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**The Pi Beta Phi Settlement School: Progressive Reform in
Gatlinburg, Tennessee, 1910-1965**

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

Shirley Marie Robinson
August 2009

Dedication

For Pauline Ray Browning and Barbara Rice Robinson, who first taught me about mountain people.

Acknowledgments

I would like to offer my thanks to all of those who assisted me in the creation of this thesis. My advisor, Dr. Daniel Feller read various drafts and offered valuable advice. Anne Bridges and Steve Davis initially guided me to this topic by introducing me to their own research for the Great Smoky Mountains Regional Project. Deb Schillo assisted me with my research in the archives of the Southern Highland Craft Guild. Barbara Beville, who is the daughter of Pi Phi Henrietta Huff, allowed me to interview her regarding the school and checked my thesis for accuracy. Dr. Lynn Sacco and Dr. Robert Morrissey joined my thesis committee and offered suggestions that will allow me to transform this project into a dissertation.

Abstract

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, reformers, intellectuals and travel writers drew the attention of the American public to Southern Appalachia. Although the region had previously not been viewed as distinct from other parts of the rural South, a mythology about mountain deviance emerged after the Civil War. Commentators identified mountaineers as aberrant based on exaggerated accounts of violence, poverty and ignorance. As the urban middle class became identified as the core of American society, efforts to “Americanize” other groups brought organizations such as the Pi Beta Phi into the Mountain South.

Founded in 1867 at Monmouth College in Monmouth, Illinois, Pi Beta Phi Women's Fraternity decided to embark upon its first national philanthropy in 1910. The growing national focus on Appalachia led them to plan a settlement school in the region. An investigation of the most educationally needy areas of the Mountain South brought them to the village of Gatlinburg, Tennessee where the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School would become the center of a partnership whose legacy lives on in the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts.

An examination of the school's history requires an attendant investigation of the interactions between Appalachian people and those who perceived themselves as the main stream of American society. This analysis brings Appalachia from the periphery to the center of discussions about American identity building. Another goal of this thesis is to provide mountaineers with agency beyond the usual stock characterizations that many histories of the region have assigned them. Rather than passive recipients of philanthropy, Gatlinburg's residents displayed their desire for a school from the outset and assisted the Pi Phis whenever possible. The primary purpose of this thesis is to interpret the bilateral relationship between the fraternity

women and the subjects of their reform by giving a voice to the local people.

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Chapter 1: Why Southern Appalachia?

At a 1910 convention of the Pi Beta Phi Fraternity for Women, alumna Emma Harper Turner laid out plans for a proposed settlement school in the mountains of Southern Appalachia. The school would be the first philanthropic project by a Greek Letter organization in the United States, and the first such endeavor for Pi Beta Phi. A relative latecomer to the field of benevolent work in Appalachia, the fraternity had been in existence for over forty years; however, the timing of the project was neither an afterthought nor a coincidence.

Turner's proposal addressed the fraternity's desire for a philanthropy that would honor its founders. Established in 1867 at Monmouth College in Monmouth, Illinois, the fraternity, which members originally called "I.C. Sorosis" for unknown reasons, was the first women's Greek Letter organization in the United States. The Pi Phis called their organization a fraternity because the term "sorority" would not be coined until the 1870's. The founders adopted the arrow as their symbol, and it can be found in the names of many of the fraternity's projects.¹

Pi Beta Phi provided a support group for collegiate women at a time when only five universities in the United States accepted female students.² During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, large numbers of educated women became involved in the Progressive movement and Pi Beta Phi's members were no exception. As typical Progressives, they came from predominantly middle-class backgrounds. In her 1915 history of the fraternity, settlement school committee member Elizabeth Clarke Helmick describes Pi Beta Phi's original members as "Western women, infused with the broad and constantly expanding spirit of freedom,

1 Pi Beta Phi Fraternity for Women homepage, Town and Country, Missouri, <http://pibetaphi.org/pibetaphi> [accessed 25 September 2009].

2 Ibid.

independence, and healthy normal growth.”³ This belief in a national ideal, tempered as it was by a regional perspective, served as a driving force behind Pi Beta Phi’s decision to enter the field of benevolent work in Appalachia. Moreover, their membership in the nation’s dominant culture informed the way in which the fraternity women approached their project.

The Pi Phis’ position as women also affected their choice by channeling them into certain varieties of reform that bestowed authority without openly challenging their presumed domestic roles. They tended to view mountain women, in their most visible roles as mothers and housekeepers, as potential conduits of their reform ideology. Therefore, many of the settlement school’s programs would focus on local women. “We Pi Phi sisters here, they, hillfolk sisters there, we in the midst of all things lovely and true, they for whom the whole world seems askew...,” proclaimed a song written by Pi Phi Kate Miller.⁴ In addition to the effects of class and culture, the relationship between the Pi Phis and locals also represents the interplay of the social mores of gender between these two groups of women.

Since the 1970’s, revisionist histories of Appalachia have questioned the motives of reformers who entered the region during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By indicating that various benevolent groups carried out agendas of personal gain or cultural imperialism alongside or even in lieu of their plans to help mountain people, scholars such as Sandra Lee Barney have noted that the intentions of such reformers may not have been purely altruistic. In Barney’s 2000 book, *Authorized to Heal*, she argues that physicians allied themselves with women of the local elite during the early 20th century in an attempt to gain a monopoly on Appalachian health care

3 Elizabeth Allen-Clarke Helmick, *The History of Pi Beta Phi Fraternity* (Boston: David R. Nickerson and Company, 1915), 27.

4 Agnes Wright Spring, “The Settlement School on Little Pigeon,” *The Arrow of Pi Beta Phi* 52, no. 3 [1936]: 257.

as well as the professionalized status that this would provide.⁵ In light of such critiques, a closer assessment of the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School prompts the question of whether the Pi Phis retained hidden objectives. If the fraternity women meant to instigate covert changes in addition to their overtly stated mission to offer economic, health, and educational reform, the next logical query is whether this impeded their more ostensible goals.

A shortcoming of studies that present the interaction between reformers and Appalachian people as nothing more than attempts at cultural imperialism is that they obscure the participation of the mountaineers themselves. Before scholarly accounts of Appalachian history began to emerge during the 1970's, most social scientists viewed the region's past as the preserve of folklorists or anthropologists. In short, they felt that the Mountain South had no history because it existed in an unchanging past. The accounts of amateur historians focused on poverty in the Mountain South, which they attributed to a personality defect among its people. In 1963, Harry Caudill's *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* altered this view by focusing on the wrenching changes that the coal mining industry had introduced in eastern Kentucky. Caudill's work inspired a new generation of scholars who began the task of building a framework for understanding Appalachian history.⁶

Such accounts initiated the serious examination of Appalachian history by highlighting the abuses that mountain people endured at the hands of rampant capitalism and emergent class-consciousness. Although Caudill's account is not a professional work of history and often fails to move beyond the pitfalls of stereotype, his declaration that Appalachian people had not caused their own poverty prompted historians and sociologists to search the mountain past for a chain of

5 Sandra Lee Barney, *Authorized to Heal: Gender, Class and the Transformation of Medicine in Appalachia, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

6 Harry M. Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1963).

causation that had led to these circumstances. Groundbreaking works by historians such as Henry Shapiro and Ronald Eller served as a basis from which scholars constructed the field from the ground up. In 1978, Shapiro's intellectual history, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, examined the dominant middle class' creation of a deviant image of Appalachia after the Civil War.⁷ Eller's 1982 book, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, sought to finish what Caudill started by providing a scholarly account of the colonization of Appalachia by northern industrialists.⁸

Many of the histories that followed these landmark works tended to focus on the victimization of Appalachian people. Sadly, mistreatment at the hands of large corporations and negligent state governments is an undeniable part of Appalachian history. However, the inclination to engage with mountaineers only in their role as victims can generate an opaque sort of history that is nearly as detrimental to the field as the notion that it did not exist. The new trend in scholarship often treated mountaineers as two-dimensional characters who could only be viewed through their suffering. There can be no doubt that the economic power balance in Appalachia fell inordinately in favor of the industrialized North, but to deny mountain people any sort of agency in their own history renders them as stock characters, rather than real people.

When the Pi Phi selected Gatlinburg, Tennessee as the location for their settlement school, they required the assistance of the local people to create and maintain the institution. In most cases, Gatlinburg residents gave that assistance wholeheartedly. Had locals not provided money to purchase land for the school, assisted with its construction and maintenance, or sent their children to its classes, the enterprise would have failed. The college women undoubtedly felt that the mountaineers stood to benefit from what they considered superior knowledge and

⁷ Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978).

⁸ Ronald D. Eller, *Miners, Millhands and Mountaineers: Industrialization in the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville, Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 1982).

cultural traditions. However, their interest in preserving aspects of mountain life, regardless of how uninformed these attempts may have been, indicates that their intention was not to completely obliterate that way of life. Although the balance of power between these two cultural groups was evidently uneven, the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School represents a partnership, rather than a unilateral bid for cultural supremacy.

In order to understand the relationship between the Pi Phis and the people that they intended to help, it is necessary to examine the fraternity's motives for creating a school in Appalachia. The fraternity's decision reflected how many middle-class Americans viewed the Mountain South during the early 20th century. Three prevalent impulses prompted the creation of this model of Appalachia. They included the swelling self-awareness of the middle class after the Civil War, the reactionary nativism of the early 20th century, and turn-of-the-century accounts that painted the Mountain South as an aberrant region.

The Search for "True" Americans

The tendency of members of the emergent middle class to view themselves as the main stream of American society after the Civil War coincided with the escalating frequency of tales that cast mountaineers in opposition to this assumed norm. Increased immigration during the late 19th and early 20th centuries led to the preoccupation of nativist thinkers with the "Americanization" of groups who served as foils against which "native" Americans could construct their identities. Those who feared the influences of large immigrant groups used the vague term "old stock" as a yardstick of seniority against which claims of "true" American status could be measured. Many nativists included mountaineers in their efforts to familiarize the

“alien”, which gave Appalachia a prominent place in the process of national identity building.

Ironically, many middle-class and nativist thinkers simultaneously identified Appalachian people as a quintessentially American group by categorizing them as fundamentally “old stock”.

Philanthropists and writers visited Appalachia because they subscribed to a certain mythology regarding the region’s populace. According to Gatlinburg area native Bonnie Trentham Myers, “the old stereotypes are myths mixed with a tiny bit of truth.”⁹ Besides drawing reformers into the mountains, these ideas determined how outsiders interacted with the people they intended to help. It benefited 19th-century writers and missionaries to perpetuate these ideas, since they garnered sales or support by portraying mountaineers as deviant. Myers states “magazine and newspaper writers have come here seeking the very worst among us...they have exploited an image of Appalachia to turn the simple life of the mountaineer into grist for the literary mill.”¹⁰ The historian Henry Shapiro argues that before the Civil War Americans did not tend to view Appalachia as distinct from any other part of the rural South. In the aftermath of the war, however, northern visitors to the mountains published travel accounts like Will Wallace Harney’s 1873 article, “A Strange Land and Peculiar People”.¹¹

The local color movement, which also appeared immediately following the Civil War, expanded on these travel writings and boosted sales by producing increasingly exotic tales about mountain people. For instance, the local colorist Louise Coffin Jones wrote in her 1883 article “In the Highlands of North Carolina” that Appalachia was “as unfamiliar to us as the dweller in a wheeled house on the Scythian Steppes.”¹² Periodicals that emerged after the Civil War, such as

9 Bonnie Trentham Myers, Best Yet Stories of the Early Life and Times of Smoky Mountain People: An Anecdotal Encyclopedia of Smoky Mountain Lore, (Maryville, Tennessee: Bonnie Trentham Myers, 2002), 2.

10 Ibid., 2.

11 Shapiro, 5.

12 Ibid., 6.

Harper's and *Lippincott's*, accommodated an overwhelmingly northern, middle-class audience. According to Shapiro, these publications drove sales by reinforcing the lifestyles of their readers. As with other groups that were defined as peripheral by middle-class authors, popular literature denigrated Appalachian people by exaggerating homogenized “alien” traits such as poverty, regional dialect, and an assumed propensity for violence.¹³ Elizabeth Clarke Helmick’s description of the daily lives of mountaineers as an “almost animal existence” indicates that this sort of literature heavily influenced the Pi Phi’s vision of their mission in Appalachia.¹⁴

Several Protestant denominations, such as the Methodist Episcopal Church, also perceived southern Appalachia as a deviant society. Representatives of the Protestant Home Mission Movement desired to alter the mountaineers’ “unchurched” condition.¹⁵ Although mountain people had their own Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist churches, missionaries from national institutions did not approve of their independence or the largely untrained nature of their clergy. The Home Mission Movement sought to bring the country churches of Appalachia into the national networks of large denominations and to standardize their clergy and doctrine. School and church-building programs were launched across the region during the 1880’s, and mission workers regarded Appalachia as though it were a foreign nation.¹⁶ When they arrived in the mountains, many settlement workers found themselves cooperating with these earlier arrivals and their denominational schools.

Most philanthropists who entered the mountains during the late 19th and early 20th centuries identified poverty as the preeminent incarnation of mountain deviance. A number of interwoven factors contributed to widespread poverty in some subregions of the Mountain South.

¹³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴ Helmick, 249.

¹⁵ Shapiro, 32.

¹⁶ Shapiro, 33.

These causes included corporate exploitation and the fact that many mountaineers were not fully integrated into the capitalist market and, therefore, could not be judged by its standards of material wealth. The search for a less complex answer led reformers to blame economic hardship on geographical isolation. Consequently, their simplistic solutions for mountain poverty often involved bringing mountaineers into the sphere of mainstream American culture. Ironically, the same commentators who located mountaineers outside the domain of accepted American culture frequently contributed to the emergence of romanticized myths that portrayed them as “pioneers” or “pure Anglo-Saxon stock”. This created a dilemma in which reformers wanted to lure mountaineers away from cultural traditions that were viewed as a hindrance to their development, but not so far as to obliterate these valuable facets of the American heritage altogether.

