Mountain's legacy of moonshining dying out

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SYLVA – The romantic – and stereotypical – days of the mountaineer working at his clean, copper still deep in the Appalachian woods are virtually over.

Old-timers with the knowledge to make moonshine are dying out, and other drugs _ legal and illegal -have taken the legendary beverage's place, both for consumption and production.

Yet stories about moonshiners and the revenuers who chased them linger like a hangover throughout the region, and white lightnin' remains an inseparable part of Western North Carolina culture, folklore and myth.

Long before Western North Carolina counties were "wet" enough to serve mixed drinks or host ABC stores, there were those who toiled in the woods to make their own liquor from corn mash and spring water.

Like almost any industry, whiskey-making has had its boom and bust periods. During the 1930s, Prohibition and the Great Depression sent mountain dwellers deep into the woods to churn out thousands of gallons of illegal liquor to satisfy thirsty customers and to put food on their tables.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the trade boomed again, as law enforcement agents busted 684 stills in North Carolina in 1967, and tore down another 755 stills in 1972.

But by the mid-1970s and into the 1980s, a complex set of factors conspired to make moonshining less appealing and less profitable. Sugar, a common ingredient in corn liquor, skyrocketed in price. Legal liquor became easier to get and traditional, home-

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Local woman raises 22 children

She easily recalls accomplishments, but not all the birthdays

By Jeri Young
THE CHARLOTTE POST

PHOTO/SUE ANN JOHNSON

Nancy Harrison points out children in family portrait, displayed above wooden family plaque.

Hanging on the wall of Nancy Harrison's living room in Hidden Valley is a small family tree done by her son, Gilbert.

It is a simple wooden plaque, with colored gems for each of her children.

Twenty-two gems in all.

"Child, don't even ask me how many grandchildren I have," she says, then laughs. "Seems like two or three new ones come along every year."

As close as her son Alfred, pastor of Fellowship in Christ Christian Center on the Plaza, and her granddaughter, Nelta, can figure, Harrison, 82, has at least 90 grandchildren and more than 200 great-grands.

She is the first to admit her memory is not what it used to be. The birthdays of her children and even the year she married have faded, but Harrison still remembers the accomplishments of her 18 living offspring.

A daughter, Alice, earned her doctorate, and is a school principal in Virginia. Her son Wilbert, a '60s crooner, is responsible for the hit "Kansas City." A son, Gilbert, is a prominent Los Angeles banker. Another son Johnny is a South Carolina postmaster. All of her children are hard-working, she says, musically inclined and most importantly, rooted in the church.

"I feel good about my children way deep down in my soul," she says. "Never knowed any to sell drugs, or get tangled up with the law. Ain't never been on welfare. I don't owe the state nothing."

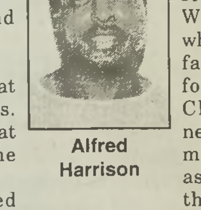
Harrison credits her children's success to hard work.

"All my children started working for their father when they were about nine," she says. "I would save their little money for shoes, clothes, things like that."

Their father, James William Harrison, who died in 1985, was an employee of H.L Keller, a local realtor. He and the older children carried coal to apartments, patched roofs, cut grass and trimmed hedges and washed windows, while Harrison stayed home and tended the younger children.

"I remember carrying coal up and down stairs and getting a bologna sandwich and a glass of water," says Alfred, 46. "That was pay."

Born in Chester, S.C., Harrison moved to Charlotte as a youngster and at 13 joined the United House of Prayer. Pictures of Daddy Grace, the flamboyant founder of the church, adorn her walls. Harrison was among the first to join the first church, located at the corner of Third and Caldwell in 1926. She and her future husband, a widower with three children – Dorothy, Wilbert and Matilda – met there.



Alfred Harrison

"I guess it was love at first sight," she says. "Others were looking at him, but I was the main one."

They were married around 1930. Times were hard. Segregation and poverty were rampant in the South. but somehow, the Harrisons always had enough.

"Daddy didn't take no mess off whites," said Alfred.

"He worked hard and was respected," said Harrison, "We got along."

The Harrisons' first home was in the Greenville community on Oliver Street.

"It was nice back then. Had nice houses," said Harrison. "We had a long porch. We turned half of it into a bedroom. They tore down our house and the old Fairview School."

From Greenville, the Harrisons moved to Cummings Street. It was there they began a second family.

They took in foster children – 12 in all.

"Betty Love from social services was so nice," Harrison said. "She helped me. My foster children still come see me. One has a daugter and is buying a home."

They finally moved to a larger house in Hidden Valley in 1971. It was there that William died and where all of Harrison's family mementoes found a place. Clippings from her nephew, musician and minister John P. Kee, as well as portraits of the children that proceded her death. The twins that died in their 20s and early 30s. The son who died of a heart attack at the age of 15 as well as Wilbert, who died two years ago.

Harrison, however, focuses on her surviving children and helping others. She volunteers around town and she and Alfred make an annual trek to Cherokee County to take clothing and toys to the Native American reservations for orphaned children.

She has ideas about what today's parents need to do to raise healthy children.

