	+99
Surry	525,387	896,233	+71
Buncombe	1,044,316	1,579,162	+51
Ashe	47,323	63,157	+33
Transylvania	23,065	27,790	+20
Clay	13,173	14,000	+6
Swain	85,625	83,081	-3
Macon	59,380	46,296	-22
Average	169,785	471,683	+178

Source: Graham County not included. *Report on the Manufacturing Industries ... Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1895), 540-543; and *Twelfth Census ... 1900 ... Manufacturers, Part II: States and Territories* (Washington: US Census Office, 1902), 664-666.

Beginning in the 1830s, urbanization had widened the gap between town and countryside. Mountain townspeople, embracing the amenities and philosophies of urban America, increasingly viewed themselves as different from their rural counterparts. But the expansion of towns during the 1880s ultimately brought these two groups together. According to Edward

³⁹ Population of non-county seat towns can be found in Branson and Branson, *Branson's North Carolina Business Directory, 1896* and Merriam, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 286-295.

Table 7.6. Percentage Increase or Decrease in County Seat Population in Western North Carolina between 1890 and 1900

County Seat	1890	1900	%
Lenoir (Caldwell)	257	1,296	+404
Sparta (Alleghany)	148	501	+239
Waynesville (Haywood)	455	1,307	+187
Shelby (Cleveland)	825	1,874	+127
Wilkesboro (Wilkes)	336	635	+89
Dodson (Surry)	175	327	+87
Brevard (Transylvania)	327	584	+79
Marshall (Madison)	203	337	+66
Hendersonville (Henderson)	1,216	1,917	+58
Newton (Catawba)	1,038	1,583	+53
Asheville (Buncombe)	10,235	14,694	+44
Marion (McDowell)	799	1,116	+40
Taylorsville (Alexander)	300	413	+38
Columbus (Polk)	256	334	+31
Webster (Jackson)	209	267	+28
Morganton (Burke)	1,557	1,938	+24
Franklin (Macon)	281	335	+19
Rutherfordton (Rutherford)	800	880	+10
Charleston (Swain)	450	417	-7
Murphy (Cherokee)	803	604	-25
Bakersville (Mitchell)	815	511	-37
Jefferson (Ashe)	413	230	-44
Hayesville (Clay)	311	142	-54
Burnsville (Yancey)	450	207	-54
Boone (Watauga)	425	155	-64
Robbinsville (Graham)	60	n/a	n/a
Total	23,084	32,604	+41

Source: William R. Merriam, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Population, Part I* (Washington DC: United States Census Office, 1901), 286-295. I derived the population of Webster from the 1896 edition of *Branson's North Carolina Business Directory*. When calculating the total population of county seats in 1890, I did not include Robbinsville.

Ayers in *The Promise of the New South*, these commercial centers served not only as marketplaces for goods, but also points where rural culture intersected with the larger currents of the “outside world.”⁴⁰ With improved transportation, farmers found it easier to travel to towns, hundreds of which dotted the mountain countryside by 1900. There, they found a larger market

⁴⁰ Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 55-109. See also Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman, “The Village South,” in *Small Worlds, Large Questions: Explorations in Early American Social History, 1600-1850* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 231-272.

for their products, purchased a variety of new consumer goods, and became more attuned to “mainstream” culture. Although numerically small, mountain villages and towns ultimately bridged the gap between rural and urban life.

Meanwhile, many mountain farmers confronted an economic crisis. Paul Salstrom and other scholars have discovered that by the late nineteenth century “traditional” agricultural practices had begun to work against many Appalachian farmers. The “slash-and-burn” technique of forest farming, for instance, became counterproductive, as deforestation and soil exhaustion increased in the mountain region. Inheritance practices and population growth worsened the situation by decreasing farm acreage, large amounts of which were required to leave sections of the land fallow and restore the fertility of old soils.⁴¹ As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, these forces had impacted western North Carolinians following the Civil War, making it more difficult for them to practice forest farming and rely on what historian Robert Weise has labeled “household commercialism.”⁴²

Some mountain farmers adapted to these changes by migrating to commercial centers, where they often found employment in industrial factories, or moving to mining or lumber camps.⁴³ Others invested in commercial agriculture. Many of these rural folk began to cultivate

⁴¹ Paul Salstrom, *Appalachia's Path to Dependency: Rethinking a Region's Economic History, 1730-1940* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 20-41; Dwight B. Billings and Kathleen M. Blee, *The Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Hardship in Appalachia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 178-187, 199-200; and J.S. Otto, “The Decline of Forest Farming in Southern Appalachia,” *Journal of Forest History* 49 (1983), 18-26.

⁴² As Wiese has argued, rural “plain folk” relied heavily on subsistence agriculture during the nineteenth century. These men and women, however, also operated through market production. Nonetheless, although “firmly linked to ... the advanced capitalist, national economy,” they were not “fully integrated” in it. Household commercialism signifies this limited relationship between farmers and the larger market economy. See Robert S. Weise, *Grasping at Independence: Debt, Male Authority, and Mineral Rights in Appalachian Kentucky, 1850-1915* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 7-8.

⁴³ For a discussion on mine, lumber, and other industrial workers in southern Appalachia, see Ronald D Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982); Ronald L. Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class and Community Conflict, 1780-1980* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987); Waller, *Feud*; David Alan Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922* (Knoxville: University of

tobacco, and for good reason. By the 1880s, a farmer, with the help of “two small boys,” could earn \$900 for every acre and a half of tobacco harvested. Well-to-do farmers benefited the most from this cash crop because they had the economic resources available to purchase additional lands and hire tenants.⁴⁴ But tobacco also held great promise for small landowners, a growing number of whom had gained access to the larger market economy via urbanization and improved transportation. As a result, tobacco cultivation skyrocketed 181 percent in western North Carolina during the 1880s, while corn production increased only 12 percent (see table 7.7). Many counties in the far southeastern and northeastern parts of the region, whose residents had historically been the most isolated, experienced the highest percentage increase in tobacco cultivation. Like those residing in counties east of the Blue Ridge and in the French Broad Valley, farmers there had begun to rely on commercial agriculture.

Contrary to what northern missionaries and local urban reformers claimed, these rural whites embraced “progress” during the late nineteenth century. By the 1880s, the railroad and new communication technologies had begun to hasten the decline of the isolation of rural culture. The rise of towns facilitated this process by providing farmers with larger markets and drawing them more into the cash economy. Meanwhile, Carolina highlanders confronted an agricultural crisis, as forest farming became an ineffective adaptation to the land. For better or worse, industrial capitalism and urbanization offered these rural whites new markets and

Tennessee Press, 1991); and Crandall A. Shifflett, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

⁴⁴ Van Noppen and Van Noppen, *Western North Carolina Since the Civil War*, 276; Wellman, *The Kingdom of Madison*, 110; Zeigler and Grossup, *The Heart of the Alleghanies*; and Sondley, *A History of Buncombe County*, 727-734.

Table 7.7. Percentage Increase or Decrease in Tobacco Production in Western North Carolina between 1880 and 1890 (in Pounds)

County	1880	1890	%
Swain	1,166	47,543	+3977
Haywood	39,516	861,096	+2079
Polk	931	5,461	+487
Henderson	4,087	22,486	+450
Jackson	4,801	25,211	+425
Alexander	11,799	54,774	+364
Burke	20,079	83,810	+317
Yancey	33,898	139,464	+311
Buncombe	475,428	1,482,688	+212
Madison	807,911	2,168,823	+168
Caldwell	25,384	55,516	+119
Surry	705,250	1,429,025	+102
Transylvania	3,853	6,569	+70
Mitchell	29,647	44,458	+50
Graham	1,095	1,170	+7
Clay	5,771	6,105	+6
Rutherford	12,908	10,740	-17
Watauga	7,210	4,540	-37
Catawba	26,380	16,400	-38
McDowell	30,541	16,319	-47
Wilkes	33,211	17,322	-48
Alleghany	2,049	835	-59
Macon	9,154	3,695	-60
Ashe	11,064	3,080	-72
Cherokee	8,411	2,140	-75
Cleveland	5,122	610	-88
Average	89,103	250,380	+181

Source: *Report on the Productions of Agriculture ... Tenth Census: 1880* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 300-302; and *Report on the Statistics of Agriculture ... Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1895), 444-445.

opportunities. Many of them shifted from semi-subsistence to commercial agriculture by cultivating tobacco and, in the far southeastern part of the mountain region, cotton.⁴⁵ Hoping to maximize their profit margin, these mountaineers also abandoned “traditional” agricultural practices. One rural resident observed in 1890 that farmers around the small community of Emanuel in Caldwell County had become “a very progressive class of people.” “Some are using

⁴⁵ Western North Carolina counties where farmers grew large amounts of cotton were Catawba, Cleveland, Polk, and Rutherford. See *Report of Agriculture in the United States at the Eleventh Census* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1895), 395.

improved farming implements, such as wheat drills, harvesting machines, mowers, sulky plows &c,” he proudly wrote, “and almost all of them make good progress improving their farms.”⁴⁶

Census records further confirm that a growing number of mountain farmers embraced “modernization” between 1880 and 1900. During those years, the cash value of farming implements and machinery in the region increased 71 percent.⁴⁷

The expansion of commercial farming, industrial capitalism, and urbanization in more remote parts of western North Carolina sparked a social revolution. By the 1890s, many rural residents expressed the sentiments of their urban counterparts. Having greater access to towns and becoming more entrenched in the larger market economy, they found themselves – to use the words of one rural highlander – “afloat on the tide of improvement.”⁴⁸ These men and women adapted to the new environment by not only abandoning “traditional” agricultural techniques, but also stressing the importance of public education. “The day has arrived when uneducated people must take a rear position in the ranks of life,” a rural resident from Transylvania County explained in 1891. “Let us hoist the banner of education west of the Blue Ridge till it can be seen all around.”⁴⁹ A farmer from southeastern Caldwell County agreed. “We want better society and better schools,” he revealed. “Society is what the neighborhood makes it. So we all should try to our utmost to make it good.”⁵⁰ Through education, internal improvements, and participation in the larger market economy, a growing number of rural whites believed that their communities would achieve economic prosperity.

⁴⁶ *Lenoir Topic*, October 22, 1890.

⁴⁷ *Report on the Production of Agriculture ... Tenth Census: 1880* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 300-302; and *Twelfth Census ... 1900 ... Agriculture, Part I: Farms, Live Stock, and Animal Products* (Washington: United States Census Office, 1902), 464-466.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, June 23, 1893.

⁴⁹ *Tuckaseige Democrat*, October 14, 1891.

⁵⁰ *Lenoir Topic*, July 16, 1890. For additional examples, see *Morganton Herald*, April 2, 1891, April 28, 1892; *Tuckaseige Democrat*, February 5, 1890, August 20, 1890, November 26, 1890, July 15, July 22, September 9, 1891, April 16, 1892; *Lenoir Topic*, March 26, April 30, 1890, March 16, 1892, February 5, 1896; *Bryson City Times*, December 18, 1896; and *Asheville Weekly Citizen*, April 7, 1892.

Like their urban counterparts, rural highlanders also increasingly critiqued “traditional” drinking mores because they feared that liquor had impeded the region’s economic and moral potential. The Southern Farmers’ Alliance offers a lens through which to view anti-alcohol sentiment among these mountain whites. Founded in Texas in 1878, this organization addressed the immediate concerns of farmers and tenants struggling to achieve their economic independence during the late nineteenth century.⁵¹ Like those elsewhere in the South, many Carolina highlanders, embracing commercial agriculture and/or becoming more dependent on the cash economy, fell victim to the crop-lien system, exorbitant shipping rates, and declining tobacco prices.⁵² The Southern Farmers’ Alliance’s call for cooperatives, credit reform, and railroad regulation appealed to these rural whites (and blacks) caught in a vicious cycle of debt. In fact, by 1891, western North Carolinians had organized suballiances in at least sixteen of the twenty-six mountain counties.⁵³

As historians William Holmes and Robert McMath have demonstrated, the Southern Farmers’ Alliance succeeded in part because it worked within the prevailing rural culture.⁵⁴ In other words, this organization reflected the values of its members, providing us with an

⁵¹ For a discussion on the Southern Farmers’ Alliance in North Carolina and other parts of the South, see Lala Carr Steelman, *The North Carolina Farmers’ Alliance: A Political History, 1887-1893* (Greenville, NC: East Carolina University Publications, 1985); Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*; Robert C. McMath, Jr., *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers’ Alliance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); and Michael Schwartz, *Radical Protest and Social Structure: The Southern Farmers’ Alliance and Cotton Tenancy, 1880-1890* (New York: Academic Press 1976).

