Recentering Appalachian Voices: The Commodification and Persistence of Appalachian Folk Healing

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Bennett-Tinsley Award for Undergraduate History Research and Writing Sample

7 February 2025

Sick Cider

2 hot peppers, split in half
1 large lemon, sliced– rind and all
2 tablespoons chopped rosemary (or 1 teaspoon dried)
2 tablespoons chopped thyme (or 1 teaspoon dried)
1 cinnamon stick, a few allspice berries, and a few whole cloves
1 teaspoon black peppercorns
1/4 cup raw honey, or more to taste

My grandmother Virginia had a plethora of recipes, tinctures, and remedies to address almost any ailment. Her brain mimicked an accordion of fixes for afflictions of all shapes and sizes. From small injuries, like splinters or rashes, to seasonal illnesses like colds or sniffles, all the way to serious conditions, like the baby blues or memory loss, my grandmother always seemed ready to share a fix. For example, the sick cider produced from the recipe mentioned above is shared by the women in my family, in various renditions depending on the practitioner. According to Grandma V, the recipe is “as old as the hills,” but reappears each fall when the air starts to bite.

Some of my earliest memories involve the smell of a cup of sick cider staring at me from my grandmother's kitchen table. Despite my best effort to avoid its bold flavors, she watched over me to ensure I finished every last drop of my smoldering cup. Regardless of my protest to certain recipes, I admired my grandmother's healing craft. Admirable as it was, I often wondered *how* and *where* she learned to be our family's healer.

We lived in central Indiana, but most of my grandmother's side of the family had connections elsewhere. Largely her family called the hills of Kentucky home, relocating to Kenton County when my grandmother was young. When my grandmother was around five years old, they migrated to Bedford, Indiana, where she spent the majority of her life.

Depending on one's perspective, neither of these locations is conventionally considered part of Appalachia. However, my family closely identified with numerous customs, practices, and values aligning to Appalachian culture. As a result, it was commonplace within our family to regard ourselves as "mountain people," despite the absence of mountains.

What then, was I supposed to make of the mountain traditions that filled our church, kitchen, and garden? *What then*, was I to make of the methods of healing passed down to generation after generation of women within my family?

These questions are persistent in the minds of Appalachian migrants, remaining in part due to ongoing queries related to Appalachian ethnicity, culture, and history. While millions of migrants found new homes outside of the region at the height of the twentieth century, the story of Appalachian migrants piqued the interest of various academics. However, a lack of inquiry seemingly befell upon folk healing.

In the rare instances that folk medicine caught the attention of academics, it was often from a skewed position.[1] Folk medicine, as described by Folklorist Bonnie N. O'Connor, is dictated and defined by the "...academic constructs that identify a particular subset of healing and healthcare practice."[2] On one hand, folk medicine has historically been viewed as "outdated," suggesting it should be replaced by "conventional biomedicine."[3] On the other hand, folk medicine is romanticized, being portrayed as an "...important repository of once universal human knowledge and talents abandoned or forgotten…" by modernity.[4] In other words, perceptions of folk medicine are fragmented by presumptions that are "...based largely on insufficient depth of study and unexamined assumptions…" which are perpetuated by the Western-based knowledge system that wishes to understand it.[5]

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[1] In this project, the terms "folk healing" and "folk medicine" will be utilized interchangeably unless otherwise stated. It is important to note that many emic perspectives would not describe their practices as "folk healing" or "folk medicine" outright. Rather, these terms have been imposed upon emic practices as a means of categorization.
[2] Bonnie B. O'Connor and David J. Hufford, "Understanding Folk Medicine," in *Healing Logics: Culture and Medicine in Modern Health Belief Systems*, ed. Erika Brady (2001), 13, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt46nwrq.5.
[3] O'Connor, "Understanding Folk Medicine," 14.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid, 16.

Thus, academic perspectives have played a large part in dictating how folk healing is studied, historicized, and externally perceived. To counter this notion, the emic lens best serves to frame definitions of Appalachian folk healing.

Contemporary folklorist and folk-healer Phyllis D. Light describes folk medicine as "...a system of medicinal beliefs, knowledge, and practices associated with a particular culture or ethnic group."[6] Light, who self-identifies with southern Appalachian heritage, cites the many facets of folk healing from the contemporary perspective of a healer and scholar. While contemporary scholars make distinctions between Appalachian and Southern ethnic identity, Light cites that Southern and Appalachian folk medicine were historically thought of as synonymous practices.[7]

Along with concerns related to ethnic distinctions, the study of folk healing is complicated by its fluidly progressing nature. Much like other types of folk medicine, Appalachian folk medicine is "...not static [and is] evolving and changing through synthesis and hybridization to meet the needs of its people."[8] From herbalism to healing through faith, Appalachian folk healing encompasses a large variety of practices culminated by a large variety of informed and observed learning.[9] Because of these many facets, generalizing about what *is* and *is not* Appalachian is at best vague, and at worst exclusionary.

However, when considering Appalachian migrants, ethnic identification further complicates the study of folk healing. Self-identification with an Appalachian ethnic identity can impact the way

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[6] Phyllis D. Light, *Southern Folk Medicine Healing Traditions from the Appalachian Fields and Forests* (North Atlantic Books, 2018), 9, https://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=none&isbn=9781623171575.
[7] Light, *Southern Folk Medicine,* 9; This notion draws ties to etic perceptions of assimilated identities, along with a shared geographical proximity between Southerners and Appalachians.
[8] Ibid, xix.
[9] Ibid, 18; Light notes that the oral education that is typical of Appalachian folk medicine was influenced by several ethnic groups within the region, such as that of Native American, European, and African backgrounds. Oral histories of any ethnic group are at a heightened risk of being lost to time because of eurocentric standards reliant on written material. This, combined with cultural and racial marginalization of such ethnic groups makes an even more complex case for Appalachian Folk healing. Due to the highly complex nature of this issue, this layer cannot be accurately or ethically addressed in this work. It is my suggestion that such inquiries be made by members of these ethnic groups in conjunction with Appalchian studies.

in which migrants perceive not only themselves, but their associations with the ethnic group.[10] This lapse in self-identification has been extensively studied in relation to its impact on Appalachian migrants seeking biomedical healthcare, but such studies occurred only after *Appalachian* was recognized as a distinct ethnic group in the later half of the twentieth century.[11] Before this period, studies of The Great Migration shaped the historical representation of Appalachian migrant ethnic identity and cultural practices.