William Goodell Frost, president of Kentucky’s Berea College, championed the notion that Appalachian people required a degree of sophistication, so long as it did not destroy the aspects of their culture that he viewed as national assets. Frost popularized the various ideas about Appalachia that emerged during the late 19th and early 20th centuries by solidifying them into a standard set of beliefs. During the 1910’s, he focused on Appalachia’s so-called “feuding culture”, which he viewed as the region’s most serious malady. Like his contemporaries, Frost argued that the source of the region’s supposed violence lay in its isolation, which he believed resulted in mass ignorance by freezing mountain people in time. Pi Phi Pearl Cashell Jackson echoed this notion in her 1927 history of the settlement school. In explanation of these “primitive” people, Jackson says “since time began there has been a grand division between the

people of mountain and plain”.¹⁷

Frost proposed to end the mountaineers' seclusion by bringing education and commerce to Appalachia in the form of schools and handicraft programs. Thanks to the broad acceptance of Frost's ideas, many reformers believed that the people of Appalachia represented a direct link to an “Anglo-Saxon,” or “pioneer” past. Scholars repeatedly used Frost's term “our contemporary ancestors” to portray the region's populace as ahistorical relics. Although these ideas alienated mountaineers from mainstream American society, they also convinced reformers that, by the virtue of their “Anglo-Saxon birthright”, mountain people were worth saving.¹⁸

Before their arrival in the mountains, Pi Beta Phi presented its settlement school workers with an extensive reading list that was intended to provide them with a better understanding of Appalachian people. The list included several novels by Mary Noailles Murfree, such as *In the Tennessee Mountains*. Murfree, who used the pen name Charles Egbert Craddock, was a leading name among the writers of local color fiction. She portrayed mountaineers as romantic, yet tragically flawed characters in need of redemption. Murfree drew her characterizations from the rare glimpses of local mountain people that she caught while vacationing at a resort in the Cumberland Mountains with her prominent Middle Tennessee family. Despite their lack of basis in fact, as is evidenced by her clumsy attempts to replicate mountain speech, Murfree's stereotypes were widely accepted by fiction readers and reformers alike.¹⁹

The reading list also contained pieces such as R. Erskine's “The Craftsmanship of the Mountaineers of the Blue Ridge”, which informed the future settlement workers that mountain

17 Pearl Cashell Jackson, *Pi Beta Phi Settlement School* (Gatlinburg, Tennessee: Pi Beta Phi Fraternity, 1927).

18 Dwight B Billings and Kathleen M. Blee, *The Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Hardship in Appalachia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8.

19 “From Pi Beta Phi to Arrowmont” website, The University of Tennessee and the Great Smoky Mountains Regional Project, Knoxville, Tennessee, <http://www.lib.utk.edu/arrowmont/readinglist.htm> [accessed 26 February 2009].

people retained traditional skills, such as weaving, spinning, and basketry. The inclusion of this piece indicates that the staff of the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School arrived with the expectation of finding and encouraging such skills. The Pi Phis' writings, which often mention the successes of craft programs like those at Berea College, bear this evidence out. Paradoxically, the fraternity's mission to incorporate the mountaineers into mainstream American society also involved the revival of skills that had already begun to fade because of escalating modernization.²⁰

Frost's writings also figured prominently in the Pi Phis' inventory. The fraternity included his article "Berea College", to illustrate the success of his Eastern Kentucky programs with mountain youth in the areas of industrial and higher education. The Pi Phis planned to have a similar industrial focus within their own institution, as would become apparent in their agricultural and handicrafts curriculum. The inclusion of Frost's articles "Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains" and "The Southern Mountaineer: Our Kindred of the Boone and Lincoln Type," clearly shows that the Pi Phis accepted Frost's image of mountaineers as the ethnically homogeneous remnants of a previous era of national greatness.²¹

A Brief History of Gatlinburg, Tennessee

Although its scarcity of traversable roads and proximity to some of the highest peaks in the Smoky Mountains made travel to and from Gatlinburg difficult, the community never experienced complete isolation from the outside world. Despite the arguments of scholars like William Goodell Frost, time did not stand still in the Mountain South. East Tennessee never experienced the level of economic and social exploitation witnessed in areas with heavy coal

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

production; nevertheless, it experienced profound change during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Rural Sevier County did not prove immune to the effects of war or industry, and the inexorable wheel of transformation had begun to turn before the women of Pi Beta Phi ever set foot in Gatlinburg.

In 1803, Edgefield, South Carolina native William Ogle planned to become the first white settler in the Gatlinburg area. With the help of local Cherokees, Ogle notched the logs for a cabin and returned to South Carolina to bring his family to his “land of paradise”. Ogle never realized his dream, since he contracted malaria and died shortly after returning to his family in South Carolina. Around 1806, Ogle’s middle-aged widow Martha Jane Huskey Ogle crossed over the Indian Gap Trail and into the Smoky Mountains with her seven children, her brother Peter Huskey, and his family. Ogle located her husband’s logs and finished the cabin with the help of her family. They became the first whites to settle in the area they dubbed “White Oak Flats” for its plentiful white oak trees.²²

The history of Gatlinburg’s first white settlers was not to follow stages of settlement and subsequent isolation as outlined by Frost. The original families were soon joined by a steady stream of veterans of the Revolutionary War who used their service pay to purchase land that had been cleared of most of its Native American inhabitants during the 1770’s. Reagans, Ownbys, Whaleys, McCarters, Trenthams, and Bohanans joined the Ogles and the Huskeys, creating a list of surnames that continues to preponderate in Sevier County.²³

The majority of the residents of White Oak Flats were self-sufficient farmers, but this did not preclude the creation of formal institutions or the presence of an entrepreneurial spirit. As

22 Jeanette S. Greve, *The Story of Gatlinburg (White Oak Flats)* (Strasburg, Virginia: Shenandoah, 1931), 3.

23 Ibid.

with many Appalachian communities, religion was an important part of life in White Oak Flats, and residents held services out of doors or in a neighbor's cabin until the construction of a church building could take place. This suggests that the area's settlers had an interest in recreating familiar institutions, rather than seeking to break with civilization altogether

Most of the community's predominantly Scots and Scots-Irish settlers were Presbyterian, but an extension of the county seat's Baptist church became the first established church in White Oak Flats. The congregation began to meet in a cabin on Baskins Creek within a few years of the village's settlement. In 1837, the Reverend Richard Evans founded White Oak Flats Baptist Church on Mill Creek. The log church house doubled as a subscription school for area children. In 1875, White Oak Flats' second church moved into a modern frame building. Although the community changed its name to Gatlinburg in 1860, the church did not become Gatlinburg Baptist until 1932.²⁴

Religion retained a strong influence into the 20th century, and the Pi Phis encountered a village in which strong drink and dancing were frowned up in equal measure.

Several subscription schools operated in the area during the 19th century and the first free, state-supported school was established in 1867. School sessions lasted only two to three months a year because of the students' need to help their families with agricultural labor and the limited budget of the school system. Students focused on the "three R's", or basic reading, writing, and mathematics, which the farming community no doubt found sufficient for its educational needs. Local politics played a large role in the selection of teachers. When coupled with low salaries, this meant that highly skilled instructors often sought jobs elsewhere. Teacher incomes in Sevier County tended to lag behind those of other Tennessee counties well into the

²⁴ Ibid.

20th century and few residents could afford to attend college. Consequently, most educators in the Gatlinburg area had no more than a fifth-grade education. Residents who possessed the financial means sent their children to institutions such as Sevierville's Murphy College, which provided secondary education from 1892 to 1935.²⁵

In 1850, Martha Jane Huskey Ogle's grandson Noah established White Oak Flats' first store, which he operated for sixty-six years. In 1854, a flamboyant Baptist preacher named Radford Gatlin moved to White Oak Flats with his family and established the village's second general store. Gatlin also became community's first postmaster in 1856. The merchandise for Ogle and Gatlin's stores traveled from Knoxville to Pigeon Forge, where it had to be transferred to horseback for the last leg of the trip.²⁶ The stores served as a valuable link to the world outside the mountains by providing locals with store-bought goods, news in written and verbal form, and a regular line of postal communication from Knoxville to North Carolina.

As a vocal secessionist and slave owner, Gatlin did not mesh well with the overwhelmingly pro-Union residents of White Oak Flats. Area resident Gladys Trentham Russell states that Gatlin's neighbors disliked him because of his cruel public treatment of a slave woman.²⁷ The preacher also incited a quarrel with the prominent Ogles when he attempted to divert the village's main road to suit his own purposes. Gatlin also established a Baptist church in the community, and local descriptions of the institution as a "Gatlinite" church suggest that he used his position as a minister to further his influence within the village. According to local legend, the other residents offered to rename the village after him if he would agree to leave.

Although other, more orthodox histories attribute the name change to his position as postmaster,

²⁵ Greve, 40.

²⁶ "Shadow of LeConte is Cast over Historic Mountain Town," *Montgomery's Vindicator*, May 7, 1930, 25.

²⁷ Gladys Trentham Russell, *Call Me Hillbilly: A Personal Account of Growing Up in the Smokies Near Gatlinburg*, (Alcoa, Tennessee: Russell Publishing Company, 1974), 12

it seems coincidental that the community received its new name a year after Gatlin moved to South Carolina in 1859.²⁸

In addition to local squabbles, outside conflicts impacted Gatlinburg during the 19th century. A majority of the community's residents attempted to remain neutral during the Civil War, but some local men served in the Union or Confederate armies. The village was occupied by Confederate forces when Colonel Will Thomas and his Cherokee legion took up residence in a blockhouse atop 'Burg Hill. They attempted to secure the nearby saltpeter deposits at Alum Cave, but Sevier County's only Civil War skirmish ended when Union troops drove Thomas' legion back into North Carolina. Due to the volatile mixture of Union and Confederate sentiment in the mountains, Gatlinburg frequently suffered the depredations of raids that were carried out by both sides.²⁹

The conclusion of the Civil War did not signal a corresponding end to the influence of national and international events on Gatlinburg. The involvement of Sevier County's enlisted men in the Spanish-American War in 1898 also belied the vision of Gatlinburg as a community untouched by outside forces. As soldiers returned to their rural homes, they brought with them their experiences from other parts of the world.³⁰

That Radford Gatlin's exodus failed to extinguish the community's entrepreneurial spirit is evidenced by the several generations of Ogles who continued to operate their family store. Noah Ogle's son Ephraim took over the business in 1916, and his son Charles and grandson Charles Earl maintained E.E. Ogle and Company until the 1970's. In addition to a wide array of

28 "Shadow of Leconte is Cast over Historic Mountain Town", 25.

29 Ibid., 25.

30 The Smoky Mountains Historical Society, *The Gentle Winds of Change: A History of Sevier County, Tennessee, 1900-1930* (Sevierville, Tennessee: The Smoky Mountains Historical Society, 1989), 17.

merchandise, the store housed the community's post office until 1925.³¹ Despite depictions of the community's populace as a pioneer society that had remained isolated since its earliest settlement, a small but steady flow of goods and people entered and left Gatlinburg throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Increasing numbers of local men worked in the lumber industry during the late 19th century. Appalachia's lumber mills began as small, locally run enterprises that employed a few men. The penetration of railroad systems into the mountains allowed large northern lumber corporations to enter Appalachia during the 1890's. This precipitated a timber boom that caused massive deforestation in the Smoky Mountains before the lumbermen moved on to the Pacific Northwest after World War I. A majority of mountain men participated in a mixed economy by continuing to farm while supplementing their families' incomes with wages earned from timbering. Many sought employment in the company town of Townsend, in neighboring Blount County.

Established in 1898, Andrew Jackson Huff's Little Pigeon Lumber Company provided a closer alternative. The operation included a home office in Newport, a shipping yard in Sevierville, and a lumber camp near Gatlinburg.³² A native of Greeneville, Tennessee, Huff and his wife Martha Whaley Huff of Greenbriar moved to Gatlinburg two years after he and his brother founded their operation. By 1911, the timber industry in the Gatlinburg area had begun to decline, and the Huffs investigated other business opportunities. By the time of the Pi Phi's arrival in 1912, Huff had become one of the community's leading citizens.³³

31 Gatlinburg official website, <http://www.gatlinburg.things-to-do/culture-history/>, Gatlinburg, Tennessee_ [accessed 26 February 2009].

32 "Gatlinburg's Leading Hotel Popular Resort", *Montgomery's Vindicator*, May 7, 1930, 25.

33 John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia, A History*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 246.

Some area residents earned cash by providing room and board for lumber workers and the company officials who came to scout the area's resources around the turn of the 20th century. After 1900, a trickle of tourists appeared in response to the picturesque descriptions of Mary Naoilles Murfree and her fellow local colorists. The presence of lumbermen and tourists increased when the Knoxville, Sevierville, and Eastern Railroad reached Sevierville in 1910. That year also marked the opening of Elijah Lawson Reagan's woodworking shop, which is believed to be the oldest continuously operated business in the history of the Smoky Mountains.³⁴ Several local men earned a living by serving as mountain guides to the increasing flow of tourists. Wiley Oakley, whose nickname "the Roamin' Man of the Mountains" illustrated his fame as a guide, became well-known outside Gatlinburg and used his proceeds to purchase large tracts of land.

Many of Gatlinburg's farmers participated in a primarily subsistence economy during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Earlier settlers, or those with greater financial resources, established farms in the more productive bottom lands along streams and rivers. Those who arrived too late to claim the more fertile tracts, or who could not afford them, settled on steep mountainsides and in the area's many "hollers". The mountainous terrain tended to geographically separate area residents, and farmers wrung a much smaller yield from the thin soil of hillside farms. Social events such as "sings," "workings," or church functions provided valuable social time for people who did not get the opportunity to interact with one another on a daily basis.

Although a majority of local residents operated their farms at the subsistence level of

34 Smoky Mountain Railroad historical website, Sevier County, Tennessee, <http://www.trainweb.org.smokymtnrr/history.html> [accessed 27 February 2009].

production, they did not hesitate to market surpluses when they occurred, and some of them did engage in commercial farming. Farmers who exceeded the subsistence level often transported their crops to Sevierville by rafting down the Little Pigeon River. Some of these products continued on flatboats to Dandridge, where they were transferred to steamboats that traveled to Knoxville. Corn, which was the backbone of most of Appalachia's farming enterprises, maintained its position as Sevier County's primary staple well into the 20th century. Many farmers in the Gatlinburg area also grew tobacco, which became Appalachia's chief cash crop after the turn of the century.³⁵

Although many of Gatlinburg's farmers continued to operate at the subsistence level after the turn of the century, the village's residents exhibited an enterprising spirit whenever opportunities to earn money presented themselves. Area residents never experienced complete isolation from the outside world, and they adopted labor-saving amenities and popular modes of dress or home decor when they could acquire them. Although Gatlinburg seemed rustic to urban observers, the community differed greatly from its "pioneer" origins.

35 The Smoky Mountains Historical Society, *The Gentle Winds of Change*, 12.

Chapter 2: Reform Methodologies

Pi Beta Phi's efforts at the settlement school included three separate yet interrelated strands of national self-examination. The nativist drive for the "Americanization" of the nation's populace, various Progressive movements, and the Arts and Crafts Revival each centered on the fear that the nation's journey toward its pinnacle had somehow been derailed. These various impulses often diverged over issues such as when the error had occurred, or how to correct it, but they each included the reactionary impulse to return to an imagined golden age. The Pi Beta Phi Settlement School represents aspects of each of these impulses; thus its history not only illustrates how self-identified mainstream Americans viewed Appalachia, but also how many middle-class Americans wanted to perceive themselves.

