Janice Holt Giles: A Bio-Bibliography with Evaluations of the Kentucky Frontier Books as Historical Fiction

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Glenn Estes, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Eugenia Mauldin, Dorothy Ryan

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)
June 1969

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Florence Williams Plemmons entitled "Janice Holt Giles: A Bio-Bibliography with Evaluations of the Kentucky Frontier Books as Historical Fiction." I recommend that it be accepted for nine quarter hours of credit in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Library Service.

Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Eugenia Maudein
Dorothy E. Ryan

Accepted for the Council:

Vice Chancellor for Graduate Studies and Research
JANICE HOLT GILES: A BIO-BIBLIOGRAPHY WITH EVALUATIONS
OF THE KENTUCKY FRONTIER BOOKS
AS HISTORICAL FICTION

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate Council of
The University of Tennessee

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

by
Florence Williams Plemons
June 1969
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was (1) to present a biographical sketch of the novelist Janice Holt Giles in terms of the influences upon her writing, (2) to evaluate the Kentucky historical novels written by Mrs. Giles in light of the requirements for historical fiction, and (3) to present a survey of the reviews of those books.

The life data on the author were obtained largely through two personal interviews with her and through her two autobiographical works: 40 Acres and No Mule and A Little Better Than Plumb. The Adair County Record Books on file at the Court House in Columbia, Kentucky, were consulted to determine the time the Giles ancestors made their first settlement in south-central Kentucky. For references to other biographical information, Biography Index, Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Education Index, and Library Literature were searched. A scant amount of data on the author were found in Current Biography 1958, Wilson Library Bulletin, and Contemporary Authors 1962.

Certain criteria for evaluating historical fiction were specified in order to appraise the Kentucky frontier books by Mrs. Giles. The requirements of sound historical fiction: truth, graphic power, consistent character portrayal, sustained dramatic and human interest, are those cited by Helen E. Haines in her work Living with Books. Each requirement was discussed in evaluating all the books covered in this paper. Included in the discussion were details from the life influences of the author as they were thought to bear upon the novels.
In conclusion, each book met those requirements of sound historical fiction. Hannah Fowler and The Land Beyond the Mountains were the most highly praised in the survey of reviews.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Historical fiction has the ability to re-create the past, to imbue historical figures with vitality, and to enable the present-day reader to realize past conditions of living.¹

Among other writers of historical fiction, Janice Holt Giles has made a significant contribution to regional literature in America. Her interest in the early history of this country centered on the settlement of new territories as civilization moved across the Appalachian Mountains and went westward. Many different areas and different historical periods have been described through the writing of Mrs. Giles, but her four Kentucky frontier novels are closely related by characters as well as area. It was for this reason that The Kentuckians, Hannah Fowler, The Believers, and The Land Beyond the Mountains were chosen to be evaluated in this bio-bibliography.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this study (1) to present a biographical sketch of the novelist Janice Holt Giles, in light of those biographical influences which have come to play upon her work, (2) to specify the requirements for sound historical fiction, (3) to

evaluate the Kentucky frontier novels: The Kentuckians, Hannah Fowler, The Believers, and The Land Beyond the Mountains, in terms of those requirements for historical fiction, and (4) to present a survey of the reviews of those novels.

Importance of the study. A prolific writer, Mrs. Giles has had recognition of her writing prominence. Each of her novels has been selected by one or more book clubs, and Hannah Fowler was published in Sweden as well. Paper Back Library recently bought all the historical fiction series published in the past with option on those others which might be written in the future. Excerpts from the Kentucky frontier books have been implanted into at least one textbook on Kentucky history, and the dramatic rights to The Plum Thicket have been bought.2

Many bibliographies list the works of Mrs. Giles. In the seventh edition of Fiction Catalog, eight of Mrs. Giles' books were listed. Of those given, three were starred as generally recommended, and five titles were marked with the letter "y" as appropriate literature for young people. All four of the Kentucky frontier books discussed in this paper were marked in one or both ways as recommended reading.3

Three bibliographies covering only historical fiction recognize the works of Mrs. Giles—Hannah Logasa's Historical Fiction; McGarry and


Although Dickinson and Logasa correctly place the novels in designated historical periods, McGarry and White inaccurately list *The Land Beyond the Mountains* as a book of the period between 1865 and 1900. This estimate is at least three quarters of a century late. The novel dealing with Kentucky statehood actually occurs prior to 1792 when Kentucky was admitted to the Union.

The first piece of historical fiction written by Mrs. Giles, *The Kentuckians*, is now sixteen years old. Like all the other books by the author except the Piney Ridge Trilogy, it is still in print. Even her books of nonfiction have had multiple printings. Eleven titles are listed in the 1968 edition of *Books in Print* which does not include the books too recent to be listed: the second printing of *A Little Better Than Plumb*, and the latest book due for publication in the spring, 1969.

**II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS**

**Annotation.** The term "annotation" in this report means, "A note added by way of comment or explanation." Annotations are used often by book reviewers to summarize or criticize or explain a work.

**Bio-bibliography.** A bio-bibliography is a type of bibliography with biographical notes about the author. Usually a short biography, it
is especially concerned with the bibliography of the subject.  

Family. The family of the Shaker village was composed of 30 to 90 individuals. One house was designated for each family, but the stories of the house were divided, separating men from women. (See Chapter IV, The Believers.)

Fiction Catalog. The Fiction Catalog is a catalog containing short annotations of works of fiction. Certain symbols denote appropriateness or recommendation of materials on the part of the consultant. For example, an asterisk beside an entry indicates high recommendation, while the letter "Y" beside an entry denotes suitability for young adults.

Historical fiction. The definition of historical fiction used in this paper is that offered by Helen E. Haines in her work Living with Books. According to Miss Haines, historical fiction should depict actual periods, persons, or events of history in such a manner that they can be identified readily.

Kentucky frontier series. Several of the books by Mrs. Giles are based on research of the early settlement of America, particularly as the movement reached Kentucky. These novels follow the successive movements of the Fowler family, the Cooper family, or the Cartwright family, their

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8Fidell and Flory, op. cit., p. 1.

9Haines, op. cit., p. 539.
members, and descendants set against a pioneer environment. Those par-
ticular books set in Kentucky include: *The Kentuckians, Hannah Fowler,*
*The Believers,* and *The Land Beyond the Mountains,* all discussed in Chapter IV of this paper.

**Piney Ridge trilogy.** The term "Piney Ridge trilogy" refers to three early books by Mrs. Giles: *The Enduring Hills, Miss Willie,* and *Tara's Healing.* Set in the south-central Kentucky hills, called ficti-
tiously "Piney Ridge," the novels have many of the same characters, each new book building on the previous story.

### III. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Primarily Janice Holt Giles is a writer of books and it is upon four of these works that this study is concentrated. It is believed that by covering those historical novels of frontier settlement in Kentucky, the research has a coherent emphasis, and it is possible to give more thorough evaluation to each work. The appraisal of each title is supple-
mented by the comments of reviewers and critics and the author Janice Holt Giles herself. In the summer of 1967 and again in the summer of 1968, the writer of this paper wrote Mrs. Giles requesting a personal interview. The author granted two interviews: one in July, 1967, and the other in June, 1968. Both interviews were held in her home. The first was conducted before her log house was moved from the flood area. The second interview occurred after the house had been moved to its new location. (See "Biographical Sketch," Chapter III.)

The biographical facts supplied in this paper include those seemingly important to the influence on Mrs. Giles' writing.
IV. ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

Chapter I contains a statement of the problem, the importance of the study, the definition of terms used, the limitation of the thesis, and the organization of the paper. Chapter II is a review of the literature. There is a short review of material found on Mrs. Giles' life and works, but the major part of the chapter discusses the definition of historical fiction and establishes its requirements. Chapter III is a biographical sketch of Mrs. Giles divided into four main sections: (1) Early Life in Oklahoma and Arkansas, (2) Life in Kentucky, (3) Research and Writing, and (4) Personal Characteristics of the Author.

Chapter IV, the longest and major part of the thesis, analyzes the Kentucky frontier novels, concentrating on those requirements for sound historical fiction as set down in Chapter II. Each main section discusses one book, and a survey of professional reviews is given at the end.

Chapter V is the summary and conclusions.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

An effort was made to discover any reference to previous studies on the life or works of Janice Holt Giles; however, there is relatively little material about the author available. A thorough search of the literature revealed only a few paragraphs. Dissertation Abstracts contained no mention of the author. Mrs. Giles has said there have been several studies done of her books though none of them have dealt in depth as this paper has with biographical influences.¹

I. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Autobiographical material. Two important sources of autobiographical information were the author's books of nonfiction: 40 Acres and No Mule and A Little Better Than Plumb, the latter co-authored by her husband Henry Earl Giles. The first book describes the author's first experiences upon moving to the Kentucky hills, and the second book tells of the construction of their log house. Much background material enriches the primary purposes of these books, making them excellent autobiographical sources.

Two interviews granted this researcher in the summers of 1967 and 1968 were most helpful. Transcripts of the taped interviews with Mrs. Giles are located in the Department of Library Service, The University of

¹Janice Holt Giles, personal interview, June, 1968.
Tennessee, Knoxville. Mrs. Giles was receptive to questions and gave suggestions in locating further information. Letters for more information were promptly answered. (See Appendix A.) Samples of questions asked the author pertaining to the Kentucky frontier series are given in Appendix B.

Biographical material. A search was made of Biography Index, Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, Education Index, and Library Literature for references to articles about Janice Giles. Through Biography Index it was learned that information in Contemporary Authors, Wilson Library Bulletin, and Current Biography was available. These same articles were cited in Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature.

In Volume I, Contemporary Authors, 1962, some biographical information was given on her career, her writings, and her personal life. An outline listing the publications of Mrs. Giles through 1962 was presented, and mention was made of her research for one subsequent novel, Run Me a River. In February, 1958, Margaret Webb gave a more expanded description of the author in the Wilson Library Bulletin, but the extent of this information was still only one page in length. This same article was printed almost verbatim in Current Biography, 1958. No other biographical information was found.

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Other material. It was necessary to consult the Adair County record books, Columbia, Kentucky, to determine when the Giles ancestors settled in south-central Kentucky. After the searching of land deeds at the Adair County Court House, further research was done at the Green County Court House, Greensburg, Kentucky. (Adair County was a part of Green County at the time of the first Giles settlement in 1803.)