The Great Migration is a widely studied period of internal migration in the United States, typically associated with the early twentieth century through the 1970s.[12] Broadly, scholars have studied how Southern populations fared as they migrated northward and beyond, being especially interested in the plight of black Southern migrants.[13] Further inquest into this migration interpreted the social conditions of migrants both black and white, framing the "Southern Diaspora."[14] Regardless of their race, Appalachian and Southern migrants were treated as a homogenous group, overlooking diverse ethnic identities and potential cultural differences.

This assimilation led to the erosion of history and diverse perspectives, sparking complex academic discourse surrounding ethnic identity among these migrants.[15] To address these gaps, scholars like Alexander J. Trent enriched discussions of the Southern Diaspora by incorporating Appalachian-specific inquiries.[16] As a result, the concept of the "Appalachian Diaspora" emerged in academic circles, offering a valuable framework through which scholars could better understand and

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[10] Robert L. Ludke, et. al, "Identifying Appalachians Outside the Region," In A*ppalachian Health and Well-Being*, (University Press of Kentucky, 2012), 297-314, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jcssn.19.
[11] Roger Guy, *From Diversity to Unity: Southern and Appalachian Migrants in Uptown Chicago, 1950-1970* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2007).
[12] James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 12, http://site.ebrary.com/id/10273403.
[13] National Archives, "The Great Migration," Accessed December 10, 2024. https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/migrations/great-migration.
[14] Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora,* 1.
[15] Henry D. Shapiro, "The Place of Culture and the Problem of Identity," in *Appalachia and America: Autonomy and Regional Dependence*, ed. Allen Batteau (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 111–41, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt130j75j.10.
[16] Alexander, J. Trent, "Defining the Diaspora: Appalachians in the Great Migration" *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 37, no. 2 (2006): 219-247, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4139547.

contextualize the experiences of Appalachian migration, while avoiding oversimplification and stereotyping.[17]

In conjunction with this frame, Appalachian scholars Phillip Obermiller and Michael Maloney encourage studies that "...reflect the political, historical, and philosophical context in which they are presented."[18] In studying Appalachian folk healing, it is vital to remain sensitive to these factors, avoiding a constrained connotation while describing an *Appalachian culture* or *Appalachian folk healing*. In alignment with scholars such as Obermiller, Maloney, and Light, this work defines *Appalachian* holistically, recognizing nuance *and* distinctions by emphasizing the voices of Appalachians to further understand Appalachian folk healing as it was complicated by migration.

While scholars from multiple disciplines have addressed gaps left behind by the Southern Diaspora, Appalachian folk healing has experienced a slower revitalization. This work addresses these fissures, calling to question the role of academic influence in perpetuating essentialized notions of Appalachian folk healing as it influenced migrant perceptions, perpetuations, and practices of folk healing practices during the twentieth century. To inform this stance, Indiana is utilized as a key location of inquiry.

Indiana not only saw a great influx of migrants from Appalachia in the mid-twentieth century but was also the location for significant sociological research related to migrants during this period. Through the primary perspective of various generations of Appalachian migrants turned Hoosier, the commodification and romanticization of Appalachian culture illuminate the complex interplay between cultural preservation, stereotyping, and economic exploitation while investigating the affairs of folk healing.

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[17] Trent, "Defining the Diaspora: Appalachians in the Great Migration," 222; Trent's work also argues for great emphasis to be placed on the complexities related to migration studies as they rely on boundaries, delineating the ways in which academics pre-1970 would investigate migrants. The "...apparently contrasting finding of two generations of scholarship on white migration from the South can partly be explained by subtle but significant shifts in researchers' choices about which set of internal boundaries to privilege."

[18] Phillip J. Obermiller, and Michael E. Maloney, "The Uses and Misuses of Appalachian Culture," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 22, no. 1 (2016): 110, https://doi.org/10.5406/jappastud.22.1.0103.

Like all work in history, this endeavor imposes modern eyes on archival materials. It is impossible and unethical to retroactively suppose the thoughts, feelings, and worldviews of the subjected Appalachian migrants included in this story. Rather than an undertaking of archival material to repose a point, this study enlightens the misconceptions imposed upon Appalachian migrants which were perpetuated by academics, and further entrenched by the commodification of Appalachian folk ways. Most importantly, it aims to reconstruct and reemphasize an emic understanding of folk healing from the perspective of mid-twentieth century Appalcahin migrants by asking questions such as; How did Appalachians practice folk healing? How did they perceive folk healing post-migration? How much of this perception was modulated by the stereotypes they faced as they migrated? What is the impact of commodification on their practices?

To address these questions, it is essential to understand how images of Appalachia, its people, and their practices were constructed. The creation and imposition of borders and identities must not be taken for granted. Engaging with these ideas requires examining the historical context in which stereotypes about the Appalachian region emerged, especially when considering how these imaginations became entrenched upon an Appalachian ethnic identity.