The Progressive movements, which began during the 1890's and declined with the advent of World War I, often became a vehicle for middle-class ideals. Progressivism frequently overlapped with nativism, and some Progressives supported restrictions on immigration, as well as measures that were aimed at normalizing the "deviant" behavior of immigrants. In addition to earlier efforts such as the Home Mission Movement, the various agendas of the Progressive reform supplied organizations like Pi Beta Phi with the motivation and methodologies with which they would approach mountain people. As Progressives, the Pi Phis' efforts in Appalachia were deeply rooted in the era's educational, health, and settlement movements, as well as in the social control agenda that often underlay them.³⁶ Although Progressivism included a staggeringly disparate array of agendas, most reformers shared the goal of alleviating the traumatic dislocation of industrial urbanization. As representatives of the dominant culture, middle-class

³⁶ John Whiteclay Chambers II, *The Tyranny of Change: America in the Progressive Era 1900-1917* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980).

Progressives typically equated “salvation” with the acceptance of their own values.

The announced goal of the health reform movement was to create a better quality of life for Americans through improved health. Infectious disease, which was still endemic to most areas of America in the early 20th century, became the primary focus of health reform. Reformers found that prevention was less costly than curative treatment, so inoculations and health education became the primary modes of reform.³⁷ Health reform programs caused a dramatic decrease in death due to infectious disease that eventually benefited most groups in the United States. However, because of fears that the “superior” race was in danger, many reforms initially targeted “Anglo-Saxon” Americans.

Lillian Wald, who founded public health nursing at her Henry Street Settlement House in New York City, became a driving force behind the rural wing of the health reform movement. In 1908, she convinced Theodore Roosevelt to form the Commission on Country Life.³⁸ The Progressive desire to use scientific methods in order to solve social problems characterized the commission, which investigated health conditions in rural areas. Its report outlined serious deficiencies among groups such as Mexican laborers and poor Appalachian people. The Commission pressured country schools and county governments to build privies and to hire district nurses and doctors.³⁹ At Pi Beta Phi Settlement School, the acquisition of a public health nurse and the formation of a medical infrastructure became essential parts of the fraternity’s plans for the Gatlinburg community.

Health reformers soon realized that combating disease in rural areas also required the alleviation of poverty. Improved education served as a vehicle for the dissemination of health

37 Ruth Clifford Engs, *The Progressive Era’s Health Reform Movement: A Historical Dictionary* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 262.

38 Ibid., 287.

39 Ibid., 287.

care knowledge and provided greater occupational opportunities in a quickly advancing industrial age. Prominent education reformer John Dewey advocated “learning by doing,” rather than the traditional educational mode of rote memorization. He believed that an emphasis on critical thinking and vocational training would better prepare children to live fruitfully in a diversified industrial society.⁴⁰ Pi Beta Phi’s emphasis on its agricultural and vocational training programs reflects the application of these ideas.

The settlement house movement, which began at the end of the 19th century, best characterizes the union of health care and education reform. Like their urban English predecessors, American social settlements emerged as a response to the negative effects of rapid industrial growth. Samuel and Henrietta Barnett initiated the movement when they opened London’s Toynbee Hall in 1884. They hoped to effect change in the impoverished East End by offering education and social services.⁴¹ Settlement workers believed that they could improve the lives of the poor by altering their environment, so, rather than focusing on the individual, they involved the community as a whole.

The ambitiously optimistic social agenda of Toynbee Hall impressed young Progressives such as Jane Addams, who co-founded Chicago’s famous Hull House with Ellen Gates Starr in 1889.⁴² Hull House became the best known settlement house in the United States, and served as the precedent for many similar institutions. In 1893, Lillian Wald founded the Henry Street Settlement, through which she operated a visiting nurse service.⁴³ With its combined focus on health, education, and social work, Wald’s establishment served as an important precedent for

40 Marten, 107.

41 *From Pi Beta Phi to Arrowmont* project website, *The Great Smoky Mountains Regional Project*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee, <http://www.lib.utk.edu/arrowmont/> [accessed 1 November 2007].

42 Chambers, 15

43 Engs, 348.

rural settlements.

According to the historian James Marten, the Progressives' nostalgia for the small-town lifestyle of their Victorian childhood figured prominently in their reform efforts. In order to instill "small-town" values in urban children, reformers instituted programs that accentuated "interpersonal contact, wholesome entertainment and leisure activities, and a sometimes naive sense of fair play."⁴⁴ Rural reformers, who took many cues from the urban settlements, sought to instill a sense of community that they felt was lacking in areas that were more isolated.

By focusing on a combination of health care and education reform, the rural manifestation of the settlement house attempted to alleviate poverty among country people. Established in 1895 in Asheville, North Carolina, the Log Cabin Settlement was the first of the rural settlements.⁴⁵ In 1902, Kentucky natives May Stone and Katherine Pettit founded Hindman Settlement School in the mountainous eastern part of their state. Hindman became the most influential of these institutions by serving as a model for rural education, health care, and social service programs like those that would be undertaken by Pi Beta Phi. Stone and Pettit incorporated elements of the Arts and Crafts Revival into the school's curriculum by encouraging the local community to produce traditional mountain handicrafts. Besides providing craftspeople with an income, Stone and Pettit also hoped to preserve a way of life that was disintegrating rapidly in the face of modernization.⁴⁶

Handicrafts came to symbolize Appalachia, as well as its supposed link with the colonial past. According to Jane S. Becker, the author of *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930-1940*, urban collectors often felt that the purchase of

⁴⁴ Marten, 4.

⁴⁵ Williams, 202.

⁴⁶ Hindman Settlement School website, Hindman, Kentucky, <http://www.hindmansettlement.org> [accessed 1 October 2007].

Appalachian handicrafts allowed them to own a piece of their own national heritage.⁴⁷ The turmoil caused by industrialization and accelerated immigration impelled Americans to seek a core within themselves, to locate something that tied them to an untainted and patriotic past. Although contrived, this idealized heritage drove many Americans to seize upon mountain culture as an antidote to urban chaos.

William Morris, a prominent supporter of England's late 19th century Arts and Crafts Revival, had argued that a return to traditional handicrafts would serve as a cure for industrial degradation. An idealized population of "folk", or craftspeople, was to play a key role in Morris' plans for social redemption. Americans, who worried that their nation would suffer under industrialism as England had, quickly adopted his ideas.⁴⁸ As they combed the nation in search of the "folk" who would lead the charge against dissolution, reformers vied for the authority to authenticate handicrafts. At the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School and other rural programs, the promotion of crafts became a way to integrate mountaineers into mainstream society while preserving the aspects of Appalachian culture that reformers considered worthwhile. Becker argues that the relationship between those who claimed the authority to judge the validity of crafts and the people who they labeled as "folk" has broad implications for the American class system.

The social control impulse, which intersected with nativism and health reform, figured implicitly in the programs of the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School. Social control was a broadly based effort by "old stock" Americans to impose a homogeneous culture on the nation's various ethnic and social groups. Measures such as compulsory education and immigration restrictions

⁴⁷ Jane S. Becker, *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930-1940* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

evidenced this desire for a uniform culture. “Old stock” Progressives overwhelmingly identified themselves as Anglo-Saxon and Protestant, which drove their conflicting desires to simultaneously denigrate and save the “Anglo-Saxon” Protestants of the mountains. Despite their lack of formal education, Pi Phi Pearl Cashell Jackson argued that the mountaineers “entered at birth into the full enjoyment of their racial heritage, which had enabled them to develop so many of the essentials of culture.”⁴⁹ Efforts to rescue Appalachian people from poverty and ignorance became an integral part of the crusade to save the “old stock” from extinction.⁵⁰ In this way, mountaineers played an important role in national self-identification; as the interrelated groups who defined themselves as the core of American society scrambled to legitimize that position by compartmentalizing everyone else.

49 Jackson, 33.

50 Engs, 181.

Chapter 3: The Foundation of the Settlement School

In 1910, Pi Phi at a meeting of the National Alumnae Association heartily approved Emma Harper Turner's proposal for a settlement school in Southern Appalachia. When asked which area of the Mountain South was the most educationally needy, the United States National Commissioner of Education immediately indicated the school system of East Tennessee.⁵¹ This need occurred because many East Tennessee counties failed to generate the tax revenue necessary to support a quality school system. Since the typical salary of thirty dollars a month did not allow them to obtain higher education, the teachers who operated the one-room rural schools usually had little more than a fifth grade education.⁵²

"A Trip of Investigation"

After extensive correspondence with the Tennessee State Board of Education, the Pi Phi arranged to visit several proposed locations in East Tennessee. In 1910, Grand President Dr. May Lansfield Keller, President of the Washington Alumnae club Emma Harper Turner, and Anna F.T. Pettit set out for the mountains. Along the way, they met a representative of the United States Department of Agriculture who had educational experience in the South. He urged the Pi Phi not to work independently because of their lack of understanding for mountain youth. This observation accurately predicted many of the difficulties that would arise from the Pi Phi's

51 Jackson, 6.

52 Pi Beta Phi Elementary School website, Gatlinburg, Tennessee, <http://www.pbp.sevier.org/> [accessed 25 September 2007].

inexperience with Appalachian people.⁵³

The Pi Phis' first destination was mountainous Monroe County, where the citizens of Madisonville urged them to establish an agricultural school. Madisonville already boasted a high school, so the fraternity women moved on to Tellico Plains, which is also located in Monroe County.⁵⁴ After making the decision to view one more community, the investigators phoned the State Superintendent of Education and learned of an upcoming teachers' convention in Sevierville. The Pi Phis repeated Turner's outline at the seat of Sevier County as a gathering of teachers listened eagerly. Teacher Mabel Moore told them of the particular need of the nearby village of Gatlinburg. She reported that one Gatlinburg woman had confessed that the people there desired "a place where we can send our children to school when they get older."⁵⁵

Turner and Pettit returned to their northern homes, but Keller agreed to visit Gatlinburg and assess its situation. After parting with Keller, Turner and Pettit stopped over in Asheville, North Carolina, where Pettit visited Allanstand Cottage Industries and the Biltmore Arts and Crafts School. Both of these institutions promoted the production of mountain handicrafts as a way of improving the economic wellbeing of local people. After seeing programs like the ones that she had read about at Berea College in practice, Pettit saw an opportunity for the expansion of the Pi Phis' endeavor to assist mountain people economically. The seeds of future projects at the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School were sown.⁵⁶

From Sevierville, Keller rode over what she referred to as "seventeen miles of the worst

53 Anna F. T Pettit, "A Trip of Investigation," *The Arrow of Pi Beta Phi* 27, no. 1 [November 1910], 49.

54 Ibid., 51-52.

55 Jackson, 13.

56 Pettit, 54.

road in Tennessee.”⁵⁷ The rural area had no bridges, so it was necessary to ford rivers or ride up streams in the horse-drawn buggy. Keller and the superintendent of Sevier County schools, T.C. Drinnen, visited several of the one-room schools that they passed along the way. Here Keller discovered that, although the teachers lacked higher education, the students appeared to be “intelligent and bright,” which led her to the decision that a settlement school could be successful in this area.⁵⁸

Gladys Trentham Russell, who became Pi Beta Phi's first salutatorian before attending Lincoln Memorial University, recalls the trials endured by her mother in obtaining an eighth-grade education at one of these small rural schools.⁵⁹ The flooring had been removed from the center of the single room in which Mary Jane Ogle Trentham attended classes so that a fire could be built upon the ground. Trentham's thirst for education was such that she wore heelless shoes to school for three months after suffering a severe case of frostbite. Although quality education was not available to most mountaineers, they obviously prized what they could acquire.⁶⁰

In Gatlinburg, Keller encountered a village that consisted of six houses, a blacksmith's shop, a few general stores, a one-room school, and a Baptist church in which an untrained preacher held services once a month.⁶¹ As in the 19th century, Sevier County's budget was such that it could only afford to fund school sessions for three to four months out of the year. The postal service at that time was conducted by David Crockett Maples, who delivered the mail from Sevierville on horseback.⁶² The surrounding valleys sheltered about two hundred families

57 Ibid., 14.

58 Ibid., 14.

59 Russell, 27.

60 Russell, 9.

61 Spring, Agnes Wright. *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee* (Gatlinburg, Tennessee: Pi Beta Phi Fraternity, 1936). 1.

62 Lucinda Oakley Ogle, *Queen of the Smokies: Remembrances of 94 Years in the Smoky Mountains*

for whom the tiny village served as a hub.

At the time, Sevier County had no public medical infrastructure. Area physicians such as Dr. Henry Hoffman, who served the Gatlinburg area during the early 20th century, traveled up to twenty miles to reach patients.⁶³ This could mean a long wait in the event of an emergency, especially if the doctor was not at home when messengers arrived. Consequently, many people in the area relied on “Granny-women”, or local midwives, in medical emergencies.

Such was the state of things when Keller and Drinnen arrived. Many Gatlinburg residents appeared as the news of their visitors spread. Keller soon discovered that she must address several of the locals’ preconceived notions before negotiations over the school could proceed. Some of the men told Keller of their fear that the Pi Phi might be a religious sect, bent on conversion. Keller notes that some of the older women expressed great curiosity at finding a single woman of marriageable age in their midst. Because of their unfamiliarity with philanthropy, some of the proud residents worried that the fraternity intended to offer charity. Although time and increased familiarity would cure most of the early awkwardness, some suspicions and misconceptions lingered for years, causing difficulties in the fraternity’s partnership with the community. However, Keller allayed most of the inhabitants’ fears by assuring them that the Pi Phi represented all Christians but no one denomination in particular, and that charity was not their design.⁶⁴ She was told “if the women wanted to give them a school, they were mighty sure they would be mighty glad to have it for their children.”⁶⁵

(Seymour, Tennessee: Artcraft Printers, 2004), 15.

⁶³ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁴ Interview with Henrietta Huff, Interviewed by Bernice Stevens, Gatlinburg, Tennessee, July 21, 1982.

⁶⁵ Jackson, 15.

