Persistent Culinary Traditions in Rural Southern West Virginia

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PERSISTENT CULINARY TRADITIONS IN RURAL SOUTHERN WEST VIRGINIA

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College of Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Geography

by

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Approved by Dr. James Leonard, Committee Chairperson Dr. Joshua Hagen Dr. Godwin Djietror

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Abstract

The Appalachian region is home to a number of culinary traditions that are, in many ways, unique to the area. These traditions have persisted in a nation whose food ways are becoming largely homogenized. Using primary sources from Southern West Virginia such as historic cookbooks, archived newspaper articles, and personal interviews this research depicts a unique regional rural food tradition that has survived in many forms to this day. Comparisons are made to other regional rural diets, as well as well documented historic trends in traditional erosion as seen at the national urban and suburban levels, to support not only the historic food traditions but their impact on the evolution of the Appalachia diet.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Appalachia holds pockets of traditionally and economically isolated people who adapted methods of food preparation and consumption that were unique in many ways as compared to adjacent regions. This area is primarily rural, like much of American during the first half of the twentieth century, and relied on local food practices. Though a general remoteness helped to maintain these rural methods for generations, there have been steady erosions in traditional practices, similar in many respects to movements experienced throughout the United States. This erosion has been influenced by a number of factors such as industrialization, market forces, globalization, and consumerism, to varying degrees. The coalfields of Southern West Virginia, for example, were generally slower to adopt new patterns of consumption due to a number of variables. These variables allowed the rural region to longer maintain a food tradition dissimilar to America’s urban processes.

Southern West Virginia culinary traditions have been shaped less by ethnic backgrounds and influences and more by the manner in which a group localized people attempted to feed themselves. The term “traditional” culinary practice encompasses methods of raising, obtaining, and preparing foods and also to the specific food items used within this geographic region that housed a number of differing groups. Although Appalachian cuisine exhibits many similarities to the national base diet, methods of production, preparation, and food item availability played a significant role in shaping the regional food ways.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

Regional geography has long been a staple of geographic inquiry. Geographer Robert Platt (1957) calls the regional method the “heart of geography,” pointing out that systematic geography deals with something about *every* part of the world as opposed to regional geography which deals with *everything* about *some* part of the world. Although this statement may seem a very simplistic explanation of the regional method, it points toward a manner of inquiry that can be used as geographers attempt to paint a picture of an entire region by examining specific localized practices exhibited and created by humans. Among these elements (traditionally) are the utilization of resources for food production and consumption.

Three types of geographic regions are commonly recognized by geographers: formal, functional, and perceptual. Formal regions share common physical attributes such as climate, or landform (Kuby et al. 2010). The mountains are the most obvious physical commonality in the Appalachian region. Researchers such as Cooper and Knotts (2010) have used poverty levels and other economic variables to delimit the American South as a formal region. Similarly, Appalachia can be seen as a formal region sharing characteristics of rural poverty. For example, the Appalachian Regional Commission has defined Appalachia by economic status (ARC 2013).

One of the first delineations of Appalachia as a formal region came from John C. Campbell’s *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* published in 1921. Campbell’s interpretation was based mostly on terrain. He noted similarities in culture across the region but also that there were numerous pockets of dissimilar cultures. A comparison of his delineation, which begins at the Mason-Dixon Line, can be compared to an expanded map of ARC Appalachian counties, many of which were added in 1965 (See Figure 1)(1969).
Geographer and folklorist John Rehder (2004) acknowledges that Appalachia as a formal region is often mythologized and misunderstood. He argues that mountain culture is often presented as a caricature of itself. Culture, as described by many regional geographers, is in fact
learned. It is cultivated, accepted, and passed down by communities of humans who either accept or reject its tenets (which can be said of both rural and urban regions). Rehder discusses the common cultural indicators of Appalachia but also devotes a great deal of time to the delimited region. He points to the obvious shared topography of the region—an elongated S. He also notes that there are regions within the Appalachian Mountains and describes them as three major geomorphic provinces: the Blue Ridge; the Ridge and Valley; and the Allegheny and Cumberland Plateaus. All three regions are linked but have some distinctions, such as land formation, running parallel to one another from Northeast to Southwest.

Another method of regional delineation is the use of functional regions that tend to focus on areas as defined by specific spatial interactions, which may include transportation systems or governmental and politic designations such as a county or a state. Though the region of Appalachia can be thought of as a formal region restricted to the topography of the mountains, there are wider functional interpretations of the region that have extended its boundaries. The Appalachian Regional Commission which controls funding, grants, and various programs aimed at the development of Appalachia includes counties that are farther north and south than traditionally thought (See Figure 2). These counties are forty-two percent rural and bound not only by physical geography or economic status but now also by government administration of development funding (ARC 2013).
Williams (2002) claims that Appalachia is better thought of as a functional region with a core and periphery of spatial interaction:

Although the traditional approach to Appalachian regionalism originated at least partly in antimodernism, it relied on the modern definition of region as established by geographers at the end of the nineteenth century: a territory set apart from others by an enumerated set of attributes, features that could be mapped in their distribution from regional core to periphery and measured in
intensity so that one could say confidently how “Appalachian” (of southern or western or New England-ish) a given place was. (12)

Williams (2002) continues to explain that Appalachia can be seen in a postmodern approach as a zone of interactions among the diverse people and environment present in the area. These interactions serve to help researchers define the region without relying solely on a specific set of cultural or socioeconomic or environmental markers. He also notes that Pennsylvania’s inclusion in the region has more to do with its impact on the region than a true, shared culture or physical attributes. It was from Pennsylvania that industrialism spread throughout the mountains and from that state that many settlers entered the mountains. A map of Williams’ Appalachia as he discusses it in terms of core and periphery can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Williams’ Appalachia

Perceptual regions have also been called popular regions by researchers such as Mayfield and Morgan (2005), or more commonly, vernacular regions by geographers such as Hardwick et al. (2008) and Zelinsky (1980). Unlike formal and functional regions, vernacular regions are defined by self-identification of the inhabitants (Cooper and Knotts, 2010; Ambinakudige, 2009). According to Zelinsky (1980), a vernacular region is not something created by political division or the scientist’s specific purpose. It is an expression of identity and place.

Ambinakudige (2009) reviewed and delineated a contemporary region of “Dixie” by examining specific markers of self-identification in the traditional south. Taking note from other researchers such as Zelinsky (1980), Ambinakudige identified all occurrences of “South, Southern, American, and Dixie” that existed in electronic telephone directories in the lower 48 states. Businesses that referred to local and political jurisdictions, insurance companies, and banks were excluded. Terms that identified ethnic groups (such as “Native American”) were also excluded. Large corporations with more than 20 branches were left out as well. Each location was tied to a zip code, recorded in a database, and loaded into ArcGIS for examination. This research showed the identification of “South” greatly outweighed that of “Dixie.” It also noted that the rural counties tended to have a much greater identification with these markers than did urban centers. In both instances, however, the study showed the vernacular regions were eroding as compared to previous studies cited. The erosion of “Dixie” was much more rapid due to a long held negative connotation of the term but each shows the erosion of traditional identities as they pertain to regional studies.