The Invention of Appalachia(n)

> *"You see, mountains isolate people and the effect of isolation on human life is to crystallize it. These people… have had no navigable rivers, no lakes, no wagon roads… They have been cut off from all communication with the outside world. They are a perfect example of an arrested civilization and they are the closest link we have with the Old World"*[19]

The Appalachian mountain range is rich both in geographical and anthropological significance. From the perspective of the contemporary federal government, the Appalachian region

[19]John Fox, *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 97, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jcwk3; Originally published in 1908, this book is one of the earliest accounts of fiction to dictate the perpetuation of Appalachian stereotyping (also see Elizabeth C. Herschman, "Tracing Origins of Appalachian Stereotypes in Pop Culture: Early Twentieth Century Through the 1930s," *Journal of Liberal Arts and Humanities* 2, no. 10 (2021): DOI: 10.48150/jlah.v2no10.2021.a1).

encompasses these mountains, along with 423 counties spanning from New York to Mississippi, blending diverse places, times, and cultures.[20] Established in 1963, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) stands to "...coordinate federal, state, and local action in addressing the Region's needs."[21] However, the assumption of need is a perception-dependent variable, as is the assumption of a border. Many Appalachian studies scholars cite border distinctions as overly simplistic when considering Appalachian ethnic identity, instead regarding "...Appalachians as sharing a heritage that includes a relationship to the geography of the mountains, but is not limited to it."[22] This holistic perspective, however, was not necessarily present before the turn of the century.

The Appalachian region captivated scholars of the late nineteenth century. By the late 1860s, it became a point of fascination for the Local Color movement. Local Color artists—wealthy white men seeking to document America's climate, geology, and natural history for both scientific and popular audiences—played a key role in shaping perceptions of Appalachia.[23] This movement, defined by "...the work of a generation of writers whose dialect tales and sketches describe little-known or forgotten aspects of American life…" invented an image of Appalachian people and their practices through published literature beginning in the 1870s.[24]

The observations of the Local Color artists were presented as scientific and authoritative and were widely consumed by the American public through emerging literary magazines.[25] The Local Color artists characterized Appalachia as a land of mystery, "...asserting the existence of ethnic, geographic, or chronological distance separating the strange land and peculiar people of Appalachia…" from mainstream America.[26] This externally defined Appalachian culture through an

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[20] Appalachian Regional Commission, "Home," 10 December 2024, https://www.arc.gov/.
[21] Appalachian Regional Commission, "Home."
[22] Phillip J. Obermiller and the Urban Appalachian Council Research Committee, *Down Home, Downtown: Urban Appalachians Today* (Kendall Hunt Publications, 1996), xi.
[23] 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), 9.
[24] Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 7.
[25] Ibid, 6.
[26] Ibid, 28.

essentialized image of the region, creating simplified and stereotypical ideas about the region itself and those who lived there. The stories, images, and descriptions produced by the Local Color artists contributed to a narrative of "otherness" that framed Appalachia and its inhabitants as fundamentally distinct from the rest of America.

By the 1890s, Appalachia had become the focus for a new wave of attention, characterized by "...the emergence of mountain benevolence as a distinct aspect of denominational activity, and an increasing secular interest in the mountain field as an area for the exercise of systematic 'scientific' philanthropy."[27] Building on the narrative of "otherness," this attention framed Appalachians as a population in need of intervention.

Cultural missionaries quickly moved into the region. In the form of "folk schools," wealthy white women from outside the region sought to elucidate Appalachian residents in alignment with contemporary American standards.[28] However, this education was selective and strategic: folk schools preserved aspects of Appalachian culture deemed economically useful or symbolically valuable while discarding or reshaping those aspects that did not align with mainstream ideals.[29] Folk schools crafted an image of Appalachians as simple, self-sufficient, and resourceful while also portraying them as uneducated, primitive, and in need of reform. This selective framing developed a marketable vision of "Americanness," where Appalachians were stereotyped as both a symbol of desirable American traits and a cautionary example of what needed to be overcome.

By the early 1900s, Appalachia was entrenched in a paradox. Its "otherness" had become a convention of American consciousness, on one hand being framed as a cultural curiosity and problem

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[27] Ibid, 85.
[28] David E. Whisnant, *All That Is Native & Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 33; Whisnant writes of the social settlement movement of the early twentieth century, using the Hindman Settlement School of Knott County, Kentucky as a case study to exemplify the cultural missionaries who set out to cleanse America of "insufficient" practices.
[29] Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine,* 43; For example, the Hindman settlement established "...mountaineers as hopelessly degenerate or merely temporarily wayward kinsmen of the best stock; local culture as beautiful and life-affirming or perverted and morbid; settlement women as bearers of modernity and enlightenment or seekers of primal authenticity amid modern alienation and anomaly."

to be solved.[30] On the other hand, folk schools and broader cultural narratives both idealized Appalachian residents as idyllic Americans.[31] Cultural narratives and interventions had solidified Appalachia's dual identity in the American imagination. This framing found further expression in works like *The Land of Saddle-bags: A Study of the Mountain People of Appalachia* (1924) by James Watt Raine, which exemplifies how these narratives were perpetuated and institutionalized through literature and missionary efforts.

Raine's work was published with support by the Council of Women for Home Missions and Missionary Education Movement of the United States in Canada, organizations which attempted to bring sociological change and assistance to populations deemed deficient. *The Land of Saddlebags* followed Raines' eyewitness endeavors related to the speech, education, religion, community structure, and other facets of life in Appalachia. The "mountain people" were depicted as having "... their own quaint atmosphere of dignity and romance…" but were described with sympathetic undertones.[32] While simultaneously upholding the "quaint" qualities of the mountaineers, Raine made clear judgments regarding "..the lack of intelligent…" resources available, especially related to health care.[33]

To remedy this lack of educated healthcare, Raine supported activities like those of the Frontier Nursing Program, which brought biomedically educated nurses into areas in which little to no biomedical care was easily available. These nurses could "...give instructions in cleanliness, sanitation, diet, health habits, first aid, and home nursing…" while also being a community leader conducting "...individual clinics in the care of babies, and give instructions in the nursing of children, school lunches, and diet for convalescents."[34]

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[30] Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind,* 121.
[31] Ibid, 246; Shapiro notes of the irony which positioned Appalachia as a "folk society manqué," rendering it "...both 'primitive' and distinct, embodying traits that were simultaneously quintessentially American and antithetical to modernity."
[32] Raine, *The Land of Saddle-Bags*, x.
[33] Ibid, 215.
[34] Ibid, 252.