II. BOOKS BY JANICE HOLT GILES

Since the publication of her book, The Enduring Hills, in 1950, Mrs. Giles has written steadily. Her second novel, Miss Willie, a hill teacher characterization, was published just one year later, and before the end of that same year, Tara's Healing had appeared. In 1952, Mrs. Giles turned to her first book of nonfiction, 40 Acres and No Mule, after which the first of the Kentucky frontier books was written. The Kentuckians which introduced the frontier series in 1953 was followed by Hannah Fowler, The Believers, and The Land Beyond the Mountains in 1956, 1957, and 1958. The Plum Thicket, perhaps the most beautifully artistic book, was written in 1954. The author continued her writing of frontier life by moving the setting westward in Johnny Osage, 1960. Another pioneer character study was Savanna in 1961, followed by Voyage to Santa Fe the next year. A Little Better Than Plumb, the second piece of nonfiction, was published in 1963, co-authored by Henry Earl Giles. In Run Me a River, 1964, the setting was Western Kentucky. The Great Adventure, 1966, described the early Rocky Mountain fur trapping. Shady Grove, which appeared in 1967, told of the Fowler family branch who stayed in Appalachia while other members of the fictitious family moved
west. Her latest book, another western novel about the stage coach era, is due for publication in the spring, 1969.

A bibliography of all books written by Mrs. Giles to date is given in part A of the Bibliography, with sources of the reviews of each of the books. The single most helpful tool in finding book reviews was Book Review Digest which listed most of the fiction books and some nonfiction. Fiction Catalog included annotations and recommendations for four of the books covered in this paper. Book Review Index and An Index to Book Reviews in the Humanities were also searched. Many new leads were found in these bibliographies, especially those cited in obscure sources.

III. OTHER SIMILAR STUDIES

Two bio-bibliographies of other authors have been written at The University of Tennessee by students in The Department of Library Service. The subjects of these bio-bibliographies were entirely different from the subject of this paper; however, each thesis was compared and studied as to the organization and treatment of the subject.

In June, 1967, Martha Skinner Thomas produced a thesis entitled James Agee: A Bio-Bibliography. It is related to this study in that the intent was to show the relationship of the author's life to his writings and to present a survey of the reviews of those writings.

In August, 1967, Constance Glann Battle wrote Robert McCloskey: A Bio-Bibliography. The McCloskey paper also showed the relationship of an author's life to his work.

In both bio-bibliographies the major portions of the papers described the author's life and literary work and presented a survey of the reviews. In these characteristics this paper is similar.
IV. CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING HISTORICAL FICTION

It was necessary to specify the standards for evaluating historical fiction in order to judge the four novels discussed in Chapter IV of this paper. The following paragraphs define historical fiction and discuss the necessary characteristics of the genre.

**Definition of Historical Fiction**

Helen E. Haines has perhaps the most easily understood definition of historical fiction. She believes historical fiction should depict actual periods, persons, or events of history in such a manner that they can be identified readily.\(^5\)

Within this paper Haines' definition will be used. Certainly variations and combinations of those elements cited are used by most authors. Identifiable time, place, historical agent, and social conditions are qualities of good historical fiction.\(^6\)

**Characteristics of Good Historical Fiction**

The characteristics of good historical fiction described in this paper are those held by Helen Haines in her work *Living With Books*. They are as follow: truth, graphic power, consistent character portrayal, and sustained dramatic and human interest.\(^7\)

**Truth.** To write about the past truthfully, the writer must do

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7 Haines, op. cit., p. 541.
research. The historical novelist must be an historical expert, a technical director, so to speak. MacKinlay Kantor, himself an historical novelist, describes the versatility of a good writer in this way:

He must be at times botanist and zoologist, entomologist and ichthyologist. He must don in turn the frilled apron of the housemaid and the leather apron of the farrier. He must wear the spectacles of the schoolmaster, the opera cape of the actor, the shabby gilt slippers of the prostitute. 8

The writer of historical fiction must know much more history than that shown on the pages of his novel or that which he does reveal will be shallow and thin. Old newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, novels, plays, and poetry of the time give illuminating details. The writer is free to create all the fictitious characters he cares to invent. He may incorporate fictitious scenes, fictitious conversations, and fictitious incidents into his story, but he must stay within the limits of his created elements. "Let him not," says Kantor, "select the fact from where it lies, a dusty sapphire in the jewel-box of Time, and take it out, recut it, reset it, and declare that he has an emerald." 9

Graphic power. If historical fiction is to have graphic power, it must describe clearly and vividly, for through the graphic power of a story intangibles of an era come to life. 10 Among the premiums of this ability are the powers to inform the reader and awaken sympathies. The story should have a "modernity, a whitehot reality of the telling,

9 Ibid., p. 5-40.
according to Kantor. At the beginning of his career Kantor believed factual history was more acceptable if presented to the reader through the indirect means of a story. After years of writing, he has not changed his mind.\textsuperscript{11}

Consistent character portrayal. Strong reader identification with the central character is an important objective of the historical fiction writer. William O. Steele, writer of juvenile historical fiction, tries to achieve reader identification by presenting a plausible character, true to time and place. As the story is told, the author never stands between the character and the reader for the closeness which he strives for would be lost if he were to intrude to make a comment on bits of landscape or historical happenings.\textsuperscript{12}

Character portrayal should reflect valid psychology. The reader of the historical novel should be able to link motive logically to action and to distinguish valid reasons and influences for developments. Authoritative history is not expected, but the broad requirement of historical truth should be evident.\textsuperscript{13}

Sustained dramatic and human interest. The most assured way of getting a reader's attention is to make a book interesting. "It does an author no service whatsoever," believes Irving Stone, "to have his book unreadable and hence unread."\textsuperscript{14} Dullness is often a common pitfall in

\textsuperscript{11}Stone, O'Hara, and Kantor, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 37.


\textsuperscript{13}Haines, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 542.

\textsuperscript{14}Stone, O'Hara, and Kantor, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 3.
historical fiction. To avoid this William O. Steele believes that whatever is vital to advancing the plot, the characterization, and the theme of the story should be presented through action. An author should not merely tell. He should dramatize. If the author brings the reader into the heart of the emotion being engendered, the reader will make the story his own. To catch and keep his interest, the story must unfold for him even as the events unfold for the participants. Perhaps a sheer storytelling quality best commands the interest and emotional response on the part of the reader.

In light of all the requirements for historical fiction set down here, the Kentucky frontier books by Janice Holt Giles will be evaluated in Chapter IV, following the biographical sketch of the author in Chapter III.

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16 Steele, loc. cit.

17 Stone, O'Hara, and Kantor, op. cit., pp. 3-7.

18 Haines, op. cit., p. 544.
CHAPTER III

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

This chapter will sketch those biographical facts considered significant to the writings of Mrs. Giles. It is organized into four main sections. The first two sections cover the different time periods of the author's life, "Early Years in Oklahoma and Arkansas," describing her first twenty-eight years; and "Life in Kentucky," covering the time of all her book publications and most of her adult life. The last two sections of Chapter III include "Researching and Writing" and "Personal Characteristics of the Author."

I. EARLY YEARS IN OKLAHOMA AND ARKANSAS

At the home of her maternal grandparents in Altus, Arkansas, Janice Holt was born March 28, 1909. Her parents, John Albert Holt and Lucy Elizabeth (McGraw) Holt, went home with their daughter to Indian Territory where they taught school in the old Choctaw Nation of eastern Oklahoma. Mrs. Giles grew up in the classroom. Long before she was school age, she came to school with her parents.¹ From this early exposure to the classroom, the influence upon the author is evident. She has created a novel, Miss Willie, with a teacher as the central character, and her own work habits are scheduled largely by school terms.

Janice Holt knew a happy family situation as a child. There were
certain enrichments the Holt parents wanted their children to enjoy, but
household finery was not important to them. More important were music,
books, and travel. Because her parents were teachers, there was a
nightly routine in the household. When supper was over and the dishes
were washed, the family sat around the dining table, the children
studying while the parents graded papers. While they worked, there were
apples and nuts and popcorn and, at times, home-made candy to munch. The
children were expected to do their homework independently and were
allowed only so much time in which to complete it. After they were in
bed, Mr. Holt would play the violin while Mrs. Holt played the piano.
They continued the music until each child was asleep.\(^2\) On other occasions
the whole family participated in the music making. Mrs. Giles believes
these experiences account for her sense of pace and sound in her writing.\(^3\)

The strong personality of Lucy Holt was important in shaping the
person of the young author. The objective of Mrs. Holt was to make her
children self-reliant. She was successful, for today Mrs. Giles is
resilient and independent.

After two or three moves from one coal camp to another, Mr. and
Mrs. Holt settled with their children in the small town of Kinta, Oklaho-
ma. This was not in coal country but was at the edge of a farming and
ranching area in the old Choctaw Nation. The first memories of Mrs. Giles
are of Kinta, but by that time the Indian territory had become the state

\(^2\) Janice Holt Giles and Henry Earl Giles, *A Little Better Than

\(^3\) Janice Holt Giles, personal interview, June, 1968.
of Oklahoma.\textsuperscript{4} Still everyone around her was Indian; consequently, she grew up knowing some of the Choctaw language. She herself is thirty-second Cherokee.\textsuperscript{5}

On one side of Kinta was a long prairie, crossed here and there by dry washes. On the outstretch, not far from the house, was a grove of persimmons and blackjacks. Here the children built playhouses and climbed. To the back of Kinta stood the foothills of the Quachita Mountains. Janice Holt was taken into these mountains for long camping excursions. During the summer months when her father and mother were not teaching school, a six-weeks-long camping trip was made with wagon and team. Fishing and hunting were part of the journeys into the mountains on the Jack Fork River. There were deer, bear, and wild turkey, and occasionally the men of the families stayed away overnight to hunt down their game.\textsuperscript{6} These camping experiences must have served in part in preparing the author to write of the outdoor living of frontier settlers.

When she was eight the author's family returned from Oklahoma to Arkansas where they settled permanently in Fort Smith. Years later she wrote The Plum Thicket largely about her own childhood there. At the home of her Grandfather Holt there was indeed a plum thicket with a child's grave under the boughs. However, the family never knew the history of the grave. The grandfather of the book was similar to her real grandfather. The house with the four chimneys and large center halls was as

\begin{itemize}
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picted, and there were Confederate Reunions and camp meetings to attend. But on the other hand, the grandmother of the book was strictly fictional.  

More than one real person from the Holt line of the family has been used as minor characters in the books by Mrs. Giles. She discovers while working with a certain period and area that a relative was in the appropriate area at the appropriate time. David Holt of Savanna was from a collateral branch of the author's family, and so was Joseph Holt, Postmaster General during the last two years of the Buchanan Administration, who will appear in the book to be published in the spring, 1969. 

The grandparents as well as the immediate family provided a strong sense of family lineage. Mrs. Giles is proud that she came from a line of pioneer women. One grandmother came with her husband from north Mississippi to homestead in the foothills of the Ozarks. There she gave birth to three children in her first log cabin. The other grandparents grew up in north Mississippi, also in circumstances of poverty. Those grandparents moved to western Arkansas and bought a cotton farm. The stories that Janice Holt heard from her grandmothers are interwoven into her writing much as are the stories of the neighbor women living near her in Kentucky today. Like the Kentucky hill women, her grandmothers made soap, cooked heavy fried foods, and filled their conversations with colloquialisms. 

As a child the author liked particularly to hear her grandfathers' stories of The Civil War. One grandfather fought the entire four years, and the other one ran away when he was fifteen to fight the last year. 