The Beginning of a Partnership

The Pi Phis opened classes on February 20, 1912. Due to the situation surrounding education in East Tennessee, state and county authorities allowed public schools to cooperate with denominational schools in an attempt to provide more widespread education. The Pi Phis initially intended to collaborate directly with the Sevier County school system, but a year of waiting for approval left them determined to establish an independent school.⁶⁶ When the Pi Phis arrived in 1912, a local man, who earned around thirty dollars a month, continued to hold classes in Gatlinburg's one-room school. The Pi Phis convinced Sevier County to turn the community's meager funding over to them, and they became its sole educational facility. Pi Beta Phi leased a teacher's cottage for one dollar and fifty cents a month and began to set up their small operation.⁶⁷

The school's first teacher, Martha Hill of Nashville, Tennessee, held classes in a log cabin that had served as a Methodist church decades earlier. Hill was not a Pi Phi, but as an experienced mountain worker she was a natural choice to make inroads with the people of Gatlinburg. Along with her salary of forty dollars a month and free housing, the fraternity provided Hill with transportation to and from Nashville.⁶⁸

In addition to the responsibilities of opening and running the school, she also faced the challenge of convincing parents that they should send their children in the first place. A heavy workload rested upon mountain women, who often recruited older children to watch their

⁶⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁷ Interview with Henrietta Huff.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

younger siblings during the day. As a result, many of the school-age children attended the first few years at the settlement school with the little ones in tow. According to Elizabeth Clarke Helmick, some students walked up to ten miles to attend classes.⁶⁹ Despite these and other hardships, the idea of obtaining an education for their children quickly caught on as parents saw their neighbors doing so. Local lumber entrepreneur Andy Huff carried his four-year-old daughter Mattie to the school every day in order to set an example for other parents. The school's first session opened with thirteen students and closed with thirty-three.⁷⁰

This rapid growth convinced the Pi Phis that they required a larger facility. In 1913, the fraternity approached the local people about purchasing land for the school. Pi Beta Phi offered to pay six hundred dollars of the estimated eighteen hundred dollar cost, with the community making up the rest. Gatlinburg's citizens, who had no experience with philanthropic projects and did not understand the process, were slow to provide their agreed-upon share of the money.⁷¹ The majority of area residents would have had little cash on hand, so it fell to the community's elite to support the school. Elizabeth Helmick, the chair of the Chicago-based Settlement School Committee, informed the local men that most communities in her native Midwest expected their businessmen to support such endeavors. If the community had not collected the funds by a specific hour, she declared, the fraternity would move the school to another location.⁷²

Pearl Cashell Jackson describes a series of events that quickly became part of local legend. Andy Huff's wife sent word to her husband's lumber camp that the Pi Phis were leaving. According to Martha Huff's descendants, she had reported having a dream in which the "fog of

69 Helmick, 247.

70 Ibid., 11.

71 Spring, 9.

72 Ibid., 9.

ignorance” engulfed Gatlinburg’s children.⁷³ Heeding his wife’s warning, Andy Huff hurried back to Gatlinburg, where he and orchard owner Steve Whaley each agreed to provide two-hundred-and-fifty dollars of the land fund. Excitement built as Huff and Whaley raced to find the rest of the money. Ephraim Ogle added another two-hundred-fifty dollars to the land fund. Meanwhile, Huff and Whaley visited households in the area and asked them to donate what they could in order to ensure the future of Gatlinburg’s children.

As the story goes, word came that most of the money had been raised just as a carriage arrived from Sevierville to remove the Pi Phis. As local leaders, Huff and a Mr. Maples agreed to cover the deficiency themselves. The fact that the community was able to raise such a large amount of money on short notice proves the extent to which local people desired quality education. Store owner Ephraim Ogle stated that he would be willing to sell a thirty-five acre tract for less than its estimated value because he wanted the school more than the land. He also offered an additional two-hundred-and-fifty dollars toward its purchase. When the Pi Phis announced that they would not be leaving after all, young Charlie Ogle initiated an impromptu celebration by setting off a string of firecrackers and the waiting crowd relaxed. Thus began a process that would forge an inextricable bond between the school and its community.⁷⁴

The Establishment of Settlement Programs

On August 14, 1913, the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School was officially opened by Abbie Langmaid, who replaced Martha Hill due to an illness, and Settlement School Committee member Kate Miller. The fraternity contracted with Andy Huff and C.R. Williams to build a new

⁷³ Interview with Barbara Beville, Interviewed by the author, Knoxville, Tennessee, 13 October, 2008.

⁷⁴ Agnes Wright Spring. *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi’s Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. 10.

facility.⁷⁵ The construction of Pi Beta Phi's first school house, which measured sixty by eighty-four feet and included six rooms, began during the spring semester of 1914. The fraternity also erected barns and chicken houses for their agricultural demonstration work. In an act that deeply symbolized their mission in Appalachia, the Pi Phis raised Gatlinburg's first American flag on January 1, 1914.⁷⁶ Their mission to integrate mountaineers into mainstream American society had begun. The intended extent or success of this program of integration remained to be seen.

The Pi Phis' avowed goal in establishing the school was to provide a better quality of life for the people of Gatlinburg through increased economic opportunities, as well as health care and education reform. The children initially met together as one class, regardless of age or educational level, but the school separated the grades as attendance increased and more teachers were hired. Pi Phi Delle Gillette, a trained librarian from Illinois, joined the staff during the school's second semester. The Pi Phis did not attempt to grade their students' work until the 1915-1916 school year, which also marks the first term that the school received state funds. In order to attract quality teachers, Pi Beta Phi provided them with living quarters in order to offset the meager salaries afforded by Sevier County.⁷⁷ By the 1914-1915 school year, there were four teachers at the school, which would eventually offer a complete kindergarten through high school education.⁷⁸ The school reopened that year with one hundred thirty-four students.⁷⁹

A debate ensued when the settlement school committee discussed the nature of the school's curriculum. Some of the committee members argued for a specifically agricultural program. They did not expect Gatlinburg's children to attend college and failed to see the need

⁷⁵ Helmick, 247.

⁷⁶ Anna F.T. Pettit, "News From Little Pigeon," *The Arrow of Pi Beta Phi* 29, no. 3 [1913], 428.

⁷⁷ Virginia Brackett Green, *Those Wonder Years at the Settlement School* (Gatlinburg, Tennessee: Pi Beta Phi Fraternity for Women, 1962), 7.

⁷⁸ Helmick, 247-248.

⁷⁹ Jackson, 39.

for purely academic subjects. Like many reformers who entered Appalachia, the Pi Phis desired to give these “pioneer” people a better way of life without necessitating their migration from the mountains to industrial centers. May Keller insisted that a well-rounded education would enrich the students’ lives and give them more knowledge of the world than they had experienced directly.⁸⁰ Keller eventually won the argument, and the Pi Phis adopted a comprehensive curriculum that retained a strong emphasis on agricultural and vocational studies. The Pi Phis focused on raising the agricultural production of Gatlinburg above the level of subsistence in order to provide local farmers with marketable commodities.⁸¹ According to Pi Phi Anna Dowell of Iowa, Gatlinburg farmers did not produce greater quantities of crops because they had no readily accessible market other than Sevierville.⁸²

Like the school’s other programs, efforts to improve farm production began first with students and then extended throughout the entire community. The staff used the knowledge that students took home, in addition to demonstration, to draw Gatlinburg’s adults into their sphere of influence. Early efforts to teach modern agricultural techniques reflected popular methods that were in use at similar institutions in Appalachia and other parts of the rural South. The Pi Phis’ early projects included the creation of a tomato club and the planting of an orchard and vegetable gardens in 1914. Students used the latest scientific methods to care for their trees and vegetables under the gaze of curious farmers, who began to inquire about the unfamiliar techniques.⁸³

When they visited local homes, the Pi Phis noticed that some of the local people continued to engage in traditional handicrafts, such as weaving, basketry, and chair making. By interviewing these crafters, vocational teacher Caroline McKnight Hughes learned that

80 Agnes Wright Spring. *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi’s Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. 10.

81 Helen, Chew, “Report for the School Year, 1923-1924,” Pi Beta Phi Settlement School documents.

82 Agnes Wright Spring. *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi’s Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. 56.

83 Jackson, 38-39.

Gatlinburg had been “a community of weavers” prior to the Civil War. During the 1880’s, the introduction of rural free delivery by companies such as Sears, Roebuck, and Company brought a wave of store-bought goods into mountain homes.⁸⁴ By the 20th century, these manufactured products had largely replaced traditional practices, which included the use of the plant-derived dyes that mountaineers called “ooze”.⁸⁵

Inspired by the success of other mountain craft programs like the ones at Berea College and Hindman Settlement School in Kentucky, Hughes encouraged the few local women who still had them to bring out their unused looms. Hughes announced, “I want the industrial work of our school to be given a thorough trial, for I believe it will be the salvation of these people.”⁸⁶ In 1915, Hughes convinced the Settlement School Committee to add an arts and crafts program to its curriculum. She encouraged older women like “Aunts” Lizzie Reagan and Lydia Whaley to share their traditional techniques of weaving and basketry with other women in the community.

In hopes of encouraging production by providing local weavers and basket makers with a source of income, the fraternity began to market their products through Pi Beta Phi’s alumni clubs across the United States and Canada.⁸⁷ Pi Beta Phi also disseminated knowledge about the school by including exhibits of Gatlinburg crafts at their national conventions. This ensured a steady flow of settlement workers and monetary support from the chapters.⁸⁸ The resulting publicity made Gatlinburg a widely known name among the philanthropic circles that focused on Appalachia.

According to the Pi Phis, Lizzie Reagan had lost none of her skill after thirty-five years

84 The Smoky Mountains Historical Society, 8.

85 Hughes, 444.

86 Ibid., 446.

87 Agnes Wright Spring, *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi’s Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. 19.

88 Marcia Winn. “Pi Phi Delegates to See Art Work of Hill Proteges”, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 23. 1936, 16.

away from the loom. After pulling the old barn loom out of storage, she immediately set up the intricate system and put it to use. Reagan joined the school's staff in 1918, where she initially assisted principal Norman Prickett and his wife with their new baby. Her skill at cooking, cleaning, gardening, and caring for others led the Pi Phis to offer her a position as the school's housekeeper. Aside from domestic duties and her contribution to the weaving program, Reagan served as an invaluable link between the Pi Phis and the mountain people. She provided the staff with directions for their visiting rounds, as well as information about the families they desired to help. It is very likely that Aunt Lizzie prevented some of the cultural blunders that might have resulted from the Pi Phis' lack of understanding for mountain people.⁸⁹

Health care reform was a major part of Pi Beta Phi's design from the beginning. According to Pearl Cashell Jackson, the fraternity conceived of a public health clinic in 1914, but a lack of funds and the advent of World War I made finding a school nurse and obtaining medical supplies impossible. The school's staff did their best to inaugurate health education without the assistance of a trained nurse. From 1913 to 1916, principal Mary Pollard of Vermont worked with the Hookworm Association to bring its clinics to the school. Pollard reportedly walked for countless miles to talk to area people about preventing the parasite.⁹⁰ Dr. Massey, who worked in the Gatlinburg area during the early 20th century, reported that Head Resident Evelyn Bishop had performed as well as a trained nurse while assisting him with an amputation.⁹¹

When the "Spanish" Influenza epidemic hit Sevier County in 1919, frantic residents turned to the school for help. Bishop, who possessed no medical training, did her best to direct the able-bodied staff and to make use of their limited resources. According to Agnes Wright

89 Agnes Wright Spring, *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. 5.
90 Ibid.

91 Agnes Wright Spring, *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. 13.

Spring, there were no flu-related fatalities in Gatlinburg. In a letter to the Settlement School Committee, Dr. Massey declared that, due to the steadfastness of Bishop and her staff, the locals had become willing to trust the school with their health concerns. Most importantly, the crisis convinced the fraternity that the presence of a trained nurse was an absolute necessity.⁹²

In 1920, the Pi Phis hired Pi Phi Phyllis Higinbotham of Alberta, Canada as the community's first public health nurse. Higinbotham had served as an army nurse during World War I and gained settlement house experience by working at Lillian Wald's Henry Street establishment in New York City. She also acquired some experience with mountain work by visiting the Hindman Settlement School prior to her arrival in Gatlinburg.⁹³ Higinbotham's ultimate goal was to shift the people's reliance from local healers to professional doctors and, by so doing, to replace curative with preventative medicine. Although other members of the school's staff assisted her whenever possible, she had her work cut out for her from the beginning.

The fraternity obtained the cabin of William and Martha Jane Huskey Ogle in 1921 when they purchased another tract of Ogle land as an addition to their original thirty-five acres. The structure had displayed the family's skill as builders by housing its members until 1910, when the Andrew Ogle family became its last residents. Nurse Higinbotham relocated her clinic from a corner of the head resident's office to the Ogle cabin, which accommodated the school's hospital until the new Jennie Nicol Health Center was completed in 1922.⁹⁴ From 1922 to 1926, the Pi Phis converted it into a museum of traditional mountaineer culture. The fraternity eventually had the cabin moved to the location of the community's first church, where it remains as a tourist

92 Agnes Wright Spring, *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. 12-13.

93 Phyllis, Higinbotham. "Nursing in the Mountains." *The Arrow of Pi Beta Phi* 39, no. 4 [1923]: 634-638.

94 *Ibid.*, 28.

attraction.⁹⁵

The 1922-1923 school year proved to be a critical time in the school's development. The Pi Phi introduced Gatlinburg's first high school curriculum that year, which initially consisted of a two-year program. This expansion convinced the fraternity of the necessity of additional facilities, and plans were begun for a separate high school building. Another notable accomplishment was the achievement of regular attendance for the first time in the school's ten-year history. Systematized school lunches were initiated, which proved extremely beneficial to the students who failed to bring their own food because they were unaccustomed to eating away from home or lacked the material means to do so. The Pi Phi also had phone lines run between the school's buildings, which made communication much faster on the growing campus.⁹⁶

The year 1922 also saw the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act for agricultural advancement, which provided federal aid for farming programs. The school intensified its curriculum by erecting additional demonstration barns and chicken houses during the 1920's.⁹⁷ The Pi Phi also used that year's Smith-Hughes funds to hire O. J. Mattil of Chattanooga, Tennessee, as an agricultural and industrial instructor. Mattil, a University of Tennessee graduate, was a "jack-of-all-trades" who taught agriculture, animal husbandry, and woodworking, while maintaining the school's buildings and grounds.