Mayfield and Morgan (2005) studied the New River as a vernacular region within Appalachia by identifying markers that capitalized on the image of the New as the “oldest river.”
They clearly show that beginning in the 1970s a campaign designed to save the New River from being dammed inadvertently created a common association among those living near the “oldest river.” Their study is a representation of inhabitant’s association of self and place.

Identity associated with the term “Appalachia” can be dated to the late 1800s. At this time, researchers from outside the area began examining the mountain region and its “peculiar” people. The case of Appalachia is interesting because the term (and later self-identification) originated from outside the region and was both projected and adopted by the local inhabitants (Cooper et al., 2011). On a larger scale, Cooper et al. attempted to re-examine the Appalachian region as a whole as it can be delimited based on cultural identity. They examined the appearance of “Appalachia” in business names as they appeared in 2011, finding the cores area of Appalachian identity resides in Eastern Kentucky, Southern West Virginia, Eastern Tennessee, Western North Carolina, and Southwestern Virginia. Cooper et al. note the importance of revisiting commonly accepted regions because, regional identification is a process and may well change over time.

Formal, functional, and vernacular criteria can be combined in order to define geographic regions. The prevalence of one may well be considered over another in order to suite the specific purpose of a researcher’s study. Kuby et al. (2010) point out that nothing is sacred or concrete about regions. Geographers also note the need to revisit historically delineated regions. Simply put, regional geography is not set in stone. Regions are not fact, but academic analyses of sets of factors.

These descriptions of varied geographic methods beg the simple question: Why do geographers study regions? Geographers Murphy and O’Loughlin (2009) best explain this answer:
…it is imperative that geographers, economists, and other social scientists deepen their understanding and appreciation of the forces at play in different world regions…it is regional geography that is concerned with explanation, not just depiction; that treat regions as constantly shifting products of social and economic relations, not simply as units that need to be understood and that does not look at regions in isolation, but instead see them in relation to developments unfolding both above and below the scale of regions. (241-2)

This depiction of the importance of regional inquiry provides both the basis and the inspiration for this paper. The examination of a region of Appalachia (in this instance Southern West Virginia) exhibits the importance of regional geography as researchers attempt to create and uphold community identities and also explain the evolution of rural culture and the influence exuded by national urban trends.

Vernacular regions are studied largely by considering the inhabitants and their methods of self-identification. Researchers also take more historical and ethnographic approaches when considering the study of regions. Edwards, Ashbury, and Cox (2006) present a series of essays and papers as a depiction of a larger Appalachian region discussing at length elements such as culture, religion, and geography (among others). Though not entirely typical of the more mountainous areas in Southern West Virginia, the average plot of family land in Appalachia was approximately two hundred acres during the middle portion of the nineteenth century. Each “farm” was largely wooded with only small portions cleared and devoted to subsistence farming. Inhabitants of the Appalachian region relied on small farms and localized gathering influences by the wilderness and available wild food sources (Edwards et al. 2006). Of course true ownership in Appalachia is a debatable concept when one considers the existence of the broad-form deed, which effectively stripped a large portion of land owners of the mineral rights to their property (Portelli, 2011).
In pockets of Appalachia, although varying somewhat, the depiction presented by Edwards et al. (2006) is one that pervaded much of these eastern mountains. It is also a narrative that is common among Appalachian studies scholars, presenting life as it can be recalled from the mouths of those who lived in the region. Oral history techniques, often utilized by social historians and ethnographers, capture a very clear snapshot of the everyday life of those being studied.

Discussions on regional geographic methods provide a basis for understanding how the Appalachian region might be interpreted and ultimately described. In each instance, we can see a similar region influenced by identity and geomorphic features. These concepts will be important in any discussion of Appalachia that attempts to describe culture or people as it they are influenced on a local level. However, when discussing food patterns, other resources will be needed to create a comparison to urban and suburban American trends.

Over the course of two books, Harvey Levenstein (both 2003) details the transformation of the American dietary habits from 1880 to the present day. His research is primarily aimed at presenting a more historical account with few detailed discussions of regional, rural, or cultural habits. His work represents a straightforward attempt to describe chronologically linear patterns and changes as they occurred in urban and suburban America. Essentially, Levenstein tracks the progression of the American diet from localized markets to processed foods that were (and are) transported across the nation from region to region. There are also in-depth accounts of the changes in food preparation that arose in the same time period.

Ann Vileisis (2008) also outlines the patterns exhibited in American food consumption in her book *Kitchen Literacy: How We Lost Knowledge of Where Food Comes From and Why We Need to Get It Back*. Also presented in a chronologically linear fashion, her research is designed
with the specific intent of tracking and explaining the loss of general food knowledge and change in food ways seen in urban and suburban America. Vileisis’ account follows the rise of processed foods, adulteration of traditional items, and the search for and exploitation of ‘easy’ foods by increasingly busy Americans. These accounts provide a historic, urban-leaning baseline that can be compared with the rest of rural America, in this instance Appalachia.
Chapter 3

Appalachia as a Food Region

The food traditions of Appalachia, in many respects, are quite similar to other areas of rural America. Although the largest differences arise when compared as a rural region to large urban centers, there are still a number of variations in the mountains that distinguish the regional diet.

The existence of regional food traditions can be best exhibited by the work of Renewing America’s Food Traditions (RAFT). RAFT (2013) is a coalition of a number of non-profit food and cultural organizations dedicated to the preservation and re-emergence of localized food traditions in North America. RAFT is partnered as well with Northern Arizona University and is charged with the task of identifying and preserving long-held traditions that may have been recently eroding. A simplistic map provided on their website illustrates their point (Figure 4). This particular map is quite basic. For example, the Appalachian mountain falls into a number of categories. One, in particular, stretches from east to west and is labeled “Cornbread and BBQ Nation.” This depiction is overgeneralized and includes the mountains with edges of the Plains and the East Coast, areas that actually have greatly varied diets. Though not all encompassing, this map represents the notion that regional geography plays an important role in the development of regional food traditions.

According to Rehder (2004), food practices are among the more broad characteristics of a rural society’s culture. His discussion goes beyond a simple account of what items have been consumed or what recipes have been prepared in the area and begins an analysis of cultural practices that surrounds culinary practice. For example, Rehder links the act of planting foods in
Appalachia to a common superstitious tendency present in Southern West Virginia—planting by the signs of the moon and the zodiac.

Figure 4: RAFT Food Regions

\textit{Appalachian Folkways} is full of stories of mountain people gathering greens, nuts, berries, ramps, and herbs for their dinners. To Rehder, “food was the most convincing introduction to Southern Appalachia that I could find” (205). Not only have people of this region developed unique foods but also have created festivals intended to celebrate the harvest of
specific food items scheduled during the same time of year as their typical ripening. Of these are more individualized festivals such as the Cosby Ramp Festival each May (2004), the Black Walnut Festival of Madison, and the Pumpkin Festival of Milton.