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It had been The War's destruction of their home country in Mississippi that led both families to move to Arkansas.

During Janice Holt's young years men still drove a surrey and team and worked their farms with horses. Her Grandfather Holt had a surrey and team which she was allowed to drive. During those years she drove wagons and buggies as well as rode horseback. In fact, riding was such an early skill she cannot remember when she learned. One of her earliest memories was of riding a cow pony.\(^8\) Again there were outdoor experiences which appealed to the young author.

In the Fort Smith public schools where her school-teacher parents worked, Janice Holt attended high school. Part time she earned book and clothing money by working in the public library as a page, near the age of thirteen.\(^9\) It was an opportune job. Since she had learned to read at the age of four, she had an eager appetite for books. The home had always been full of reading material, and for many years a book a day had been the normal fare for her. Her interest in fiction gradually became a study of writing techniques. Often she would begin a book on something about which she knew nothing and continue to read on the subject until she had covered thirty to forty books. Much of the background research used today in her novels was done years before she wrote her first line. She cannot precisely remember, for example, in what year she read about the Iroquois Indians, but the background of information serves her well.\(^{10}\)

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\(^8\) Giles, interview, 1968.

\(^9\) Webb, loc. cit.

\(^{10}\) Giles, interview, 1968.
After high school graduation, the author did not go directly to college. Her father was ill with tuberculosis, so she went to work to help support the family. Not long afterward in 1927, she married Otto Jackson Moore by whom she had a daughter Elizabeth, now Mrs. Nash Hancock. Twelve years later the author was divorced. Then she began college studies and her writing.

For a time she was director of religious education at Pulaski Heights Community Church, Little Rock, Arkansas. Later she was director of children's work in the Arkansas-Louisiana Area, Board of Missions, Little Rock. During this time she studied at Little Rock Junior College and The University of Arkansas, by extension.¹¹ There was a problem of source material needed for the young people in the church because nothing available was quite appropriate. To meet these deficiencies, Janice Moore began to write poetry and plays. Her work gradually shifted to the field of teaching teachers, directors, and leaders rather than children. She became widely known for this kind of work, and in 1941 she was invited to come to Louisville, Kentucky, as an assistant to Dean Lewis J. Sherrill at the Presbyterian Seminary.¹²

Her residence in the West had ended by this time, but her personality had already been molded. During her early years she had observed the prairies, its pioneers, cowboys, and frontier ranches. Her girlhood memories influence every piece of her western historical fiction. Her Indian characters could not be drawn so credibly had the author not


understood thoroughly Indian lore and habits partially because of her own life in the old Indian Territory. There is also the possibility that those details which the author herself did not witness could have been accounted for personally by parents and older relatives in a family fond of books and stories. Certainly the feeling for nature evident in every piece of her historical fiction was partially learned from early camping trips and the prairie environment of her childhood. Mrs. Giles still goes back to visit and observe before starting a new novel set in the West. Her base of operations is usually her daughter's home now in Santa Fe.

It would be less than realistic to present in this paper the love with which the author writes of Kentucky without saying that this same love is for many other places, particularly the West. She is equally enthusiastic about Oklahoma, Colorado, New Mexico, Wyoming, Arkansas, Mississippi, and many other parts of America. "It's all our land," she summarizes. 13

II. LIFE IN KENTUCKY

The author spent nine years at the Presbyterian Seminary from 1941 to 1950. With Dr. Sherrill, who was both Dean and professor of religious education, Janice Moore worked with ministerial students, who in turn, would become religious educators.

During one summer vacation in 1943, on her way to visit her daughter who lived in Texas at the time, she met a soldier, Henry Earl Giles, who boarded the bus at Bowling Green, Kentucky. This man was to

13Giles, interview, 1968.
become her husband. Mr. Giles had been visiting his parents in Kentucky while on leave from the army. The two friends exchanged letters during World War II, then in the summer of 1944, Janice Moore visited the parents of Mr. Giles in Adair County, Kentucky. A year later when Mr. Giles returned from war duty, they were married. Mrs. Giles continued to work at the seminary while her husband went to college, but they planned eventually to move to the hills of Adair County.\footnote{Janice Holt Giles, 40 Acres and No Mule (second edition; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), pp. 32-33.}

Heretofore, her work had required a lot of writing, but none of it had been fiction. She had never considered fiction until she began writing her first book at night after a full day in Dr. Sherrill's office. With her husband, who was also to become an author, she talked over general plot ideas. As the story grew, they set up a working schedule. When Mr. Giles settled down to his studies at night, Mrs. Giles worked at a rented typewriter in another corner. She made herself follow a rigid three hours even when the work did not go well. She has maintained such discipline.

The Enduring Hills was published in April of 1950. It was the first book written by the author, the first submitted to a publisher, and the first book sold. In September of that year Mrs. Giles learned that her book had been chosen by Family Book Club as their May selection.\footnote{Ibid., p. 141.} Perhaps learning this gave the Giles' courage to buy their first forty-three acres near Knifley, Kentucky. The purchase was official May 7,
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No more important happening occurred in her life than the move to Giles Ridge. If she had been reared in a family full of stories and varied experiences, she had also married into a family rich in legends. She had published her first book while still in Louisville, but the background of the novel even then came from her husband's family. She admits that she has never written a book that was not about the Giles to some extent.

With a native interest in history, she began to weave real happenings into her early books. She had moved into a small house on Giles Ridge where her husband's ancestors had settled and lived nearly a century and a half before. She was told a family legend that the first Jeems Giles came into the hills hunting and traded his gun for one thousand acres. This sizable plot was subdivided and divided again as the generations were born. When this writer searched the Adair County Record Books in Columbia, Kentucky, and the Green County Record Books in Greensburg, Kentucky, the earliest land date found was in 1817 to Alexander and Polly Giles. However, Mrs. Giles asserts that records do exist which show an earlier purchase by a Giles in 1803. The longevity is something of which Mrs. Giles and her husband are proud.

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17 Giles, 40 Acres and No Mule, p. 52.

18 Giles, interview, 1967.

19 Giles, 40 Acres and No Mule, p. 48.

Through her father-in-law and his brothers, stories came down to the author. They are all very old men today whose memories go back to shortly after The Civil War. The way they lived and the stories they in turn heard from older generations are talked about to the great satisfaction of the author.

One book in particular, *Shady Grove*, published in 1967, is completely based on experiences in the Giles family. It is meant for a read-a-loud narrative told by an old hill woman, in answer to the attention lately given the Appalachian area. Mrs. Giles declares she did not concoct a single incident in the book nor did she go outside the Giles family to find her material. However, she cannot use living persons as total book characters, for they are not flexible enough. Her characterizations are composites of actual people she has known or read of or heard discussed.  

After settling into their first farm home, Mrs. Giles wrote two more books of present-day fiction set in Appalachia. With *The Enduring Hills*, the next two books, *Miss Willie* and *Tara's Healing*, completed the series many critics have called The Piney Ridge trilogy. Besides writing, Mrs. Giles helped her husband tend the farm for three years. It took some time for them to discover that they wanted to live in the country but they did not want to farm. Besides the physical lack of freedom that farming caused, the author found she no longer had energy to write as she had before. A decision was made to sell the animals and rent the farm. Mr. Giles began work in journalism at the nearby Campbellsville News-Journal. While he commuted to work, Mrs. Giles wrote *Hannah Fowler.*

21 Giles, interview, 1968.
during her first year of full-time writing. Perhaps because of her new freedom the book was of outstanding quality. As pleasant as the arrangement was however, the Giles' residence was to change again.

To be near Mr. Giles' work in Campbellsville, the writers rented a large apartment in town where they lived for two years. Set away from the street, the apartment was quiet and private. The author wrote The Believers there.

Before the end of the first year on the farm, Mrs. Giles had wished for a log house built near a body of water. Several circumstances worked together to set in motion the plans. First, both of them tired of living in the city. Secondly, there came a good offer to sell their farm. Thirdly, they learned a smaller farm was for sale in the valley near Giles Ridge. Right through this piece of land Spout Springs Branch flowed. It might have been the first choice of the writer to build near Green River, venerated in her books of historical fiction, but Spout Springs Branch was not an unhappy compromise. Before buying the property, she had used the branch in several of her books. The earliest novels, The Enduring Hills and Miss Willie both had such a stream. On visiting the area today, it is easy to imagine Miss Willie presiding at the Spout Springs school house now owned by the Giles. It was the school Mr. Giles attended as a child and spoke of years later to his wife. Miss Willie, drawn from a composite of good country teachers such as Henry Giles had known, knew the place as Big Springs School. The people from The Land Beyond the Mountains had such a spring also. In this, the fourth of the Kentucky frontier books, (discussed in Chapter IV, Part iv, of this
paper), Mrs. Giles called the setting Cartwright's Mill. 22

The Giles wanted their log house to look very old, so only old logs were used. Each set of logs was at least one hundred years old; some were older than a century and a half. The four log houses from which they came were all from Adair County. With an old appearance, Mrs. Giles hoped that it would seem to have always been there. She even hoped that it would not be too easy to find, but this did not prove true. There continued to be a close identification with her from readers who visited her in great numbers.

Fortunately a few old men in the community still knew how log houses were built. Mr. Giles' father rived out the shingleboards for the roof. A Little Better Than Plumb, co-authored by her husband, describes the ordeals of gathering logs, of setting a large stone chimney on the uncertain creek bed in her yard, and finally of learning that the region was to be flooded in a Tennessee Valley Authority project. Fortunately, it was possible to move the log house except for the chimney to a higher elevation a few hundred yards away. 23

Many of the homestead houses described in her frontier novels were constructed similarly to the house the author lives in every day. Her present living room was once an entire log house. Her place of work as well as residence, here the author writes in a part-history, part-fiction way of her own and her husband's ancestors and other illustrious pioneers.

22 Giles, A Little Better Than Plumb, pp. 29-44.
III. RESEARCHING AND WRITING

Mrs. Giles is consistently thorough in her research, but she realizes the research is just as much the writer, his personality and experiences. In her case, there is the background of thirty years of reading, experiences in observing people, and living a varied life.

Although authentic history is important to her, she believes the fiction has to be more important. In all her works, she intends her purpose as history, but her created characters become alive to her and become a part of the history itself. As their story unfolds, it is as vivid and real as if the characters actually lived. In fact, at times a character will become so real, he becomes inflexible. She has a warning, a very uncomfortable feeling, when she is tampering too much with her own characters. After persisting in the course she is developing for two or three days, she suddenly sees that the action is totally out of character. After this realization she can get back inside the skin of her character and continue.24

To get the feel of the land and time of which she writes, Mrs. Giles makes regular voyages to her setting. At one time or another she has traveled the West widely with her husband and daughter. She spends a year or two in a region before she begins to write about it. This usually is part of the pleasure of going back out West, or in the case of the books set in Kentucky, a part of traveling to nearby areas. Besides the traveling, she works with original source materials from university

24 Giles, interview, 1968.
libraries, historical societies, and state archives in preparing for a book. 25

A new book for Mrs. Giles has a slow beginning. The author goes through a period of several months of living with it in her mind. For her it is a distressing period. The characters are not yet clear, but she does have the grain of an idea. She "ghost walks around" to use her description, for a length of time. When the story becomes clearer, she doesn't wait until she has the total plot although she knows generally what the story line will be. What is going to happen from day to week to month does not matter when the book is begun. The opening is always rewritten; consequently, the first chapter is conspicuously strong. There is reason for the rewriting.