Using the motor of his Ford car as a generator, Mattil showed instructional films in a barn loft.⁹⁸ As a charter member of the Southern Highlands Handicraft Guild, he viewed crafts as a viable source of economic improvement for mountain people. Unlike the majority of the Guild

95 <http://www.gatlinburg.com/things-to-do/culture-history/>

96 Agnes Wright Spring. *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. 41.

97 Ibid., 42.

98 Agnes Wright Spring. *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. 18.

members, Mattil was a native of the southern mountain region, and this undoubtedly affected his ability to interact with local people. He held classes on furniture making for Gatlinburg's boys and men, and employed locals in his own shop, Woodcrafters and Carvers, which he opened in 1927.⁹⁹ Mattil was succeeded as the school's industrial instructor by Don Smith in 1929 and Elmer Kite in 1935.¹⁰⁰

In 1923 the Washington D.C. Chapter hosted Pi Beta Phi's first meeting in which the general public was invited to hear about the settlement school. The presentation included samples of mountain weaving and blankets, as well as a talk by Kate Miller, who chaired the Settlement School Committee. The fact that the article that announces the event bills Miller as a "lecturer on Americanization", in addition to her other official capacity, says a great deal about what the reformers hoped to accomplish in Appalachia. The article also fails to provide specific details of the school's mission in Gatlinburg, which implies that readers were expected to have a familiarity with Appalachia and the type of work that was being undertaken there. Due to the fraternity's efforts, prominent Washington women such as Pi Phi Grace Coolidge had taken an interest in the settlement school.¹⁰¹

The settlement school also received notoriety during the 1920's through the various socials and benefits that the Pi Phis hosted in order to raise awareness of their project and garner financial support. In 1929, the Chicago Chapter gave a performance of "The Critic", from which the proceeds went to the settlement school. Exhibits and sales of Gatlinburg's handicrafts accompanied these fund raisers and broadened the market for such goods. The fact that nationally read periodicals, including *New York Times* and *Christian Science Monitor*, printed

99 The Robert W. Gray Library Collection. Southern Highland Craft Guild. Unpublished biographical article on O.J. Mattil.

100

101 "Pi Beta Phi to Hear of Settlement School," *Washington Post*, February 4, 1923.

articles on Pi Beta Phi's school indicates the level of concern over Appalachia's development. In most pieces regarding Pi Beta Phi's activities in Gatlinburg, little explanation is given why the reformers selected the region, which leaves the reader to conclude that their reasons were already widely known and accepted by the general American public.¹⁰²

In 1923, the Pi Phis extended their reform efforts to the nearby Sugarlands community, which was more isolated than Gatlinburg and had a higher rate of poverty. The fraternity acquired land upon which they located the Emma Harper Turner Center and the Hazel Meaden teachers' cottage. The first of the extension teachers were Pi Phi Helen Chew and Gatlinburg native Cora McCarter. Both children and adults took advantage of the school's classes.¹⁰³ Due to the community's numerous cases of hookworm, the teachers included health education along with their basic curriculum. Because the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park required the relocation of residents from the area, Pi Beta Phi sold its Sugarlands property to the federal government in 1932.¹⁰⁴

The year 1926 marked the establishment of the Arrow Craft shop, from which Pi Phis Lois Rodgers of North Carolina and Harmo Taylor of Texas marketed local handicrafts. The two women lived in an attic apartment above the shop and fielded questions about locals in addition to selling crafts. The shop reportedly received such distinguished guests as Tennessee Governor Austin Peay and his wife.¹⁰⁵ The school's craft sales kept pace with the growth of tourism, which the impending creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park increased exponentially during the early 1930's. Arrow Craft, whose name the fraternity later combined into a single

102 "Helps Mountain School," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 9, 1929, 17.

103 Agnes Miller Turner. "The Hazel Meaden Cottage." *The Arrow of Pi Beta Phi* 43, no. 4 [1927]: 639.

104 Green, 5.

105 "A Visitor's Impression." *The Arrow of Pi Beta Phi* 43, no. 2 [1926]: 185.

word, would develop the largest cottage weaving industry in the United States.¹⁰⁶

Aside from local churches and stores, no other venues of communal organization were available in Gatlinburg during the early 20th century. The settlement school quickly became a locus of concerted activity, a trend which intensified during the first World War. The school operated a Red Cross chapter that “adopted” local soldiers and provided them with clothing. The Red Cross meetings provided a support group for families whose loved ones were overseas as well as a foundation for more formal community interaction.¹⁰⁷ The school also hosted town meetings, locally produced plays, fairs, and other social functions. Pi Beta Phi completed its high school building in 1928 and the facility's auditorium served as a social venue by hosting public meetings, plays, and sporting events.¹⁰⁸

The national philanthropic focus on Appalachia and the fund raising activities of Pi Beta Phi united to place the school in the public eye. Along with Franklin Delano Roosevelt's official dedication of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 1934, visits by such figures as John D. Rockefeller raised the level of curiosity about the mountain community and its school. In 1933, Gatlinburg weaver Maggie Parton sent a length of woolen homespun to Eleanor Roosevelt to express her gratitude for New Deal legislation. The reformers' position as intermediaries between mountain people and other Americans became evident when a representative of Pi Beta Phi, rather than Parton, presented the First Lady with the gift.

Roosevelt's interest in homespun fabrics influenced other elite women during an exhibit of mountain fabrics at the Corcoran Art Gallery in Washington D.C..¹⁰⁹ The First Lady visited

106 Ibid., 21.

107 Agnes Wright Spring. *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. 15.

108 Green, 5.

109 “Woman of the Hills Weaves Cloth for First Lady,” *Washington Post*, November 17, 1933, 12.

Gatlinburg in 1937 with a local man acting as her chauffeur and guide. Aside from describing the area's stunning beauty, Roosevelt discounted many negative stereotypes by recounting that she dined in “an immaculately clean mountain cabin” and that “the food was delicious”.¹¹⁰ With such prominent figures in support of handicrafts as a method of reform in Appalachia, such philanthropy quickly became popular with middle and upper-class Americans.

During the late 1930's and early 1940's, the school received visits from Dean Edwin Holton of Kansas State College and Dr. William Taylor of the University of Kentucky who surveyed its work with Gatlinburg's children. Both men advised the Pi Phis to turn the school's cost over to Sevier County as quickly as possible. In 1943 the fraternity convinced the county to provide the settlement program with the same amount that other Sevier County schools received for basic education. The school required the continuation of supplementary education by Pi Beta Phi in order to become accredited by the state of Tennessee and the fraternity retained joint control of its curriculum.¹¹¹

Misunderstanding Mountain People

In 1915, Head Resident Caroline McKnight Hughes of Minnesota convinced the school to initiate a manual training program with modernized tools. When the male residents of Gatlinburg heard that “those women” were going to “teach tools”, they ran to meet the delivery wagon as it rolled in from Sevierville. Despite the initial excitement, this innovation proved one

110 Eleanor Roosevelt, “My Day,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 15, 1937, 18.

111 Green, 6.

of the first and most serious difficulties faced by the school's staff.¹¹² In an article for the fraternity's quarterly publication, *The Arrow*, Hughes described the resistance of the farmers to unfamiliar new tools and methods. "Apparently no one knew much about tools, except the saw, plane and hammer," said Hughes. Exasperated, she incorrectly interpreted the reluctance of students to take up new practices as "'plum Laziness', which is a very popular complaint in this part of the country".¹¹³

The changes that Pi Beta Phi hoped to engender required the people of Gatlinburg to alter their traditional ways of life. Opportunities to generate a cash income were few, so that entire families depended upon the year's harvest for survival. New methods did not meet with immediate success in Gatlinburg's economy because it probably seemed to farmers that they were gambling with their families' lives. It is unclear whether some of the resistance resulted from Hughes' insistence on teaching "male" skills. A gendered division of labor prevailed in early 20th century Appalachia, with women performing "inside" tasks and "men's" work taking place outdoors. However, mountain women could and did take on "men's" work when the family's survival was at stake. Some women reported that they preferred manual labor, such as plowing fields or felling trees, to domestic or "inside" work.

Another impasse that arose from the Pi Phis' attempt to enforce their own cultural norms was the difficulty they experienced in acquiring regular school attendance. According to Anna Dowell, it took them ten years to achieve a consistent turnout among most of the student body. Dowell complained that, previously, students had "come to school when they felt like it and stayed at home when they felt like it, as the parents were not interested enough to make them

112 Caroline McKnight Hughes, "Our Industrial Work at the Settlement School," *The Arrow of Pi Beta Phi* 32, no.3 [1916], 443.

113 Ibid., 443.

come.”¹¹⁴ As with many other misunderstandings that arose over their years in Gatlinburg, the Pi Phis' lack of understanding for mountain culture was the chief cause of their frustration.

The objective of subsistence farming is survival, which proved to be the greatest obstacle to regular school attendance. Often children had to choose between helping their parents with necessary tasks and attending school. Dowell reports that students were frequently kept home to “grub briars and to help put in the crop.”¹¹⁵ Many Pi Phis believed that parents simply did not care about having their children educated, but with entire families dependent on the year’s crop, work often took priority over school. Gendered roles were definitive in early 20th century Appalachian society, and they often determined which children attended school. As the eldest girl in her family, area resident Lucinda Oakley Ogle helped with the younger children and did not attend school with her sister and older brother. Weakened by her difficult pregnancies, Rebecca Oakley required her daughter’s help with domestic chores.¹¹⁶

The lingering suspicions of older Gatlinburg residents also prevented some children from coming to school. For example, when Lucinda Oakley Ogle’s parents finally allowed her to enroll in the school at eleven years of age, her grandfather Oakley threatened to disown his son’s family. Oakley argued that the women of Pi Beta Phi were “all Catholics, and that was the very reason that they had left...the old country was religious oppression and the heavy taxes they levied.”¹¹⁷ Despite her grandfather’s protests, Lucinda became one of the first children from outlying areas to attend Pi Beta Phi Settlement School. The Pi Phis soon established girl's and boy's dormitories on the campus, which enabled numerous students who lived further away to

114 Dowell, 712-713.

115 Ibid., 713.

116 Ogle, 46.

117 Ibid., 53.

attend the school.¹¹⁸

The women of Pi Beta Phi arrived in Gatlinburg with the goal of helping its people obtain a better quality of life, but these intentions relied, in part, on misrepresentations of mountain life. Writers of romantic fiction had portrayed the Appalachian people as melancholy and hopeless. In an article that appeared in the *New York Christian Advocate* in 1915, the author wrote that mountaineers lived “the narrow, hard and discouraged life and die before their allotted time.”¹¹⁹ The Pi Phis saw this statement as descriptive of their mission and reprinted the article in their periodical, *The Arrow of Pi Beta Phi*. As many of the settlement school’s programs attest, the Pi Phis sought to substitute their own middle class norms for a lifestyle that appeared to make the mountain people miserable.

Reformers often used the stoicism of the mountain people to show that they were unhappy. The Pi Phis discovered that Gatlinburg’s children did not react the same way to things that would spark obvious excitement in the middle-class children with whom they were familiar. The Pi Phis’ first Christmas in Gatlinburg provides a key example of the cultural misunderstandings that caused difficulties between the school’s staff and locals. Delle Gillette recounts how some little girls “were joyful to the point of actually looking it” when they received dolls.¹²⁰ She clarifies this remark by describing the children as “the most stolid little things that I ever saw, with the least affection that is visible.”¹²¹ Many mountaineers were very formal with strangers and used stoicism to adapt to their strenuous way of life. According to Lucinda Oakley Ogle, this was not necessarily an indication that Appalachian folk were unhappy. “We were happy folks,” declared Ogle, “we might not have had rugs on the floors, but we had plenty of

118 Ibid., 56.

119 Lena P. Wilbur, “Our Visit to the Settlement School,” *The Arrow of Pi Beta Phi* 32, no. 3 [1916], 460.

120 Jackson, 17.

121 Ibid., 17.

pride and dignity.”¹²²

Marjorie Chalmers of Illinois, who became the school nurse in 1935, describes people who seem unrelated to those depicted by Gillette. Chalmers portrays the mountain people as “quiet” but innately hospitable, and states, “even the babies are friendly.”¹²³ At the time of her 1975 account, Chalmers had spent thirty years working in Gatlinburg. When describing a group of visitors who asked questions about the “natives”, Chalmers remarks, “I wonder if we look as queer to them as they do to us, sometimes.”¹²⁴ Her tenure in Gatlinburg was much longer and occurred later than Gillette’s did, so it seems that the mountaineers and the school’s staff had acquired a better understanding of each other through decades of cooperation.

The Pi Phi created many scrapbooks, which they circulated throughout their nationwide chapters in order to garner support for the school. With the obvious agenda of raising funds to ensure the school’s continuation, the staff often used photos to measure the success of their programs in Gatlinburg. Teacher Marie Ditmars of Indiana published an article entitled “Before and After”, which includes a 1912 photo of Martha Hill and her first group of students. The children in the photo appear stern and unsmiling, which was generally the custom when being photographed in the 19th and early 20th centuries. On the next page, Ditmars compares the earlier picture to a 1915 photo of four smiling girls. The later photo bears the caption “these children were in the 1912 picture”.¹²⁵ Throughout their writings, the staff makes references to local children “learning to smile”. Since the Pi Phi obviously passed this affectation on to Gatlinburg’s residents, it does not serve as an accurate barometer of the mountaineers’ happiness.

The Pi Phi also used the physical appearance of Gatlinburg’s people as an indicator of

122 Ogle, 4.

123 Marjorie Chalmers, *Better I Stay* (Gatlinburg, Tennessee: Crescent Color Printing Company, 1975), 17.

124 Ibid, 41.

125 Marie Ditmars, “Before and After,” *The Arrow of Pi Beta Phi* 32, no. 3 [1916], 451-452.

the school's success. By revamping local modes of dress, the Pi Phis ensured that residents resembled the styles of the urban middle class. At first, some of Gatlinburg's youngsters were reluctant to give up their accustomed manner of dress. For instance, some little boys insisted upon wearing their overalls underneath their athletic shorts while playing basketball because they thought that the shorts were too revealing.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, principal Mary Pollard noted that the community's youth were quick to accept outside ways.¹²⁷ "How they have changed in the two years I have been here," remarked Marie Ditmars, "They are now happy little children, with bobbed hair, dressed as other little children of their means are dressed."¹²⁸

According to Agnes Wright Spring, the Pi Phis were surprised to discover that their students did not know how to play popular games such as "Farmer in the Dell." Spring recalled how "the teachers reported that the little ones had such sad faces."¹²⁹ Although they were not familiar with games played elsewhere, mountain children did not lack pastimes of their own. Lucinda Oakley Ogle, who was born near Gatlinburg in 1909, says that coaxing the "doodlebug" from its hole in the ground was a favorite among other nature-centered games.¹³⁰ Other entertainments enjoyed by Ogle and her siblings included fishing, hunting, tree-climbing, and social gatherings such as "corn shuckings" and "sings".¹³¹ Gladys Trentham Russell recalls that many local boys were avid marbles enthusiasts, while she enjoyed sewing clothes for dolls.¹³² Ogle's friend Alie Newman Maples, who is a native of the nearby Sugarlands community, recounts when a tourist visiting the Great Smoky Mountains National Park handed her a bag of

126 Agnes Wright Spring. *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. 8.

127 Mary O. Pollard, "Our Work and Our Needs," *The Arrow of Pi Beta Phi* 32, no. 3 [1916], 447-450.

128 Ditmars, 450.

129 Agnes Wright Spring. *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. 7.

130 Ogle, 8-9.

131 Ogle, 20.

132 Russell, 47.

toys. “[They probably] saw a lot of pictures of dirty, tacky kids and felt sorry for them”, says Maples, “But they didn’t know what a good time we children had up in the mountains.”¹³³

Chapter 4: The Birth of an Arts and Crafts Program

133 Margaret Lynn Brown, *The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 85-86.

The Pi Phis frequently complained about the locals' abandonment of traditional techniques in favor of store-bought items. The reformers failed to grasp the irony of the situation, or to acknowledge that their representations of Gatlinburg as a community of isolated pioneers did not always coincide with reality. After the initial establishment of White Oak Flats, settlers continued to enter and leave the area throughout the 19th century.