⁵² By the late 1890s, the cash value of farms in western North Carolina had dropped 17 percent, while farm acreage plummeted an additional 22 percent. For a more in depth discussion on the impact of these forces on southern farmers, see Steven A. Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeomen Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

⁵³ These counties were Madison, Burke, Caldwell, Jackson, Macon, Yancey, Wilkes, Catawba, Buncombe, Cherokee, Swain, Henderson, Haywood, Rutherford, Cleveland, and Ashe. See *Hickory Mercury*, December 2, 1891; *Tuckaseige Democrat*, February 12, April 9, November 26, 1890; *Wilkesboro Chronicle*, April 22, May 20, 1891; *Lenoir Topic*, July 24, 1889, March 26, 1890, November 4, 1891; *Morganton Star*, April 11, 1889; *Swain County Herald*, April 18, May 16, May 30, June 13, July 18, September 19, 1889; *Hickory Western Carolinian*, September 9, 1887; and Steelman, *The North Carolina Farmers’ Alliance*, 63, 260.

⁵⁴ William F. Holmes, “The Southern Farmers’ Alliance: The Georgia Experience” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 72 (Winter 1988), 629; and McMath, *Populist Vanguard*.

opportunity to gauge rural whites' views on, among other things, market relations and temperance. An examination of the Alliance in western North Carolina, for instance, reveals that many mountain farmers had accepted capitalism by the early 1890s. Although sponsoring cooperatives, most highlanders ultimately refused to endorse the subtreasury plan, government control of railroads, and other radical reforms.⁵⁵ These farmers sought to protect themselves from bankers, merchants, and landlords, but also wanted to continue to participate in the larger market economy. Their goal was to "humanize" capitalism, not to overthrow it.⁵⁶

Working through the Southern Farmers' Alliance, rural highlanders further desired to improve their communities both "mentally" and "morally."⁵⁷ These men were living in "a progressive age" and yearned to "keep up with the times." "Let your main object," the Watauga County Farmers' Alliance declared in 1890, "be to educate the agricultural people as the world moves onward and higher in the heights of civilization and intelligence ... or we will always be behind."⁵⁸ Like their urban counterparts, alliancemen sought to rid the countryside of "ignorance" and lawlessness by advocating for education reform and gun-control laws.⁵⁹ They also echoed missionaries' views that temperance would bring moral and material improvement. According to the Caldwell County Farmers' Alliance, alcohol was "one of the greatest evils of our land," having "degraded mankind," "blighted our homes," and robbed "heaven of precious souls."⁶⁰ In order to achieve success in farming, these men urged people to restrain their

⁵⁵ *Swain County Herald*, September 19, 1889; *Lenoir Topic*, February 26, 1890, November 4, 1891; and *Tuckaseige Democrat*, February 12, 1890.

⁵⁶ In this case, western North Carolinians were not exceptional. Most farmers elsewhere in the South also embraced capitalism. See Bruce E. Stewart, "The Urban-Rural Dynamic of the Southern Farmers' Alliance: Relations Between Athens Merchants and Clarke County Farmers, 1888-1891," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 84 (Summer 2005), 155-184.

⁵⁷ *Hickory Mercury*, December 2, 1891.

⁵⁸ *Lenoir Topic*, July 2, 1890.

⁵⁹ *Swain County Herald*, June 27, 1889; *Tuckaseige Democrat*, January 14, 1891; and *Lenoir Topic*, August 13, 1890, March 13, 1891.

⁶⁰ *Lenoir Topic*, July 27, 1892.

appetites and become “modest, gentle, unassuming, moral, and temperate.”⁶¹ As one mountain farmer explained in 1891:

The Alliance encourages honesty, industry, and morality. Its members are encouraged to live within their means, and to avoid debt as much as possible ... Indolence and downright laziness has affected us all more or less. We all eat too much idle bread. Too much precious time is wasted ... [Thus,] no lazy man should be admitted ... The fostering and encouraging of morality ... will tend to lessen crime, elevate the membership, and indirectly benefit all the people. [As such,] no drunkard, liar, thief, openly profane man, fornicator, or dishonest man should be admitted or retained in the alliance.⁶²

For these whites, alcohol had no place in the New South. It had stymied the region’s economic potential by breeding ignorance, idleness, and crime. The drinking mores of their neighbors, many rural alliancemen concluded, required reforming.

The Alliance’s stance against intemperance also garnered it the support of rural Baptists and Methodists, who increasingly attempted to purify mountain culture at the turn of the twentieth century. By the early 1870s, these congregates had revived the anti-alcohol struggle in part to re-create a deeply religious South that they claimed had existed before the Civil War.⁶³ Reconstruction’s end further persuaded rural Baptists and Methodists to advocate for social reform because it lessened sectional tensions. “With little incentive to appear different from the northern, radical, political churches,” historian Charles Israel has argued, “southern Evangelicals could more safely enter politics on the side of moral questions.”⁶⁴ Moreover, the growth of the Good Templars and other secular temperance organizations motivated congregates to increase their role in the anti-alcohol campaign during the 1880s.⁶⁵ Fearing that they were becoming irrelevant in modern society, evangelicals in western North Carolina and other parts of the South

⁶¹ *Tuckaseige Democrat*, July 9, 1890.

⁶² *Lenoir Topic*, March 13, 1891.

⁶³ See Chapter 5.

⁶⁴ Israel, *Before Scopes*, 81.

⁶⁵ Fletcher, “The Story of a Mountain Missionary: Rev. James Floyd Fletcher,” Fletcher Papers, NCDAH.

insisted that churches, not secular organizations, should “lead in the great reform.”⁶⁶ By the end of the nineteenth century, these phenomena – Lost Cause ideology, the end of Reconstruction, and increased competition from secular organizations – had deepened rural Baptists’ and Methodists’ resolve to reform the behavior of all mountain residents and embrace local prohibition.⁶⁷

Moreover, these evangelicals became more troubled with the apparent rise of sinfulness in western North Carolina society. By 1900, improved transportation had made it easier for rural residents to travel to towns, where they sold their produce and bought new consumer goods. To the dismay of many evangelicals, however, these trips also exposed their rural brethren to profanity, prostitution, and alcohol.⁶⁸ As those in other parts of the South, mountain evangelicals responded by forbidding congregates from drinking ardent spirits.⁶⁹ They also passed local-option laws, hoping to protect the home and church from the sins of urban America.⁷⁰

It should come as no surprise, then, that rural highlanders became the leading proponents of prohibition during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Between 1881 and 1889, 101 mountain churches and schools located in non-county seat townships or in communities with fewer than 100 residents passed local-option laws, an increase of 248 percent from the previous decade (see table 7.4). This trend continued into 1890s. Of the 258 known places that enacted local-option during that decade, 164 (or 64 percent) of them were situated in rural communities (see table 7.8). These findings lend credence to Ownby’s argument that the rise of prohibition

⁶⁶ *Hickory Press and Carolinian*, November 17, December 8, 1887.

⁶⁷ For a more in depth discussion on the impact that these phenomena had on encouraging evangelicals to broaden their churches’ authority to include all of the surrounding society, see Israel, *Before Scopes*, 79-84.

⁶⁸ *Asheville Citizen*, November 19, 1891.

⁶⁹ *Meat Camp Baptist Church Minutes* (1885), 105; *Minutes of the Catawba River Baptist Association* (1882), 9; *Minutes of the Brushy Mountain Association* (1882), 7; *Minutes of the Green River Association* (1881), 7; *Minutes of the Brier Creek Association* (1881), 7; Fletcher, *A History of the Ashe County, North Carolina and New River, Virginia Baptist Associations*, 75, 102, 106.

⁷⁰ Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 167-173, 206-208.

Table 7.8. Percentage Increase of Rural Places that Enacted Local-Option in Western North Carolina between 1891 and 1899 Compared to the Previous Decade

	Rural	Urban	% Rural	% Urban
1881-1889	101	74	.58	.42
1891-1899	164	94	.64	.36

Source: In western North Carolina, 407 churches, schools, towns, and industrial facilities enacted local-option between 1891 and 1899. I was unable to determine the exact location of 149 of them. See *Laws of North Carolina* (1891), 345-350; *Laws of North Carolina* (1893), 297-300, 328-329, 414-415; *Laws of North Carolina* (1895), 452-454; *Laws of North Carolina* (1897), 579-582, 596-598; and *Laws of North Carolina* (1899), 417-418, 879-884.

sentiment in the rural South was largely a reaction to urbanization. Like those elsewhere in the South, mountain evangelicals increasingly turned to local-option with the hope of redefining their place in the changing world.

Table 7.9. Percentage Increase and Rank of Capital Invested in Manufacturing in the Fifteen Mountain Counties with the Largest Number of Rural Places Enacting Local-Option between 1880 and 1900

County	Local-Option Enacted in Rural Places/Rank	% Increase of Capital Invested in Manufacturing/Rank
Madison	31/1	+3151/3
Ashe	28/2	+27/24
Caldwell	28/2	+995/7
Mitchell	22/4	+106/23
Polk	13/5	+629/11
Surry	13/5	+311/15
Wilkes	13/5	+1827/4
Henderson	11/8	+398/13
Cherokee	9/9	+187/20
Alexander	8/10	+142/22
Buncombe	8/10	+912/8
Catawba	8/10	+670/10
Haywood	8/10	+1038/6
Rutherford	8/10	+3913/2
Jackson	8/10	+1729/5

Source: *Report on the Manufacturers ... Tenth Census: 1880* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 159-160; and *Twelfth Census ... 1900 ... Manufacturers, Part II: States and Territories* (Washington: United States Census Office, 1902), 664-666.

But this is only part of the story. An examination of local-option legislation at the county level reveals that other forces also encouraged western North Carolinians to support prohibition.

As the following tables illustrate, between 1880 and 1900, prohibition laws were more often enacted in rural locales undergoing industrial and economic growth. Of the fifteen mountain counties that had the highest percentage increases of capital invested in manufacturing during those years, for instance, eleven of them led the region in rural communities that passed local prohibition (see table 7.9). Rural highlanders living in counties where farming remained profitable were also more likely to support local prohibition. Nine of the fifteen counties that experienced the highest percentage increases in the cash value of farms led the region in the number of rural churches and schools that enacted local-option laws (see table 7.10).

Table 7.10. Percentage Increase/Decrease and Rank of Cash Value of Farms in the Fifteen Mountain Counties with the Largest Number of Rural Places Enacting Local-Option between 1880 and 1900

County	Local-Option Enacted in Rural Places/Rank	% Increase or Decrease of Cash Value of Farms/Rank
Madison	31/1	-3/20
Ashe	28/2	+33/11
Caldwell	28/2	+24/14
Mitchell	22/4	+52/3
Polk	13/5	+20/16
Surry	13/5	+22/15
Wilkes	13/5	+30/13
Henderson	11/8	+48/5
Cherokee	9/9	-2/19
Alexander	8/10	-53/25
Buncombe	8/10	+39/8
Catawba	8/10	+4/18
Haywood	8/10	+36/9
Rutherford	8/10	+51/4
Jackson	8/10	-69/26

Source: *Report on the Production of Agriculture ... Tenth Census: 1880* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 300-302; and *Twelfth Census ... 1900 ... Agriculture, Part I: Farms, Live Stock, and Animal Products* (Washington: United States Census Office, 1902), 464-466.

The rise of prohibition sentiment in rural communities, then, was more than just an evangelical crusade against the evils of urban America. It was also a product of the region's

transition from a rural to an urban-industrial economy. By the 1890s, the expansion of commercial agriculture, industrial capitalism, and urbanization sparked a social revolution. Expressing the sentiments of their urban counterparts, a growing number of rural western North Carolinians believed that “traditional” drinking mores made a poor fit with the exigencies of life under the burgeoning industrial social order. This new worldview made it easier for them to support local-option legislation. Nonetheless, many highlanders were not yet ready to embrace state-wide prohibition during the 1890s. As we shall see, only when local-option and other anti-liquor laws had failed to reduce alcohol consumption would the reformers’ call for state-wide prohibition gain widespread currency in the region. The moonshiner and his legal counterpart played a central role in this drama.