You start cold. You've got to begin, so you start. Then when you've finished, you've got nine months to a year of this daily rhythm which has carried you. You can go back and do a beautiful opening chapter ••• because it's all warm, it's all there, going, rolling on wheels. 26

She brings her central character on stage as soon as possible because he is foremost in her mind. She does not outline nor plot a book. An example of an unplanned course of action is the old Shakespeare-quoting man in Run Me a River. This character was not meant to be a part of the book. A sudden intuition, all at once she heard that character's voice rolling out across the flood waters. There was no plan to it.

There are many examples of intuition in the writings of Mrs. Giles. She is unconscious of introducing each opening chapter differently or of


26 Giles, interview, 1968.
deciding whether the central character should be a man or woman. There is never any doubt to her as to which character would be more effective. It is distinctly a man's story or a woman's. She finds it as easy to write from a man's point of view as from a woman's, for her own early independence, in her opinion, has helped her understand the male role.

The character dialogue created by Mrs. Giles is full of the rural speech evident in her own conversation. Hannah Fowler is a prime example. In fact the author remarked when told that Hannah Fowler had been sold to a foreign publisher, that the original text would first have to be translated into English. Yet when a type of character demands a change in patterns of speech, such as James Wilkinson in The Land Beyond the Mountains does, Mrs. Giles creates more sophisticated dialogue. (See Chapter IV.)

Over the years Mrs. Giles has developed a philosophy as to the making of successful writers. She believes there are three requirements, assuming a person is born articulate and imaginative and learns the techniques of the trade. He must first have a strong desire to write; secondly, he must be persistent and hard to discourage; and lastly, he must be capable of hard, lonely work for long periods of time. She believes a writer tries to do an impossible thing, for all he has to work with are words. He cannot approximate the realities of life with these tools. Realizing he fails before he starts, the writer must still try for society needs a literature. Mrs. Giles herself allows no personal

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27 Giles, interview, 1968.
29 Giles, interview, 1968.
preferences to interfere with her work. She begins early in the morning to work and continues into the afternoon until two o'clock or so.

She has said there are more books than she will ever have time to write. Among future books, she has in mind a two-volume autobiography. One volume would cover the four years in Kinta, Oklahoma, and the other volume would be on her writing career. In the past when she has alluded to a future book, that book has appeared in the near future. She believes a writer's commitment is total and unending, and that his books must be his "good work." Achieving this, there is not time for more. 30

IV. PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTHOR

Janice Giles today is a tall woman with hazel eyes and hair more brown than gray. Her personality is gracious, but her conversation is full of purpose. Her poise is very commanding. She is not unlike the hardy pioneer women or present-day hill women of whom she writes. Like all rural people everywhere, she has developed a practical, down-to-earth way of living. She is unusually self-confident. She believes the circumstances in her life have made her strong. She admittedly wants to see this strength in other people. All of her central characters reflect strong individualism like her own.

It's a message I have preached in every book I've written. Stand on your own feet. Be strong. It's a tremendous American heritage. The history wouldn't be worth writing about if it weren't. ... That's what the whole series is about. 31

30 Giles, A Little Better Than Plumb, p. 156.

31 Giles, interview, 1968.
There are many biographical influences evident in the writing of Mrs. Giles. Her interest in writing began when she became an avid reader. Much of the information used in the historical novels today was learned from thirty years of reading a variety of material. Living in farming and ranching country in Oklahoma in the Old Indian Territory, the young author witnessed real cowboys and frontier living. Outdoor experiences included long camping trips and riding horseback. She was proud of her pioneer grandmothers who homesteaded in Western Arkansas, much as the settlers she writes of did. The musical experiences in her home gave her a feeling for the lyricism of expression in her writing. After marrying into the Giles family, she realized she had come upon a great source of raw material for writing. Her husband's family has influenced every book she has ever written. Her pride in America and love of history is obvious in the historical fiction she writes, and her strong central characters reflect her own individualism.
CHAPTER IV

EVALUATIONS OF THE BOOKS OF THE KENTUCKY FRONTIER
WRITTEN BY JANICE HOLT GILES

This chapter discusses those four historical novels by Janice Holt Giles set in frontier Kentucky. It contains four major divisions by book title in the order of their publication: The Kentuckians, Hannah Fowler, The Believers, and The Land Beyond the Mountains. Within each major division are two main subdivisions: a critical review of each novel and a survey of reviews from professional reviewing sources. (All available reviews of the books have been searched and presented.) The critical review of the novel Hannah Fowler is done in more depth than the appraisal of the other novels because this book is thought to be the major book of the series.

Under the first main subdivision are four lesser sections discussing the requirements of good historical fiction in evaluating the novels. These lesser divisions are truth, graphic power, consistent character portrayal, and sustained dramatic and human interest.

Preceding the critical discussion of each book is a short summary and introduction.

I. THE KENTUCKIANS

The Kentuckians were the uncultured settlers who first explored and took residence in early Kentucky. Into the new country came fictitious David Cooper along with Daniel Boone and Benjamin Logan. While on
the way, David met and fell in love with Bethia Jordan who later came to live near him in Harrod's Fort. Colonel Henderson of the Transylvania Company tried to lay claim to all the new area, but like the British-inspired Indian attacks, he was repelled. After Bethia's husband Judd Jordan was killed, David and she married and moved to their own cabin near the Green River.

The plan of organization for this first novel was later to be used many times by the author. She began by creating a small group of central characters who interacted with the principle historical people of the time. The fictional characters were committed to a part of the total action in line with authentic history.

The most important source of information used by the author was based on the dissertation by Charles Gano Talbert, "Life and Times of Benjamin Logan." The book form of Talbert's work, Benjamin Logan: Kentucky Frontiersman was consulted by this researcher in determining the historical accuracy of the novel.

Critical Review as Historical Fiction

Those requirements of good historical fiction already discussed in Chapter II of this paper will be used in measuring the quality of The Kentuckians. The requirements: truth, graphic power, consistent character portrayal, and sustained dramatic or human interest are presented in the order given here.

Truth. In her first historical novel Mrs. Giles has generally interwoven her facts and fiction smoothly. Much of the factual history in The Kentuckians concerns the affairs of the Transylvania Company. The dispute of Colonel Henderson of that company with the Kentucky settlers
sets in motion the major conflict in the novel. The barter that Colonel Henderson made with the Cherokees for the whole area composes one of the opening scenes of the book. There is a sense of definite place in the description of the meeting with the Cherokee chiefs at the Sycamore Shoals on the Watauga River.

Many instances of historic happenings are found throughout the book. It is true Daniel Boone was hired as the guide and explorer for the Transylvania Company, and, as Mrs. Giles says, Boone was sent ahead with twenty axmen to cut a road to the Kentucky River. The fictional David Cooper, following the trail blazed by Boone, encountered several small parties fleeing for fear of Indians. This also is historically sound.

One very small incident talked of by the settlers at Logan's Fort tells how Barney Stagner was captured, his head cut off and set upon a post in view of the fort. Again the incident is factual. The Indian way of mutilating the bodies of dead settlers was based on religious beliefs, according to the research of Mrs. Giles. They believed to destroy a body thoroughly was to prevent his living in the afterlife; hence, the Indian would never have to fight that same settler again.

The construction of the fort itself is described with care. Mrs. Giles enumerates those people occupying the fort and their places: the Ben Pettits, the William Whitleys, the William Manifees, the George Clarks, and the James Masons. Yet life in Logan's Fort does not seem as

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2 Janice Holt Giles, personal interview, June, 1968.
vivid in *The Kentuckians* as it does in the following novel, Hannah Fowler. Nor are the details of David Cooper's life as numerous and incidental as they are with the central character in the second historical novel. The period of time at Logan's Fort, however, is not distorted. The shooting contest which Esther Whitley won is exactly as reported in history, the reward being the lead of the bullets used in the shooting. The incriminating papers found on Judd Jordan paraphrase closely the proclamation the British issued, offering food, lodging, and humane treatment to all who deserted the American cause. It is true there was a young widow named Ann McDonald who came with her baby son to Logan's Fort and was there flattered by every available man. Also true is the incident when Ben Logan rescued the wounded Burr Harrison by slipping out of the fort at dusk and pushing a bag of wool ahead of him for a shield. Major historical happenings such as the signing of the petition carried back to Virginia and presented to the Virginia Convention are responsibly included. So are trivial bits of history such as the fact Ben and Ann Logan used a blanket for a cabin door for many months.

One minor contradiction between Talbert's book and the interpretation of Mrs. Giles is found in her account of Ben Logan's trip to the Holston Settlements for ammunition. In the novel the fictional David Cooper makes the trip with Logan. Some historians believe Ben Logan made the trip entirely alone. Talbert is of still another opinion.

There is reason for doubting that he was by himself except possibly on the return trip. James Harrod and a small group of men started from Harrodsburg on June 5 and headed for Boone's Wilderness Trail. It is likely that they would have been at St. Asaph's on June 6, which was the day that Logan's trip began.
Logan was back at his fort by June 25, but Harrod did not return until July 11.³

This minor discrepancy was the only one noted in the novel after comparing Talbert's book with _The Kentuckians_. Evidently Mrs. Giles gleaned and applied bits of recorded history carefully in order to reflect truth in her novel.

**Graphic power.** In _The Kentuckians_ are passages of graphically strong writing even if the author was new at historical fiction. David's love for Bethia Jordan is an idea that grows by proportions in his mind. Letting the love take hold of the character is a difficult task. It is founded on a very short meeting, but his mind dwells on Bethia as he clears his land and waits out the summer. While his corn ripens, so does his love for the girl. It seems likely that out of David's solitude in the country, Bethia would come to be the focus of his thinking.

Another example of graphic description is that of the Indian attack near the end of the book. Of course, David Cooper and Bethia Jordan were not really in that party who stepped sleepy-eyed out of the fort to milk the cows that certain morning, but the reader lives through the ambush with the settlers because of the fictionalizing. Consistently through the novel the author displays graphic power.

**Consistent character portrayal.** The small corps of central characters created by Mrs. Giles in _The Kentuckians_ are believable pioneers, but they are not as maturely developed as are the central characters in the later books. David Cooper is true to time and place, but his conversation seems pedestrian at times. Nor is Bethia whole-fleshed. The

³Talbert, _op. cit._, pp. 15-44.
reader knows she has red hair but little more. Judd Jordan is somewhat more real if but for his dark nature alone. He can easily be seen limping away from the camp fire the night of his fight with David. The act of Jordan skinning his own animal alive horrifies the reader but defines the sadism of the character. The incident is not described by the author for the sake of mere sensation.