Discussion of the overall geography of the area lends itself to the foods that were consumed, as well as the methods of production and preparation. The mountainous terrain of Appalachia allowed for only sporadic farms. Plantations were limited to the few lowland areas, largely near rivers. Many of these areas developed into urban and suburban centers as populations grew (Williams, 2002). The difficult terrain of rural Appalachia meant that there was little land for pasture or garden. Most inhabitants raised subsistence gardens during the summer. The colder months consisted largely of pork, potatoes, and hunted game. Pork could easily be preserved and hogs were allowed to roam the forests foraging for acorns and underbrush. Beef was a rarity. With little land for cattle to graze, only few were kept and typically used for milk production (Rehder, 2004).

The choices of meats in the region were largely a matter of convenience and practicality. While other regions such as the Great Plains relied heavily on beef (Shortridge, 2003), pork was the Appalachian’s herd. In fact, Shortridge went on to describe a typical meal as described by Great Plains respondents calling it a typical meal of rural American. The meal consisted of beef, potatoes, salad, and corn. Her study outlines the commonality of rural diets, creating a base menu but comparing it to rural regions in North America. She makes the comparisons to other rural communities such as New Mexico that also incorporated rice, tortillas, and pinto beans. Accordingly, Shortridge notes that, whereas rural diets varied, respondents from urban centers described meals that were much more elaborate and diverse (2003). Similarly, seafood was prevalent, and in fact celebrated in coastal communities such as New England (and as far inland
as it could be transported without impacting freshness) (Petrocci, 1995), but in Appalachia it was confined to freshwater fishing, not often a weekly meal.

Gathering foods was also a standard habit in rural Appalachia. Wild greens such as poke and Shawnee were local favorites. Wild fruits native to the region were also often gathered. These included berries, paw-paws, and persimmons. Mountain regulars such as ramps and morels (often called molly moochers) were favorites. All of these grow naturally in the Appalachian Mountains and collectively add to the local diet creating one invariably tied to geography (Rehder, 2004).

Another wild food gathered in Appalachia was the scuppernong, a type of wild grape used largely for preserves and wine. The scuppernong and the similar muscadine once grew in abundance in the Allegheny, Blue Ridge, and Cumberland regions of Appalachia. Their vines climbed trees in the mountain wilderness. Attempts to cultivate these wild grapes were largely unsuccessful though the occasional laden arbor could be found. Their use is another example of the gathering techniques of the region (Dabney, 1998).

Mark Sohn (2005) uses his background as a food historian to present Appalachian food in its preparation and acquisition. According to Sohn, Appalachia (his focus lying in the Southern Highland region) has few unique food types, as there were many pockets of varying ethnicities. Traditional food in Appalachia can be determined by its method of acquisition, “it [mountain food] is distinct because the region’s people were independent, its mountains offered an abundance of natural resources, and because its settlers mixed with the Native Americans” (3).

Speaking to the differences in Appalachian diet as it relates to geography, Sohn (2005) points out:

Many of the iconic foods of Appalachia are equally common in the South (cornbread, biscuits and gravy, fried apples, and chicken and dumplings, to name
a few)…But geography and climate limited the spread of other foods. For example, seafood is uncommon in land-locked Appalachia, and rice—associated with Charleston, South Carolina and regions farther south—could not be grown in the mountains. The same is true of cane sugar, which grows in frost-free climate zones but not in Appalachia. This suggests why sorghum, honey, and maple syrups are the sweeteners found in cooler climates including Appalachia. Similarly, Irish potatoes are more popular in Appalachia than in the South. It is simply too warm in the Deep South for farmers to hold seed potatoes over from one season to the next. (8-9)

Sohn’s text produces a vital point. As the ARC points out, Appalachia is largely rural. Rural regions share certain commonalities such as gardening and similar vegetables/meats. The extent to which gathering was used in combination with hunting in Appalachia sets it apart. The preference for pork is uncommon to many parts of the nation, with exception of the traditional South. The limitations of the land created an altered rural menu in this region.

Researcher Christi Smith (2003) discusses the notion of regionally recognized food traditions in her ethnography of Kentucky, exhibiting the manner in which food is entangled with both history and culture. Smith interviewed twenty-one people, mostly out-migrants of Kentucky. All hailed from rural Appalachian backgrounds, but some had found their way to more urban settings. Many spoke about traditional hunting practices and their nostalgia for traditional rural meals such as classic cornbread and soup beans—items from their places of origin that were lacking in their new urban environments.

Smith (2003) notes that as food patterns have changed, Appalachians have been more apt to embrace modified or modern versions of their traditional foods than new menus entirely. Mountain folk made small jumps to cornbread made from pre-mixed powders and to broiling rather than frying from the 1950s onward. Hunting continued to be an important expression of an entrenched cultural tradition. The practice evolved from a staple in the average Appalachia diet to a past time enjoyed at only short, designated intervals of each year.
Smith (2003) alludes to a very important point—though culture is a human production, we carry it with us as we grow and leave our home territory. The idea that rural Appalachians who moved to a more urban setting missed their homegrown meals points to an obvious note that there was a marked difference in diets from location to location (2003).
Chapter 4

Methodology

The research presented in this project was collected from three sources: historical cookbooks, local newspaper archives, and resident interviews. It was conducted and compiled in an interdisciplinary fashion borrowing elements from regional geography, ethnography, and historic inquiry. The analysis of historical literature provided a baseline by which changing food traditions in Southern West Virginia were measured, as a model of rural America, against trends in urban and suburban America. The progression of trends in urban America, as well as timelines were contrasted with information collected from the Southern West Virginia counties of Kanawha, Lincoln, Logan, Boone, Wayne, Wyoming and Mingo (See Figure 5). These counties were chosen as representations of the Appalachian region for several reasons. They are (more importantly they were) similar to one another in physical geography, economies, and culture—existing in the central portion of most delineations of the Appalachian region. Their proximity to more urban Charleston, West Virginia offers both moderate seclusion and also moderate levels of influence and ease of transport.

As the traditional foods of Appalachia have been well documented by researchers such as Mark F. Sohn (2005) and Joseph E. Dabney (1998), emphasis was placed on presenting timeframes in which foods and techniques were used and to present a sense of chronology to their moderate decline. As most texts written on rural foods tend to focus on traditional recipes and methods collected with little regard for the specific time period, there needed to be a concerted effort to attach dates/eras to practices. This research was accomplished through archival research examining historic local cookbooks, searching through archived local newspapers for examples of food preparations and acquisition methods, and conducting oral
interviews with select locals from these counties. This primary research was coupled with existing secondary information found in published research from additional Appalachian scholars. These methods would allow for accurate rural snapshots of food ways, to be compared with the documented urban dietary trends.

Figure 5: Southern West Virginia Counties:

Kanawha, Lincoln, Boone, Logan, Wayne, Mingo, and Wyoming.