CHAPTER 8

THESE DISTILLERS DON'T GIVE A DARN: A POLITICAL HISTORY OF PROHIBITION, 1882-1908

Rise, ye men of North Carolina,
Hear ye not the muffled roar
Of the battle-drum resounding
From the mountains to the shore?
See the banner floating high.
Bearing this sublime inscription:
“North Carolina Will Go Dry.”¹

Celebrated as heroes during Reconstruction, alcohol distillers – the moonshiners, in particular – found themselves in retreat by the late 1870s. The improved performance of revenue agents, along with the resurgence of anti-alcohol sentiment, had encouraged a growing number of western North Carolinians to tolerate federal liquor taxation and become more hostile towards illicit distillers. Nonetheless, many mountain residents, urban and rural, were unwilling to support state-wide prohibition during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. They believed that local-option would solve the liquor problem and remained hesitant to infringe on the rights of alcohol manufacturers, insisting that tavern owners were largely to blame for intemperance. But a series of events ultimately convinced them otherwise. To the dismay of temperance workers, distillers (legal and illegal) continued to sell their product in “dry” communities during the 1890s. Infuriated, mountain reformers mobilized against the moonshiners and their licit counterparts by passing anti-distiller laws, but to no avail. By the turn of the century, these men and women had concluded that alcohol manufacturing lay at the

¹ *Waynesville Courier*, April 23, 1908.

heart of the liquor problem and that state-wide prohibition was the ultimate solution. For them, distillers were neither legitimate businessmen nor folk heroes, but the purveyors of violence and crime. This change of sentiment was made easier due to the Democratic Party's acceptance of federal liquor taxation and subsequent abandonment of the moonshiners beginning in the early 1880s.

Depoliticalization of Federal Liquor Taxation

In January 1882, mountain Republican J.J. Mott, emboldened by his party's successful campaign to defeat the August 1881 referendum on state-wide prohibition, quickly moved to consolidate his political power in North Carolina. He first secured the support of President Chester Arthur as a means of limiting opposition from within Republican ranks. Mott then resigned as Collector of Internal Revenue, hoping to allow himself more freedom of action, and nominated Tom Cooper, who was head of the North Carolina Anti-Prohibition Executive Committee, to replace him. Despite opposition from former Republican state chairman Thomas Keogh and other prohibitionist Republicans, Mott persuaded the U.S. Senate to confirm Cooper's nomination. By April, Mott was in complete control of the North Carolina Republican Party.²

Mott then sought to attract dissatisfied Democrats, many of whom had supported prohibition, into the so-called Liberal movement by opposing the state's undemocratic county government system. At the end of Reconstruction, Democrats had created a county government system in which the state legislature named local officials rather than allowing voters to elect them. This system suppressed not only Republicans, but also dissident Democrats, thereby providing Mott with an issue that appealed to prohibitionists.³ In June 1882, Republicans and

² McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 98.

³ *New York Times*, July 16, 1882.

Liberal Democrats agreed that they would cooperate in races for the state legislature during the upcoming fall elections. Centering their attacks on the county government system, along with prohibition, coalition candidates ran strong races throughout the state and almost unseated the Democrats.⁴ In North Carolina's Seventh Congressional District, Liberal Democrat Tyre York received 51 percent of the vote, while Democrat Robert Vance saw the percentage of his vote in the Eight Congressional District fall 13 points between 1880 and 1882. Vance's opponent in 1882 was C.L. Cooke, an independent candidate who wanted to reform the state's county government system.⁵ The mountain Democratic Party was in serious trouble.

Even before the 1882 elections, Senator Zebulon Vance, fearful that it would weaken the party, attempted to discredit the Liberal movement, accusing Republicans and dissident Democrats of being part of an alleged corrupt internal revenue machine. In January, Vance, with the support of several mountain Democrats, had begun to gather evidence against Mott and the Republicans.⁶ Believing that several Republicans would testify against their party leader, Vance convinced the U.S. Congress in April to launch an investigation into the Bureau of Internal Revenue in western North Carolina.⁷ Held in Washington in April 1882, the senate hearings generated over 450 pages of testimony. Vance, who served as the chairman of the investigating committee, hoped that these hearings would highlight federal revenue officials' political abuses. Several witnesses, most of whom were Democrats, charged that revenue officers sometimes took bribes from legal and illegal distillers.⁸ Vance also forced Mott to admit that he had solicited money from revenue officials to fund the 1880 state Republican campaign. Mott, however, added that

⁴ McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 98-99, 120.

⁵ *Asheville News*, December 20, 1882. Vance received 69 percent of the mountain vote in 1880 and 56 percent of the mountain vote in 1882.

⁶ R.M. Furman to ZBV, January 20, 1882, W.S. Pearson to ZBV, January 23, 1882, J.C. Brown to ZBV, July 3, 1882, all in *Vance Papers*, reel 8; W.H.H. Cowles to ZBV, July 3, 1882, reel 5, *Vance Papers*.

⁷ G.M. Mathes to ZBV, February 2, 1882, reel 5, *Vance Papers*.

⁸ "Sixth District of North Carolina," testimony of W.C. Morrison, 8; testimony of W.H. Kestler, 53; testimony of J.N. Summers, 90; testimony of J.S. Leonard, 110; and testimony of A.C. Avery, 442.

these donations were voluntary and that he had not punished any agent refusing to make a contribution.⁹ Commissioner of Internal Revenue Green B. Raum quickly came to Mott's defense, testifying before the congressional inquiry that the collector was "entitled to the approbation of the government for the manner in which he has administered the office."¹⁰

Although Vance was confident that the congressional investigation demonstrated that Mott and revenue agents were corrupt, it had little impact on the mountain Republican Party or the Liberal movement. The committee failed to uncover any revelations of malfeasance in which North Carolinians had not already suspected. "In fact," according to Gordon McKinney, "the argument can be made that the hearings gave men like Raum and Mott an opportunity to distinguish themselves from those who had clearly abused the system before them."¹¹ Moreover, by 1882, revenue collection had become less of a political issue in western North Carolina. As discussed in Chapter 5, increased force, leniency, and the improved performance of agents had combined to decrease mountain opposition to the Bureau of Internal Revenue.

Vance could have also blamed the Democratic Party. In 1878, Democrats gained control of both houses of Congress and, despite denouncing it as tyrannical during Reconstruction, left the Bureau of Internal Revenue intact.¹² That same year, Mott reduced local Democratic opposition by appointing several highly qualified Democrats. To dismay of the moonshiners, these revenueurs continued to enforce the law.¹³ The national party's failure to abolish the federal liquor law ultimately forced many mountain Democrats to become reconciled to the system. Revenue enforcement was slowly becoming a bipartisan issue in western North Carolina. Agent D.C. Pearson remembered in 1882:

⁹ Ibid., testimony of J.J. Mott, 362-395.

¹⁰ Ibid., testimony of Green Raum, 293.

¹¹ McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, 358.

¹² Miller, *Revenueurs & Moonshiners*, 145.

¹³ *Blue Ridge Blade*, July 10, 1880.

Public sentiment [to revenue enforcement improved in the South Mountains], because the Democrats, getting control of Congress, made no change in the revenue laws, and those people became convinced that it would be the same, let them be in power or out of power that those appeals that had been made to them on the part of the Democracy, to enable the Democracy to get into power, proved not to be true.¹⁴

Burke County Democrat W.S. Pearson agreed. “The people believe that the reason why it [the Bureau of Internal Revenue] was not abolished,” he informed Zebulon Vance in 1882, “arose from the ambitions of the Asheville-Greensboro Democrats to get the places, which it gives, when Tilden was to have come in.”¹⁵

By 1882, the mountain Democratic Party found itself in a precarious situation. Committed to reducing the national tariff, which its constituents believed would help raise the price of agricultural goods, Democrats remained reluctant to abolish the revenue service. If the U.S. Congress eliminated internal taxation, along with the millions of dollars it generated in federal revenue, they feared that most Republicans would refuse to consider reducing the tariff.¹⁶ Moreover, the liquor tax had become the country’s leading source of internal revenue, “rising from 30 percent of the collections in 1868 to 63 percent in 1884.”¹⁷ Many mountain Democrats increasingly admitted that abolishing the internal revenue system was “impractical” and that the U.S. Congress should focus on reforming it.¹⁸ Robert Vance, one of the most outspoken critics of the revenue service during the 1870s, agreed. “Perhaps it would be best to attempt only a readjustment of the system to the actual wants of the people,” he told a *Charlotte Observer* reporter in 1883.¹⁹ Nor were Democrats as quick to denounce the whiskey tax. Although continuing to argue that the U.S. Congress should eliminate the Bureau of Internal Revenue, the

¹⁴ “Sixth District of North Carolina,” testimony of D.C. Pearson, 323.

¹⁵ W.S. Pearson to ZBV, January 23, 1882, reel 5, *Vance Papers*.

¹⁶ J.C. Wills to ZBV, February 18, 1884, reel 8, *Vance Papers*.

¹⁷ Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 148.

¹⁸ *Mountain Banner*, July 14, 1882; *Morganton Mountaineer*, August 8, 1883, February 13, July 2, 1884; *Asheville Semi-Weekly Citizen*, December 16, 1882, June 13, 1883.

¹⁹ *Asheville Weekly Citizen*, December 20, 1883.

Democratic *Morganton Mountaineer* favored a tax on distilled spirits. “[Democrats] demand the repeal of the system, not the tax,” the newspaper read in January 1884. “They fully recognize the fact that it is but just and right that whiskey and tobacco should be taxed.”²⁰ “Let the tax alone,” the Democratic *Mountain Banner* in Rutherford County wrote three months later, “but let free people pay it like freemen and then let it go to the U.S. Treasury instead of into the pockets of [revenueurs].”²¹

When Democrat Grover Cleveland became president in 1885, mountain Democrats, now having control of federal patronage, further embraced the Bureau of Internal Revenue. According to Raum, Democrats no longer held “up to contempt the hated internal-revenue officer [following Cleveland’s victory]. This person is now a Democrat, and of course must be regarded as a gentlemen.”²² Letters from Democrats poured into the office of Zebulon Vance, asking the senator to nominate them for a revenue position.²³ Vance would not disappoint many of them. He secured the appointment of Sixth District Collector for his former law partner Clement Dowd and a position as a revenue agent for his son, Charles.²⁴ Vance and other Democrats also protested Cleveland’s decision to retain several Republican revenueurs until their terms of office expired. In July, Dowd complained to Vance that only one out of the fifty men he recommended for positions in the Bureau of Internal Revenue had been appointed.²⁵ Editors of the *Lenoir Topic* lashed out at President Cleveland that same month:

We know that the excuse is that these old deputies know the ropes and are re-appointed to show the new deputies around; but there has been plenty of time for that. And there are

²⁰ *Morganton Mountaineer*, January 30, 1884.

²¹ *Mountain Banner*, April 25, 1884.

²² Miller, *Revenueurs & Moonshiners*, 149.

²³ C. Dowd to ZBV, July 8, September 2, November 21, 1885; John A. Richardson to ZBV, July 1, 1885, H.H. Helper to ZBV, February 16, 1885, E.P. Jones to ZBV, March 30, 1885, all on reel 5, *Vance Papers*; and Robert Vance to ZBV, October 23, 1885, M.W. Ransom to ZBV, 1885, both on reel 9, *Vance Papers*.

²⁴ McKinney, “Moonshiners, Law Enforcement, and Violence,” 15.