Johnnie Vann, the fictitious intermediary between the Indians and the settlers, is a moody outcast. In his circumstances it is credible he should be just that, but his character is mainly uninteresting. Whether or not Vann was patterned after any particular real trader, Mrs. Giles does not say. There were several Indian traders who brought in things to sell to the Indians on pack horses, according to her research. The incident of the son dying and the mourning of the Delaware wife perhaps do more than anything to invigorate Vann's characterization.

Much more vivid than the fictional characters are the historical people in the book. Little Carpenter and Dragging Canoe seem to be distinctly Indian and distinctly individuated at the meeting of the Six Nations when Colonel Henderson made his trade. The spread of the gathering appears to be told by an eye witness. Colonel Henderson himself is well developed into a persuasive dandy. George Rogers Clark is likewise successfully depicted as a gentleman soldier. Although these secondary characters do not over-shadow David Cooper, they are somehow more distinct.

4Giles, interview, 1968.
According to the novel the central character had been a neighbor of Daniel Boone long before the real frontiersman made his first trip into the wilderness. In the story David interacts with Boone and such other true characters as Captain Floyd, George Rogers Clark, Jim Harrod, and Ben Logan. Boone is more in the foreground in this novel than in the second book, but Logan, on the other hand, is better characterized in the second novel, *Hannah Fowler*. Boone is depicted as a misguided, trusting woodsman with wanderlust; Logan is a steady, highly-principled settler.

Many historic people met in *The Kentuckians* were to be used by Mrs. Giles in her later frontier books. Ben and Ann Logan, as well as William and Jane Manifee are more fully developed in the novel *Hannah Fowler*, discussed in the next section of this paper. The general quality of characterization in *The Kentuckians* shows promise of later skill.

*Sustained dramatic and human interest.* From the opening chapter the story of the Kentuckians is engrossing. Even when interspersed with known bits of history, the author manages to surprise the reader. David's love complications arouse one's sympathies, and the danger of the Indians makes the reader alert. The story line does not lag even at the end when David and Bethia leave Logan's Fort and bring the tale of the settlers to a temporary close.

**Survey of Reviews**

Below are given excerpts from professional reviews of the book *The Kentuckians*. The longest evaluation was given by Frances Gaither in the *New York Times Book Review*:

... Any reader worth his salt will take David Cooper's word for it that his signature was one of those on the petition sent
back to the Virginia Assembly appealing against the demands of 'the colonel's' land company; that his 'fine deckard' was one of the fifteen ill-supplied guns defending tiny Logan's Fort against redskins armed with plenty of British lead and powder; and that his was the very hand that held open the stockade gate through which Logan issued on his famous rescue of a wounded comrade. Even the log house he raised for love of the girl Bethia seems stout enough to warrant a hope that it may still be there on the banks of the Green, drawing to it at family reunions goodness knows how many progeny by now.5

Caroline Tunstall wrote in the New York Herald Tribune Book Review the following evaluation:

Mrs. Giles has endowed her version of the American pastoral with warmth and charm. The real Logan and Clark, Harrod and Boone, the fictional David and Bethia and Judd are all clean-minted as story-book pictures. The meadows and mighty forests, the birds and beasts of the American wilderness are realized for sight and sound and smell. The familiar theme is winningly presented.6

Kirkus Reviews also evaluated the novel. "This has a certain authenticity," says that reviewing service, "but stockade characters and situations do little to civilize or glamorize this for easy entertainment."7

Booklist gave two short evaluations of The Kentuckians, the first listed under the heading "Fiction":

The first person telling plus a wealth of historical facts and details of pioneer life give the story such plausibility that it will appeal to those readers who prefer historical novels that give more fact than fiction.8

The second appraisal was under the section "Books for Young People":

7 Kirkus Reviews, 21:396, July 1, 1953.
8 Booklist, 50:13, September 1, 1953.
Because this reads more like biography than fiction, it may not be read for the story but for the information it gives about the period.  

Although there were mixed reactions to the novel, the general tone of the reviews was commendable.

II. **HANNAH FOWLER**

Only a few years after the Kentuckians build their first forts, Hannah Moore comes into the wilderness with her father Samuel. While Hannah hunts for bear meat one day to use as poultice for her father's axe wound, she meets Tice Fowler in the woods. He befriends her when her father dies and takes her to Logan's Fort with him where they are later married. Hannah and Tice homestead their land, build their cabin, and begin their family. During her second pregnancy, Hannah is captured by two marauding Indians and forced to kill one of them before escaping to find her way home to Tice and daughter Janie.

Hannah Fowler is the mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother of all the large Fowler family whose members populate most of the books of historical fiction by Janice Holt Giles. The author says the characterization is based largely on stories of Chinesy Giles, her husband's great-grandmother.

After the publication of *The Kentuckians* in 1956, many readers wrote Mrs. Giles requesting another frontier book, this time with a feminine central character. At the time the Giles' lived on their first ridge farm, once owned by Chinesy Giles. One day the author remarked

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9 *Booklist*, 50:14, September 1, 1953.

about the long rows of chestnut-rail fencing on the farm. Her father-in-law told her the rails had been split and the fences built by Chinesy Giles herself. The husband of Chinesy Giles, she was told, went away to the Mexican War. To his wife was left the man's work of plowing and planting. She plaited horse collars from corn husks; she made the children's shoes on the shoe last still in the family; and she built her own rock chimney for her home. Years later, when the author and her husband constructed their first chimney, one hearthstone from the chimney Chinesy Giles had built was reused. In many ways she did those things a man would have done, as Hannah Fowler does in the novel.\footnote{Giles, interview, 1968.}

The dissertation "Life and Times of Benjamin Logan" by Charles Gano Talbert was again largely basis for the historical research done by the author. The writer of this paper also compared the book form of Talbert's work, \textit{Benjamin Logan: Kentucky Frontiersman}, with the novel to determine the authenticity of the history the author presents.

\textbf{Critical Review as Historical Fiction}

The novel \textit{Hannah Fowler} will be evaluated by again citing those requirements of good historical fiction: truth, graphic power, consistent character portrayal, and sustained dramatic or human interest.

\textbf{Truth.} The true experiences of Daniel Boone are perhaps the most easily recognized happenings in \textit{Hannah Fowler}. Although Boone is never directly brought on stage in this book, his influence is felt and his moves are discussed. Boone's surrender to the Indians at Blue Lick, Kentucky, where he had gone with a party to make salt, is the most
controversial of his actions in the story. The neighbors of Hannah Fowler speculate over Boone's guilt or innocence. When charges of conspiring with the Indians are brought against him, he faces a courtmartial. Through her characters' conclusions, the author implies that his actions are honorable. So concludes historians as well as his fellow Kentuckians. The Dictionary of American Biography and the Encyclopedia Americana as well as Talbert's book, seem to support the account of Daniel Boone here. 12

Another important protagonist in the novel is the historical character Benjamin Logan, met once before in The Kentuckians. It is to Logan's Fort near present day Stanford, Kentucky, that Hannah is first taken by Tice Fowler. It is true that the fort was built in 1776, as Mrs. Giles says. So did Logan participate in the expedition led by Colonel John Bowman against the Shawnees at Chillicothe. The battle, in which Tice Fowler supposedly fought, is told faithfully as to times and happenings. It is hard to imagine that Tice was not there that certain May 27th when the Indian dogs set up their howl and the settlers shot the first suspicious warrior. The attack at Chillicothe saw Benjamin Logan as second in command under Bowman, as presented in the novel. 13

The national situation is shown through the conversation of the settlers. They talk of the war with the British and their nearly worthless paper money, but the atmosphere of the frontier is most apparent in small ways, such as the every-night chores of Hannah and Tice. The


historic timing of the author is accurate in many examples. The Carolina parakeet, once common in the United States, is seen by Tice and Hannah. Ann Logan dips soft soap for Hannah to use in washing up her first night at the fort. The reader senses the historic authenticity of the novel Hannah Fowler because the author has understood the day-to-day living on the frontier.

**Graphic power.** Graphically strong, Hannah Fowler is at times amusing, at times seriously gripping, and at all times readable. The smell of a frontier cabin and the quaintness of Hannah's world saturate the atmosphere of the book. The central character is introduced in the first line. From then on her private story is caught within the historical events of the settlers.

**Consistent character portrayal.** The people of Hannah's world are unlettered but clever frontiersmen. The central character herself epitomizes the strong pioneer woman, presenting perhaps the best character creation of the four books discussed in this paper. The practical, strong-willed Hannah is geared to living with nature. If her appearance is somewhat masculine, so is her personality for she was reared by her father. She is given to manish adventures, much as Chinesy Giles was—hunting, chopping wood, splitting rails, milking cows, plowing, or turning an axe handle. She is not complex. Enjoying a simple life as she does leads directly to her easy adaptation on the frontier. She can do whatever the occasion requires. She stoically applies hot rags to Samuel's wounds; although pregnant, she walks many miles with the Indians who

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capture her. Besides Chinesy Giles, the pioneer grandmothers of the author, who themselves homesteaded on a frontier, might have served as inspiration for the creation of Hannah, and the strain of individualism shown by the character is not unlike the personality of the author herself.

Samuel and Tice, the two fictitious men in Hannah's life, are similar, and from the first, she unconsciously compares the two. This comparison causes her proposal to Tice a few weeks later to seem realistic and contributes to her easy marital adjustment. The character of her husband is strong, but he does not have the dimension of Hannah's portrayal.

The historical character most admired by Hannah and Tice is Benjamin Logan. Through her depiction of the real pioneer it is apparent Mrs. Giles respects the history of the man greatly. It is true, as she presents in the book, that Logan was versatile, going from the role of settler to leader of the militia. (The author notes very few explorers made such transitions.)

The wife of Benjamin Logan, Ann, interacts with Hannah, turning her hand to help those who come and go from the fort. It is logical that Ann Logan was the practical person Mrs. Giles pictures, for she had to adjust to the discomfort and restrictions inside the stockade.

Shown more closely than the Logans are the real husband and wife, William and Jane Manifiee. Jane, like Hannah in the novel, overshadows her husband. She is an outspoken midwife, knowledgeable in an uneducated

way. It is true, says Talbert, that she had a salty tongue and was as capable of firing on the Indians as any man. Often she spoils a story told by her husband by inserting a comment into his tales. William is irked by her impatience, for he likes to mull over a story. These two secondary characters provide the comic relief in the novel and round out the social environment of Hannah's small world.

The characters of the two nameless Indians who capture Hannah contrast personally and physically. Growing up in the old Indian Territory of Oklahoma helped Mrs. Giles understand the traits of the Cherokee. As a girl she learned some of the language of that tribe and is herself one thirty-second Cherokee. As she depicts, they jealously guarded their hunting grounds, and it was true that they would buy white women for wives. Additional information was found by Mrs. Giles in anthropological studies from the Department of the Interior. She studied the Shawnee language book in order to depict the sound of the old Indian's speech. He was not as fierce on the surface as the Cherokee. Mrs. Giles believes he was typical, capable of inflicting pain with indifference, yet at times compassionate.