The cookbooks examined were primarily from local civic organizations such as churches and women’s clubs. Some were from private collections but most were held in the West Virginia State Archives and Special Collections at the Division of Culture and History. Most of their publication dates were known: however, some were estimates given by resident historians
employed by the Division of Culture and History. These cookbooks were primarily either self-published or printed by local businesses. The intention with many of them was to sell them to raise money for charities or organizations. The dates and specific techniques and food items were used to contrast with the documented urban trends occurring at the same. Localized cookbooks were chosen as they were compiled and written by the rural women (mostly women) who lived in the respective towns and counties. The recipes given were daily meals that were typical of the Southern West Virginia family. Most of the cookbooks chosen come from the latter part of the nineteenth century through the mid twentieth century and are written by Appalachian inhabitants.

Another source of information was found in the form of weekly newspaper columns. Throughout most of the first half of the twentieth century each county in Southern West Virginia had multiple newspapers. Most exhibited weekly columns focused on the presentation of recipes or methods of cooking. These articles were written by local women for local women and are the most accurate, definitive account of historic day-to-day local food practices. The time range from which articles were pulled covered the early portion of the twentieth century to the 1970s. Topics ranged from local and seasonal recipes to methods of food preparation. Articles were acquired through research at the West Virginia Division of Culture and History Library and Archives.

Finally, as cookbooks and newspaper articles have no voices of their own, interviews from local inhabitants were collected to give a clear picture of day-to-day life and eating habits in Southern West Virginia. The questions asked of each inhabitant can be found in Appendix A. The interview questions, methodology, and consent forms were all reviewed and approved by the Office of Research Integrity at Marshall University and the Letter of Approval can be seen in
Appendix B. Participant interviews were personally recorded (using digital audio), transcribed, and kept entirely confidential. After transcription the digital files were deleted. The consent forms and anonymous transcripts will be kept on file by the principal investigator at Marshall University. The respondents’ oral histories provide personal knowledge and local experiences that help contrast with the national image of changing food patterns. The accounts offer actual voices that add to the picture of regional significance of Southern West Virginian Appalachia.
Chapter 5

Primary Source Analysis and Comparison

Changes in the rural Appalachian diet were seen in Southern West Virginia in only a similar fashion to the rest of the country. Discussions on European influence, increased use of processed foods, and erosion of some traditional practices all existed in varying degrees throughout the twentieth century. Some influences were delayed, whereas others seem confined to the few urban areas. Economics, limited mobility, and traditional practices left Southern West Virginia to lag behind urban trends. Increased industrialization and transportation in this region has pushed it along a path of modified acceptance as a thorough examination of primary sources collected from various points of time can show. These sources include locally distributed cookbooks compiled by various civic organizations, newspaper articles from Southern West Virginia counties, and interviews with local inhabitants of the area.

The following information is intended to develop a discussion of culinary trends in rural food regions using Kanawha, Lincoln, Logan, Boone, Mingo, Wyoming and Wayne counties, West Virginia as a representation of Appalachia. The majority of sources come from these areas directly. However, additional sources from other parts of West Virginia are also vital as adjacent areas vary only minimally but are all considered rural as noted by the Appalachian Regional Commission. In addition, some anthologies or collections compiled and produced in the northern portion of the state purport to be either all-inclusive or to be a direct representation of the state as a whole. These cookbooks are not dissimilar to historians’ attempts to generalize the United States’ urban experiences as a whole in order to present a universal model.

Locally compiled cookbooks from Southern West Virginia offer historic representations of local culinary palettes and traditional insights at specific points in time. Examinations of these
books offer a depiction of the regional change in traditional practice as it relates to preparation of food items as well as specific items themselves.

The Ladies of the Baptist Aid Society in Mt. Hope, West Virginia, produced a cookbook in 1907. This cookbook compilation was not meant to capture historic, traditional food practices but to present a guide for women of the time. Its pages are filled with what the now contemporary chef would see as a localized and simplistic menu. For example, a recipe for smothered rabbit begins aptly with “dress and cut up the usual way” (Baptist Ladies’ 1907, 18). There are no further detailed instructions. It is assumed that the homemaker would clearly understand how to dress a rabbit and how to acquire one. The recipe goes on to describe the process of cooking the hare stating “roast until tender and delicately brown. The rabbit will be juicy and toothsome” (18). There are no temperatures or time limits here. Southern Appalachians had not been exposed to modern appliances or home economics. In addition, it is interesting to note the language used in this 1907 cookbook is very similar to American Cookery written in 1796 by Amelia Simmons and largely considered the first American Cookbook (Vileisis 2008). While the rest of urban America was introducing processed foods shipped from various parts of the country, Appalachian women were still preparing “toothsome” meals gathered largely from their own or local property.

During the first and second decades of the twentieth century, new developments in food science and preservation led to a movement known as ‘Home Economics’ which centered around the management of these new forms of cookery that utilized newly processed foods and clearly defined methods of cooking that incorporated specific measurements and practices. As America adopted more modern appliances, the campaign expanded. Home economics began as a support for the new “progressive” food ways of urban and suburban America. Contrasting with rural
methodology of the same time, one can see the slower acceptance of food science in rural regions.

Throughout their 1892 *Cook Book: Sold in Aid of the Home for the Destitute*, the Ladies of Charleston outlined numerous traditional Appalachian meals such as corn muffins in which the cook is instructed quite simply to mix the ingredients with corn meal “added to the consistency of better [sic] cakes. Bake in muffin rings in hot oven.” (53) Again here the instructions are simple with very few measurements. A section of the cookbook is titled “Fancy Desserts” and includes meringues and soufflés, items missing from many Southern West Virginia books of the time period (Ladies of Charleston 1912). This example showcases both the existence of rural influence on a small city but the microcosm of diverse methodology beginning to separate the culinary nation.

From 1880 to 1900, urban America had developed obsessions with image, hosting elaborate dinner parties with varied menus served by hired hands became a commonality, particularly among the middle class (Levenstein, *Revolution* 2008). Although the rest of the nation’s urban households placed importance on image while entertaining, Southern West Virginians valued manners and the importance of comfort foods. Similarly, cookbooks from Charleston, West Virginia speak to proper placement of utensils and place settings while entertaining guests but note that “true politeness and hospitality should be the real guide for table etiquette” (Home Economics Dept. of Charleston 1921). Guides on entertaining spoke less to the use of servants and more to the proper placement of settings and menu design (*Charleston Cook Book* 1914). These discussions, however limited, were more prevalent in urban Charleston than the coal camps of Logan County but beginning more than 20 years after the urban trends.
Boone county native Lucy Bennett Smoot, with encouragement from her family, wrote a cookbook of family foods and practices in 2005. Her documentation follows not only recipes found in historic cookbooks but in traditional practices described by Sohn. She describes searching for sassafras root to make sweet tea as well as a very typical “hog killin' time … an annual event that the family took for granted. Together as part of the ritual, women and men would grind meat into sausage. But women canned the sausage. Men and women made the lard” (16). These traditions followed Smoot through to the latter half of the twentieth century, a time when the rest of America had already accepted TV dinners and fast food and began questioning the safety and validity of their choices (Levenstein, Paradox 2008). At Smoot’s home, she gathered wild foods and prepared meals grown from a rural garden. Her (2005) account is an important comparison to urban and suburban America in the twentieth century. Smoot exemplifies the farming and gathering Appalachian as he/she existed well into the modern era of food processing. Hers is a story of a rural region whose food choices were still largely localized.