While it is true that many people living in Appalachia at the time did not have access to biomedical care, they did have access to their own methods of healing. Raine made this distinction, but not in a way that is reflective of his romanticized understanding of the rest of mountaineer life. Raine described that "...[m]others, as a rule, have no physician's care in childbirth," asserting that "...midwives are ignorant, untrained in procedure, seldom licensed, and without the slightest knowledge of infection or sanitary measures."[35] These women were educated, but not by a standard that Raine considered adequate; midwifery "....naturally falls to an occasional stalwart 'granny-woman,' or to a resolute widow, for experience is the only teacher."[36] This points to an already developed notion regarding the folk healing ways of Appalachians, influenced by the sociological and emerging biomedical dominance of the period.

Criticism of Raine's work is not meant to diminish the benefits of the biomedical care provided by missionary women. These services, which often brought physicians to areas with no prior access to healthcare, undoubtedly brought significant benefits to the people of Appalachia. Instead, this critique explores how images of folk healing were constructed, extrapolated, and asserted. Raine's work aligned with prevailing narratives of Appalachians as a "rapidly disappearing" population that needed preservation "...[i]n the colossal task of Americanizing America [so to] wish for nothing better than these simple virtues of the pioneer, who has always been hardy, honest, hospitable, and fearless."[37] This framing contributed to tensions related to the desirability and complexity of Appalachian identity as migrants moved from the region.

Manifestations Of Stereotyping, Commodification, and Modernity in Middle America

"Haven't you heard there are only 45 states left in the Union?
Kentucky and Tennessee have gone to Indiana and Indiana has gone to hell.[38]

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[35] Ibid 215.
[36] Ibid, 226.
[37] Ibid, x.
[38] John Cartlow Martin, "Is Muncie still Middletown?," Harper's Magazine, 1944.

Stereotypes of Appalachians, deeply entrenched in earlier scholarship and literature, continued to influence how migrants were perceived both academically and socially, even as they migrated from the region. This tension was evident in Indiana, where the influx of Appalachian migrants intersected with broader sociological efforts to document the impacts of industrialization and modernization. In the Hoosier state, this effort was bound by the epic proportions of foundational works like *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (1929).

Atop increasing migration, sociologists Robert Staughton Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd set out to examine and document the social impacts of modernity, industrialization, and urbanization on the average American small-town. This inquiry produced *Middletown I*, based on fieldwork the Lynds conducted throughout the 1920s.[39] *Middletown I* examined the lives of Muncie residents, who experienced a great boom in economic and industrial development with the discovery of natural gas reserves in 1886.[40] It was this boom that "...began… to transform the placid county-seat…" of Muncie "...into a manufacturing city," thus intriguing the Lynd's.[41]

Simultaneously, Muncie experienced an influx of Appalachian migrants during this period, many of whom were following the industrial boom which promised work and economic benefit. Later estimates of Muncie's population would attribute eight percent of its population to Appalachian migrants.[42] The Lynds were not explicitly interested in identifying ethnic groups, being more interested in collecting, studying, and analyzing small-town American life. Their study proceeded on the assumption that all activities of their subjected American town could be viewed as falling under

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[39] Robert Staughton Lynd and Hellen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture*, (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1956), 5; The 1929 *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* is often referred to as *Middletown I,* with its serial publications *Middletwon in Transition* being referred to as *Middletown II,* along with subsequent titles.
[40]Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture*, (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1956), 5.
[41]Ibid, 5.
[42] Margaret Ripley Wolfe, "Appalachians in Muncie: A Case Study of an American Exodus," (Spring 1992), 169-89.

specific categories.[43] These categories were imposed by the Lynds; while informed by the residents of Muncie, direct quotes from residents are few and far between. When it was included, directly quoted material– or "folk talk–" was "...presented, not because it offers scientifically valid evidence, but because it affords indispensable insights into the moods and habits of thought of the city."[44]

The moods of Muncie emphasized the town's transition from its pioneer roots to a modern industrial hub. Part of this transition included health and healing practices. The Lynds noted that even as biomedical practices became dominant, remnants of folk healing persisted. They described cures like "nanny tea" and "bleeding" as part of the town's "close...pioneer background," saying little more about how these practices were practiced by residents.[45]

Framed by an urgency for modernization, the authors suggest that reliance on folk medicine was partly fueled by the aggressive marketing of "patent medicines," which inundated local newspapers with advertisements for "salves, soaps, and remedies" promising cures for various ailments.[46] The popularity of these products, especially among poorer families, aligns with the Lynds' observation that the working class was often drawn to accessible, low-cost medical solutions.[47] However, this portrayal risks perpetuating stereotypes about the Appalachian-descended working class as superstitious, gullible, or even poverty-stricken, being forced to rely on outdated or unscientific practices.

While the Lynds presented folk practices as part of Middletown's cultural fabric, their framing reinforced stereotypes. By linking folk medicine primarily to the working class and associating it with a "pioneer" identity and "quackery," they implicitly suggest a lack of progressiveness. However, their inclusion of anecdotes and acknowledgment of the broader social

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[43] Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown I,* 4; The Lynd's imposed all aspects of "American Life" as fitting into one of the six "...main-trunk activities: Getting a Living, Making a home, Training the young, Using leisure in various form of play, art, and so on, Engaging in religious practices, Engaging in community activities."
[44] Ibid, 6.
[45] Ibid, 435.
[46] Ibid, 437-8.
[47] Ibid, 437.

context—such as economic constraints and advertising pressures—provides a somewhat nuanced view of why folk practices did or did not endure amongst migrants.

In *Middletown I*, the true location of the study was kept anonymous, as the Lynds wanted to focus primarily on collecting an idealized representation of American life. Following the great success of the first book, *Middletown I* was later revealed as Muncie, Indiana. This success prompted the Lynds to produce another publication during the Great Depression era: *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (1937).[48]

These books created a legacy for Muncie which embarked pieces of Appalachian culture as an area of commodification. The Lynd's works went on to inspire a series of additional publications, including replicated studies, books, and even documentaries.[49] *Middletown I* and its subsequent renditions serve as a pivotal lens through which to examine the commodification and stereotyping of Appalachian culture in Indiana. However, in documenting these practices, the Lynds' framing both recognized and marginalized these traditions, inadvertently feeding into broader societal stereotypes that shaped how Appalachian culture was perceived and marketed.