Although the arduous nature of transportation made intercourse with the world outside Gatlinburg more difficult, the community was never completely isolated from national, or even international currents. It seems that some of the Pi Phis' reasons for working with mountain people were either willfully fictitious or the result of a gross misunderstanding of Appalachia. If the Pi Phis contrived some of their reasons for entering the field of mountain work, this begs the question of where their true motives lay. Pi Beta Phi's crafts program was to become the fraternity's most enduring legacy in Gatlinburg. Aside from the Pi Phis' health care agenda, craft work provided the staff with their most intimate contact with local adults. The settlement school's arts and crafts program also embodies several of the most prevalent in a number of paradoxes in the Pi Phis' involvement with mountain people. Therefore, an analysis of the school's involvement in handicrafts provides insight into the fraternity's goals and motivations.

The first of these paradoxes is evident in the mountaineers' ready acceptance of store-bought goods and labor-saving devices. The advent of rural free delivery during the 1880's presented rural Sevier Countians with an unprecedented array of goods. The weavers who had previously labored for countless hours to provide their families with fabric for clothing, curtains, and bedding now purchased ready-made cloth or finished clothing with alacrity. With the establishment of their art and crafts program, the Pi Phis hoped to provide mountaineers with a

marketable resource while instructing them on the fundamentals of capitalist enterprise. The irony in this situation lies in the fact that their scheme for accomplishing this involved the revival of practices that had been eroded by the growing integration of locals with the capitalist market.

Despite the program's eventual success, the Pi Phis were once again frustrated when their lack of understanding for local customs created difficulties with locals. Many of Gatlinburg's residents had no experience with wage labor or consignment. Consequently, they were unwilling to wait for the proceeds from the sales of their crafts to arrive, and they demanded immediate payment or "spot cash" whenever the Pi Phis accepted their products.¹³⁴ This presented a problem, since the school's budget had not allowed for such payments. Additionally, the Pi Phis found that getting the crafters to adhere to shipment deadlines or office hours was as difficult as obtaining regular school attendance.¹³⁵ Head resident Evelyn Bishop and her staff often reported being awakened at dawn by locals who had come to sell their wares.¹³⁶

The only deadlines faced by most subsistence farmers were those imposed by the seasons, or the sun's rising and setting. According to Lucinda Oakley Ogle, there were few reliable clocks in Gatlinburg during the early 20th century, and most residents used a variety of means to tell time, which included the use of "sun time" or reliance on their own internal clocks.¹³⁷ "When you are in the mountains...time and money don't mean anything," remarked Ogle's father, Wiley Oakley, "Most of the mountain people thinks the same thing about this rushing business."¹³⁸ Mountaineers were far from lazy, since their survival demanded constant

134 Elizabeth A. Helmick, "Improvements and Accomplishments During This Year as Seen by our Chairman and Treasurer," *The Arrow of Pi Beta Phi* 32, no. 3 [1916], 440.

135 Ibid., 440.

136 Agnes Wright Spring, *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*, 21-22.

137 Ogle, 80-81.

138 Wiley Oakley, *Roamin' and Restin': With the Roamin' Man of the Smoky Mountains* (Gatlinburg,

hard work, but deadlines and the other strict temporal demands of capitalism were foreign to them.

The second paradox of the crafts program in Gatlinburg arises from the way in which the Pi Phi planned to expand it. In 1925, the Pi Phi hired Winogene Redding, who later became a prominent member of the Southern Highlands Handicraft Guild, as the school's weaving instructor. While attending a Boston art school, Redding had read about the "quare women", as mountaineers called a group of reformers who had founded art programs in the mountains of Kentucky. When a recruiter from the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School visited her institution, Redding sensed an opportunity for adventure and immediately accepted the position as full time weaving instructor. As a loquacious Bostonian, Redding's first challenge was in establishing a rapport with the reserved local women. Upon the school nurse's suggestion, she started conversations with mountain women by drawing on their love of flowers. Apparently, her first few months in Gatlinburg were spent discussing flowers, rather than weaving.¹³⁹

As with the changes that had occurred in Gatlinburg prior to their arrival, the Pi Phi apparently also failed to see the paradoxical nature of their choice to hire an outsider to teach and promote native crafts. As a professionally trained artist, Redding was knowledgeable about what would sell in urban markets, and she enforced these uniform standards on the community's weavers.¹⁴⁰ Although they also took pleasure in aesthetics, mountaineers tended to create crafts for functional purposes. Since functionality dominated their production, the dictates of quality control had never been a concern for Gatlinburg's craftspeople. Consequently, they were slow to adapt when Redding demanded unfamiliar commercial standards, such as uniformity of shape

Tennessee: Oakley Books, 1986), 16.

139 Interview with Winogene Redding, Interviewed by Bernice Stevens, Tape Recording, Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, March 18, 1965.

140 Ibid.

and color.¹⁴¹

The Southern Highland Handicraft Guild, with which the settlement school cooperated after its establishment in 1930, demanded strict quality standards of its members. In order for a program such as Arrowcraft to join the Guild, they were required to send in three samples of their producers' work. Since craft centers entered the Guild as members, they each received a vote in the organization's affairs while the local producers had none.¹⁴²

Gatlinburg's craftspeople included weavers, basket, chair, and fan makers, whittlers, and woodcarvers. Some of these craftspeople followed in the footsteps of older relatives, but most of them learned their art under the auspices of the settlement school. Jane Becker argues that reformers often overlooked the array of changes that had taken place in Appalachia since the late 19th century. Instead, they chose to see the mountaineers in the light of romantic visions that cast their traditional way of life as an antidote for industrial degradation. The Pi Phis did not seem to register the fact that many mountain people had begun to relinquish their traditional ways of life before reformers set foot in the mountains. If "pioneer" traditions had begun to dissolve, their mission would be to recreate them.

One clear advantage for Gatlinburg residents was the increasing income generated by Redding's marketing strategies. In 1923, the proceeds from weaving sales amounted to one thousand dollars. They had rocketed to fourteen thousand dollars four years later. Although area residents continued to make and sell other types of crafts, especially baskets, weaving quickly became the most prevalent pursuit in Gatlinburg. During the Great Depression, many families managed to receive some income through Arrow Craft sales. Redding split the work evenly

141 Agnes Wright Spring, *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. 20.

142 Becker, 85-86.

among the weavers, so that everyone was guaranteed a small but fairly steady source of cash. Redding paid the weavers by the piece, so that they received a larger share of the proceeds than the low wages at some of the other craft centers. Despite the dire economic conditions, wealthier women continued to order items through the fraternity's chapters.¹⁴³ As the school's staff was fond of pointing out, no one in Gatlinburg was on government relief during the 1930's.¹⁴⁴

While men and women made baskets, chairs, fans, and brooms, the Pi Phis designated woodworking and carving as male pursuits. Despite the traditional European designation of weaving as a predominantly male activity, Gatlinburg's weavers were female. The women's participation in the weaving program resulted in an eventual shifting of gender relationships in the community. Traditional social outlets for mountain women were infrequent, but included "workings", funerals, weddings and religious functions. A system of communal reciprocity also led women to offer aid to their neighbors in the event of illness, death, or childbirth. Apart from these occasions, an extensive workload kept many Appalachian women confined to the vicinities of their homes. When Redding arrived at the school in 1925, she began to invite the weavers to the teachers' cottage for yearly socials. Shyness prevented many of them from attending Redding's 1925 tea, but she notes "a few of the brave ones came and enjoyed it so much that they asked to have another the next year".¹⁴⁵ Although Redding found that coffee made a much better impression with the weavers than did tea, the meetings were successful and grew in frequency.

Redding organized the Gatlinburg Weavers' Guild in 1932. The new high school building included a weaving room in which the women began to meet on a monthly basis. At first, the

143 Interview with Winogene Redding.

144 Ibid., 21.

145 Winogene Redding, "The Weaving Meetings in Gatlinburg", *Mountain Life and Work*, [April, 1933], 16.

subject matter consisted of business and weaving techniques, but Redding began to host musical performances and guest talks. One such presentation addressed the issue of storage space in the home, which Redding considered appropriate because Gatlinburg experienced a building boom during the early 1930's. The majority of the weavers worked in their homes with private supervision by Redding; so the Guild meetings provided them with a venue for comparing their work to that of other weavers as well as a place to socialize.¹⁴⁶

The Guild also served as a support group for its members. The women created an emergency fund which they could vote to bestow on their peers when emergencies occurred. In 1940, the Guild produced a comedic play written by Mrs. Elder Ogle. "Store Britches" ran for three consecutive years in the settlement school's auditorium and drew a substantial income from tourists. The proceeds went to Gatlinburg's public library and Red Cross chapter, as well as to Guild members who required glasses and medical treatment for their families.¹⁴⁷

The weavers had a certain amount of freedom in deciding how much or little they wanted to work because they were paid by the piece. The school provided their materials and designs, many of which were not native to the area. Each weaver operated her own loom.¹⁴⁸ They often wove during the winter and stopped when their agricultural duties increased in the spring. Redding, who strove to ship orders on time, expressed her frustration when many of the weavers failed to keep up a consistent flow of production. The ability to work at home provided busy mothers with an otherwise unattainable source of cash. Redding believed that the women should be able to spend their earnings as they saw fit, and she refused to hand the money over to their

146 Ibid.,16.

147 Agnes Wright Spring. *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. 7.

148 Interview with Winogene Redding.

husbands.¹⁴⁹ She notes that the weavers often used their proceeds to build or furnish new homes, to purchase labor-saving devices such as gas-powered washing machines, or to obtain higher education for their children. Their new buying power, coupled with the authority to designate its use, began to alter women's place within the traditionally patriarchal family structure.

Despite its obvious benefits to the people of Gatlinburg, historians have questioned some aspects of the Appalachian Crafts Revival. According to Jane Becker, instructors like Redding enforced a system of corporate capitalism on native craftspeople. Although there is no indication that such a situation existed in Gatlinburg, some craft centers required their employees to work under sweatshop conditions in which grueling hours and low pay were standard.¹⁵⁰ Craft leaders encouraged their weavers to abandon their traditional looms in favor of smaller modern designs. Weaving terminology evolved apace with this change in equipment as the mountain weaver's "chain" came to be known as a "warp".¹⁵¹

The women no longer produced solely for their families, which meant that the products of their labors changed. Redding noted in a 1929 article that instead of the traditional items that a weaver colored with homemade dyes, "we find her weaving bright colored scarfs or modernistic towels of fine linen..."¹⁵² The fraternity continued to sell handicrafts through alumni clubs across the United States and Canada, while the Arrow Craft shop catered to tourists who visited Gatlinburg. Although locally-made crafts dominated Gatlinburg's early tourist economy, many visitors never met the items' makers face-to-face. According to one *New York Times* article, tourists could view a film on mountain weaving and purchase these goods at a local hotel.¹⁵³

149 Interview with Winogene Redding.

150 Becker.

151 Redding, Winogene, "An Old Art Modernized," *The Handicrafter*, 1, no. 6 [August-September, 1929], 3.

152 Redding, Winogene. "An Old Art Modernized", 3.

153 David Voisin, "Great Smoky Trails," *New York Times*. October 12, 1941, xxi.

In 1937 Allen Eaton's *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands* transmitted Appalachian material culture to a wider American audience. He believed that craft work was important because it compressed the temporal gap between an individual and his or her ancestors. As an organizer of the Southern Highlands Handicraft Guild, Eaton intended to educate the general public about craft work in order to achieve a wider market for mountain crafts.¹⁵⁴

Due to the influences of Eaton's work and the earlier Handicrafts Revival, as well as Pi Beta Phi marketing, urban women of the middle and upper classes composed the primary consumer base for Gatlinburg's weavers. Although these women felt that they had acquired a piece of their nation's cultural heritage by purchasing goods that were produced by mountain people, they had little use for items that would have appeared in a traditional Appalachian home. Although Redding lamented that the creation of monotonous items such as potholders was “getting craft at about the lowest pitch you can get it”, she recognized that the demand for such affordable items could produce a large profit.¹⁵⁵ Becker insists that by enforcing modern commercial standards upon crafters, representatives of the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild produced a type of “faux” Appalachian art in which only the labor was authentic.¹⁵⁶

Encouraged by the success of the Arrow Craft program, several local people like Allie Owenby established their own handicraft enterprises in Gatlinburg. Owenby, a Gatlinburg native and college graduate who became a member of the school's staff, opened Smoky Mountain Handcrafters during the 1920's.¹⁵⁷ These various shops represented the realization of the Pi Phis' mission to provide the community with educational and economic opportunities. Oddly, Redding

154 Allen H. Eaton, *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*, (New York: The Russell Sage Foundation, 1937).

155 Interview with Winogene Redding.

156 Becker.

157 “Smoky Mountain Handcrafters Shop Revives Old Colonial Arts”, *Montgomery's Vindicator*, May 7, 1930, 26.

complained that this competition against Arrow Craft represented a sort of disloyalty on the part of Gatlinburg's native entrepreneurs. She was not a Pi Phi, and perhaps this caused her to view the program as a personal achievement more than a reform effort.¹⁵⁸

In cooperation with the University of Tennessee, the Pi Phis began holding summer craft workshops on the school grounds during the 1940's. Locals had the opportunity to make extra money by cooking, cleaning, or sometimes demonstrating their skills, but the attendees came from other parts of the nation.¹⁵⁹ In 1948 the first Craftsmen's Fair was held on the grounds of the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School. The Southern Highlands Handicraft Guild and Southern Highlanders, which was the North Carolina-based Guild's Tennessee counterpart, sponsored the event.¹⁶⁰ In this four-day event, tourists gathered to watch as mountain artisans from eight states displayed their skills in traditional crafts such as weaving, spinning, woodworking and basketry. In addition to his prominent organizing role, "Mr. Craftsmen's Fair" O.J. Mattil joined the ranks of craftspeople with an exhibit from Woodcrafters and Carvers.¹⁶¹

When Sevier County finally took full responsibility for education in Gatlinburg, the fraternity decided not to pull out altogether because of the craft program's continued importance to the community. In 1964, they voted to found a full time arts and crafts school, and Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts opened on the settlement school grounds in 1969. Although the Arrowcraft shop began to sell non-local wares in addition to local crafts, the program's presence continued to benefit the local people.¹⁶² The Pi Phis' foresight helped to create a continuing

158 Interview with Winogene Redding.

159 <http://www.lib.utk.edu/arrowmont/>.