In similar fashion to Sohn (2005), many organizations attempted to preserve recipes and practices from the Appalachian region in cookbooks. Many traditional recipes such as corncob jelly, homemade vinegar, and persimmon cookies made use of locally grown and wild food items (WV Extension Homemakers 1974). If one did not have access to such items, a brief drive would likely produce a local seller. Others exemplify the Southern West Virginians ability to make use of the majority of their resources, such as “Hog Jowl with Turnip Greens” (Connor 1972). These cookbooks, compiled by local women, provide important snapshots of the rural culinary practices of the day.
The cookbooks of Southern West Virginia illustrate an interesting shift. Whereas early local cookbooks simply presented common foods consumed in particular communities, later books such as Smoot’s (2005) attempt to preserve localized and family recipes as tribute to accepted food culture. This conscious attempt at preservation points to a couple of assumptions. First, Appalachians are aware of a common regional food tradition. Second, they are also aware of a trending erosion of that tradition and thus a need for its preservation. Modern “traditional” cookbooks tend to be retrospective in nature, while the archival examples are matter-of-fact representations of the time period. This realization is an obvious after effect of globalization in the food production industry as processed foods began trickling into rural markets.

Another useful tool in mapping culinary trends are newspapers. Daily and weekly papers were abundant in Southern West Virginia. During the first half of the twentieth century, most counties had at least two publications (often with political party affiliations). Many of these papers contained articles dedicated to recipes or home economics, largely written to appeal to the woman of the household. Examination of these articles can reveal changes in food usage that is somewhat similar in pattern, though not in time period nor substance, to urban trends.

*The Wayne County News* printed a popular section called “Mother’s Cook Book” written by Nellie Maxwell that ran as late as the 1920s. Maxwell dedicated a large portion of her articles to the traditional home cooked meals and personal food preservation. She advocated smart use of material with such recipes as soup from the bones of fowl (Maxwell April 1921). A number of her weekly columns also emphasized the use of seasonal items local to the area. This is in contrast to the arguments provided by Vileisis and Levenstein who claim that by this time Americans were beginning to lose their sense of seasonality as it pertains to food and argue over the stripping of vitamins in the preservation process. Maxwell produced weekly recipes that
showed the use of seasonal items to be alive and well in Southern West Virginia. Among these are recipes that used local apples for yearly desserts, as well as many “midsummer jams and jellies” made from blackberries and wild grapes (Dabney’s scuppernongs) that were native to the region (Maxwell January; July 1921).

Even the more urban areas in Southern West Virginia were well aware of seasonal foods and looked forward to harvesting favored items each year. Articles in the Charleston newspapers were nearly as likely to present recipes containing wild blackberries and local rhubarb, easily obtained with a day trip to the surrounding countryside (Bye August 1919).

Levenstein (Paradox 2003) depicted the 1940s and 50s as among the height of early processed food usage along with rationing and the expansion of food science in advertising. During the 1940s, few recipes in Southern West Virginia called for items more exotic than baking powder or raisins. Many homemakers’ articles still devoted their pages to the proper development of corn bread, although by now the recipes were often somewhat more complex than the over simplified versions of the turn of the century cookbooks. Many recipes of this time period were complete with full measurements and proper baking temperatures (Howe February 1941). It is important to note here the influence that technology and science had on these practices. Many Southern West Virginians were slowly adapting to the use of modern stoves beginning in the 1950s and 60s to replace the traditional “warm ovens” heated by burning wood or coal, a transition that was largely complete by this time in the rest of the nation (Weller 1965). This lag is largely a delayed inclusion in other rural settings as well, but still quite important to the development of the easier recipes that followed.

Appalachians continued making liver and vegetable pies to make use of every part of the animals they butchered (Chambers October, 1941). They also held on to and incorporated long
held food items such as sauerkraut in combination with pork chops from the fall slaughter but incorporated experimental items such as fruits into the recipes (Howe January 1941). Entire pages were still being devoted to the art of proper biscuit baking (Gibson March 1936).

Interestingly, there are few mentions of rationing in the Southern regions of West Virginia during World War II. Seemingly the rural counties still relied heavily upon local foods and home gardens. This trend is supported by personal interviews, as well as the commonality of items in historic cookbooks and seasonal newspaper recipes. The publications of small urban areas such as Charleston, West Virginia exhibited numerous discussions of wartime rationing and even offered numerous tips regarding the best way to spend weekly points to get the most butter for biscuits (Cook’s Forum May 1943).

According to urban historians, women (largely the household food preparer of the time) began accepting easier recipes and pre-prepared foods and meals beginning with their introduction into the workforce during World War II and after. As many women stayed in their jobs, cutting corners and purchasing TV dinners became very popular (Levenstein, *Paradox* 2003). Swanson developed the first frozen meal in 1951 and a year later Campbell’s Soup began circulation of mass cookbooks that extolled the use of condensed soups in modern recipes (a function of the Home Economics movement). In 1954, McDonald’s, already in existence, was purchased by Ray Kroc who began a national chain devoted to the quick meal (A Taste of the 20th Century, 2000).

In Southern West Virginia, large numbers of articles devoted specifically to saving time were not prevalent until beginning in the 1960s. Jack Weller, a minister who came to work in Appalachia wrote about the mountain family in 1965. At that time, the family dynamic was only beginning to shift. Women in the coalfields were going to work in larger numbers due to
increase mechanization in industry and coalmining. Husbands were out of work and wives sought employment leaving less and less time to cook family meals. The modern electric and gas stoves did not begin to gain wide popularity in the region until the 1960s.

A prime example of this trend can be seen in the popular article “Cooking Without an Apron” seen in the *Logan News*. One article examines an easy method to produce a traditional stew:

> “Hamburgers, steaks, and chops are great, but there comes a moment in every working wife or busy homemaker’s menu planning when she yearns to serve a good stew. Generally, such dreams are stifled by thoughts of the many hours of slow simmering necessary to produce such a treat. There’s no need to forgo the enjoyments though. A ‘Thermos’ wide mouth vacuum bottle will do the cooking while you work or play.” (Cooking Without an Apron January 1963)

This article continues to detail a method of making stew that utilizes the Thermos rather than a stovetop to cook. It underscores the prevalent notion of time management as well as planning that was typical of the working mother of the time. The 1960s and 1970s brought with them the increased use and avocation of canned, pre-prepared, and processed foods. Articles began appearing in local newspapers extolling the virtues of “convenience foods” such as canned applesauce, peanut butter, and condensed juices. Additional instructions tell the reader to develop unique recipes by adding personal blends of spices to prepared and processed foods to save time (Be Smart April 1972). It was not until this time (in some locations as early as the 1950s) that elaborate advertisements for new grocery stores began creeping into the local rural newspapers. These trends are well behind the national suburban and urban timetable.