The commodification of Appalachian culture as seen by *Middletown* underscores the original paradox; while stereotypes marginalized Appalachian migrants by portraying them as unprogressive or impoverished, these same stereotypes became the basis for cultural commodification. This commodification offered economic opportunities for those documenting or marketing Appalachian traditions but often did little to address the structural inequalities faced by Appalachian migrants themselves. Instead, it perpetuated a cycle where migrant culture was celebrated at a distance while lived realities were neglected or dismissed. Thus, the cultural legacy of Appalachians became both a

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[48] Robert Staughton Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937).

[49] In the 1970s, the National Science Foundation funded a replication of the Lynds' original study (known as *Middletown III*). In 1982 and 1983, The University of Minnesota Press published some of the results in two books: *Middletown Families: Fifty Years of Change and Continuity* and *All Faithful People: Change and Continuity in Middletown's Religion*. A limited replication (known as *Middletown IV*) was done in 1999 for the PBS documentary *The First Measured Century*.

source of pride and a site of exploitation, commodified and exoticized as its practitioners were marginalized.

The *Middletown* publications point to discernable proof that the Appalachians carried their folk healing traditions with them as they moved, even as they faced potential backlash within their new communities. However, the internalization of negative associations with Appalachian folk healing practices among migrants appears rooted in both cultural dislocation and the pressures of assimilation into biomedical norms. By drawing on primary accounts, we can trace the transition from the widespread acceptance of these practices among Appalachian migrants to their marginalization among migrants in urban or non-Appalachian settings.

One such account is that of Verna Bagley, a student of folklore at Indiana University in 1967. As a curriculum requirement, Bagley was tasked with collecting folklore, producing a project of interviews and analysis. Now housed at the Indiana University Archives in Bloomington, Indiana, Bagley's work– titled *A Collection of Appalachian Folklore, 1967*– provides a primary account of the perception and perpetuation of folk healing by Appalachian migrants.[50]

Bagley's informants consisted of her mother, father, and middle-aged sister, along with personal anecdotes. Bagley's work consisted of a variety of folktales and information collected from her family, including information about "healers," "blood stoppers," and other "folk cures."[51] For example, Bagley made note of a folk cure her mother and sister detailed for the removal of warts.

To address a bothersome wart, Bagley's mother and sister informed Bagley to "...pick up 9 little pebbles…then…run each of these over the wart one at a time."[52] After completing these steps, Bagley was to wrap the pebbles in a "...brightly colored rag or piece of cloth," disposing of the pebbles on the roadside.[53] As soon as the pebbles were picked up by a curious passerby, the warts

[50] Verna Bagley, Manuscript: *A Collection of Appalachian Folklore, 1967*, Indiana University Folklore Institute Student Papers, 1967-2010, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.
[51] Bagley, *A Collection of Appalachian Folklore, 1967*, 13-15.
[52] Ibid, 13.
[53] Ibid.

would be gone and transferred to the passersby.[54] What is most notable about this cure is not the intricacies of the remedy itself, but the sentiments that Bagley's sister related to the cure. Bagley's sister indicated that this cure would be ineffective if "...the person using it doesn't believe in it…" but that she herself had seen it work many times.[55]

Bagley's study demonstrates that her parents and sister, who left Appalachia decades prior, still practiced traditional remedies, illustrating their enduring participation in Appalachian culture ways despite being transplanted elsewhere. Her mother and father specifically had "...been removed from the Appalachian region for some 23 years, but they…kept many of the 'old-ways' – especially since they [were] a part of the community, Austin, Indiana, which is made up mainly of Appalachian migrants."[56] The folk cures that Bagley described suggest a cultural continuity where proximity to Appalachian identity was maintained through the practice of folk healing.

How Bagley felt about the folk cures she described cannot fully be answered without personal inquiry, but by including that these methods are viable only if one "believes" in the "old ways," Bagley's work suggests a poignant curiosity toward the remedies' legitimacy. Yet, Bagley's tone suggests an implicit acknowledgment of these practices as relics of a bygone era.

In including various generations of migrants, Bagley's work suggests even further curiosity. Her informants were born in Appalachia, having spent some time living in the region. Interestingly, Bagley makes explicit mention that she had not been born in nor lived in Appalachia.[57] Bagley made clear that her Mother, Father, and sister, who were first-generation migrants, seemed to practice folk medicine regularly, while she positioned herself as a distant observer of the practices. Throughout her manuscript, Bagley never directly mentions negative sentiments related to folk cures or lore, but she

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[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid, 2; Bagley makes note that her mother and father were raised in the presence of older relatives when in Appalachia, and that her mother in particular "...learned many of the 'rules' for farming, caring for illnesses, and rearing children…" from these relatives.
[57] Ibid, 1-2.

also does not include herself in legitimizing the practices. This silence calls to question how second and subsequent generations of migrants framed and fathomed folk medicine internally.

A further observation into how generational differences impacted migrants' perception of folk healing is illuminated by Robert Brougher, another IU folklore student tasked with the same project as Bagley. Robert Brougher interviewed his grandmother, Maggie, and his mother, Jean. Jean belonged to the generation of Appalachians "'moving away' from the more ancient traditions of the Appalachian folk," and was a second-generation Appalachian migrant.[58] What knowledge of folk medicine Jean did possess was passed down from her mother (Maggie) and her grandmother, though Jean "...no longer really use[ed] it because when she was married she moved to a city and never had a chance to practice it."[59]

Throughout the interview, Jean stays relatively quiet, only speaking after being prompted several times. When asked what she was given for colds as a child, Jean replied that Maggie "...was always rubbing something on me that she had boiled…" indicating the use of a slave of tallow and herbs, or otherwise giving her things that "...sure didn't taste very good."[60] While Jean's disdain for the taste of this remedy is seemingly marginal to her relationship with folk healing, it reveals a deeper sentiment. Without speculating on Jean's relationship with folk healing, or how it related to her identity as an Appalachian, these anecdotes reveal that Jean did not have an active, personal relationship with folk healing at the time of this interview because of her perception of folk healing.