²⁵ McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, 373.

other men in Caldwell County than the Republican deputies who know the lay of the land and need no instruction from them in the work of hunting illicit distillers.²⁶

Clearly, Vance and other Democrats now accepted the revenue system, realizing that it provided them with patronage powers that they had never held before.²⁷

The political change in 1885, however, escalated the potential for lawlessness by leading many moonshiners to believe that Democratic revenue agents would ignore them or at least harass them less than Republicans. In Cherokee, Macon, and Jackson counties, where many farmers continued to have limited access to railroads and other transportation arteries, local citizens and revenueurs reported an upsurge in illicit distilling following Cleveland's victory in the presidential election. According to Macon County resident Samuel T. Kelsey in February 1885, moonshiners there and in the neighboring township of Moccasin in Rabun County, Georgia had become "so bold that they think they can run over the community as they please."²⁸ In fact, on the night of March 11, these illicit distillers attacked the village of Highlands in Macon County, attempting to rescue two fellow lawbreakers from jail. Deputy Marshal T.B. Coward remembered:

There were 12 or 13 of the raiders. They formed a line in front of us about 40 ft. from us, made a demand on us for the release of the prisoners at the peril of our lives, at the same time presenting their guns on us. I called to them if that was their only business the best thing for them to do would be to leave at once for they could not get the prisoners. At the close of my last words, they fired upon us. Came near getting me the first fire. We were ready for them and returned the fire, I suppose there were about 60 shots fired from our side. They stood the fire until about the sixth round from our side, then retreated in the dark and were not seen anymore that night. One of their party William Ramsey was killed dead, 3 arrested, and from the best information I have been able to obtain 3 or four wounded, one perhaps fatally.²⁹

²⁶ *Lenoir Topic*, July 8, 1885.

²⁷ See Hamilton Erwin to Samuel Tate, March 18, 1885; W.W. Stringfield to Samuel Tate, March 19, 1885; Bob Newland to Samuel Tate, March 31, 1885; C. Dowd to Samuel Tate, March 31, 1885; A.A. Shuford to Samuel Tate, April 3, 1885; A.J. Hugh to Samuel Tate, April 6, 1885; and M.N. Kimsey to Samuel Tate, May 1, 1885, all in Tate Papers, SHC.

²⁸ S.T. Kelsey to D.D. Davies, February 26, 1885, Box 97, Year Files, Department of Justice Records.

²⁹ T.B. Coward to Thomas B. Keogh, March 26, 1885, Box 97, Year Files, Department of Justice Records. For additional reports on the so-called "Moccasin War," see D.D. Davies to A.H. Garland, March 5, 1885; Thomas B.

The so-called Moccasin War forced Democratic officials to take immediate action.³⁰ Newly appointed Commissioner of Internal Revenue and Democrat Joseph Miller was appalled and blamed “the late disturbance” on the moonshiners’ mistaken belief that the Bureau of Internal Revenue would no longer enforce the federal liquor law. With the support of Zebulon Vance, Robert Vance, and other mountain Democrats, Miller authorized the creation of a “special force” to apprehend the “criminals who are terrorizing the law abiding citizens of [Highlands].” He then instructed bureau agents in other parts of the Carolina highlands to suppress illicit distilling. Due to the “acts of violence and threats of the illicit distillers,” Miller explained to Attorney General A.H. Garland in April 1885, “I deem it highly important that there should be an early manifestation of the intention of the Government to bring to punishment, at whatever costs, all persons who so defy its laws and menace the lives of law-abiding and peaceful citizens.”³¹

These efforts were successful. In 1885, the first year that Democrats controlled the Bureau of Internal Revenue, agents seized 196 stills in western North Carolina’s Fifth and Sixth Collection Districts, an increase of 216 percent from 1884 (see table 8.1). The number of convictions for evading federal liquor taxation also rose from 163 in 1884 to 357 two years later (see table 8.2). These attempts to enforce the federal liquor law significantly hampered moonshiners’ ability to sustain a well organized resistance movement. By the end of 1886,

Keogh to A.H. Garland, March 13, 1885; D.D. Davies to Jas. E. Boyd, March 16, 1885; H.C. Goodell to Thomas B. Keogh, March 20, 1885, all in Box 97, Year Files, Department of Justice Records; and Randolph P. Shaffner, *Heart of the Blue Ridge: Highlands, North Carolina* (Highlands, NC: Faraway Publishers, 2001).

³⁰ For more on the “Moccasin War,” see Randolph P. Shaffner, *Heart of the Blue Ridge: Highlands, NC* (Highlands, NC: Faraway Publishing, 2001), 205-212.

³¹ Joseph Miller to A.H. Garland, April 9, 1885, Year Files, Box 97, Department of Justice Records. See also Joseph Miller to A.H. Garland, May 15, 1885; Joseph Miller to A.H. Garland, May 22, 1885; D. Settle to Joseph Miller, May 16, 1885; and T.B. Coward to D. Settle, September 28, 1885, all in Year Files, Box 97, Department of Justice Records.

Table 8.1. Stills Seized by Bureau of Internal Revenue Agents in North Carolina's Fifth and Sixth Collection Districts between 1883 and 1888

Year	Stills Seized
1883	97
1884	62
1885	196
1886	94
1887	87
1888	87

Source: *Annual Report, Commissioner of Internal Revenue*, 1883, 1884, 1885, 1886, 1887, 1888.

Table 8.2. Total Number of Cases Involving Moonshining in North Carolina's Western District Court between 1883 and 1888

Year	Convictions	Acquittals	Discontinued	Total
1883	53	13	67	133
1884	163	52	69	284
1885	167	73	102	342
1886	357	67	41	465
1887	307	44	59	410
1888	376	63	78	517

Source: *Annual Report, Attorney General*, 1883, 1884, 1885, 1886, 1887, 1888.

Clement Dowd believed that three-man posses, which would have been considered insufficient during the 1870s, were all that was needed for them to conduct raids in western North Carolina. "The 'moonshiner' invariably runs on the approach of an officer," Dowd reported to Commissioner Miller that December. "They are as utterly without organization, & almost as wild, as the foxes & wolves which roam among the 'craggs & crannies' of the Blue Ridge."³²

The Democratic Party's acceptance of the Bureau of Internal Revenue and willingness to enforce liquor taxation, however, convinced some highlanders that the party had betrayed them. "You now hear the clamor of aspirants to be revenue collectors on the democratic side of the

³² C. Dowd to Joseph Miller, December 11, 1886, Letters Received, Internal Revenue Records.

house,” a Watauga resident complained in March 1885. “The Radical party saw the folly of the system, why not the democrats see the folly of it likewise?”³³ Democrats in Burke County were just as furious. Following the news of Cleveland’s victory in November 1884, they had felt “like the children of Israel when they reached the Promised Land,” believing that their party would eliminate the revenue system. But “no change will be made in the law,” these mountain residents despaired in May 1885, “and that is, we see too many of our leading Democrats fishing for the offices.”³⁴ The *Morganton Star* agreed. “The Democratic Party will not do what it promised, namely, repeal the revenue law; and this arises from the fact that so many Democrats are seeking revenue offices,” it read in the fall of 1885. “The odium of the Internal Revenue is now shifted from Republican to Democratic shoulders; and it is indeed an onerous burden, widespread and far reaching in its ramifications.”³⁵

Mountain Democrats quickly scrambled to appeal to disgruntled party members, and for good reason. They found themselves in the same predicament that had plagued Republicans during Reconstruction. Needing the patronage and wanting to reduce the national tariff, they were forced to support a federal agency that mountain whites, mostly residing in remote parts of the region, continued to oppose. To make matters worse, North Carolina Republicans in 1884, perhaps believing that Cleveland would win the presidential election, adopted a plank in their platform calling for the abolition of the revenue service. Reviving claims that Republican revenueurs were corrupt, the Democratic Party tried to reassure voters that it would reform the system. “The Republican men all drank whiskey,” the *Shelby Aurora* in Cleveland County reported in July 1885, “but the Democrats are temperance and church members and will never

³³ *Lenoir Topic*, March 18, 1885.

³⁴ *Morganton Star*, May 1, 1885.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, August 28, October 16, 1885. See also *Morganton Star*, October 16, 1885, *Lenoir Topic*, April 8, 1885; and J.W. Wilson to ZBV, March 3, 1884, reel 5, *Vance Papers*.

take a smile or get crooked.”³⁶ Meanwhile, the *Lenoir Topic* praised newly appointed collector Clement Dowd, pointing out that “he has given orders that no man who drinks whisky need apply to him.” “Illicit distilling will go now,” the paper concluded, “but revenue officers will not be traveling politicians any longer. That is the difference.”³⁷ Nonetheless, most Democrats accepted the Bureau of Internal Revenue and, based on the rising number of arrests and seizures, were determined to suppress moonshining, a profession that many mountain whites increasingly believed had no place in the new industrial social order.

By the mid 1880s, moonshiners found themselves in a precarious situation. Portrayed as “semi-barbarians” by the national media and denounced as “bad men” by many local reformers, they had now lost the support of the Democratic Party. With the election of Grover Cleveland in 1884, mountain Democrats embraced the Bureau of Internal Revenue and the patronage powers that it provided them. Responding to moonshiner violence and the demands of urban middle-class residents, who were becoming an economically and powerful force in western North Carolina, they intensified their efforts to enforce the federal liquor law. For Robert Vance and other mountain Democrats, moonshiners had become a political liability. These Democrats also soon embraced local-option, the consequences of which would further alienate legal and illegal distillers from mountain communities.

The Local-Option Crusade and Its Consequences

On December 10, 1885, eighty of North Carolina’s leading prohibitionists met in Greensboro to discuss the possibility of organizing a state Prohibition Party. In 1869, the Good Templars and other northern-based temperance societies had founded the national Prohibition Party. Convinced that “wets” controlled Democrats and Republicans alike, they wanted to

³⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, July 10, 1885.

³⁷ *Lenoir Topic*, May 20, 1885.

increase prohibition sentiment by educating voters on the evils of alcohol and providing them with a practical political alternative.³⁸ Following Reconstruction, this third-party movement began to garner support among southerners, a growing number of whom believed that the major parties had stymied anti-alcohol legislation. By 1884, reformers had established the Prohibition Party in Alabama, Texas, Tennessee, and Virginia.³⁹ Distraught over the failed state-wide prohibition campaign of 1881, North Carolina prohibitionists followed suit at Greensboro in 1885 and agreed to organize the state Prohibition Party. “As we can no longer support either of these old parties [Democratic and Republican] ... without endorsing the power of the saloon in politics and aiding to perpetuate that power,” they concluded that December, “we ... declare the imperative necessity for a new party, with Prohibition of the Liquor Traffic its prime object ... and invite the votes of all who cast ballots and the sympathy of all others.”⁴⁰

State and mountain Democrats feared that this new political organization would weaken their party and greeted it with disdain. Just four years earlier, they remembered, over 40,000 North Carolinians, most of whom were Democratic, had favored state-wide prohibition. These voters were now being encouraged to join a party that had prohibition as its leading objective. Democrats quickly lashed out at the Prohibition Party by arguing that it threatened to impede the progress of temperance. “We cannot see any good to come of such a party,” the Democratic *Salisbury Watchman* read in December 1885. “There is reason to apprehend more damage to the temperance cause than benefit.”⁴¹ That same month, the *Lenoir Topic* expressed the true motive behind Democrats’ denunciation of the Prohibition Party. It warned that this third party would

³⁸ K. Austin Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition: A New History of the Anti-Saloon League* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 41-42.

³⁹ Isaac, *Prohibition and Politics*, 61; James D. Ivy, *No Saloon in the Valley: The Southern Strategy of Texas Prohibitionists in the 1880s* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), 27, 28, 36; Pearson and Hendricks, *Liquor and Anti-Liquor in Virginia*, 174; and James Benson Sellers, *The Prohibition Movement in Alabama, 1702 to 1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1943), 84.

⁴⁰ *State Chronicle*, December 17, 1885, quoted in Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 81.

⁴¹ *Salisbury Watchman*, quoted in *Lenoir Topic*, December 23, 1885.

divide Democrats in the upcoming 1888 gubernatorial election and “give fresh hopes of reanimation to the Republican party which, but yesterday, was dead in North Carolina.” “A Democrat naturally opposes any movement antagonistic to the success of the great and living principles of his party,” the newspaper elaborated, “while a Republican just as naturally welcomes whatever tends to promote the disintegration of the great party of people.”⁴²

But Republicans were unable to capitalize on their adversaries’ dilemma. As historian Daniel Whitener has demonstrated, the rise of temperance sentiment within the party of Lincoln during the mid 1880s had made it dangerous for Republican leaders to embrace the anti-prohibition cause. More importantly, they remained unconvinced that a three-cornered gubernatorial election would result in Republican victory, predicting (correctly) that Prohibitionists would fail to convince enough Democrats to defect from their party.⁴³ As such, Republicans and Democrats alike attempted to counteract the appeal of the Prohibition Party. In the months leading up to the 1888 gubernatorial election, most Republicans downplayed their party’s opposition to state-wide prohibition seven years earlier. Meanwhile, Democrats labeled Prohibitionists as “radicals” and urged party members to “stand by the old ship of Democracy – the friend of the South and of white supremacy.”⁴⁴ Election results reveal that Republicans and Democrats soundly quelled the Prohibition Party, as its candidate for governor received only 3,124 of the 285,556 votes cast.⁴⁵

The third party’s fight to promote prohibition was not in vain, however. Before the 1888 gubernatorial election, Republicans and Democrats for the first time officially endorsed local-

⁴² *Lenoir Topic*, December 23, 1885.