160 Green, 14.

161 Warner Ogden. "Come to the Fair: Southern Highlands Craftsmen Prepare Gatlinburg Exhibits," *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, July 24, 1949.

162 Ibid.

economic resource for Gatlinburg. Arrowcraft became the largest cottage weaving industry in the United States, and Gatlinburg is a leading craft center.

Chapter 5: Pi Beta Phi's Health Reform Mission

According to Agnes Wright Spring, the settlement school's health program “helped more than anything else to take the School into the homes and to bring the people to the School for

help and advice.”¹⁶³ Like the arts and crafts program, health care in Gatlinburg served as a vital link between the reformers and the community. Once locals became convinced of the effectiveness of professional medical knowledge, the Pi Phis could use this link as an inducement to participate in the school's other programs.

Prior to the Pi Phis' arrival, Gatlinburg's people had relied on a few professionally trained doctors and traditional lay healers to fulfill their medical needs. Dr. Henry Hoffman, a former surgeon from Heidelberg, Germany, served the area for over thirty years during the early 20th century. Appalachian lay healers had various levels of skill and knowledge according to Marjorie Chalmers, who became the school's nurse in 1935. She stated, “Granny-women were deft in nursing the sick and birthing new babies, and some were wiser than others about herbs.”¹⁶⁴ Chalmers respected traditional healers and became interested in finding out about herbs, such as ginseng, that generations of mountain people used before their adoption by the modern scientific community.

The mountaineers were primarily subsistence farmers and had large families to help bear the burden of agricultural labor. Obstetrics was a primary area of medical need and Granny-women were usually compelled to help their neighbors out of necessity, rather than as a true calling. They tended to be older women, having already raised their own children, but some experienced midwives were younger women or even men. A mother or grandmother might have trained the more skilled Granny-women, but the only skill possessed by many was a desire to help those in need when no other means were available. Mountain midwives charged little or nothing for their services, based on the economic means of their patients. They often stayed to

¹⁶³ Agnes Wright Spring, *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee* 13.

¹⁶⁴ Chalmers, 44.

assist ill or newly delivered mothers with their housework.¹⁶⁵ A system of communal reciprocity existed in most mountain communities, by which neighbors assisted one another whenever necessary with the understanding that the favor would be repaid in the future. Modernization eroded such beneficial systems as it caused the deterioration of traditional ways of life in rural areas like Southern Appalachia.

As the only trained nurse in Sevier County during the 1920's, Phyllis Higinbotham kept an exhausting schedule that included performing health examinations for the school's students and riding out to visit homes in Gatlinburg and outlying areas, as well as providing inoculations and health education. She assisted O.J. Mattil with health meetings in the surrounding area. In addition to supervising the health of the settlement school's students, Higinbotham also visited other schools in nearby communities.¹⁶⁶ "Miss Phyllis" remained on call day and night in case of medical emergencies, and she made all of her trips into the mountains by foot or on horseback .

One of the early struggles she faced was in convincing the people of Gatlinburg that the services of a public health nurse were beneficial to them. Higinbotham could not stay with the sick for extended periods, like the private nurses and midwives that Gatlinburg residents had dealt with. She also could not make diagnoses as a doctor would, and as a result, the locals were unsure of what to make of her.¹⁶⁷

Because of the prominence of the area's obstetrical need, midwifery comprised a large part of Higinbotham's work. She was usually able to reach patients well before the doctors, who had to travel further. She would prepare for the doctor's arrival, but was often required to deliver

165 Anthony Cavender, *Folk Medicine in Southern Appalachia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 129-130.

166 Agnes Wright Spring, *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. 15.

167 Ibid., 25

babies on her own. In an article for *The Arrow*, Higinbotham recalled that the physicians she worked with taught her “much that belongs to the sphere of a doctor because they felt there would be emergencies to be met when they weren’t there.”¹⁶⁸ One of Higinbotham’s goals was to convince area residents to rely on professional doctors, and she refused to attend patients who had not first attempted to call on a doctor.¹⁶⁹ She worked closely with area doctors and convinced several to donate their time at the school. Higinbotham also arranged for visits from specialists, such as dentists and opticians, who held clinics in Gatlinburg.¹⁷⁰ In order to get patients accustomed to paying for medical services, she began charging a small fee for visits in 1922.¹⁷¹

When “Miss Phyllis” arrived in Gatlinburg, she discovered that poor nutrition was to be one of her primary foes in helping local people to achieve better health. Many residents' diets consisted mainly of starchy foods, such as potatoes and corn. Higinbotham constantly worked to teach local women cooking techniques that would preserve vital nutrients. Modern baby foods and formulas were unavailable to most of the area's parents, and the Pi Phis reported that infants as young as five or six months ate green beans, fried eggs, or cheese that had been chopped or mashed.¹⁷² According to Bonnie Trentham Myers, some mothers chewed the food for their babies.¹⁷³

Hygiene proved to be another area in which the nurse found deficiencies. Some new mothers reportedly believed that it was dangerous to wash infants immediately after birth. Personal hygiene and house-cleaning techniques became part of Higinbotham's educational

168 Ibid., 29.

169 Higinbotham, Phyllis, “News from Little Pigeon,” *The Arrow of Pi Beta Phi*, 37, no. 4 [1921], 336.

170 Higinbotham, Phyllis, “The Jennie Nicol Memorial,” *The Arrow of Pi Beta Phi* 39, no.4 [1922], 721.

171 Ibid., 721.

172 Agnes Wright Spring, *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee* 13.

173 Myers, 13.

repertoire.¹⁷⁴ It is unclear from the Pi Phis' reports how widespread the problem of poor hygiene was, but some local accounts contradict the notion that all mountain people were dirty. Bonnie Trentham Myers reports being deeply offended when an interviewer asked whether or not her mother bathed. "To even hint that my mother might not have bathed was really a shock to me. As far as I knew, everyone in every home bathed."¹⁷⁵ Gladys Trentham Russell recalls that scrubbing the floors of her family's home was a regular activity.¹⁷⁶

Poverty almost certainly played a role in some cases, but the Pi Phis may have also found that some mountain homes failed to meet their middle-class standards because of the large number and arduous nature of household tasks. Most women in the Gatlinburg area lacked labor-saving devices such as washing machines until well into the 20th century. Seemingly simple tasks such as doing laundry became all-day ordeals as women used "battling sticks" to stir clothes in boiling pots of water.¹⁷⁷

In 1922, the school purchased and dedicated the four-room Andrew Ogle cabin as the Jennie Nicol Memorial Health Clinic in honor of the physician who was a founding member of the fraternity. Most of the clinic's medical equipment came from Pi Beta Phi chapters. Nurse Higinbotham used the facility alternately as a public health clinic, a hospital, a community clearinghouse for supplies, and a classroom. She collaborated with several area doctors to hold one such class for local midwives in order to provide them with better medical knowledge. The three women who attended the course were described by Higinbotham as "unusually fine" and

174 Agnes Wright Spring, *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. 15.

175 Myers, 16.

176 Russell, 19.

177 Myers, 16.

each of them received a state certificate for midwifery.¹⁷⁸

Nurse Higinbotham resigned her post in 1926, after accepting a job as State Supervisor of Public Health Nurses for Tennessee.¹⁷⁹ After seeing the Jennie Nicol clinic for himself, a leading doctor at the State Medical University at Memphis had insisted that it be used as the model for all rural health centers.¹⁸⁰ With the cooperation of the settlement school staff, the Gatlinburg community, and area doctors, Higinbotham had begun the establishment of a public medical infrastructure that had been previously non-existent. Lucinda Oakley Ogle referred to her as “a God-send for the mountain people.”¹⁸¹ From 1926 to 1935, several nurses succeeded Higinbotham in short stints at the school. The work load seems not to have diminished, and by 1931 the school nurse was visiting thirteen schools in the surrounding area. In 1935, the Pi Phi hired Galesburg, Illinois native Marjorie Chalmers, who operated the Jennie Nicol Clinic until the fraternity closed it in 1965. Although she was initially nervous around the “sinister looking” mountain men, Chalmers soon learned that she was “safer here, perhaps, in these hills, than anywhere else on earth.”¹⁸² Chalmers became a facet of the community and remained in the Gatlinburg area until her death in 1986.

She drove her own car to the school and used it in her visiting rounds, whereas Phyllis Higinbotham had ridden a horse. Chalmers’ expertise and daring when driving on rutted or nonexistent mountain roads would have made her an excellent rally car driver. One local man who was alarmed by her bravery reportedly asked, “Woman, do you want to die? Don’t you

178 Higinbotham, “A Class for Nurses.” 924.

179 Ibid., 16.

180 Agnes Wright Spring, *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi’s Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee* 15.

181 Ogle, 20.

182 Chalmers, 61.

know that men won't drive that road in a car?"¹⁸³ Chalmers claimed that driving as far as she could, then walking the rest of the way saved valuable time. In her autobiography, she explains techniques such as how to ford a stream without stalling the car and the best way to disentangle it from a stump. Chalmers also used the car as an ambulance to transport patients who required emergency treatment to Sevierville or Knoxville. The men at the local garage never knew when their loved ones might need the car's services, so they took a special interest in its upkeep.¹⁸⁴

Chalmers knew nothing of Gatlinburg when she accepted the position. When she arrived, she was informed, "The job is there. You can do with it as much or as little as you please."¹⁸⁵ Chalmers soon found out the true meaning of that statement. She gave immunizations, dispensed prescriptions, tended to medical emergencies, and continued the health education work started by Nurse Higinbotham. Like her predecessor, she used the clinic to hold first aid, home nursing, and hygiene classes for high school students and adults.¹⁸⁶ With the help of the county sanitarian, Chalmers conducted inspections of the seven other schools in the area. They tested spring water, performed physical examinations on the students, and gave inoculations for typhoid, diphtheria and smallpox.¹⁸⁷ Chalmers collaborated with doctors to provide "Well Baby" clinics in outlying areas, which were often operated out of the trunk of a car.¹⁸⁸ Given the large number of hunting dogs in the area, she even served as an impromptu veterinarian by providing rabies vaccinations. Most of her patients were not familiar with public health nursing, and as a consequence were not sure of what her duties encompassed. Chalmers notes that she was even asked to help prepare

183 Ibid., 21
 184 Ibid., 21
 185 Ibid., 14.
 186 Chalmers, 25.
 187 Ibid., 13-14.
 188 Ibid., 43.

corpses for burial on a few occasions.¹⁸⁹ Like Phyllis Higinbotham, Marjorie Chalmers' goal was to replace curative with preventative medicine. Instruction was a large part of her job, so she tried to give the "whys and where fors of medicines" with every service.¹⁹⁰

In 1933, the Sevier County Department of Public Health introduced Blue Ribbon Day, which became a major vehicle for the advancement of health care in Gatlinburg. Based on the National Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis' Modern Health Crusade, which reformers integrated into school health curricula during the 1920's, the Blue Ribbon program used positive reinforcement to raise the health standard in Sevier County. Children who complied with health guidelines received a pin. In order to win, students were required to receive inoculations, adopt a healthy diet, and obtain necessary glasses or dental work. Students with pins joined a yearly trip to Sevierville for a parade and ice cream. Chalmers remarked that "They made life miserable for those parents who were slow about the permitting the correction of defects, or who withheld permission for inoculations."¹⁹¹ As with many of the school's programs, the Pi Phis used their influence over the community's children to bring parents into their sphere of influence.

Like her predecessors, Marjorie Chalmers cooperated with area doctors and medical companies to provide dental and optical clinics for Gatlinburg residents. When civic groups such as the Lions, Rotary, and Elks clubs were established, they donated frequently to Pi Beta Phi's health care program. A charitable organization known as "Friends of Mountain Children" donated fifty dollars a year for the correction of remediable defects.¹⁹² Gatlinburg got its first resident doctor in 1934, which decreased the nurse's workload substantially. However, his stay

189 Chalmers, 17-18.

190 Ibid., 25.

191 Ibid., 27-29.

192 Ibid., 29.

was not permanent, and Nurse Chalmers continually expressed anxiety over the community's lack of a physician.¹⁹³

The health program at the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School had finally begun to realize its ultimate goal by the 1940's. As the people of Gatlinburg accepted the principles of preventative medicine, the health center could take on "the habiliments of an educator", rather than the constant duties of curative medicine. To further the health program's new role, Chalmers hoped to obtain a new clinic. The old health center was in a state of severe dilapidation and the community lacked the financial resources to pay for another.¹⁹⁴ Several Gatlinburg residents wrote letters to Pi Beta Phi in support of a new facility. "Of all the many things that your sorority has done for the school and community here," wrote Mrs. J.B. Donahoe, "I feel that the Health Center is the most essential and important."¹⁹⁵ After gaining enthusiastic support and financial backing from the alumnae clubs, the school began to construct a new clinic. The new Jennie Nicol Memorial Health Center was dedicated on July 12, 1948 and continued to serve the community until it closed in 1965.

With the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 1934, the workload of the school nurse grew heavier. Increased traffic from tourists who were unfamiliar with the mountain roads resulted in frequent auto accidents. Many patients from outside the community came to the Jennie Nicol Health Center for treatment.¹⁹⁶ Through constant hard work, the nurses of the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School succeeded in building a health care infrastructure from the ground up. This came as an inestimable boon in a community where many residents lacked the means to acquire professional medical attention.

193 Ibid., 35.

194 Ibid., 48.

195 Ibid., 50.

196 Ibid., 53.

Conclusion: Tourism and the Legacy of Pi Beta Phi

The creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which spanned the years from 1926 to 1930, represented a turning point for Gatlinburg. In 1931, the village also became the end point on a trans-mountain highway that extended through the park to Cherokee, North

Carolina.¹⁹⁷ Prior to the 1930's, a slowly increasing trickle of tourism had provided locals with an intermittent flow of cash. A majority of those who had traveled through Gatlinburg were lumber company representatives, for whom Andy Huff had built the Mountain View Hotel in 1916.¹⁹⁸ Gatlinburg's location at one of the park's main entrances transformed the trickle of visitors into a flood. The number of yearly visits skyrocketed from around 120,000 in 1931 to over 2,000,000 in 1963.¹⁹⁹ This allowed local elites who already engaged in capitalism to become entrepreneurs on a larger scale. The Whaley's Riverside Inn and the Huff's "Duncan-Hines-approved" tourist camp were among the plethora of accommodations that sprang up to meet the tourist demand.²⁰⁰

The Arrowcraft program bloomed as the folk art revival of the 1930's spurred vacationers to spend huge sums on native crafts. The sleepy village that had been "a wide spot on the Pigeon River" grew into a tourist Mecca and national crafts and convention center over a few short decades. As local craft sales exceeded those generated by Pi Phi chapters and the catalog, a correlating shift in the community's relationship with the fraternity occurred. Gatlinburg's development continued to juxtapose its mountain roots with the newness of modernity. "Although uniformed bellhops carry luggage at the fine hotels, and neon signs light the dusk along the main street--only a stone's throw away can be heard the bawling of cows,"²⁰¹ wrote Agnes Wright Spring in 1941.