Later in the interview, Jean spoke for the second and last time. Brougher prompts Jean to describe what remedies Maggie relied on when Jean was affiliated with measles as a child. Jean indicated that Maggie boiled corn fodder into tea until "...the measles broke out."[61] The "breaking out" of the measles indicated the arrival of the distinct rash that accompanied the illness; Jean

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[58] Robert Brougher, Manuscript: *Folk Medicine of the Appalachian Mountains, 1981,* Indiana University Folklore Institute Student Papers, 1967-2010, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana; 3.
[59] Brougher, *Folk Medicine of the Appalachian Mountains, 1981,* 3.
[60] Ibid, 7.
[61] Ibid, 15.

remembered that within twenty-four hours of drinking the tea, she developed this rash. "The rash had to come out, they said in old folklore…if the rash stayed inside of you…" the side effects related to measles would impact the inside of the body.[62] However, Jean is not apt to speak to the efficacy or consistency of this remedy, while Maggie always jumped at the opportunity to defend the folk remedies. Maggie indicated that, when she was young, she also constructed measles, and her grandfather induced a similar breaking-out by utilizing various plants, such as ironweed.[63] This remedy was utilized by several generations within Maggie's family, which reassured her of its efficacy when utilizing it on her own daughter, Jean.

Maggie, a first-generation migrant, passionately described and defended her remedies. For example, each time Maggie brought up a cure, Brougher asks if the cure "...really worked…" to which Maggie always enthusiastically replied, "...it sure does!"[64] Brougher asked Maggie if she thought that her knowledge of herbal medicine was "...even better maybe than the things they use today to help people…" and Maggie replied in the affirmative, saying they are better especially because "...there are no side effects."[65] After being asked if she would rather use herbal medicines as opposed to medicine from a biomedical doctor, Maggie replied that, before she migrated, she "...didn't know what doctor medicine was...herbs was all I knowed," revealing that she relied on herbal remedies long after migrating because of both her feeling toward folk healing and its prevalence in her identity.[66] Her confidence and trust in these methods—combined with her continued use of them even after migration—reflects how the first generation of migrants often resisted the pressures to abandon traditional practices. Brougher's mother Jean, however, was markedly less engaged in the discussion, illustrating the generational erosion of these traditions.

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[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid, 16.
[64] Ibid, 15.
[65] Ibid, 13.
[66] Ibid, 7.

While Jean represents the sentiments of the second generation, Brougher's personal sentiments toward Appalachian identity are noteworthy. Akin with Bagley, Brougher never self-identifies as Appalachian. However, Brougher could be considered a third-generation Appalachian migrant. Rather than personal anecdotes, Brougher's work centered upon his belief that "...the people of the Appalachians possess priceless knowledge and if we of urban society are smart we will learn from and use this knowledge in an effort toward betterment of humanity as a whole," revealing his personal feelings toward Appalachian folkways. With a sense of urgency, Brougher reassures the reader that there is "...hope as some people are turning their backs on the rat race of urban America preferring the simpler life of the mountain folk and their tradition-rich society."[67]

Already Brougher revealed an urgency to salvage lost knowledge when describing the tensions between Maggie's generation and Jean's generation. Brougher found it important to gather the perspective of his grandmother, as she belonged to a group "...which is slowly fading from the American scene as more and more of the young Appalachian folk move to the cities and 'modern life.'"[68] Brougher's perspective is influenced by this sense of urgency to reconcile between generations, but it is also influenced by potential societal perspectives.

Brougher explained that his interview with Maggie in particular was "...an excellent example of how much emphasis the mountain folk put on their natural environment."[69] According to Brougher, Appalachians "... gave to nature and received her miracles of creation with the faith of children, not asking why, but simply accepting what was and using it to their benefit."[70] While this fundamentally is not an act of violent stereotyping, it is a sense of reinforced stereotyping that influenced Brougher's perspective of folk healing, implying stereotypes of infantilized mountain folk capable of mystical, yet simplistic, folkways. In comparison, Jean's lack of interest was seemingly

[67] Ibid, 20, 3.
[68] Ibid, 2.
[69] Ibid, 4.
[70] Ibid.

influenced by forces other than her mother who regularly practiced folk healing and fully embraced its many facets.

Brougher was not the only Appalachian to swing back toward embracing folkways. In 1972, The *Foxfire* books were published. The first of nine books was "...dedicated to the people of [the] mountains in the hope that… some portion of their wisdom, ingenuity, and individuality will remain long after them to touch us all."[71] While not specific to Indiana, the publication of the *Foxfire* series served as a guidepost to catalog and salvage the stories and voices of Appalachian elders, with their possession in Appalachian migrant homes often being viewed as an "exercise in nostalgia."[72]

Originally, the content of the first *Foxfire* book came from a high-school English project facilitated by author Eliot Wigginton. Noticing his "ailing classes" and seemingly disinterested students, Wigginton tasked his tenth-grade class with collecting the stories of the elders in their community.[73] He released his students to the community to collect content for what was to become the *Foxfire* magazine to be published at the local level.[74] Seemingly out of happenstance, students collected stories from their elders related to their life knowledge and "other affairs of plain living," among other content pertaining to mountain life, such as poetry and music.[75]

The magazine became popular enough to gain subscribers in "...all fifty states and a dozen foreign countries," pointing to interest in the content of Appalachian heritage.[76] Read critically, there were clear motivations for the content outside of salvaging the knowledge of the elders. The author noted that "...the magazine had to sell, and that literally forced [the writers] to emphasize folklore

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[71] Eliot Wigginton, *The Foxfire Book: Hog dressing; Log Cabin Building; Mountain crafts and foods; Planting by the signs; Snake lore; Hunting tales; Faith healing; Moonshining; and other affairs of plain living*, (Anchor Press, 1972); dedication page, number not listed.