The author did not consciously set out to make the Indians different. Intuitively she decided to use the Cherokee. She wanted to create an urgent situation for Hannah which would incite her to do something nearly beyond endurance. To have one of the Indians buy Hannah from the other for his wife was an effective way to create that urgency; hence, the second Indian became a Cherokee.

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16 Talbert, op. cit., p. 37.
17 Giles, interview, 1968.
The actions of the characters in Hannah Fowler arise naturally from their personalities and situations, and they consistently speak in the vernacular of the uneducated wilderness people. Tice and Hannah and Samuel seem no less real than those characters from the novel a reader might find in books of history.

**Sustained dramatic and human interest.** Hannah Fowler achieves a high interest level because the drama is lived through the central character. At times the reader suspects what lies ahead from clues laid by the author. For example, the bad omen of the crows in the woods leads one to expect Samuel's death, but the reader is unprepared, as is Hannah, for her encounter with the Indians. The scene in which she senses their presence in her home is stealthily told. The realization creeps upon the reader as it does Hannah. This part of the story is not based on a similar experience by Chinesy Giles although many Indian captures in Kentucky are a matter of record.  

Each step Hannah takes on the long march seems immediate to the reader, and even the description of her killing the Shawnee is neither underplayed nor exaggerated.

**Survey of Reviews**

A summary of the entire plot of Hannah Fowler is given in the New York Times Book Review by Charlotte Capers. An excerpt from that evaluation is presented in the annotation below:

Janice Holt Giles has apparently steeped herself in the letters, journals and account books of the Kentucky pioneers. The vernacular of her characters rings as true as Hannah's axe. Devotees of early Americana will be fascinated with accounts of life in the Kentucky

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18 Giles, interview, 1968.
country in the days of Daniel Boone. Contemporary patriots who prefer to look backward to the cultivated society of Eighteenth Century Williamsburg will do well to look farther west, to the wild country that was won by unlettered Americans such as these.

The evaluation in the Saturday Review had the following to say:

Most of the action--building, planting, nursing, molding bullets--is seen through the eyes of sturdy Hannah, whose unsettling experiences include an abduction by Indians. Mrs. Giles ... recreates early Americana in engrossing fashion.

When Hannah Fowler was reviewed in the Library Journal, it was highly recommended.

With little space given to captivity, Mrs. Giles devotes her attention to providing pioneering atmosphere and warm personalities ... and a tender ending. Historic heroes of the period influence the plot but are not actors. Highly recommended.

The Horn Book says, "The backwoods dialect will seem difficult to some readers but girls who accept it will find this a sturdy, un glamorized, but holding pioneer novel."

Booklist also praises this piece of historical fiction.

The raising of a cabin on Tice's stand, their fight against cold, famine, and wolves during a severe winter, the birth of their first child, and Hannah's escape from marauding Indians are described with restrained sentiment, convincing simplicity, and a wealth of authentic detail.

The final review given here is from Kirkus Reviews.

A dependable, durable, rather than romantic reworking of incidents within the familiar frame of this period--this is largely for women.

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23 Booklist, 52:311, April 1, 1956.
The evaluation of Hannah Fowler by the majority of reviewing sources was complimentary.

III. THE BELIEVERS

In the early Nineteenth Century the Believers, commonly known as the Shakers, established a colony in South Union, Kentucky. Rebecca Fowler, daughter of Hannah, follows her husband Richard, son of David Cooper, into the religious sect after his conversion. The plot of the book involves the Shaker belief in community property, celibacy, and their strange manner of worship. While Richard hardens into fanatic dedication, Rebecca comes into a maturity of her own. She enjoys the children she teaches, especially Sabrina, a young girl frustrated by the restrictions of the sect. After Sabrina's suicide Rebecca divorces Richard (under an early Kentucky law), and marries Stephen Burke, a non-Shaker who leaves the mission with her.

Although this was not the last novel written in the Kentucky series, its historical time is the latest of the four books discussed in this chapter. The early frontier element is not as prominent in this book, but it is related to the two preceding novels by the descendants of the two fictionalized families.

In preparing to write the novel, Mrs. Giles visited Pleasant Hill and South Union, both near her home and both once occupied by the Shaker sect. In both places the brick buildings stand after more than 150 years have passed. The double-front doors are there as permanent symbols of celibacy. Besides these sites, the author studied the primary sources still in existence. In the Kentucky Building Library at Western Kentucky
State College, Bowling Green, she found journals and diaries kept by officials as Family records. The record of the elder or eldress showed the major happenings of the day. Eldress Molly, one character used in The Believers, kept a journal as well as a diary. Both are preserved now in the Kentucky Building Library.

The author tried to imagine the feelings of a person reluctantly following her spouse into the Shaker colony. It was clear to her the book should be told from a woman's point of view. In the early Nineteenth Century the man most often made the family decisions, and most often it was he who first converted to the Shakers. The woman merely followed his example, as did Rebecca in the novel. 25

Critical Review as Historical Fiction

As in the discussion of the two previous novels, the requisites of historical fiction will be used in evaluating The Believers. Those requirements: truth, graphic power, consistent character portrayal, and sustained dramatic and human interest, are discussed below.

Truth. By the time she wrote this book, Mrs. Giles was able to marry fact to fiction smoothly. There seems to be nothing synthetic in the novel. The daily life in South Union is lucid, and the world of the central character is three-dimensional. The reader sees many historical aspects in Rebecca's life: the two-story houses; the austere sleeping rooms; the prescribed fashion of dress; the rotating duties of work; the dairy; the garden and mill; and the communistic kitchen.

Reference is made to religious hierarchy coming from New York

where Mother Ann first established the church in America. This is as happened. The theology of the millennial church with dual heads can be learned from the novel. The principle of celibacy is perhaps one of the best known facts of the Shakers. Other well known habits were the strange mode of worship—dancing or shaking, spontaneous singing, "speaking with tongues," falling into trances, and such ecstatic behaviour. Their dancing was done according to notated formations. This fact was learned by Mrs. Giles from the old Shaker music books. The shaking began with the fingers and moved up into the shoulders, but the frenzy of the emotional exercise led to discipline problems, believes the author. Backsliding, according to her research, was called "fleshing off" and couples who saw each other privately were disciplined by the heads of the sect. Some were tried in the church court; some were expelled from the group; but other couples, like Stephen and Rebecca, left voluntarily.

It is true that the earthquake which occurred in 1811 was felt by the Shaker village, for Mrs. Giles found mention of it in several sources. In order to depict life in South Union that particular year, the phenomenon had to be incorporated into the plot. Also historically sound is the circumstance of Rebecca's divorce, for it reflects early Kentucky state law. According to the research of the author, the first divorce in Kentucky was granted to a woman on the grounds that her husband was a Shaker.


27 Giles, interview, 1968.
There is evidence that Mrs. Giles collected thorough information about the Believers in order to re-create Rebecca's life in South Union as it really might have been. The writer of this paper found no contradictions in historical facts as presented by Mrs. Giles when compared to information in the World Book Encyclopedia and the Encyclopedia Britannica.

**Graphic power.** The account of the central character seems to be lifted from a real Shaker diary, as Rebecca implies in the story. The pain of losing her husband and the gradual change in him is artfully told. The sense of place is strong. Graphically described is the night of the earthquake. As Rebecca awakens, the reader is given a quiet foreboding of the event—"there was that scurrying sound, like a rat scratching behind the walls."\(^{28}\)

Through the description of the scene many facets of the senses are brought to the reader's experience—feeling—the first tremblings awakened Rebecca; sight—the dresses swayed on the pegs on the wall; sound—the noise of the quake and the prattle of the women. In the historical happening the author does not forget that it was the middle of winter. Rebecca felt the cold as the Family gathered in the lower floor without heat or light.

**Consistent character portrayal.** In a merger between the two fictional families of Hannah Fowler and David Cooper, Richard and Rebecca are married after many years of their young courtship. Rebecca has some of the strength and practicality of her mother Hannah, but her infatuation for Richard comes to direct her life. The character of Richard is obstinate and too serious-minded. Not even his father David can persuade him

to change his mind once he is set on a course. The author does not say to whom she owes the inspiration for either of the characterizations, but they seem to reflect real people. Rebecca's story, told as she muses over her diary, might be a talk with the neighbor next door. Her print of identity is indelible. Richard also is individuated. Up to this point, he seems to be the strongest male character created by Giles. A sensitive boy, he is moved by the Great Revival which preceeded the Believers. Once inside the emotional sect, he hardens to fanaticism. The author deliberately set out to make Richard become an unlikeable person, so that the reader's sympathies would be with Rebecca when she found a new love. 29

Seen again in this novel are characters from the two earlier books. In The Believers Hannah Fowler, older but still down-to-earth, does not understand her coquettish daughter Janie. (This daughter was born near the end of the book Hannah Fowler.) Janie is avant-garde and vain, but she is credibly portrayed. She is the best friend as well as sister to Rebecca until Permilla is introduced in the story. Enduring the silent meals and work duties with Rebecca, Permilla is earthy and uncomplicated. On the other hand, Jency is nonsensical and very complicated. The daughter of the slave Cassy, Jency is forever a child, flighty and illogical, yet given to keen observations at times. Through her concern for Jency, another facet of Rebecca's personality is revealed.

The persons of Brother Benjamin, Brother Rankin, and Sister Molly are historical, as Mrs. Giles declares in her foreward to the novel. 30

29 Giles, interview, 1968.

30 Giles, The Believers, p. vii.
They are respectfully re-created. Brother Rankin is the most prominent of the three in the story. It is through his influence that Richard is led into the body of the Great Revival on Gaspar River then later into the society of the Shakers. The author is careful to show Brother Rankin as a family friend, so that Richard's conversion seems logical.

The earthquake scene reveals character insight as perhaps no other instance in the book does. Viney complains, Permilla jokes, Sister Priscilla frets incoherently, and Richard and Rebecca flee to each other of habit until Richard remembers himself. At this time and generally through the book, the dominant psychological strain of each character is portrayed.

Sustained dramatic and human interest. Rebecca's private story is engrossing over and above the story of the Believers. There are many lesser lines of action which move in and out of the reader's attention. Jency's life is a subplot as are the stories of Sabrina and Annie. All lines come together appropriately however, and enrich the book.

Survey of Reviews

Several sources reviewed The Believers, most often the reaction being a mixture of praise and criticism. The only summation in total praise for the book was that of the Library Journal by Francis Alter Boyle:

Careful, sympathetic portrayal of the devoted Shakers. Good novel, heartily recommended because of fresh material well used. 31

Some evaluations compared this novel with Hannah Fowler. One such

comparison is given by Charlotte Capers in the *New York Times Book Review*:

The author deals gently with the Shakers who had much to recommend them. She questions only their fanaticism, never the goodness of the best of them. Her story, simply and skillfully told, is absorbing reading for those who are interested in off-brand religious sects and their influence on American life. But for devotees of Hannah Fowler’s frontier at its most rampaging, Rebecca and the Shakers may be a lukewarm dish of tea.32

Another comparison is given in the *Saturday Review* by S.P. Mansten:

Although this does not have the impact of Mrs. Giles’ previous frontier novel 'Hannah Fowler', the subject itself is intriguing.