⁴³ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 83.

⁴⁴ W.T. Blackwell to ZBV, May 21, 1888, Reel 23, *Vance Papers*; and *Hickory Press and Carolinian*, May 17, 1888. For additional examples, see *Lenoir Topic*, May 12, 1886, February 29, July 4, 1888; *Alexander County Journal*, June 28, July 19, 1888; *Morganton Star*, January 25, 1889; *Asheville Citizen*, July 26, August 12, September 16, 1888, November 14, 1889; *Hickory Western Carolinian*, September 16, October 7, October 21, 1887; and *Hickory Press and Carolinian*, May 31, August 2, October 25, 1888;

⁴⁵ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 85.

option, hoping to use it as a weapon against the Prohibition Party. By attacking the liquor trade in local areas along non-partisan lines, they sought to placate opposition from within their parties and depoliticize the issue of prohibition. “The old political parties ... have a chance to take the wind out of the sails of the third party movement by voting for local-option,” the *Wilson Advance* explained in 1885. “This they can do without interfering with their old party relations.”⁴⁶ Editor J.F. Murrell of the *Hickory Western Carolinian* agreed. “If [we] take an open and positive stand in favor of Prohibition under the operation of our Local option laws,” he argued in 1887, “... there will be no disturbing element [Prohibition Party] in this State.”⁴⁷

While this strategy succeeded in defeating the third party movement, it ultimately encouraged prohibitionists to intensify their fight against “King Alcohol.” Emboldened by Republicans’ and Democrats’ endorsement of local prohibition, North Carolina reformers organized thousands of local-option elections following the 1888 gubernatorial campaign.⁴⁸ As elsewhere in the state, these elections sparked conflict within several mountain communities and continued to make prohibition a political issue. Ironically, town boosters became the leading opponents of local-option in western North Carolina. These men feared that prohibition would stymie tourism, which had emerged as one of the region’s leading industries by the late 1880s.⁴⁹ A resident from the newly chartered town of Blowing Rock in Watauga County explained in 1889:

The burning question is that of ‘beer or no beer’ – whether or not a saloon to sell beer shall be opened. The argument begins upon the expediency of it, the advocates claiming that a saloon will be an attraction and draw visitors who would not come without it, while the opponents stoutly claim that the saloon would drive away many of the best class of

⁴⁶ Quoted in *State Chronicle*, December 17, 1885.

⁴⁷ *Hickory Western Carolinian*, September 16, 1887. For additional examples of mountain Democrats embracing local-option to offset the appeal of the Prohibitionist Party, see *Hickory Press and Carolinian*, April 5, May 31, August, 2, October 25, 1888; *Lenoir Topic*, December 23, 1885, March 3, 1886, October 3, 1888; and *Mountain Star*, January 25, 1889.

⁴⁸ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 87.

⁴⁹ For a discussion on tourism in western North Carolina, see Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*.

visitors and would attract a very unsavory class. The advocates boldly assert that no prohibition summer resort has ever been a success and that Blowing Rock will never amount to anything until it has a saloon.⁵⁰

The most publicized debate regarding the sale of alcohol occurred in Asheville in 1892, when the board of county commissioners attempted to appease both “drys” and “wets” by granting liquor licenses to several hotels on the condition that these establishments sell alcohol only to their guests. Outraged, supporters of local-option organized a prohibition voting club and demanded that the commissioners overturn their decision to license barrooms in the city, but to no avail. Politicians were unwilling to support local-option because they feared that it threatened to damage the economic interests of the community. Asheville, the “birthplace” of the temperance movement in western North Carolina, would remain a “wet” town until October 1907.⁵¹

Despite these setbacks, alcohol reformers enjoyed a broad base of mountain support. In western North Carolina, 407 churches, schools, and towns passed local prohibition during the 1890s, an increase of 60 percent from the previous decade.⁵² Even if unsuccessful, reformers discovered that local-option elections provided them with a forum to educate citizens on the dangers of alcohol and build grassroots sentiment for anti-liquor legislation. When an election was called, prohibition became the most important issue in local politics for months at a time.⁵³ Anti-alcohol advocates seized the moment by forming clubs, organizing rallies, and endorsing

⁵⁰ Michael C. Hardy, *A Short History of Old Watauga County* (Boone, NC: Parkway Publishers, Inc., 2005), 98-99.

⁵¹ *Asheville Weekly Citizen*, June 16, September 22, September 29, 1892; *Lenoir Weekly News*, October 8, 1907; *Morganton News-Herald*, October 10, 1907; J.C. Pritchard, *The Moral and Intellectual Development of the People of Western North Carolina* (1907); and J.C. Pritchard, “Judge J.C. Pritchard on Prohibition: His Great Speech at Wilmington, North Carolina to a Packed House on March 14, 1908,” Duke University Papers, NCDAH.

Townpeople in Morganton, Wilkesboro, and Hickory also remained hesitant to enact local-option during the 1890s, warning that it would damage the economic interests of their communities. See Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 96-97; *Morganton Herald*, May 7, 1891, May 9, 1895; and *Wilkesboro Chronicle*, May 7, 1896.

⁵² See *Laws of North Carolina* (1891), 345-350; *Laws of North Carolina* (1893), 297-300, 328-329, 414-415; *Laws of North Carolina* (1895), 452-454; *Laws of North Carolina* (1897), 579-582, 596-598; and *Laws of North Carolina* (1899), 417-418, 879-884.

⁵³ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 87.

politicians who supported prohibition.⁵⁴ As they had done in the past, women served as the backbone of this so-called local-option crusade, often holding prayer meetings and pledging voters against whiskey.⁵⁵ Local prohibition, male and female reformers promised, would ultimately bring peace, order, and economic prosperity to their communities.

Many mountain residents, however, quickly discovered that the adoption of local-option laws had failed to alleviate alcohol consumption and violence.⁵⁶ Expectations were dashed and support for local prohibition diminished as alcohol continued to flow into “dry” communities. “The local option law ... prevails in Lenoir and Lower Creek townships, yet liquor is sold in both townships,” the *Lenoir Topic* complained in 1889. “Many good citizens, who have voted for local option and who abhor the sale and use of whiskey as a beverage, are debating whether it would not be better to license and control the liquor traffic.”⁵⁷ One year later, a *New York Times* reporter agreed. He described western North Carolina as “‘dry,’ so dry in fact that 100 gallons of blockade whisky serves a small town of 150 inhabitants of all ages and both sexes for a week’s consumption, ... and 50 gallons provide for the festivities of the Fourth of July. The prevailing thirst due to the ‘dryness’ of the towns is amazing.”⁵⁸ Burke, Caldwell, and Mitchell county residents revealed that local-option laws had resulted in the proliferation of illegal alcohol retail establishments during the 1890s. These so-called blind tigers, editors of the *Morganton Herald*

⁵⁴ *Morganton Herald*, May 4, May 11, 1899; *Asheville Weekly Citizen*, June 16, 1892; *Lenoir Topic*, February 6, 1895; and *Wilkesboro Chronicle*, April 23, 1896.

⁵⁵ *Morganton Herald*, April 2, 1891.

⁵⁶ *Hickory Mercury*, March 9, 1892; *Lenoir Topic*, April 23, July 9, 1890, July 22, August 19, 1896; *Asheville Weekly Citizen*, April 21, May 26, 1892; *North Wilkesboro News*, September 28, 1893, November 22, 1894; and *Wilkesboro Chronicle*, July 30, 1896.

⁵⁷ *Lenoir Topic*, July 24, 1889.

⁵⁸ *New York Times*, July 25, 1890.

Table 8.3. Percentage Decrease of Farm Size and Cash Value of Farms in Western North Carolina between 1890 and 1900 Compared to the Previous Decade

	Farm Size	Cash Value of Farms
1880-1890	-13	+27
1890-1900	-22	-17

Source: *Report on the Productions of Agriculture ... Tenth Census: 1880* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 128-129, 300-302; *Report on the Statistics of Agriculture... Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1895), 168, 170; and *Agriculture: Part I ... Twelfth Census: 1900* (Washington: United States Census Office, 1902), 290-291.

complained in 1899, arose like “a small pox epidemic” and proved that sheriffs were “powerless” to enforce the law.⁵⁹

Unable to prevent the sale and consumption of alcohol in their communities, mountain prohibitionists lashed out at distillers, and for good reason. Beginning in the early 1890s, several forces encouraged a growing number of Carolina highlanders to produce alcohol (often illegally) and sell it in “dry” communities. In 1891, a nationwide depression began that would continue until 1897. This economic crisis hit many mountain residents hard, as the size of their farms declined 22 percent during those years. To make matters worse, the cash value of farms in the region plummeted from \$993.84 to \$821.36, a decrease of 17 percent (see table 8.3). Seeking to recover funds without raising the tariff, the Democratic-controlled Congress in 1894 also increased the whiskey tax from ninety cents to \$1.10 per gallon.⁶⁰ At the same time, hundreds of communities enacted local-option laws.

These factors – agricultural depression, a higher alcohol tax, and local prohibition – made moonshining an attractive alternative for many Carolina highlanders. The new tax encouraged evasion because it significantly reduced the small distiller’s profit margin. By 1894, the price for a bushel of corn in western North Carolina was forty cents, while a gallon of whiskey sold for a

⁵⁹ Sarah M. Blalock to Hon. Landon Green, January 11, 1897, Petitions (Liquor), January – March 1897, General Assembly Session Records, NCDAH; and *Morganton Herald*, August 3, 1899.

⁶⁰ Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 166.

\$1.20. Without paying a tax, mountain farmers who turned two bushels of corn into five gallons of alcohol earned a \$6.00 profit. On the other hand, legal distillers netted fifty cents.⁶¹

Meanwhile, the enactment of local-option laws provided a wider market for moonshiners, who, as sole suppliers, often raised the price of alcohol on thirsty town residents.⁶²

By the mid 1890s, moonshining in western North Carolina and other parts of the United States had increased dramatically. The *New York Times* reported in 1895 that “[t]here [was] more illicit distilling and trading of ‘blockade’ whisky in [the] country than ever before.”⁶³ One year later, the federal government estimated that moonshiners produced between 5 and 10 million gallons of alcohol annually.⁶⁴ Commissioner of Internal Revenue Joseph Miller was unwilling to concede defeat, however. Appointed in 1893, he instructed revenueurs to conduct more raids on suspected moonshine enclaves.⁶⁵ These raids often proved successful.⁶⁶ In western North Carolina, revenueurs had confiscated 355 stills and arrested 130 people between 1890 and 1893. During the first three years of Miller’s tenure, agents seized 1,065 distillers and made 208 arrests.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the great divergence between seizures and arrests suggests that illicit distillers remained elusive, posting pickets and, on at least one occasion, using a modern invention, the telephone, to give ample warning of a posse’s approach.⁶⁸

⁶¹ Joseph S. Jones Daybook, 1875-1900, Special Collections, Duke University; and Miller *Revenueurs & Moonshiners*, 28.

⁶² Miller, *Revenueurs & Moonshiners*, 172.

⁶³ *New York Times*, April 14, 1895.

⁶⁴ *New York Tribune*, January 25, 1896.

⁶⁵ Miller, *Revenueurs & Moonshiners*, 168.