[72] Hassan Amjad. *Folk Medicine of Appalachia: A Vanishing Tradition*. (Beckley, West Virginia: Self-published, 2005), 16. Hassan Amjad, MD, was trained in biomedical practice, but published several works related to folk healing. In this work, Amjad notes of the legacy of folk healing for Appalachian migrants, "...including nine Foxfire books which are considered mostly exercises in nostalgia."

[73] Wigginton, *Foxfire,* 10.

[74] Ibid, 11.

[75] Ibid, direct quote from subtitle of text.

[76] Ibid, 11.

rather than poetry."[77] Thus, as the magazine gained popularity, and eventually surmounted enough traction to develop into the *Foxfire* book series. When produced into a book, its content changed to include information about "...hog dressing; log cabin building; mountain crafts and foods; planting by the signs; snake lore; hunting tales; faith healing; moonshining…" and the "other affairs of plain living" associated with Appalachians.[78]

The *Foxfire* books now largely serve as a tool of remembrance for Appalachians, being rooted in a place to salvage Appalachian authenticity. The author noted that the content of the books "...must be saved now…" as elders were "...moving out of our lives, taking with them, irreparably, the kind of information contained in this book."[79] Notably, the author points to the sentiments of new-generation Appalachians; elders were "taking" this knowledge with them "...not because they want to, but because they think we don't care."[80] This not only points to the necessity of the preservation of the emic perspective but also how the Appalachians felt toward their own cultural ways.

While the *Foxfire* books collected stories of Appalachians still living within the region, their purpose was to influence Appalachians outside of the region. The commodification of the knowledge within the books, tinted by urgency and precarity of losing part of one's history, is further complicated by the stereotypes implied upon Appalachian migrants and medicine. This sentiment becomes clear, as the author noted that some remedies "... undoubtedly worked; some of them were probably useless; some of them…were perhaps even fatal."[81] Simultaneously, the author makes explicit mention that "...the remedies themselves stand as a weighty testament to the ingenuity of an

[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid, direct quote from subtitle of text.
[79] Ibid, 13, 12.
[80] Ibid, 12.
[81] Ibid, 120.

all but vanished race."[82] This reflects an uneasy negotiation between valuing traditional knowledge and internalizing Western biomedical superiority.

To further point to the commodification– and evolving romanticization– of Appalachians once stereotyped, the *Foxfire* books went on to sell more than a million copies, eventually even being made into a film series and broadway play.[83] The success of the *Foxfire* series and renditions underscore how Appalachian culture was transformed into a marketable product. The duality faced by Appalachian migrants stemmed from the tension between holding on to their traditional culture and trying to adapt to the urban and industrial environments they moved to, as upheld by *Foxfire*, and even *Middletown*.

In applique of the power of *Middletown* and *Foxfire,* Brougher and Bagley's manuscripts reveal several points of interest. These interviews yet again prove that Appalachians utilized folk healing post-migration. However, as generations of Appalachian migrants came to be, a shift in practice began. In the case of Bagley, her implied sense of query toward the remedies suggests an internalized feeling of marginalization toward the methods. Being that her manuscript was completed in 1967, she was unlikely to feel the upswing of the commodity on positive perceptions of Appalachian culture. This shift reflects broader tensions between traditional knowledge systems and modern biomedical paradigms, as well as the enduring impact of cultural dislocation and stereotyping of Appalachian identity. Brougher, being a third-generation migrant, is seemingly influenced by the commodification of Appalachian folk healing and cultural ways. By 1980 when Brougher's manuscript was completed, images of Appalachian culture and folkways being sold en

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[82] Ibid, 230.
[83] Harlan, Susan Cooper, *Foxfire*, directed by Arthur Penn (New York: Ethel Barrymore Theatre, 1982), Playbill, https://playbill.com/production/foxfire-ethel-barrymore-theatre-vault-0000004317;
Foxfire, directed by Jud Taylor (Hallmark Hall of Fame Productions, 1987), digital, https://pluto.tv/us/on-demand/movies/62ed577d6df8ae001a01420e?utm_medium=textsearch&utm_source=google.

masse had already proliferated through items like *Foxfire* and the *Middletown* films. While Brougher makes no mention of these materials, their influence parallels his manuscript.

Commodification in this sense is not just about selling culture; it reflects a shift in how Appalachian migrant practices were perceived, particularly folk healing. While the *Foxfire* books presented these practices as valuable, they also underscored their status as outdated relics, reinforcing stereotypes about Appalachians as mystical and simple people. These representations were part of a larger cultural narrative that essentialized Appalachian identity, even as it became increasingly marketable.

As these generational shifts became more pronounced, so too did the changing perceptions of Appalachian folk healing and other traditional practices. The work of Bagley and Brougher, alongside the *Foxfire* series, illustrates not only the ongoing practice of folk healing by Appalachian migrants but also the ways in which these practices were slowly commodified and romanticized for a wider, often outsider, audience

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Such influences made a full-circle appearance in *Middletown*– Muncie, Indiana. In 1983 the Maring Public Library held its first Appalachian Heritage Program at its centrally located Branch. This program invited several Appalachian migrants from the Muncie community to a public celebration of their cultural practices, stories, and life experiences. Captured on film, four Appalachian migrants were interviewed in front of a live audience in the Maring Branch main lobby, surrounded by display boards tacked with their photographs, poetry, and placards produced by the library. Migrants Claude Williams, Della Mullen, and Rita, answered various questions from both live audience members and the interview proctor.[84] Questions primarily stemmed from curiosity

[84]"Appalachian Heritage Project: Maring Branch Library Program," 5 November 1983, Box: 1, Folder: 1, *From Distant Shores: The Heritage of Muncie's Families research files*, MSS-241. Stoeckel Archives of Local History, VHS; Remaining video of this interview session exists only on VHS tapes housed by Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. The film cuts off abruptly, squelching Rita's last name. It could be speculated that the interviewer was a library staff member considering their style of dress, but their name is not specifically mentioned.

related to their lives in Appalachia, along with how they fared comparable as new-found residents of Muncie.