Representations of food usage in historical local newspapers seem to be the most concrete examples that support the delayed changes in food ways in rural West Virginia. They clearly show increased usage of modern processed foods and faster methods of preparation as related to a decrease in expendable time. The time periods also support the thesis that the larger
urban trends were felt later in the Appalachian region. Many newer articles show a pattern similar to that of the modern cookbooks with retrospective and progressive versions of traditional classics in an attempt to preserve some sense of regional uniqueness.

Although archival evidence leftover from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries create detailed cultural and geographic snapshots of specific points of time, it provides little opinion or elaboration on conditions or influences that might contribute to the regional story and why it differed from the rest of the nation. Personal interviews provide an opportunity to further expand on these circumstances. Individuals who were selected varied in age and location. They were taken from multiple counties to augment or explain trends as presented in historic record and archives. Each would be considered a member of the lower economic class, typical of the region. They and their families were all long-standing citizens of the region and were purveyors of what has been described as the traditional method of the region.

One respondent (referred to as Subject #1) from the southern West Virginia, born in the 1930s, describes food preparation during his childhood. Elderly now, he recalls the home he was raised in using local landmarks to describe its location. He describes it as nearby and quite modest. He and his family have been permanent residents of the area. His mother and father raised the majority of their food. As a child, he recalls purchasing only sugar, flour, and cornmeal from the local company store (owned by a natural gas company). His father worked for a number of local natural resource companies. His mother did not work but tended the gardens. His grandparents were also from the area. He had ten brothers and sisters and grew up in a small poorly heated home. His mother prepared regular family meals of cornbread and beans on a traditional coal stove. Like many Appalachians, his family kept a limited amount of livestock—one cow for milk. This was extremely common in the mountains of Appalachia.
Animals were kept alive for secondary food sources. Cows produced milk, which produced cream, butter, and cheese. Chickens laid eggs. Respondent #1 recalls chickens were primarily for Sunday dinner. They were not slaughtered often as most eggs were eaten rather than used to raise multiple broods. They raised a large garden and kept their foods in a hand-dug root cellar. When asked about his favorite meals he replied with, “pinto beans with milk and bread. Then fried potatoes. But that’s about all you had.” As a youth, he picked wild greens in the hills and lived off of fresh foods. His family did not frequent restaurants or a regular grocer. The reason was not only the lack of numerous restaurants but economics. They simply did not have the disposable income.

Subject #1’s wife (Subject #2) grew up in the same area but had a different experience. Her parents were farmers. They managed to raise enough food for themselves and kept some to trade and sell. Her childhood home was a three-room log house. Her diet was similar to her husband’s with a more varied vegetable menu, consisting of the addition of fresh cabbage and turnips. Her family also had a stock of natural sweeteners such as fresh honey and homemade molasses. They raised hogs for slaughter and her parents would also render and keep the fat. Pork is shown here as a staple to the Appalachian diet for a simple reason. Pigs were easier to slaughter and preserve than cattle. Their size and the ease as which pork can be salted and smoked give them an advantage over the bulk of a cow. She also speaks to the lack of diversity in their weekly diet. Their food was fresh. “When I was little we didn’t have white bread or nothing like that. We made all our own breads and homemade cakes and everything like that from scratch. We used to take day-old cornbread and slice it and fry it—make gravy with it. That was good.” Her statement not only speaks to local food tradition but also to the economic conditions in West Virginia at the time in which food was stretched as far as it could be.
Subject #2 only worked for 10 years as a cook in a local, home-style restaurant called (one of only a few in the nearby communities). The menu there was a copy of the local weekly meal, offering pinto beans and cornbread, fried chicken livers, potatoes and other country meals. As a child, her family did not eat out at restaurants either but both subjects report now that their normal week consists of multiple trips to local restaurants, though their meal choice are largely the same, ordering pork chops and beans even when eating out.

These interviews (along with others) also point to the preference for local foods even in the modern diet. Though trips to restaurants might be more frequent, our first respondent eats (and prefers) pork on a daily basis. Their diets still vary little as compared to the national variation in more populated regions (Shortridge, 2003). This account is a reflection of the interviews provided by Christi Smith (2003) who spoke with Appalachian out-migrants fondly recalling their favorite foods.

Southern West Virginia counties are full of stories such as this that point to the regional distinction of their rural diets. As most families were poor, they raised much of their own food well into the same time periods that the rest of America was moving toward fast food and TV dinners. One respondent (and elderly woman in Logan County, West Virginia) spoke about preservation methods—attempts to save precious foods well after harvest time. Her family used a method of drying green beans into “leather britches” that could later be reconstituted in water and heated for a meal or for soup. This method of preservation was practiced well into the 1960s when she entered the workforce after her husband was disabled in a coalsoine collapse. She also worked in the food service environment and recalled that she “worked long hours. It was fun, you know, talking to people all day. I was so used to cooking at home. I made the same stuff at work (laughs) just a lot more of it. We had these great big ol’ kettles and would
make enough to feed an army. Biscuits and gravy. Vegetables. Chicken. Pork Chops. Some of our stuff came in cans but it was mostly the same stuff.” Her husband had never eaten in a restaurant. As a child his family didn’t have the money. Her first trip to a restaurant with her late husband was not until the 1990s in Charleston, West Virginia.

Another reason that chain restaurants were slow to be adopted in Appalachia had to do with transportation. Most mass transport to and from the mountains came by boat or rail. Some of the first chain restaurants were built along busy truck routes as goods were transported along new highways. These restaurants, such as Howard Johnson’s chain, were strategically placed to gain maximum exposure by passing truckers (Levenstein, 2003). Appalachia had few similar routes through the mountains and would not have been seen as a prime location for such a venture in the adolescent years of fast food.

Some recall the extensive hunting of wild game for meat during the winter months. As Levenstein (Paradox 2003) briefly points out, the Appalachian was caught in a cyclical diet of vegetables during the later summer and early fall (harvest time) and meats and potatoes during the colder months (largely pork based and salt cured). The winter months allowed for wild game to make regular appearances at the dinner table. Some respondents recalled how frequently they seemed to eat squirrel, venison, and rabbit, as they were so abundant in the area. Rabbit in particular was a weekly entrée. This depiction coincides with the regularity of wild game recipes that were found during the archival portion of this research. This was a constant source of abundant food for many living in Southern West Virginia. Respondents and local recipes reveal a varied game diet that enjoyed deer, squirrel, turkey, rabbit, groundhog, opossum, small fowl, and many more. They weren’t simply used for food. Some, such as groundhog produced secondary, medicinal products. One interviewee recalled her mother rendering groundhog fat
into grease and storing it for use in the winter. She used it for “colds, coughs, and croup.” Anytime one of her children was heard coughing, they received an oral dose of pure groundhog grease. Evidently it is an unpleasant experience that taught the children to cough as quietly as possible.