⁶⁶ For specific examples of liquor law enforcement in western North Carolina during the 1890s, see *New York Times*, March 22, 1891, December 14, 1892, July 22, 1894; *North Wilkesboro News*, September 28, 1893, December 6, 1894, January 17, June 6, July 11, 1895; *Wilkesboro Chronicle*, February 18, March 4, April 1, 1891, June 18, November 12, 1896; *Morganton Herald*, March 26, 1891, May 23, 1895; *Asheville Weekly Citizen*, February 28, 1892; *Tuskaseige Democrat*, March 7, September 19, October 31, 1895; *Franklin Press*, March 13, 1895; *Lenoir Topic*, July 1, 1896, January 26, 1898; and *Waynesville Courier*, February 26, 1897.

⁶⁷ *Annual Report. Commissioner of Internal Revenue* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1890-1896), 17 (1890), 16 (1891), 15 (1892), 18 (1893), 17 (1894), 19 (1895), 27 (1896).

⁶⁸ *Morganton News-Herald*, February 27, 1902.

Many moonshiners also responded by returning to organized resistance. Between 1891 and 1896, for instance, illicit distillers operated a white cap club in Wilkes County to protect their whiskey operations from federal and local officials. Modeled partly on the Ku Klux Klan, white caps had appeared in Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia by the late 1880s.⁶⁹ Like the Klan, these vigilantes wore disguises and attempted to maintain white supremacy by terrorizing African Americans. They also targeted local residents who worked with revenuers to combat moonshining. In March 1891, Wilkes County white cappers assaulted their first victim, a Hunting Creek farmer rumored to have been an informer.⁷⁰ It was not until the mid 1890s, when the Bureau of Internal Revenue attempted to crack down on illicit distilling, that white cap violence occurred on a frequent basis in Wilkes County. Throughout 1895, white cappers often paid unwelcome visits to informers and fired upon federal agents conducting raids.⁷¹ In the Roaring River section of the county, these terrorists ruled with an iron fist. There, the *Wilkesboro Chronicle* reported in March 1895, white caps were “an energetic people in the cause of Satan.” The newspaper elaborated:

Last Friday night a crowd went to Ansel Prevette’s, and called him to the door and shot him through the thigh. They went to John Prevette’s near by and tore down his dwelling house. They then went to an unoccupied house belonging to Mathew Prevette and burned it. John and Mathew are sons of Ansel, [who was a witness] a few days ago in a case again W.C. Wiles, charged with blockading ... It is dangerous to be safe up there.⁷²

This violence was not confined to Wilkes County. Yancey County moonshiners also waged war against the Bureau of Internal Revenue. Most prominent among these desperadoes was George McCurry, who had gained local notoriety after shooting two federal agents in 1896.

⁶⁹ William F. Holmes, “Moonshiners and Whitecaps in Alabama, 1893,” *Alabama Review* 24 (January 1981), 31-49; Holmes, “Moonshining and Collective Violence: Georgia, 1889-1895,” *Journal of American History* 67 (December 1980), 589-611; and Holmes, “Whitecapping and Agrarian Violence in Mississippi, 1902-1906,” *Journal of Southern History* 25 (May 1969), 165-185.

⁷⁰ *Wilkesboro Chronicle*, March 25, July 1, 1891. See also *Ibid.*, March 17, 1892.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, February 21, February 28, March 7, March 28, June 6, 1895; and *North Wilkesboro News*, March 7, 1895.

⁷² *Ibid.*, March 28, 1895.

McCurry's arrest in 1897, however, failed to end the bloodshed as illicit distillers continued to attack officials attempting to enforce federal liquor taxation and local-option laws in that county. Whether traditionalists who distilled alcohol for their neighbors or large-scale operators attempting profit from prohibition laws, moonshiners remained convinced that federal and local liquor laws threatened to destroy their livelihood, and insisted that they were not – to use the words of George McCurry – “bad men.”⁷³

But the resurgence of moonshiner violence convinced a growing number of Carolina highlanders otherwise. Following the outbreak of white cap brutality in Wilkes County in 1895, residents there chastised illicit distillers, arguing that “about three fourths of them ought to be hung and be done with it.”⁷⁴ “We hope these people will realize the fact that in taking up arms against these officers they are ‘bucking,’ and it will result disastrously to them,” editors of the *North Wilkesboro News* agreed. “There are many ways of making a living other than blockading, and we hope the time will soon come when they will also realize this fact.”⁷⁵ Yancey county denizens joined this chorus of opposition. After local officials captured moonshiners George McCurry, Moses Wilson, and Mac Webb, “three of the most desperate criminals that ever infested that or any other county in North Carolina,” in 1897, residents there were “determined to see that these desperadoes are properly punished.”⁷⁶ Nor were legal distilleries immune from the wrath of mountain reformers, who increasingly denounced them as “places of vice and sin ..., maelstroms of the neighborhoods which they infect, into which nearly all that is good is swallowed up.”⁷⁷

⁷³ Bailey, *News From Yancey*, 65, 68-72, 78.

⁷⁴ *Wilkesboro Chronicle*, March 7, 1895.

⁷⁵ *North Wilkesboro News*, April 4, 1895. See also *Tuckasiege Democrat*, October 31, 1895.

⁷⁶ Bailey, *News from Yancey*, 70.

⁷⁷ *Hickory Mercury*, September 8, 1897; and *Charlotte Observer*, January 22, 1899.

Table 8.4. Percentage Increase of Rural Locales that Outlawed the Manufacture of Alcohol in Western North Carolina between 1893 and 1903

	Rural	Urban	% Rural	% Urban
1893-1903	145	64	.69	.31

Source: In western North Carolina, 369 churches, schools, towns, and industrial facilities enacted anti-distiller local-option laws between 1893 and 1903. I was unable to determine the exact location of 160 of them. See *Laws of North Carolina* (1893), 299, 414-415; *Laws of North Carolina* (1897), 579-582; *Laws of North Carolina* (1901), 761-769; and *Laws of North Carolina* (1903), 275-276, 477-483.

This increase in anti-distiller sentiment forced the General Assembly to take action. As early as 1893, state legislators responded by adding a provision to local-option laws that allowed voters to outlaw the manufacturing of alcohol around schools, churches, and businesses. If convicted, illicit distillers had to pay a fine or serve a prison sentence, the amount or length of which was determined by the county court.⁷⁸ In 1899, the General Assembly went one step further, passing a statute that permitted voters to decide whether or not to ban the sale and production of liquor within entire counties. Violators of this law were “fined or imprisoned for each and every offence or both, in discretion of the [county] court.” The statute, however, allowed druggists to purchase and sell alcohol to residents who had “the written prescription of a regular practicing physician.”⁷⁹

Many western North Carolina reformers embraced these laws. Between 1893 and 1903, mountain voters agreed to prohibit the manufacture of alcohol around 369 schools, churches, and businesses. Moreover, of the 209 known locales that banned liquor production during those years, 145 (or 69 percent) of them were situated in non-county seat townships or in communities with fewer than 100 residents, revealing that the anti-distiller movement had now shifted from urban centers to the countryside (see table 8.4). Convinced that the liquor trade impeded the

⁷⁸ *Laws of North Carolina* (1893), 300.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* (1899), 738.

region's economic and moral potential, voters in fourteen of the twenty-five mountain counties also agreed to adopt the General Assembly's 1899 statute allowing them to ban the sale and manufacturing of alcohol within their counties.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, the perceived failure of local-option led other state and mountain reformers to experiment with the dispensary.

The Dispensary Movement and Its Consequences

In 1893, Governor Ben Tillman established the South Carolina Liquor Dispensary, allowing only government-operated stores to sell alcohol in that state. Proponents of this system believed that it would appease both "wets" and "drys" by eliminating the saloon and its attendant evils without abolishing drinking. Unlike most saloons, dispensaries prohibited drinking on the premises or in groups, operated only during daylight hours, and outlawed the sale of alcohol to minors. Along with taming drunken misbehavior, Tillman and others further argued, this system would improve South Carolina's educational facilities and infrastructure. Profits from dispensaries went back to the state, which used the money to build schools, roads, and other public works.⁸¹

Many North Carolinians soon pressured the General Assembly to adopt a similar system, believing that local-option created more problems than it had solved. According to the *Wilmington Review* in New Hanover County in May 1895, dispensaries were preferable to "the regime having so called prohibition with its drug stores and blind tigers."⁸² Many Carolina

⁸⁰ These counties were Cherokee (1899), Jackson (1899), Madison (1901), Ashe (1901), Yancey (1901), Clay (1901), Polk (1905), Watauga (1905), Burke (1907), Catawba (1907), McDowell (1907), Madison (1907), Cherokee (1907), and Macon (1907). See *Laws of North Carolina* (1899), 737-738, 841; *Laws of North Carolina* (1901), 438, 548, 556, 746; *Laws of North Carolina* (1905), 499-500; and *Laws of North Carolina* (1907), 57-58, 121-123, 188, 266-269, 456-458.

⁸¹ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 116; John Evans Eubanks, *Ben Tillman's Baby: The Dispensary System of South Carolina, 1892-1915* (Augusta, Georgia: n.p., 1950); Michael Joseph Buseman, "One Trade, Two Worlds: Politics, Conflict, and Illicit Liquor Trade in White County, Georgia and Pickens County, South Carolina, 1894-1895" (MA thesis, University of Georgia, 2002); and Francis Butler Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman: South Carolinian* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944).

⁸² *Chatham Record*, May 9, 1895, quoting the *Washington Review*.

highlanders agreed. That January, a Burke County resident insisted that a dispensary in Morganton would not only reduce public disorders, but also generate economic progress. He explained:

The town needs waterworks and graded schools and we must have them soon if we expect our town to grow. Now, as to the “sources of revenue” open to the town, the most sure and lucrative is to license bar rooms or put up a dispensary ... Why not try a [dispensary]? The town needs money and in what better way could we control the liquor traffic. Give this matter your most earnest attention, and remember that our town’s interests and future welfare hangs in the balance.⁸³

Townpeople in Lenoir and Hickory also welcomed the establishment of a dispensary with the hope that it would “put an end to personal bickerings and animosities over the subject of [local-option].”⁸⁴ “The dispensary is better than the present system,” the *Hickory Press and Carolinian* read in February. “That is certain, and would be a proper solution of the liquor traffic.”⁸⁵

The North Carolina General Assembly responded in March 1895 by allowing Haywood County residents to outlaw all saloons and establish the state’s first dispensary in Waynesville. Controlled by the county government, the dispensary forbade drinking on its premises, was closed on Sundays, and sold liquor in sealed packages of one-half pint or more. Vending alcohol contrary to the law became a misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of between \$200 and \$500 and imprisonment for thirty days or more, at the discretion of the court.⁸⁶ Although selling only \$35 of alcohol on its first day in operation, the dispensary proved to be a success. In 1897, it netted a profit of \$3,112.91, which was divided equally between Haywood County and Waynesville.⁸⁷ James P. Cook, an editor of the *Concord Standard* who visited Waynesville that same year, discovered that the dispensary had also tamed main-street drinking behavior. According to

⁸³ *Morganton Herald*, January 24, 1895.

⁸⁴ *Lenoir Topic*, January 19, 1895, quoted in *Ibid.*, January 17, 1895.

⁸⁵ *Hickory Press and Carolinian*, January 31, 1895, quoted in *ibid.*, February 5, 1895.

⁸⁶ *Laws of North Carolina* (1895), 310, 545.

⁸⁷ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 118.

Cook, the dispensary's lack of saloon attractions such as billiards and gambling had taken the fun out of drinking, thereby forcing men to seek other forms of entertainment.⁸⁸

The success of the Waynesville dispensary mobilized anti-alcohol proponents who believed that local prohibition had failed.⁸⁹ By the late 1890s, hundreds of citizens bombarded the General Assembly with petitions demanding that it establish additional dispensaries and outlaw saloons. The Baptist Young People's Union of North Carolina, based in Raleigh, expressed the sentiments of state and mountain reformers alike, writing to the legislature in 1897:

We, the Baptist young people of North Carolina, representing every county and section, do hereby most humbly and sincerely petition your honorable body, to use every lawful and reasonable means within your power to pass the bills now pending for the establishment of dispensaries in certain towns and counties in North Carolina, and to use every honorable means to suppress the traffic that is cursing our State, blighting her young manhood, weakening all her citizens, crippling her schools and impeding the progress and usefulness of every church and Christian enterprise in North Carolina.⁹⁰

These demands did not fall on deaf ears. In the western part of the state, mountain residents convinced state legislators to open dispensaries in the county seats of Rutherford (1897), Swain (1899), Burke (1899), Macon (1901), and Madison (1905).⁹¹

But support for this movement was far from universal. Hard-line prohibitionists and evangelicals made little distinction between dispensaries and saloons, and denounced the county government's use of "blood-money" to build roads and schools. "I believe we have as good a right to legalize murder as we have to legalize and endorse the sale of liquor as a beverage," C.M. Anderson wrote in 1895 in justifying why he and several other Morganton ministers refused to sign a pro-dispensary petition. "When we legalize the business and sanction it [via the

⁸⁸ *Raleigh News and Observer*, February 14, 1897, quoting the *Concord Standard*.