Although the Pi Phis did not create the park, their role in the community's continued development should not be discounted. Several questions emerge from an examination of the

197 Jerome Eric Dobson, "The Changing Control of Economic Activity in the Gatlinburg, Tennessee Area, 1930-1973," (PhD diss., The University of Tennessee, 1975), 13.

198 Jackson, 40.

199 Dobson, 28.

200 Agnes Wright Spring, *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. 12.

201 Agnes Wright Spring, *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee* 4.

precise nature of this role, foremost of which is whether or not Gatlinburg's rapid development was inevitable with or without the fraternity's assistance. With the foundation of the settlement school, the Pi Phis had expressed a desire to prepare mountaineers for an economically viable existence within a rapidly changing world. After the park's opening, they often wrote with pride of the members of "their" community who were taking advantage of the new economic opportunities. By exposing local people to urban, middle-class values, the fraternity women felt that they had bolstered the community against the dislocation of modernization

The Pi Phis could not have known that a national park would be established on their doorstep when they founded the school, but the development seemed to mesh perfectly with their purposes. Their mission to provide Gatlinburg's residents with economic opportunities expanded to include a focus on tourism and hospitality training. Although more locals became entrepreneurs, the majority of them worked for others rather than owning their own businesses. The rapid construction of hotels and restaurants created an abundance of service positions for workers such as waitresses and maids. A large portion of such jobs were filled by the area's women, while many, but by no means all, business owners were men.

Although tourists are often led to believe that the Great Smoky Mountains National Park represents the preservation of pristine wilderness, much of the area had been reforested after decimation at the hands of large lumber companies. The fact that many people lived on park lands until, and in some cases, after the park's official dedication in 1934 also belies the image of the area as "wilderness". Some of those who were removed left willingly and were happy with the payments they received for their land. Others grudgingly left the land that had been in their families for generations. Many of the families from the nearby Sugarlands community moved to Gatlinburg and found jobs in its burgeoning hospitality industry. Due to this forced migration,

the village that had housed seventy-five year-round residents in 1930 had a full-time population of thirteen hundred a decade later.²⁰²

According to Micheal Ann Williams' account, *Great Smoky Mountains Folklife*, the craftspeople who were removed from park lands lost a valuable source of materials and gained a new economic outlet at the same time.²⁰³ Like local handicrafts, the land that became the Great Smoky Mountains National Park experienced a change from utilitarian use by local people to purely aesthetic consumption by visitors.

Beginning in the 1970's, scholars began to question the motives of benevolent workers in Appalachia. The historian Sandra Lee Barney has indicated that cultural imperialism and economic opportunism were implicit in many of the region's reform programs. According to Barney, professional doctors allied with middle-class club women and local elites to gain social and economic primacy in industrializing Appalachia. The agenda of these doctors, states Barney, involved the removal of traditional healers, which would enable professional physicians to join ranks and place themselves in a position of dominance at the top of mountain society.²⁰⁴ The historian Daniel Rodgers explains that doctors and lawyers experienced a national drive to professionalize during the early twentieth century that became bound up in Progressivism. According to Rodgers, professionalism was key to creating a monopoly in these fields.²⁰⁵

Pi Beta Phi's agenda for bringing a better way of life to the people of Gatlinburg involved the belief that their own, middle-class values were superior to mountain customs. It is clear, however, that the fraternity did not intend to exploit the people of Gatlinburg. Although

202 Dobson, 16.

203 Micheal Ann Williams, *Great Smoky Mountains Folklife*, (Jackson, Mississippi: The University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 85.

204 Barney.

205 Daniel T. Rodgers, "The Promise of American History: Progress and Prospects," *Reviews in American History* 10, no. 4 [December 1982], 113-132.

modernization eroded many aspects of mountain life, the Pi Beta Phi staff also attempted to preserve elements of Appalachian culture. They transformed the Ogle cabin into a museum that displayed Appalachian material culture, such as traditional farming tools, craft implements and furniture.²⁰⁶ “Old Timer’s Day” was conceived by Phyllis Higinbotham as a way to celebrate Gatlinburg’s traditional culture. This event included “hog calling” contests, mountain music and the opportunity for the residents of distant “hollers” to mingle.²⁰⁷

The Pi Phis' position as preservers or translators of mountain culture indicates that they saw themselves as the senior partners in their relationship with local people. However, it also suggests that the fraternity women valued some aspects of Appalachian life. This presents yet another paradox in the fraternity's complex array of interactions with Gatlinburg's people. The women had arrived with the avowed goal of preparing mountaineers with a better life in a modernizing world through education, health, and economic reform. However, programs such as the school's arts and crafts curriculum had a decidedly backward-looking orientation. Looking into the past as well as the future became an intrinsic part of the settlement school's programs. Reformers, and through them, the larger American public, still defined mountaineers through their supposed link to their past.

The self-sacrifice of many of the Pi Phis also speaks against intended exploitation. Marjorie Chalmers, who lost a thumb to gangrene after treating a patient’s infected wound, refused to give up her work.²⁰⁸ Like Chalmers and Head Resident Evelyn Bishop, several of the Pi Phis remained in Gatlinburg after their employment at the settlement school ended. Some of the Pi Phis, such as Henrietta McCutchin Huff, married local men and lived out their lives in the

206 Rodgers, 113-132.

207 Agnes Wright Spring, *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. 23.

208 Chalmers, 24.

area. The nature of the school's mission required staff to be on call at all hours, with regular office hours at the clinic stretching from seven to nine.²⁰⁹ The staff were often required to undergo rigorous physical activities, such as when Phyllis Higinbotham and Evelyn Bishop crawled on hands and knees in order to carry a seriously injured patient down a mountain slope. It appears that most of the Pi Phis were sincere in their efforts to help mountain people.

The fraternity women arrived in the mountains of Tennessee with some skewed ideas about the region. However, many of them voiced completely different opinions after having worked in person with the mountain people. "The people have as few superstitions as we would find in any country place in the North," wrote principal Mary Pollard in 1915. She concluded her statement by saying "The first thing that impresses everyone who comes to Gatlinburg is the feeling that what she has read in books about the Southern Highlanders does not apply here to any great extent."²¹⁰ Years of working together had created an inextricable link between the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School and the village of Gatlinburg. "I am a citizen of Gatlinburg", declared Marjorie Chalmers.²¹¹

By the 1940's, an increasing number of Gatlinburg's children were attending colleges or universities. According to Agnes Wright Spring, a majority of them returned to become teachers, public officials, or business owners.²¹² Several of these returning graduates became part of the settlement school's staff, and some of the women joined Pi Beta Phi. In 1942, Ben Fleming became to first Gatlinburg native to head the school as principal.²¹³ Pi Beta Phi's programs also altered the lives of local women by providing them with social outlets, as well as increased

209 Chalmers, 15.

210 Pollard, 447.

211 Chalmers, 54.

212 Ibid., 2.

213 Ibid., 1.

educational and economic opportunities. At the time of Spring's 1942 account, over one hundred women earned money by weaving for Arrowcraft.

Due to its phenomenal growth, Gatlinburg became an incorporated town in 1945 with Dick Whaley serving as its first mayor. The town's Chamber of Commerce was formed the same year, and it aimed to bolster the tourist industry by presenting displays at travel shows across the nation.²¹⁴ The school was not responsible for the formation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, or the attendant wave of tourism, but it did provide local people with valuable tools with which to turn sweeping change to their advantage. Unlike some areas of Appalachia, where absentee owners dominated the local economy completely, Gatlinburg natives owned most of the town's business interests until the 1970's.

Nevertheless, as scholars of Appalachia have accurately indicated, modernization came with a price in the Mountain South. Marjorie Chalmers notes that Sevier County was a "large county with a small income," which the park had further depleted by decreasing the amount of taxable land. The decreased tax base also affected the income of educators and Sevier County's teacher salaries continued to rank last in the state in the 1960's.²¹⁵ While tourism improved economic opportunities for area's elite, says Chalmers, the majority of Gatlinburg's citizens did not own businesses.²¹⁶ The expansion of tourism served as a driving force behind modernization in Gatlinburg, but despite earlier arguments by reformers such as William Goodell Frost, the assorted factors that generated mountain poverty could not be eliminated simply by recreating Appalachian communities in the image of the urban North.

214 Dobson, 39.

215 "Sevier County Teachers Lowest Paid in State, Average \$2844," *The Gatlinburg Press*, October 12, 1961, 3.

216 Agnes Wright Spring. *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. 22.

In a 1975 dissertation at the University of Tennessee, doctoral candidate Jerome Dobson explored the shifting of economic ownership that occurred in Gatlinburg after 1968. He argued that rapid economic growth in an area does not necessarily translate into benefits for its people, especially when outside capital generates the expansion. Dobson's examination of ownership in Gatlinburg from 1930 to 1973 shows a sharp increase in the number and size of businesses that were owned by non-residents or newcomers to the area. As a result, local residents owned fewer businesses and were increasingly confined to seasonal jobs in service and entertainment.²¹⁷

Sevier County had announced its intention to take over financial responsibility for the school in 1943. With eventual county administration in mind, the Pi Beta Phi began to focus more heavily on its Arrowcraft program. In 1949, Sevier County took financial and administrative control of Pi Beta Phi's elementary and high school programs, although the fraternity continued to pay the teachers' salaries and fund supplemental courses in arts and music. Over the next two decades, Sevier County accepted an increasing share of the school's financial and administrative burden. Pi Beta Phi Settlement School finally closed in 1962, when its high school merged with nearby Pittman Center High School to form Gatlinburg-Pittman High School.

After forty-three years of assisting the people of Gatlinburg, the Jennie Nicol Memorial Health Center closed its doors in 1965. Nurse Marjorie Chalmers retired from her position of thirty years but continued her involvement with Pi Beta Phi as the manager of the Arrowcraft shop. She had learned the art of weaving from Winogene Redding and, as a member of the Southern Highlands Craft Guild, frequently displayed her work at the Gatlinburg Craftsmen's

217 Dobson.

Fair. Chalmers had also been inducted into the fraternity as an honorary Pi Phi.²¹⁸ In 1966, Pi Beta Phi provided Sevier County with a long-term lease for a portion of their land that would be used for the creation of a new elementary school. Although the institution is administered and funded by the county, it bears the fraternity's name.²¹⁹ Pi Beta Phi established Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts on the settlement school grounds in 1969. The school remains in operation and has collaborated with the University of Tennessee to hold summer craft workshops since the 1960's. The sleek Arrowcraft shop now sells wares created by Southern Highland Craft Guild members that live in many parts of Appalachia.²²⁰

Modernization swept away many aspects of the mountain people's way of life. Along with the boon of improved education and health care came the erosion of reciprocal bonds that had seen them through many hard times. Most of Gatlinburg's residents seemed to believe that the advantages of modernization outweighed the losses. However, many of them looked with longing upon the simpler days before the advent of time-clocks and crowded streets. The coming change was evident as early as the 1920's, when Agnes Wright Spring questioned eighty-one-year-old Lydia Whaley about the cause of the year's poor apple yield. Aunt Lydia replied that it was the result of "a judgement of the Lord—because some of the folks are goin' down to Knoxville and ridin' 'round in them autymobiles."²²¹

In order to attract tourist dollars, many Gatlinburg residents found themselves catering to outsiders' stereotypical views of what constituted "genuine" mountain people. Most of those who

218 The Robert W. Gray Library Collection. Southern Highland Craft Guild. Unpublished biographical article on Marjorie Chalmers.

219 Pi Beta Phi Elementary School website, Gatlinburg, Tennessee, <http://www.pbpelementary.sevier.org/> [accessed 25 September 2007].

220 <http://www.lib.edu.edu/arrowmont/>.

221 Agnes Wright Spring. *Thirty Years on Little Pigeon: Pi Beta Phi's Settlement School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee* 3.

made the pilgrimage to the Smoky Mountains had little interest in seeing mountaineers who had received quality educations at the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School before going on to attend college, write books, or become entrepreneurs. Bonnie Trentham Myers recalls that many tourists asked to “see some natives”, as if local people did not fit the bill unless they were “big and barefooted”.²²² Myers recounts one occasion on which a “flatlander” family of tourists drove into the Gatlinburg area with the intention of delivering books to the “poor mountain children”. The would-be benefactors were embarrassed to find that the intended targets of their charity owned more books than they did.²²³

Profitable entertainments included performances like the one-woman play “The Mountain Woman”, which featured Irene Bewley and her “homespun mountaineer characterizations”. For her performances, the actress donned a sun bonnet and smoked a corn cob pipe. According to Bewley, her character represented “a conglomeration of gestures and phrases”, rather than one person in particular.²²⁴ Like many of the other attractions that drew tourists into the Gatlinburg area, “The Mountain Woman” turned a profit by regaling them with stock images of mountain people.

However, the cooperation of the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School allowed many of Gatlinburg’s residents to take advantage of the tides of change. “Many of the older folk are gone,” reflected Marjorie Chalmers, “and yesterday’s boys and girls are today’s leaders.”²²⁵ In an attempt to remember the lives of the “older folk” several native residents, such as Lucinda Oakley Ogle, Bonnie Trentham Myers and Gladys Trentham Russell have written accounts of the area and its people. Myers warns “with our silence our grandchildren and great grandchildren

222 Myers, 3.

223 Ibid.

224 Mrs. Lucian Siera, “No Performance by Miss Bewley Tonight,” *The Gatlinburg Press*, October 5, 1961, 3.

225 Chalmers, 51-52.

will not know their ancestors as the very strong people who lived worthy lives of substance and meaning.”²²⁶ Although the results of modernization are mixed, the unceasing labor of the Pi Phis achieved its goal of providing improved health, education and economic opportunities for Gatlinburg’s people. Modernization is a double-edged blade, but the intention of the settlement school staff was to blunt its cutting edge, rather than to profit from the destruction. In the words of one Gatlinburg native, “...the Pi Beta Phi School did more for the mountain people than good roads or the Smoky Mountains National Park, for the school prepared us to cope with the outside world.”²²⁷

226 Myers, 2.

227 Green, 15.

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