The *Chicago Sunday Tribune* gave a lengthy comment by August Derleth on the narrative style of the book:

The story is soberly told, in a straight-forward manner, more like a memoir than a fiction, as if Rebecca had determined to sit down and tell it all in an intimate letter to her folks. This device has manifest drawbacks—the even tone of the novel does not permit the heightening of climaxes or crises, suicide and death are dealt with on exactly the same plane as descriptive passages and dialog is muted. But the effect of the whole is remarkably felicitious.34

From *Booklist* came the following annotation:

The first person narrative which gives a fair, authentic and detailed picture of Shaker beliefs and ways, will appeal mainly to women readers.35

In agreement with this appraisal is that of *Kirkus Reviews*:

Combines a personal story with the authentic facts of life within the rigid restraints of a Shaker sect and the great wrongs committed in its name ... a steady, sturdy and forthright period novel--for

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34 *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, March 10, 1957, p. 4.

the market,—women rather than men—and rentals rather than sales—she has established. 36

Although this researcher believes The Believers to be the second strongest book in the Kentucky series, the general reaction from professional reviewers is moderate praise.

IV. THE LAND BEYOND THE MOUNTAINS

The fourth novel of historical fiction describes the area of Kentucky during the statehood period. Cassius Cartwright, a well-educated man of wealth, is unhappily married but plays the public role of political and business leader. The historic General James Wilkinson, friend of Cartwright's, who served America well in the Revolutionary War, later betrays his country for the favor of Spain. Because of his persuasive personality many people, including prominent statesmen, do not know his true motives. The struggle to become a state of the Union as opposed to a territory of Spain is decided by a very few men who challenge Wilkinson in the late general assemblies. Similarly, Cartwright's private problems are resolved. After the tragedy of his first wife, he marries Tattie, his ward, whom he has come to love.

The research done by Mrs. Giles for The Land Beyond the Mountains was based largely on the Memoirs of James Wilkinson and the dissertation "Wilkinson and Separatism" by Percy Willis Christian at Western Kentucky State College, Bowling Green. "The Life and Times of Benjamin Logan" by Charles Gano Talbert was again consulted by Mrs. Giles to determine the

36Kirkus Reviews, 24:878, December 1, 1956.
general historical climate during the statehood crisis. To substantiate the element of history in the novel, the writer of this paper also consulted once again Talbert's book, *Benjamin Logan: Kentucky Frontiersman*. The book, *A History of Kentucky* by Thomas D. Clark was also a valuable help in analyzing the historical content of *The Land Beyond the Mountains*.

Although Cartwright's Mill of the novel is a fictitious place, Mrs. Giles has said that she had Spout Springs Branch in mind when she wrote the book. Her place of residence seems to have orientated the author as she wrote her story.

**Critical Review as Historical Fiction**

In assessing the quality of this novel, those requirements of sound historical fiction discussed in Chapter II have again been cited. Truth, graphic power, consistent character portrayal, and sustained dramatic and human interest are discussed below:

**Truth.** Most of the historical events cueing into *The Land Beyond the Mountains* concern Kentucky coming of age as an independent state. The post Revolutionary War period in the area, then part of Virginia, was a time of political manipulation. In the center of these activities was General James Wilkinson. The instances of his expediency as shown in the novel are true. For example, after appearing to befriend Kentucky in the first important conventions called to determine the future of the territory, Wilkinson made a political move. He went to New Orleans with a

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cargo of tobacco at the very time the Spanish had closed the Mississippi to western usage. The General realized his selling success down the river would encourage the settlers to dicker with Spain. Unknown to Cartwright who helped finance the trip, Wilkinson had made an agreement with Esteban Miró, Spanish governor of Louisiana. He was to obtain free use of the Mississippi while in exchange, delivering the area of Kentucky into Spanish control.\textsuperscript{38} Another example of the duplicity of the General was a particular address to the Virginia Assembly threatening total separation by Kentucky from the Union. At the same time allegedly the same document was distributed in Kentucky, but the second document spoke only of Virginia's unreasonable taxation and failure to support the settlers against Indian attack. Many other examples of Wilkinson's guile is illustrated responsibly throughout the novel.

Other documented happenings are part of the plot of the novel. John Jay's proposal to agree to a twenty-five to thirty-year restriction upon the use of the Mississippi, precluding a treaty with Spain, set the Kentuckians into immediate protest.\textsuperscript{39} This is so presented. Over and above the historic conventions and talks of statehood however, life in The Land Beyond the Mountains involved personal trivia, as in the case of the mail-order brides. There was a boat of women brought down the Ohio River from Philadelphia as was Tattie, according to the research of the author. Men who wanted a wife paid her fare and a profit to the

\textsuperscript{38} Talbert, op. cit., pp. 232-33.

boatsman. Through the bawdiness of the men who waited in Louisville, Mrs. Giles depicts the roughness of the frontier men.

After careful comparison with sources of history, The Land Beyond the Mountains showed no distortions of known facts. Again Mrs. Giles seems to have understood thoroughly her historical period and the characteristics of public and private life.

Graphic power. The story line of the novel is clean and realistic. Especially graphic is the homecoming scene when Cartwright brings Rachel to the settlement for the first time. Nearly every character in the book comes face to face with him and his new bride. In his exuberance the enthusiasm for her settlement pours over, but Rachel sits in silence. The reader can almost surmise from her inaptitude at first that she will not adjust to the frontier. Tattie spits at her; Mag talks of mating her pig; then the whole settlement stands embarrassed for their wild welcome. The over-all style of the novel is crisp and easy-to-read though sometimes salty with frontier conversation.

Consistent character portrayal. The central character of The Land Beyond the Mountains is entirely unlike any other personality originated by the author up to this time. Cartwright possessed a degree of sophistication completely foreign to Tice and Hannah Fowler or David Cooper. Although the type of person was new, the author handled the creation proficiently. The reader sees Cartwright as the refined gentleman friend of General Wilkinson; he also sees the character struck with pity at Rachel's dilemma or Tattie's poverty.

40 Giles, interview, 1968.
Similar in background to Cartwright was the historical character of General James Wilkinson. The scoundrel who maneuvered people by his facile tongue had military proficiency and boldness. At times he was honestly concerned with other people, but more often he was selfish. If Cartwright was dignified in manner, Wilkinson was more so. His flowery speech had the sound of an Eighteenth-Century journal. His conversation was lyrical. One critic has said that Mrs. Giles writes with a poet's sense of rhythm, and in the phrasing of the General's conversation, this seems true.41 Thomas D. Clark, author of A History of Kentucky, describes Wilkinson as a man of "fine address, sound talent, exceedingly industrious and wholly unscrupulous."42 The understanding that Mrs. Giles had of the man as she portrayed him seems to have been much the same. She re-creates him into a likeable charleton, as much an enigma to the reader of the novel as the real Wilkinson must have been to his contemporaries. According to information given by the author, the archives of Spain contain much material on the American frontier era; among other reports are those of Wilkinson.43

Many real statesmen, such as Benjamin Sebastian, Harry Innes, Colonel Humphrey Marshall, and George Muter, met with Wilkinson at the conventions in Danville. Through realistic details as to time, place, and even weather, the characters have been committed in the novel to their

42Clark, op. cit., p. 81.
43Giles, interview, 1968.
true roles in history.  

The fictitious people in *The Land Beyond the Mountains* were as numerous and as contrasting as the historical characters in the book. Tattie and Rachel, the two loves of Cartwright's life, were very different. Although uncouth and violent, Tattie was more adaptable to frontier living. Rachel, on the other hand, was an idealist forever in love with her first husband. Perhaps her most beautiful trait was her Quaker speech. That trait alone set her apart from the wild settlement where she had come to live, and her thinking was as different as her language. The characters of both the women might best be reflected in Tattie's insult thrown at Cartwright about his wife:

... and I will not stay in this house with that mealy-mouthed white-faced rag of a woman you've brought home as your wife.\(^4\)

Jeremy, the settlement teacher, was the close friend of Cartwright. According to the research of Mrs. Giles, Kentucky had many traveling teachers such as Jeremy in the early days. A school was begun at Harrodsburg by a teacher almost as soon as the first settlers came. Their teaching tools were a few of the Shakespeare plays, the Bible, a book of history, and perhaps a book on algebra or calculus, much as Jeremy's were.\(^5\) If there was a fault in the portrayal of this character it was that he was too wise, too patient.


\(^5\) Giles, *The Land Beyond the Mountains*, p. 162.

\(^6\) Giles, interview, 1968.
The evaluation of characterizations would not be complete without discussing one person who never existed in the book. Edward Cabot was deceased at the inception of the story, but his foolhardy actions led to the misery and death of two of his relatives. He was not prepared for wilderness living, nor would he be advised by older settlers who tried to warn him. Because of his misguided intents, his ghost haunted his widow and caused her to destroy herself. But like the other real and fictional characters who lived in The Land Beyond the Mountains her act reflects sound psychology.

Sustained dramatic and human interest. The logical plot of this novel holds the reader's interest. The proverbial If is likely to grieve the reader. If Cabot had not come to Kentucky, he would not have died untimely by Indian attack; Cartwright would not have delivered the notice to his widow; he would not have come to feel pity and love for her; he would not have then married her and brought her into the wilderness where she died. The chain of circumstances causes a line of frustration, yet all events have reason to follow another.

Survey of Reviews

The evaluations of The Land Beyond the Mountains selected from reviewing periodicals was, on the whole, favorable. Kirkus Reviews had the following to say:

A sturdy fabric of historical and pioneer period detail, a solid narrative should assure the market of the earlier books.47

A longer appraisal from Library Journal was in agreement:

47Kirkus Reviews, 26:673, September 1, 1958.
Mrs. Giles tells the story of the ambitious, intriguing Wilkinson, and the defeat of his treacherous scheme with dramatic effectiveness. She also creates with warmth and equal dramatic tension the lives of her fictional characters, Cassius Cartwright and the men, women and children at his settlement near what is now Frankfort, Kentucky. Recommended for the general public for its attractive rendering of history, as well as its sustained interest as a story.48

The annotation from Saturday Review was also in praise of the book:

Characterization is excellent, and the background and flavor of the times are given with an intriguing mixture of feminine sensitivity and male saltiness. 'The Land Beyond the Mountains' is an entertaining book as well as an historically valid statement of the author's faith in the essential decency and worth of man.49

Henry Cavendish said in the Chicago Sunday Tribune Book Review:

"Under the author's handling, the grandeur of the Kentucky background comes alive."50 A similar short annotation from Booklist said, "a sturdy and believable reconstruction."51

In general The Land Beyond the Mountains received favorable evaluations from reviewing sources. From the standpoint of the survey of reviews, the book was as highly praised as any in the series of the Kentucky frontier.