⁸⁹ *Morganton Herald*, April 18, 1895.

⁹⁰ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 118-119.

⁹¹ *Laws of North Carolina* (1897), 592-595; *Laws of North Carolina* (1899), 649-650, 744-749; *Laws of North Carolina* (1901), 577-578; and *Laws of North Carolina* (1905), 63.

dispensary system], we become partners and are equally guilty with the salesman, and there formally withdraw ourselves by our rebellion from His provincial protection.”⁹² These complaints continued into the next century. In 1903, for instance, farmers in the small community of Ferry explained why they wanted the dispensary in Rutherford County closed: “If it is wrong for a blind tiger to sell whiskey it is wrong for Rutherford County to legalize the sale of it and receive one-half the profits. Christians can’t afford to legalize a business which will destroy peace and happiness in this world.”⁹³

By the turn of the century, other reformers’ enthusiasm for the dispensary also declined because they believed that it had failed to solve the liquor problem. Blind tigers continued to operate in mountain counties that had established a dispensary. “The laws of the land are violated in every neck of the woods,” Henrietta residents in Rutherford County complained in 1903. “There seems to be quite an array of dispensers of ‘bug juice’ in this locality, and it is evident from the signs of times that it is a very salable commodity there.”⁹⁴ That same year, Burke County voters abolished the dispensary in Morganton. “While it was in operation,” an unnamed Morganton resident remembered in 1905, “there was no appreciable falling off in drunkenness or crime, and as a source of revenue it fell far short of what its promoters claimed for it.”⁹⁵ “Johnny Hopeful” from Waynesville agreed, pointing out that the dispensary there had increased alcohol consumption. He complained in 1903: “There is nothing good ever comes in or goes out from [the dispensary]. There is where sin, and shame, and crime, and death, are sold

⁹² Quoted in *Lenoir Topic*, February 6, 1895.

⁹³ *Rutherfordton Sun*, April 16, 1903. See also *Rutherfordton Sun*, January 15, April 9, April 30, 1903; *Morganton News-Herald*, May 7, 1903; and *Wilkesboro Chronicle*, January 12, 1905, January 9, 1908.

⁹⁴ *Rutherfordton Sun*, April 30, 1903.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, April 6, 1905.

lawfully. Here is where it is lawful and respectable to buy that which makes fiends of those who drink what is sold here.”⁹⁶

Distraught over the perceived failure of the dispensary movement, these reformers once again lashed out at the producers of alcohol. Most continued to view moonshiners as the purveyors of intemperance and violence. According to editors of the *Lenoir Weekly News* in March 1903, illicit distilling had bred “more crime than any other unlawful occupation men engage in.”⁹⁷ Local businessmen joined this chorus of opposition, insisting that moonshiners had contributed to moral and economic decline by selling alcohol to their employees. S.B. Tanner, owner of Henrietta Mills in Rutherford County, remembered:

When we built our mill villages, this vicinity was noted for its blockade distilleries, and we had no end of trouble among our operatives, which interfered seriously with the running of our mills, and it was difficult for us to retain decent and respectable people at our mills, on account of rowdiness, midnight brawls, etc.⁹⁸

Nor were legal distillers immune from the wrath of mountain reformers. “The average country distillery is the loafing place of the most worthless characters of the surrounding country,” editors of the *Wilkesboro Chronicle* complained in 1903. “There are more crimes committed near the still-houses and by reason of the influence of the stills than anybody supposes.”⁹⁹ That same year, the *Henderson Hustler* insisted that legal distillers were destroying the region. “The scent of the distilleries is a stench in the nostrils of all decent people,” the newspaper read. “Lives are being wrecked at home and the bad influence is spreading.”¹⁰⁰

In March 1903, state legislators responded to the demands of reformers by enacting the Watts Law, which prohibited both the sale and manufacture of alcohol (wines and ciders

⁹⁶ *Waynesville Courier*, January 12, 1903.

⁹⁷ *Lenoir Weekly News*, March 13, 1903.

⁹⁸ Pritchard, “Judge J.C. Pritchard on Prohibition,” 7.

⁹⁹ *Wilkesboro Chronicle*, January 21, 1903. For examples of Wilkes County residents’ disapproval of moonshining, see *Wilkesboro Chronicle*, May 17, October 19, 1905.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in *Rutherfordton Sun*, February 9, 1903.

excepted) outside of incorporated towns. North Carolinians who vended liquor contrary to the law had to pay “a fine of not more than \$200 or imprisonment not exceeding six months.” Penalties for manufacturing alcohol, however, were harsher, reflecting reformers’ belief that distillers (legal and illegal) were largely to blame for intemperance. The county court charged first-time offenders with a misdemeanor and, if convicted, sentenced them to serve between six months to two years in jail. Upon the second violation of this law, distillers were charged with a felony and imprisoned for one to four years and fined between \$100 and \$1,000.¹⁰¹ The noose was tightening around the neck of alcohol manufacturers. “Every good citizen of all parties,” the *Wilkesboro Chronicle* declared in 1905, “should hold up his hands in the heroic fight he is making to end the day when violators of the law conspire to defraud the government and make a reign of terror in the neighborhoods where they carry on their nefarious practice.”¹⁰²

But not all western North Carolinians supported the Watts Law and previous anti-distiller legislation. Many evangelicals continued to insist that neither the church nor the state had the authority to ban alcohol distilling. In 1894, for instance, the Brushy Mountain Baptist Association in Wilkes County issued a decree forbidding members from manufacturing liquor. Several churches, however, denounced the resolution, insisting that members had an inherent right to distill alcohol, and forced the association to reverse its position.¹⁰³ Opposition to anti-distiller laws continued into the early twentieth century. Many congregates of the Brushy Mountain Baptist Association would have agreed with S.M. McCall, a Caldwell County minister who argued that the Bible sanctioned alcohol manufacturing. Denouncing prohibition in 1908, he insisted that Jesus Christ was a distiller, having performed his first miracle in Cana of Galilee by making water into wine. “If those interested in the effort to establish Prohibition prove to the

¹⁰¹ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 140.

¹⁰² *Wilkesboro Chronicle*, October 18, 1905.

¹⁰³ Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 108.

satisfaction of the American people that Christ committed a sin, and that Christ set a bad example to future generations,” McCall concluded, “then we fear that they will have succeeded in destroying the very foundation of the Christian Faith.”¹⁰⁴

Other mountain residents remained convinced that anti-distiller laws were unconstitutional and threatened to destroy an important local industry. In 1903, seventeen Wilkes County farmers denounced the Watts Law by arguing that it “would be an unjust infringement upon the rights of our citizens, guaranteed to them under the constitution.” Moreover, these men warned that this statute discriminated against “the poor class of people, who are entirely dependant upon their little fruit and corn crops for support.” Petitioning to the General Assembly, they explained:

Owing to the enormous crops of corn produced in the Western States of the country, we cannot enter the markets of the world in competition with these great corn producing States and owing to the cheapness of corn and other foodstuffs there we cannot compete with them in stockraising therefore without our cash market for corn furnished by the distillers here at home.¹⁰⁵

S.M. McCall agreed five years later. “We want to elect legislators and members to congress pledged to do all in their power to bring about the repeal or judicious modification of all oppressive liquor legislation, so as to give North Carolina an equal chance with the sister States of the Republic,” he declared.¹⁰⁶

By the twentieth century, revenueurs had also become outspoken opponents of anti-distiller legislation, perceiving it as a threat to their jobs and often refusing to cooperate with state officials. These federal agents were not interested in eliminating the liquor trade. Their

¹⁰⁴ S.M. McCall, “Address of S.M. McCall upon the Evils of Prohibition To the Patriotic Voters of Caldwell County, N.C., During the Campaign Between Patriotism and Fanaticism; Prior to May 26, 1908,” (S.I.: s.n., 1908), 5.

¹⁰⁵ [Wilkes County citizens] to the Honorable, the General Assembly of North Carolina, 1903, Petitions, Box 18, General Assembly Records, NCDAH.

¹⁰⁶ McCall, “Address of S.M. McCall upon the Evils of Prohibition,” 6.

goal was to derive revenue from it.¹⁰⁷ Georgian T.C. Crenshaw expressed the sentiment of many North Carolina revenueurs, declaring: “I am a tax collector, not the guardian of the prohibition laws. I am not here to suppress liquor making or liquor selling.”¹⁰⁸ To the dismay of temperance workers, agents denounced anti-distiller legislation and argued that it would fail. “Just wait until the brandy season is fairly open and you may expect to see no end of blockading,” Rutherford County agent Vance Scoggin chastised the passage of the Watts Law in July 1903. “Available locations on the creeks and braches will be at a premium.”¹⁰⁹ Meanwhile, many mountain residents insisted that payment of the federal liquor tax exempted them from anti-distiller laws, and continued to manufacture alcohol.¹¹⁰

State and mountain prohibitionists were furious. “The federal authorities are not looking for any violations of the state law,” Alexander County residents complained in 1903.¹¹¹ Two years later, D.H. Tuttle from Caldwell County complained that revenueurs received “hush money” from illicit distillers. “Let good citizens see to it that the U.S. Revenue officers do their duty,” he pleaded. “Let good men of all creeds and parties put aside their fear and indifference in this matter and using law for all its worth, end this wickedness.”¹¹² Other mountain residents charged that revenueurs had become too lenient toward the moonshiners. According to an angry Wilkes County resident in 1905, agents showed “tenderness” to blockaders. “Haven’t they [revenueurs] an oath to enforce the law and don’t they make out their pay accounts for work done,” he asked. “We have never heard of an officer getting too ‘tender-hearted and considerate’

¹⁰⁷ Richard F. Hamm, *Shaping the Eighteenth Amendment: Temperance Reform, Legal Culture, and the Polity, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 92-119, 155-174.

¹⁰⁸ *Chicago Tribune*, September 25, 1886, quoted in Hamm, *Shaping the Eighteenth Amendment*, 113.

¹⁰⁹ *Rutherfordton Sun*, July 30, 1903.

¹¹⁰ *Asheville Semi-Weekly Citizen*, April 26, 1903.

¹¹¹ *Wilkesboro Chronicle*, March 25, 1903.

¹¹² *Lenoir Weekly News*, September 22, 1905.

to send in his pay account at the regular time.”¹¹³ Cherokee County citizens agreed, pointing out that federal agents, who “loved government money more than the morals of our County,” refused to assist state officials in eradicating the moonshine trade.¹¹⁴

The tide had completely turned against the makers of alcohol and their clientele by the early twentieth century. Despite the General Assembly’s support for local-option legislation, endorsement of dispensaries, and enactment of the Watts Law, North Carolinians continued to drink alcohol, and distillers supposedly “[didn’t] give a darn,” having remained more than willing to distribute their product in “dry” communities.¹¹⁵ State and mountain reformers increasingly believed that liquor manufacturing was the leading culprit responsible for the liquor problem. For them, distillers (licit and illicit) had prevented society from achieving “peace, prosperity, and the up-building of the church and schools.”¹¹⁶ With such widespread opposition to alcohol and those who manufactured it, the stage was now set for the passage of state-wide prohibition.

At 6:30 am, on May 26, 1908, church bells rang out in Waynesville in Haywood County. Congregates in the local Baptist and other churches had awoken early that morning, eager to greet (white) male citizens as they walked to the courthouse to vote on state-wide prohibition. Before the polling place opened at 7:00 am, the “good women of the community” had already assembled on the streets, pleading with the voters to “deposit their ballots in favor of home and country.” At 9:30 am, these women, accompanied by several children, marched down Main Street, where they sang temperance songs and waved prohibition banners in the air. They would not be disappointed. Although the first ballot cast in Waynesville was “wet,” it “was soon overwhelmed by an avalanche of ‘dry’ ballots.” With the exception of Cecil, every township in

¹¹³ *Wilkesboro Chronicle*, May 24, 1905.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Miller, *Revenuers & Moonshiners*, 173.