Another participant lives today on a small lot of a few acres in southern West Virginia. A younger man, he carries on a tradition of hunting that, as Smith (2003) put it, is ingrained in his cultural image of himself. He raises a garden and has several domesticated fruit trees on his property. His favorite past time is hunting. He recounts hunting, “I wish I could do it year round. I’d eat deer everyday. My dad loved squirrel. Now I’m not much on squirrel, but deer has to be my favorite. We make chili out of it. We make burgers. We make jerky. Now that’s somethin.’ You ain’t had nothing ‘til you’ve had my deer jerky.” Working a full time job, his weeks are full of fast food and trips to the office cafeteria for personal sized pizzas. But on the weekends and evenings his diet still revolves largely around traditional rural foods. He commented, “don’t get me wrong I like to try new things. I had some Indian food a while back and it was pretty good. But day-in and day-out? No way. I can eat pork chops and mashed potatoes everyday of the year and still come back for more.” His interview is a testament to the perseverance of local traditions even in the modern Appalachian diet.

Two interviews involved a couple that left West Virginia at an early age. They moved shortly after marrying, looking for work, finding themselves on the outskirts of a major Midwest city, similar to Christi Smith’s (2003) participants. In 1999, after retiring they moved back to the Appalachian Mountains, settling not in their hometown but just outside of Charleston, West Virginia. They talked at length about the differences they found in their urban diet. Of course, gainful employment allowed for the opportunity to frequent restaurants but the largest shift was
in the use of numerous grocery stores and markets in which their food was largely purchased. Their childhood home southern West Virginia provided small gardens for their own foods, much as those of their contemporary neighbors in surrounding counties. As children they were raised on pork and cornbread with little purchased from the local grocer. In the city, they lived in a series of small homes at first with no real land. Food was purchased rather than grown. Eventually, their weekly meals changed as they worked in more diverse area. Ethnic cuisines were introduced. Upon their return to the region they commented, “I never knew how much we had changed until we got back. We got used to eat so many different types of foods. I mean you can find a lot of the same stuff in Charleston if you live there but there are just a few restaurants that have anything real different if you are outside the city. We thought, you know, we thought we were country when we were in [the city], eatin’ chicken and dumplins on Sundays. We were happy to be home though. Still nothing like home.”

Interestingly, the regular family menu seems to have changed only somewhat, at least through the 1970s. Though new foods were introduced, the staple ingredients rarely disappeared. A younger interviewee described growing up in the area eating traditional meals prepared by his grandmother. Of course when his mother cooked, their meals ranged from traditional foods to pizza. One of the largest changes here is a increased reliance on grocers for food. Even though he keeps a garden, it only accounts for 25% of his yearly food. He admits that his traditional food sensibilities still weigh on his mind even as he moves away from them stating, “Time. If we had more time to spend gardening and cooking and farming we could have better choices. It irks me to eat out and buy foods that I don’t know what’s in it. But what are you going to do? I’ll probably keep on this way ‘til I retire or win the lottery.”
Other accounts fall much in line with these stories. Respondents were largely from the rural areas and kept to traditional methods of food acquisition longer than the rest of the urban centers. Foods were gathered, raised, sold, and shared. They were largely cooked at home and carried to work. Another participant is an elderly woman from one of the southern counties. She lives with her daughter and is still quite lucid, living on a portion of what used to be her family homestead. Her ancestors were subsistence farmers. Her land is largely overgrown, the forest having grown inward toward her small, one-story home. There is a small garden off to one side of the house. It appears to have once been much larger. It is a small fenced area of a much larger flat section of earth—the only flat segment in sight. She and her daughter are lifelong members of the community and had raised and canned much of their own food. As they have both aged, trips to a nearby shopping center for fast food have increased exponentially. “Mostly we eat burgers or KFC when we eat out. Nothing fancy. We don’t do it all the time but sometimes we are both just too tired to cook. And you know it’s hard to cook for just two people when you’re used to cookin’ for a whole family.” They still raise a small garden of vegetables and turnips. “I love boiled turnips. Used to be you could walk from here to Charleston in the middle of winter and never be without food. Everybody had a turnip patch up somewhere on the hill. Never see them anymore. We still grow them ‘cause we still love them.”

Most importantly these participants highlight the existence and persistence of rural food habits. Many still eat venison regularly. When asked what their favorite meals are, they often responded with home-cooked recipes, even if they might be purchased in a restaurant. Fresh, homegrown vegetables are still preferred even by those with little time to actually raise them. Even when they dine at a restaurant, it is often a local home-style place. If not, they often attempt to order something familiar on the menu. The idea of the rural tradition is still alive.
though waning somewhat. The rural Appalachian has succumbed to the easier meal and many processed alternatives. Like their urban counterparts, localized foods have been supplanted to varying degrees. The rural environment did allow for traditional methods of gathering and cultivation to be maintained here longer than in many suburban and urban environments. The influence of long held food ways influenced not only the timetable of erosion but also the path it took in the region.

The archival research and interviews highlight a number of unique regional sources of food that can be compared to other regions of the country to show how Appalachia’s traditional food ways have influences the shift in consumption patterns and the modern resident’s diet. The most obvious item is the prevalence of pork in the Appalachian’s diet. Sohn (2005), Rehder (2004), and Dabney (1998) have all noted this traditional tendency. Even Levenstein (Paradox 2003) spoke about it when discussing the Appalachian dietary cycle. Smoot (2005) devoted an entire chapter to “hog-killin’ day.” Respondents all spoke fondly of sausage gravy and pork chops. The elderly gentleman from Cyclone, West Virginia said he still eats pork chops nearly every day even if it is just a leftover with breakfast. Compared to Shortridge’s (2003) study of the Great Plains, it shows a very direct correlation to localized markets and food availability.

Meats typically included pork and the occasional chicken. Fish, as depicted in most regional accounts of Appalachia usually only consisted of catfish, trout, or bass—with the latter rarely being mentioned. Although coastal American communities have long enjoyed seafood as a staple in their weekly diets, the Appalachians seemed to have largely disregarded it. One might search dozens of cookbooks or articles for mention of seafood only to find a recipe for fried rainbow trout (Dabney 1998). In fact, during the course of interviews for this research, only one participant even mentioned fish. The gentleman from Wayne lamented the size of the local
freshwater Bluegill. His largest complaint was that it took too many to make a full meal for the family. Sohn’s (2005) chapter on ‘Meats and Fish’ in fact only contains one traditional recipe for trout. The rest of the chapter is devoted entirely to pork and chicken.

Another trend can be seen with the soup bean. Most Appalachians relate to the pinto bean as their bean of choice. Although true green beans were certainly eaten here, the soup bean, as noted by researchers was the king. Shortridge (2003) outlines a typical menu of the Great Plains and delineates preferences for certain foods. The pinto bean was only preferred over the green bean in the southern most portions and then typically fried and refried. Recipe books and respondents all hold with the textual interpretations. Beans in Appalachia were not fried. They were harvested and dried then reconstituted in water over a warm oven for several hours (in fact most of the day). They were eaten sometimes alone but often over bread or with cabbage. Most of the older participants still list pinto beans as among their favorite meals.