51Booklist, 55:416, April 1, 1959.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

I. SUMMARY

It has been the purpose of this study to present (1) a biographical sketch of the novelist Janice Holt Giles as seen through her two books of nonfiction and two interviews with the author, (2) to evaluate the Kentucky historical novels written by Mrs. Giles in terms of the requirements for historical fiction discussed in Chapter II, and (3) to present a survey of the reviews of those novels.

The first major section of this thesis discusses the requirements for sound historical fiction. Those elements—truth, graphic power, consistent character portrayal, and sustained dramatic and human interest, as set down by Helen Haines in her work Living With Books, have been used in measuring each work.

The second chapter of this paper is a biographical sketch of the author. From the strong family ties of a happy childhood in Oklahoma and Arkansas, Janice Holt developed a vigorous philosophy of self-reliance. Without exception, in every book she has written, this quality is seen in the central characterization. The home influence of school-teacher parents fond of learning and stories and music gave the young woman a strong incentive to read avidly, among other subjects, history. Because she was prepared genetically and academically to love music, she credits this pleasure with the strong sense of pace and sound in her books. Outdoor experiences of play and camping were also part of her life. From
her early observation of nature, the terrain and topography of her frontier setting is strong and real. Her own present Kentucky residence seems to have been in mind when the frontier novels were written.

The final part of this study is the actual assessment of the four novels within the scope of this paper. Information given by the author in personal interviews on the researching and writing of each book is presented in the introduction to the discussion of that book or is included in the evaluation itself.

II. CONCLUSIONS

Janice Holt Giles planned to have a life-long work on historical fiction when she wrote even the first of her series. It was part of her farsightedness to originate a few families of fictitious characters in Kentucky: the Fowlers, the Coopers, and the Cartwrights, and then to continue the series by moving the progeny of these families west. Her most emphatic intent has been to write history. That history was to be included within the framework of an interesting story acceptable to a broad audience. Since her books have been widely received, she believes they have met her objectives.

The Kentuckians were David Cooper, his love Bethia, Daniel Boone, Ben Logan, and other first explorers who settled the Kentucky wilderness. By mixing fictional and real people, fictitious and actual incidences, Mrs. Giles paints one period of time important in the western expansion of America. Besides a breadth of frontier history readings, the author particularly leaned heavily on the research of Charles Gano Talbert in his dissertation "The Life and Times of Benjamin Logan." The truthful
reporting of social conditions and private lives is religiously delivered by Mrs. Giles, graphically strong and readable. The real Colonel Henderson of the Transylvania Company saw the monetary potential of the new country, and his greed caused the major conflict in the novel. The minor appearance of the Indians alone promise much for a first piece of historical fiction; however, character portrayal is not as well drawn as the author is able to do in the later books. Most reviewing sources praised The Kentuckians, emphasizing authenticity of the book's history.

The second book of the series is thought to be the strongest of all. The central character of Hannah Fowler is based largely on Chinesy Giles, the great-grandmother of the author's husband. Supplemetalming the story of this ancestor, Mrs. Giles again found much useful information in Talbert's work. Upon comparing Mrs. Giles' interpretation of the roles of Daniel Boone and Benjamin Logan and the Bowman Expedition, it was found that the historical facts are accurately given. Characters are full-rounded and credible, consistent in their creation and consistent with known facts. Her players in the story are involved in significant historical events, and the author has managed a high-interest level. The survey of reviews showed nearly all favorable evaluations.

The life of Rebecca Fowler, daughter of Hannah, is reported via her diary in The Believers. Her private story is mostly of her emotional conflicts in loving her Shaker husband. South Union, Kentucky, site of the old church was visited by the author as well as another restored site, Pleasant Hill, Kentucky. Both are near Mrs. Giles' home. From diaries and journals once kept by elders and elderesses, drama of the colony life was gleaned and resuscitated. As clear as Rebecca's turmoil are the
theological principles and church structure. Subplots are important in this story. The creations of Richard, the fanatical husband and Jency, the flighty slave are outstanding in their psychological make-up. Never is the story slow. Sight, sound, austere surroundings, dances of worship, and silent meals leap to life from Rebecca's diary. Perhaps with this novel more than any other in the series, one senses the story is real. However, reviewers voiced mixed praise and criticism of the novel.

The Land Beyond the Mountains is still Kentucky in old Lincoln County. The newest element in this last book of the series is the fresh types of characters introduced. Besides the ordinary frontiersmen, there were the central personage of Cassius Cartwright, rich and gentlemanly; his destined second wife, Tattie the guttersnipe; and his first love, a former Quaker, Rachel. The line of action makes up a clean, sound plot. Cartwright's business life is seen in his friendship with General James Wilkinson, a fascinating rogue. The authority for the creation of this man was based largely on the research of Percy Willis Christian in his dissertation "Wilkinson and Separatism." Dialogue is smoothly written. Wilkinson's speech as well as manner contrasts to fellow frontiersmen; so does Rachel's lyrical dialect and the harsh vocabulary of Tattie. Reviews searched were all commending.

In each book Mrs. Giles adequately meets the requirements of good historical fiction: (1) truth--After comparing her works with several sources of history, the writer of this paper found strong evidence of thorough research on the part of the author. (2) graphic power--The capacity of the author to describe vividly causes the reader to live again the frontier era. Her sense of place is strong, and she convinces
the reader that her story is now in the immediate present. (3) consistent character portrayal—The real and fictional characters in Mrs. Giles' books are well-rounded with distinct identities. (4) sustained dramatic and human interest—A common trait of any book by Mrs. Giles is the readable, easy style which introduces the line of action immediately and holds the interest of her audience until the final page.

The importance of the writing of Janice Holt Giles lies in her contribution to regional literature. The territory covered in the four historical novels discussed in this paper is the rather central area of early Kentucky. However, the books on frontier Kentucky are but a part of the series which describe the expansion of American settlement. Much of her books of regional writing are set in the western states as well.

Suggestions for subjects of further research might include the following: (1) the historical fiction written by Mrs. Giles set in the West: Johnny Osage, Voyage to Santa Fe, Savanna, and The Great Adventure, (2) The Plum Thicket, a book of fiction written by Mrs. Giles, greatly unlike any of her other books, (3) the four contemporary books on Appalachia: The Enduring Hills, Tara's Healing, Miss Willie, and Shady Grove, or (4) a comparison of the works of Mrs. Giles with those of other historical fiction writers.
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APPENDIX A

COPIES OF LETTERS TO AND FROM JANICE HOLT GILES

Waynesburg, Kentucky
July 12, 1967

Mrs. Janice Holt Giles
Knifley, Kentucky

Dear Mrs. Giles:

I believe I have read every book you have ever written. I enjoy your work not only because I am a native South-central Kentuckian, but because I think you write a sound novel.

Presently I am a graduate student at The University of Tennessee, working toward a Master's degree in library service. I would like to do for my thesis requirement a bio-bibliography of your life and works. I wondered if it might be possible for me to come to your home sometimes during the summer for a personal interview. I shall be visiting my parents at the above address the week of July 23rd through July 29th. Any day during that time I could come or any weekend which might be convenient to you.

Respectfully yours,

Florence W. Plemmons
Mrs. Florence W. Plemmons  
Waynesburg  
Kentucky  

Dear Mrs. Plemmons:

I can see you on Thursday, July 27th, at 1:00 P.M. We are very torn up preparing to move our house out of the reservoir area. My daughter is visiting me and we are in the middle of packing books, pictures, china and so forth, and I am also trying to get ready to make a trip west with her. I don't have a free weekend, therefore, but I can set aside Thursday afternoon.

Sincerely yours,

Janice H. Giles
264 East Drive
Oak Ridge, Tennessee 37830
May 24, 1968

Dear Mrs. Giles:

Other points have come up in my paper, and I am here to ask your help again. My thesis committee members believe that the paper will make more of an original contribution if I draw in depth the relationship between you, your research, and your literature. I can see that this would result in a more interesting paper. An example of the type of information I need now would be the facts such as you told me about Chinesy Giles, an inspiration for Hannah Fowler.

I have been at work on a set of questions I would like to present to you along this line. I will try to formulate the questions with care so that it will be more expedient for both of us.

I can come to see you in Kentucky nearly any weekend in the near future. But if you would prefer to reply to the questions by letter, that too would be satisfactory, of course.

I remember that you told me you save your summers for matters other than writing. Do you plan to go west again this summer? If so, how soon?

I would appreciate your further cooperation. Of course, I shall be grateful for your help thus far.

Sincerely yours,

Florence W. Plemmons
Dear Mrs. Plemmons:

If you can drive up Sunday afternoon, June 9, we can discuss some of the questions you have in mind. After that I have no free Sunday until August. And since I am working I have no free time during the week until the book is finished, which probably won't be until August either.

I shan't be traveling this summer. I plan to go to Oklahoma in October for a three or four month period of study.

Unless I hear from you to the contrary, I will keep the 9th open for you.

Sincerely,

Janice H. Giles
APPENDIX B

SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ASKED THE AUTHOR
PERTAINING TO THE KENTUCKY FRONTIER SERIES

1. Did you know when you wrote the first book of historical fiction that there was to be a series?

2. How does an idea begin for a book?

3. Generally how long does it take for you to complete one novel?

4. Is it difficult to write from a man's point of view?

5. The introduction to each of your books is always different. Is this deliberately done?

6. Do you believe the fiction in your historical novels must be more important than the history?

7. Aside from your past reading on historical movements, do you do additional research?

8. How did you learn the details of building a log house?

9. Who was the third fictional character in The Kentuckians besides David and Bethia?

10. How did you research the languages of the two Indians in the book Hannah Fowler?

11. Did Chinesy Giles have an Indian capture?

12. Did she live near the area of Logan's Fort?

13. Where did you learn the details of weaving and fire building?

14. Cassius Cartwright is the more gentlemanly of your pioneer characters. Was he drawn thusly in order to make possible the development of James Wilkinson's character through the association with Cartwright?

15. Did you accidentally uncover a lead on the historical James Wilkinson, or did you deliberately set out to research him?
16. In The Believers you brought the negro slaves into the foreground of the story for the first time. Did you know negro servants when you were younger?

17. Did you find any note of the first divorce granted to a nonbeliever in the Shaker society?

18. Were there diaries such as Rebecca supposedly kept and later consulted in telling the story of The Believers?

19. Did you find evidence of people who did not fit into the Shaker society? Were there details of members leaving?

20. Was there a prototype for Miss Willie?
VITA

Florence Williams Plemmons was born near Waynesburg, Kentucky, on February 2, 1936. She attended elementary school in Casey County, Kentucky, and was graduated from Middleburg High School in 1954. The following September she entered Berea College, and in June, 1958, she received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English.

She entered the Graduate School at The University of Tennessee in March, 1966, and received a Master of Science degree with a major in Library Service in June, 1969.

She is married to William Lawrence Plemmons of St. Petersburg, Florida.