Spend time with your children she advises. Stay at home if you can.

"Don't worry if you don't have the best car or clothes." she admonishes. "I always had a hot meal for my children. They learn better that way."

Stay away from rap music.

"That stuff makes my head hurt, and it doesn't make any sense," she adds.

And punish them.

"If you have common sense, you aren't going to break their arms and legs," she says. "But children do need a firm hand."

Harrison only worked outside of her home for four years in the late '60s.

"I worked in the cafeteria at West Charlotte (High School)," she says. "I started out cooking. I put fat meat in the beans and greens. They told me I was going to get everyone fired, so they put me to making sandwiches. But the kids sure did eat that stuff."

Harrison has her own secret to a successful marriage and family.

"Love each other. Keep working together to have a good marriage, she said. "Keep pushing, keep praying. That's what we did."

She adds, "My children still respect me and listen to me. They're grown now, and they may not like what I say, but they still listen."

Attorney and writer Graham attacks racism

By Jeri Young
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Do not ask Lawrence Otis Graham how he feels about being considered an expert on race relations.

It is always, he intimates, the first question he's asked.

"As a matter of fact," he says, "I was introduced as a 'race expert' on Geraldo (Rivera's CNBC cable TV program). I am not sure that anyone can be an expert on race relations."

Graham, author of the 1995 controversial best-seller, "Member of the Club," is, if not an expert, at least someone who vocally expresses his concerns about the current state of racial affairs in the Northeast. Graham, a professor of African American Studies at Fordham University, will be in Rock Hill Sept. 12 at Winthrop University. He plans to speak on a myriad of topics, including the lack of racial dialogue in the Northeast, covert racism and probably interracial dating.

He expects controversy.

The face of racism has changed. There are not as many cross burning but racism is still there. It is covert, he said, but just as powerful.

It is that covert racism, the slights at restaurants, the stares and the everyday difficulties, like hailing a cab that he takes on in "Member of the Club."

"I have learned a lot," he said. "When I hail cabs I keep my back to them – they can't see my face that way. They are more apt to stop."

He has also adopted a few more survival techniques.

When dining with white clients at certain restaurants, he would arrive late, thus allowing the client to get the table.

"Whites always get the better tables," he said. "If I get there first, they will inevitably lose my reservation or put us near the kitchen."

Graham

"Member of the Club" gave Graham an opportunity to address these issues and more.

He takes on everything, from the blatant racism that exists in country clubs, the NAACP, interracial dating and his nose job.

"I had the nose job to straighten a bump on my nose," he said. "I was not going for that Michael Jackson pinched look. Nor was I in any way denying my race."

Graham is a study in contrasts. A Harvard- and Princeton-trained attorney from a wealthy family, he took a leave of absence from his law practice to pose as busboy at the Greenwich Country Club. He was originally there to fill a waiter position, but upon seeing him, management thought he would make a better busboy.

His experiences led to a highly regarded article published in 1992 by New York magazine. The article titled "The Invisible Man," garnered him more recognition than any of his first 11 works. A movie is in the works starring Denzel Washington. But perhaps the greatest legacy of the "invisible man" is a letter that Graham keeps with him from a member of the club. It does not defend the racist policies of the club or explain how a waiter's job could be open at noon and filled by 1 p.m. It does not offer excuses for the comments about blacks that Graham overheard from members. It defends the "Monkey House," the moniker given to the home of the club's mostly Hispanic and black sleep-in staff.

"He did not say anything about the racism, or even the term, 'Monkey House,' " Graham said. "He simply wanted it known that Monkey House was actually very nice with new carpeting and furniture. He didn't get it."

Graham's racial identity was shaped early. He remembers being harassed by the police while riding in a wagon pulled by his brother through their exclusive, predominantly white New York neighborhood.

He remembers sirens and horns, then an officer asking from

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Geraldine Powe wins Virginia Shadd community service award

By Jeri Young
THE CHARLOTTE POST

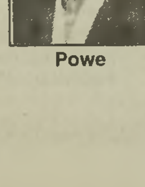
Take time for others is the credo that Geraldine Powe lives by.

"The only thing I regret," the executive director of the the Anita Stroud Foundation adds, "is that there is not enough of me to go around."

The Charlotte native and retired educator has garnered the top volunteer award of the Mecklenburg County Women's Commission. The award was presented during last week's Women's Equality Day celebration.

The award, named for late local educator and community volunteer Virginia Shadd, recognizes local women who have committed themselves to public service at the grassroots level. Past winners include Anna Hood, Sarah Stevenson, Sarah Coleman and Billye Collins.

Powe was shocked when she was told that she was the 1996 recipient.



Powe

"I don't do things for an award," she said. "I am committed to children."

Powe began volunteering in 1979 after her retirement from the Hempstead, N.Y., school system. She returned to Charlotte, began volunteering at her church, Friendship Baptist, where she initiated the prison ministry, and worked with numerous clubs and service organizations.

In 1988, Powe became involved with the Anita Stroud Foundation, an organization founded by Fairview Homes resident the late Anita

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