Della, a migrant from central Kentucky, was particularly vocal when prompted with questions related to folk beliefs. The interviewer asked Della to discuss "superstitions," to which Della immediately responded with a humorous story about haints.[85] In the same breath, Della began to rattle through a plethora of folk cures for various illnesses. Della described a cure recommended by a Granny Woman to address asthma.[86] Della recounted that she had shared the remedy with a biomedical doctor in Muncie, yet the doctor dismissed it as illegitimate. "That old Granny Woman knows more than you do…" she explained to the doctor, citing that her brother was cured after following the Granny Woman's remedy.[87]

Della's recollection of the cure, its assimilation with superstition, along with her persistence in trusting the Granny Woman, insinuates something powerful about her internalization of outside influences combined with her personal experience. Della's quick response to the interviewer associated the cure with somewhat humorous superstitions. However, she explicitly expressed her trust in the Granny Woman over the biomedical doctor, inciting in part a sense of pride in this tradition of healing. This pride followed her to Muncie, despite her explicit mention of outside influence depicting her beliefs as insufficient.

Additionally, the setting in which Della and the other migrants displayed their stories adds yet another layer of significance. Muncie was the backdrop for *Middletown,* harboring its legacy as both an exemplary American town and place of experiment. In the more than 50 years between

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[85] "Appalachian Heritage Pro"Appalachian Heritage Project: Maring Branch Library Program," Stoeckel Archives of Local History, 1983; haints and haint stories are a typical type of ghost story peppered throughout Appalachian cultural inquiries. While these stories have an element of fear, they can also serve as a humorous warning to discourage certain behavior.

[86]Ibid; A "granny woman" refers to an individual– typically an older woman– typically responsible for healing practices for a family or community. Granny women can acquire their title through a perceived plethora of knowledge, and/or through having a faith based healing discography.

[87] Ibid.

Middletown I's publishing and the Appalachian Heritage Program, an uptick in acceptance for Appalchian heritage and cultural ways seemingly made its way to Muncie.

Texts like *Middletown* countered the types of folk healing that Della described, inferring their likeness to stereotypical perceptions of the Appalachians and their cultural ways. From *The Land of Saddlebags, Middletown,* and even *Foxfire*, migrants such as Della endured an entire century's worth of outside influence. By the 1980's when Della was interviewed, Appalachian heritage had maintained its essentialized appeal to outsiders. Being celebrated in the setting of her local library in hopes to salvage traditions, Dellas interview served to understand the story of Appalachian migrants. Though the interview skewed at times to reflect essentialization of Appalachians, it represents a shift in perception of Appalachian heritage.[88]

Though Della's comments were brief, they provide evidence that emic perspectives of folk healing continued to change. Very few primary pieces of evidence explicitly exist related to migrants and their worldviews, making stories from migrants like Della, Claude, Rita, Robert, and Verna all the more cherishable. More stories like these exist, yet to be uncovered in archives across the United States. Scholars continue to work to holistically represent Appalachian migrants, attempting to retroactively account for lost stories.[89]

As proven by primary accounts, it is not the case that twentieth century Appalachian migrants had no relationship to Appalachian folk healing. Rather, unbiased inquiries into the worldview of Appalchian migrants are few and far between. Unfortunately, works like the original renditions of *Foxfire* often did too little too late to destigmatize Appalachian cultural practices. In many ways,

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[88] Ibid. The interviewer initiates the conversation with participants by inquiring about their experiences with coal mining, assuming that each participant had personal experience with its practices. Rita replied curiously, "...oh, there was no coal mining where I'm from," implying that stereotypes regarding Appalachia and Appalachians were not completely removed from this interview.

[89] Max Fraser, *Hillbilly Highway: The Transappalachian Migration and the Making of a White Working Class*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2023), https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/PublicFullRecord.aspx?p=30461556; Frasers recently published work is a contemporary example of retroactively understanding migrant stories from the holistic perspective suggested by this work.

Foxfire was doomed from the beginning; Appalachian cultural ways had already been transformed into a source of exotic, consumable “otherness” established by the Local Color Artists in the early twentieth century.

If we are to reveal the stories of Appalachian migrants from this time period we are forced to reconstruct them. This is not, however, a proposal for salvaging or romanticizing the past. Instead, this project exists to emphasize the nuance between inquiry and genuine understanding, questioning the role of modern and historical scholarship in historicizing Appalchian voices. Further investigation into how the process of memorization has influenced migrants is essential for developing a comprehensive understanding of what it means to be Appalachian in contemporary society. Migrants who are willing to share their experiences should be afforded the opportunity without the imposition of bias between themselves and the interviewer. Such inquiries must be conducted with sensitivity to the fact that migrant narratives should not be utilized as a methodological tool for an attempt to "return to the old ways," but rather as an application of inclusive historicization.

As a third generation Appalchian migrant living in Indiana, hearing and uncovering the voices of other Appalachians feels just as warm as a cup of my grandmother's sick cider. Much like her sick cider, these stories also reveal a sharp, strong reality. I hear my grandmother's voice in the words of Della; I see her methods in Maggie’s descriptions; I share Robert's curiosity. In my college dorm, stocked with an assortment of herbs, teas, salves, I astounded my freshman-year roommate with practices I had never thought to be strange. As a student of anthropology and history, my studies have been full of folk healing practices from cultures all around the globe. Appalachia did not make any appearance in these discussions, until now.

This work draws on the wisdom of the past and looks forward to how we might continue to shape the conversation around Appalachian folk healing in a way that honors the complexity, resilience, and evolving nature of Appalachian identity. It is essential to continue questioning and expanding the definitions of folk healing beyond the constraints of outdated or romanticized views,

offering a deeper understanding of how migrants, like my grandmother, navigated the intersections of tradition, identity, and survival. Through such examination, we not only recover the histories of Appalachian migrants but also contribute to a broader understanding of cultural adaptation and the enduring power of folk knowledge.

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