Corn is another important food item in Appalachia. Unlike many other parts of the country, corn was relied upon for multiple uses, as it was the easiest grain to grow in the mountains. Most rural communities contained at least one grist meal where families could take their corn to have ground for meal (Dabney 1998). Corn meal became a staple in the Appalachian diet as compared to flour, which typically was purchased from a grocer. While flour biscuits might be expected at Sunday dinners (and even then might be cut with sweet potatoes) cornbread was a regular at the weekly table. Any cookbook regarding Appalachian cuisine will discuss the proper way to make cornbread (or pone). One participant recalls using day old cornbread and frying it in bacon grease as a favorite breakfast meal. Corn had a number of uses here. Cornmeal was used to make sawmill gravy and hoe cakes. It was fried and pickled as well. Naturally, the Southern West Virginian ate corn on the cob during the harvest time but
the reliance on it throughout the winter here was paramount. Shortridge (2003) depicts the
typical rural meal in a number of states. Corn is mentioned only as a cooked vegetable or as
tortillas in the southwest. The bread (rolls typically) at the dinner table in most rural regions is
made primarily from flour. In Appalachia, most traditional recipes involving flour often cut it
with cornmeal in order to preserve the more expensive white flour.

As mentioned, the Appalachian was fond of gathering. He gathered berries and ramps.
Most importantly, he gathered greens. The traditional salad (or sallet) often held a number of
collected regional greens such as poke or shawnee. Most of the rest of the nation adopted the
hardy iceberg lettuce early (Levenstein, Revolution 2003). Many rural regions describe their
salad as consisting of lettuce primarily. The traditional Appalachian salad might have mustard
greens, poke, shawnee, ramp greens, or turnip greens to name a few. Even today many
inhabitants continue to add store-bought spinach to their salad as a replacement. A favorite
recipe supplied by a couple of participants is wilted lettuce and onions (sometimes referred to as
“kilt” lettuce), intended to replicate the wilted greens eaten in their youth. Essentially, lettuce
and onions are chopped and tossed in a bowl together while bacon grease (traditionally lard) is
heated in a skillet. The grease is then poured over the lettuce and served.

The research and narratives presented here depict a unique regional food tradition that,
Although having been altered by national trends, still persists in some fashion. The regional
food ways have greatly influenced the modern diet in southern West Virginia even if acquisition
of the items has changed. The regional differences in Appalachia can be attributed as much to
the biological diversity in the region as to cultural isolation. Appalachia as a whole is an
extremely diverse region that provided a great deal of natural foods that could be obtained
without the use of agriculture (a difficult feat in such terrain). Whether is be wild fruits and
berries, ramps, scuppernongs, poke, or the array of wild game available to inhabitants, Appalachia simply offered a varied menu that was not naturally available in other rural environments. Additionally, urban and suburban center might have been completely unaccustomed to such means of obtaining these foreign foods.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

American urban food consumption has evolved from localized traditional methods of acquisition and preparation to commercialized processed foods prepared and transported by corporations under an umbrella of science and progress. Areas near American cities have traded their gardens and cast iron skillets for canned vegetables and microwaves. Though there has been a trend toward more organic sources, local, unadulterated foods are certainly in the minority. In rural regions, exemplified here by Southern West Virginian counties, traditional food practices not only existed longer but also held on, in some fashion, well into recent days.

The archival and oral research provided in these pages has shown these counties of West Virginia did not follow the accepted historic timeline provide by researchers for the evolution of food consumption in urban America. Rural West Virginians did fully not accept the national diet. This delay can be attributed to tradition, economics, and even social structure as much (if not more so) as perceived rural isolation. This region was also more economically depressed. Families recount their reliance on home gardens as a source of affordable meals and reliable foods. They ate simply. They ate cheaply. They ate foods that were easily grown in small hillside gardens and raised hardy livestock in small numbers.

Some items were bought from local (and later chain) grocers and usually accounted for items not easily produced at the family level. Sugar, coffee, and ground grains were the most popular. This evidence points to the fact that Appalachia was certainly not isolated. Items were shipped in to these stores. In fact, grocers in the urban areas held different experiences. But in rural West Virginia, grocers imported what they could sell—what was in demand in that area and at that time.
This study has sought to examine an area within the Appalachian region to examine food consumption patterns over the course of the late nineteenth century through the twentieth century as a model for rural regions as compared to urban. This examination was compared to well-documented national trends as well as other rural regions to determine the influence, tradition, and timeline of the region. It is an exercise in regional and cultural geographic study that not only shows clear discrepancies and delays between rural and urban areas but also supports the idea of regions as they exist in modern geography. The idea of regions is upheld here as we track localized consumption patterns and food ways that differ among dissimilar environments.

This study also brings light to numerous ongoing ideas about globalization and its impact on local cultures and regions. This body of work contributes to this discussion as it clearly shows the erosion of some traditional practices, though over a distinct timeline. It is important to note here that this paper does not attempt to deny the influence of globalization nor its impact on regional culture. It does, however, depict a geographic region that has experienced the influence of globalization in a distinct way, guided by its own set of regional factors.

There is also a growing national discussion on the health practices of much of the country. A healthy diet seems to be lacking generally. This study can also contribute to the ongoing debates over proper food practices and the manner in which programs might be applied to counter poor dietary choices. An understanding of regional history and practices could be of great use on a rural scale in any attempt to organize initiatives for food and dietary education.

Southern West Virginia has not escaped the American loss of food literacy. It may have delayed the effects of national trends but has, at least partly, succumbed to its influence. The examination of regional food history allows the researcher to highlight traditional food cultures to create comparisons that might evoke certain reactions. The hope is ultimately for a pathway
toward preservation and reconnection of that culture as well as an examination of what we eat, where it comes from, and where we might obtain it in the future.
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Appendix A

Interview Questions
Persistent Culinary Traditions in Rural Southern West Virginia

James Seth Davidson

Please state your name, location, and the number of years you have lived here.
Where were you raised?
Where were your parents from? Grandparents?
Describe your family, as you were a child.
What was your home like?
What did your parents do for work? For fun?
When did you begin work?
Describe a typical meal during your childhood.
What types of foods did your family prepare? How were they prepared?
What were your favorite types of foods?
Where did your family acquire their weekly food?
How much was purchased from a grocery store?
Did you eat out often? How often?
Besides daily meals what other roles did food play in your life? (Social events, etc.)

What do you do/have done for a living?
Describe your typical weekly meals today.
How often do you eat out today?
What are your current favorite meals?
How do you acquire your weekly food now?
How do you describe the change in pattern from years past?
Appendix B

IRB Letter of Approval

January 18, 2013

James Leonard
Geography Department

RE: IRBNet ID# 392159-1
At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Leonard:

Protocol Title: [392159-1] Changing Culinary Traditions in Southern West Virginia
Expiration Date: January 18, 2014
Site Location: MU
Submission Type: New Project APPROVED
Review Type: Expedited Review

In accordance with 45CFR46.110(a)(7), the above study and informed consent were granted Expedited approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Chair for the period of 12 months. The approval will expire January 18, 2014. A continuing review request for this study must be submitted no later than 30 days prior to the expiration date.

This study is for student James Davidson.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral/Educational) Coordinator Michelle Woomer, B.A., M.S at (304) 696-4308 or woomer3@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.