¹¹⁵ *Lenoir Topic*, October 7, 1903.

¹¹⁶ *Wilkesboro Chronicle*, April 29, 1908.

Table 8.5. Percentage of Votes For and Against Prohibition in the Mountain Region Compared to North Carolina as a Whole in 1908

	For	Against	% For	% Against
WNC	31,778	10,735	.75	.25
NC	81,834	58,681	.58	.42

Source: Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, appendix.

Haywood County also voted in favor of state-wide prohibition. “Old Haywood,” the *Waynesville Courier* reported two days after the election, “had ... covered herself with glory, and had gone ‘dry’ by nearly 2000 majority.”¹¹⁷

Reformers elsewhere in the state also rejoiced, as 113,612 (or 62 percent of) Tar Heel voters approved of the state-wide prohibition in 1908. “North Carolina first at Bethel, farthest at Appomattox, and the first State in the Union to banish the liquor traffic by popular vote,” the *Washington Progress* in Beaufort County boasted on May 30. “Each man should record his vote in the family Bible.”¹¹⁸ Mountain reformers were also elated. Chastised by “outsiders” as a land of intemperance and moonshining, western North Carolina had garnered a higher percentage of the “dry” vote than elsewhere in the state, despite laws that denied suffrage to African Americans (see table 8.5). In fact, with the exception of Alexander, Surry, Alleghany, and Wilkes, every mountain county voted in favor of state-wide prohibition, a complete reversal from the doomed campaign of 1881 (see table 8.6). For many local urban reformers, their rural brethren had become members of modern civilization by finally embracing “sobriety, morality, decency, education, and progress.” “We feel so proud of Jackson in this fearless fight,” editors of the *Jackson County Journal* wrote two days after 96 percent of voters in that county had endorsed

¹¹⁷ Ibid., May 28, 1908.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in *Raleigh News and Observer*, May 30, 1908.

Table 8.6. Vote on Prohibition in Western North Carolina in 1908

County	For	Against	% For	% Against
Yancey	1,210	10	.99	.01
Mitchell	1,276	43	.97	.03
Haywood	1,928	81	.96	.04
Jackson	1,032	38	.96	.04
Clay	343	23	.94	.06
Cherokee	1,646	118	.93	.07
Madison	1,715	120	.92	.08
Cleveland	2,114	195	.92	.08
Macon	841	70	.92	.08
Buncombe	4,263	593	.88	.12
Watauga	1,106	157	.88	.12
Henderson	1,212	191	.86	.14
McDowell	1,093	187	.85	.15
Swain	610	105	.85	.15
Polk	431	107	.80	.20
Graham	224	60	.79	.21
Rutherford	1,559	426	.79	.21
Burke	1,239	546	.69	.31
Transylvania	380	178	.68	.32
Caldwell	1,240	627	.66	.34
Ashe	985	540	.65	.45
Catawba	1,784	951	.65	.45
Alexander	667	697	.49	.51
Surry	1,461	1,755	.45	.55
Alleghany	194	396	.33	.67
Wilkes	1,225	2,521	.33	.67
WNC Total	31,778	10,735	.75	.25

Source: Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, appendix.

prohibition. “It shows they are ready to stand for right.”¹¹⁹ United under the banner of temperance, an overwhelming majority of urban and rural mountain voters embraced state-wide prohibition with the hope that it would eliminate liquor manufacturing and bring an end to “King Alcohol.” To the dismay of these reformers, however, that hope would soon be dashed.

¹¹⁹ *Jackson County Journal*, May 22, 29, 1908.

EPILOGUE

Well a city slicker came and he said “I’m tough”
I think I wanna taste that powerful stuff
He took one glug and drank it right down
And I heard him a moaning as he hit the ground
Mighty, mighty pleasin’, pappy’s corn squeezin’
Whshhhoooh ... white lightnin’¹

“This is the proudest day in my life,” Governor Robert Glenn proclaimed in June 1908, moments before he signed the proclamation that would make North Carolina a prohibition state on January 1, 1909.² “It is the crowning act of my administration to sign this proclamation and to know what it means for the State.” Those who attended this ceremony in Raleigh were just as elated. “A new birth had come to its people,” one participant recalled afterwards, “and ‘Praise God from whom all blessings flow’ was the herald song of voices that welcomed the advent of the day when the blight and desolation that flow in the wake of the liquor curse shall be no more in all North Carolina.”³ These prohibitionists would again celebrate nearly eleven years later, in 1919, when the U.S. Congress passed the Eighteenth Amendment, outlawing the sale and manufacture of liquor within the entire country.⁴ It appeared that their battle against “King Alcohol” was finally over.

¹ Lyrics from George Jones’s “White Lightning” in *Classic County: 1950-1964*.

² North Carolina was the second southern state to enact state-wide prohibition. Georgia went dry in 1907. Alabama and Mississippi followed suit in 1908. Tennessee in 1909, Florida in 1909, Arkansas in 1915, South Carolina in 1915, Virginia in 1917, West Virginia in 1917, and Texas in 1918 also voted out whiskey.

³ *Raleigh News and Observer*, June 20, 1908.

⁴ “On January 10, 1919, the North Carolina Senate ratified the Eighteenth Amendment unanimously, without a roll call, and the House, on January 14, by the vote of ninety-three to ten, seventeen members being absent or not voting. North Carolina was the twenty-eighth state to ratify.” See Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 182.

But nothing could have been farther from the truth. The advent of state-wide and later national prohibition ultimately intensified North Carolinians' demand for alcohol and increased the profitability of moonshining.⁵ Like those living in other parts of the nation, many mountain residents, unable to find employment, opted to distill alcohol illegally during the 1920s and 1930s. As one Cherokee County native recalled in 1989:

Everybody was needy; half of them didn't have shoes. I finally got to where I just didn't care. Young and stout and couldn't get jobs. I'd been all around South Carolina – just hitch-hiking everywhere trying to find a job. Finally, I came back home in the fall. We'd made a crop; I'd left it with the old lady. And I started making liquor. I had to have some money.⁶

Alcohol distilling subsequently emerged as a well-organized criminal business, resulting in the proliferation of moonshiner violence in western North Carolina.⁷ These moonshiners also began to manufacture more liquor than ever before. In 1935, for instance, federal agents raided a house in Wilkes County, where they confiscated 7,100 gallons of liquor, the “largest inland seizure of untaxed whiskey ever made in the United States.”⁸

Moreover, the distilling process underwent a dramatic transformation beginning in the 1920s, as alcohol manufacturers attempted to increase their profit margin by accelerating the volume of production. Three new inventions – the “thumper” keg, the “steamer,” and the groundhog still – aided liquor makers' quest to boost production.⁹ Alcohol manufacturers'

⁵ John C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1921), 110.

⁶ Michael Ann Williams, *Great Smoky Mountains Folklife* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 104-105.

⁷ For examples, see *Bryson City Times*, October 29, November 5, 1920, May 20, August 5, 1921, March 17, May 19, 1922, July 9, 1926; *Asheville Citizen*, October 28, December 11, 1920, November 24, 1927; *Asheville Times*, May 17, 1921; Chas. J. Beck to Hon. S.R. Brame, April 22, 1921, Horace Kephart Papers, Special Collections, Western Carolina University; Muriel Earby Sheppard, *Cabins in the Laurel* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), 193-198; Wilma Dykeman, *The French Broad* (New York: Rinehart, 1955), 294-303; Hardy, *A Short History of Watauga County*, 164; and Wellman, *The Kingdom of Madison*, 164-167.

⁸ Dabney, *Mountain Spirits*, 136.

⁹ The “thumper” keg eliminated “the time-consuming second distilling step. The thumper, usually fifty gallons in size, is placed between the cooking pot and condenser, and filled with beer. Hot vapors sent bubbling up from the pot through the thumper beer produce a second distillation in the keg along with a rhythmic thumping sound. The resulting whiskey is thus double distilled on only one run. Next, a new type of still was put into operation – a

discovery that they could substitute sugar for corn mash further revolutionized the distilling process, reducing the fermentation period by three-fourths. The use of sugar quickly proved profitable. As historian Joseph Dabney has explained, “For only \$5 worth of sugar – 100 pounds worth – the moonshiner could turn out ten gallons of high proof ‘shine, selling for \$20 to \$40 a gallon, or for a total of \$200 to \$400.” Other illicit distillers began to delude their homemade brew with water and sometimes attempted to speed up fermentation by using carbide, “which heated the mash but left a deadly chemical residue.”¹⁰ With new emphasis placed on quantity over quality, alcohol distilling was no longer a craft, but a profession.

The 1920s also witnessed the collapse of the anti-alcohol alliance between urban and rural reformers in western North Carolina and other parts of the mountain South. During that decade, a growing number of townspeople became – to use the words of one Carolina highlander – “drinking prohibitionists.”¹¹ In this case, Appalachia was not exceptional. John C. Burnham and other scholars have demonstrated that during the 1920s middle-class urbanites, embracing a new consumer culture that placed less value on restraint and sobriety, redefined Victorian standards of behavior and abandoned their previous support for prohibition. For them, according to historian Richard Hofstadter, prohibition became “a grim reminder of the moral frenzy that so many wished to forget, a ludicrous caricature of the reforming impulse, of the Yankee-Protestant notion that it is both possible and desirable to moralize private life through public action.”¹²

“steamer,” which enabled the illicit distillers to boost production tremendously. The steamer sends hot vapors through one or a series of pots of fresh beer, providing very efficient distillations. Many of the early steamers were ‘stack steamers’ – two or three metal drums welded together. In some isolated areas, the groundhog still came onto the scene – giant metal cylinders that enabled a man to produce two or three hundred gallons of whiskey a day and to ferment and distill in the same giant pot.” See *ibid.*, 110.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 110, 111.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 104. See also Barry M. Buxton, *A Village Tapestry: The History of Blowing Rock* (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1989), 166; Whitener, *Prohibition in North Carolina*, 231.

¹² Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), 287. See also John C. Burnham, *Bad Habits: Drinking, Smoking, Taking Drugs, Gambling, Sexual Misbehavior, and Swearing in American History* (New York: New York University Press, 1993); Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper:*

Ironically, middle-class townspeople now perceived the anti-alcohol crusade as an unwanted remnant of “traditional” American values, overlooking that fact that their forefathers and foremothers were the first to champion it in the early nineteenth century. Meanwhile, rural evangelicals and farmers in western North Carolina and other communities across the New South, who were the last to accept prohibition, continued to defend it.¹³ For them, the anti-prohibition movement epitomized a burgeoning urban culture that threatened to displace “traditional” values. But these men and women had also forgotten why they had originally embraced anti-alcohol reform: not to restore “traditional” values (which accepted the use of alcohol), but to forge a new “modern” America, one that their urban counterparts had also envisioned.

American Culture and Society in the 1920s (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995); Robert H. Wiebe, *Self-Rule: A Cultural History of American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Willa Cather, *Not Under Forty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1936); William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Geoffrey Perrett, *America in the Twenties: History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982); and Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

¹³ Wilma Dykeman, *The French Broad* (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1955).

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 J. B. Young to S. A. Ashe, October 18, 1884

Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill:

Grant Arledge Papers
 Alphonso Calhoun Avery Papers
 Robert Burton Papers
 Tod Caldwell Papers

John Charles and Olive Dame Campbell Papers
John Ellis Coulter Papers
Orin Datus Davis Papers
Elk Creek Primitive Baptist Church Records
Oliver Max Gardner Papers
James Gwyn Papers
Lenoir Family Papers
Miscellaneous Letters
Theodore Davidson Morrison Papers
Polk and Yeatman Family Papers
James G. Ramsay Papers
Thomas Settle Papers
Eli Sharpe Papers
Shotwell Family Papers
Jacob Siler Papers
Maude Minish Sutton Papers
Strabane Account Book
Samuel McDowell Tate Papers
E. Y. Webb Papers
A. and A. T. Walker Account Book
Zeb Vance Walser Papers
Sue Campbell Watts Papers
David Eugene Whisnant Papers

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Horace Kephart Papers
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