

Folk-Ways and Folk-Speech

of SOUTHERN APPALACHIA
with Rogers Whitener

Send your suggestions for column material to Rogers Whitener, Box 176, Boone, N.C. 28604

From time to time readers have sent in information about the making of homemade soap. Letters also reveal the swapping of soapmaking recipes with neighbors and friends, an indication that a number of varieties are being produced, varying from the elementary clothes-washing variety to perfumed facial soap.

Roy L. Sturgill of Bristol, Va. recently reminded me of a vital piece of equipment in the pioneer days of soapmaking -- the ash hopper. The following excerpt from his letter reveals the nature of its operation.

"Dear Mr. Whitener As I read your column each time it is carried in the local paper, I am reminded more and more of the many customs and items of the olden days that have vanished from the American scene. One item which I am sure the majority of people today never saw, or perhaps never heard of, is the ash hopper. Before, and until after the turn of the century every family had an ash hopper. In those days there was no lye available and the hopper was a means of producing this vital product, which was necessary for washing clothes, making soap and other scouring and cleaning chores. It was also used in the making of hominy.

ed hard until all the meat scraps were eaten up. The fire was then pulled from beneath the pot and the contents left to cool, usually over night. All that was left to do was cut the soap in bars. Bear in mind the soap always came out yellow. I don't think this product was ever recommended for shaving or mi-lady's bath, but it did the job for which it was intended.

"To make hominy, the corn was selected carefully to see that there were no bad grains (either white or yellow corn could be used). It, too, was placed in the large iron pot with a given amount of lye water; here again I don't know the quantity used, but it was boiled until the husks were removed from the grains of corn. This process caused the grains to swell, bursting the husks which made them easy to remove. The hominy was then taken from the fire and rinsed in a great number of cold water baths in order to remove all traces of the lye water, and any husks that remained. It was then stored for future table use. As a small boy I remember seeing my grandmother making hominy, and basically, to the best of my recollection this is near the formula she used. However, I am not an authority on making hominy."

Another letter from Mr. William J. Rowe, of 3630 N.W. Whitehall, Washington, D.C., was passed along by Mr. Edwin Dougherty, who recently retired from the Department of History at Appalachian State University.

Mr. Williams recalls pleasant memories as a school teacher fifty years ago in Boone and a productive association with two pioneer educators in Southern Appalachia, the brothers D.B. and B.B. Dougherty, founders of what is now Appalachian State. He is in search of the words to two songs sung in the Boone "graded school" of which he was principal. A portion of his letter follows.

"There were two special songs in that school which we loved and would sing frequently. One was -- if I have the title correct -- Twenty Froggies Went to School. The other was and is Oh, The Hills, The Beautiful Hills, How I Love Those North Carolina Hills.

"I hope to resume work on the second half of my memories soon. These will be some highlights in discussion as we lived our life in Boone."

Readers who can supply the words to these songs might consider sending them directly to Mr. Rowe at the above address or dropping them off to me for indirect delivery.

I was pleased this week to receive a copy of Highland Heritage, an Appalachian Oral History Project of Emory and Henry College. It contains articles on the evolution of Bluegrass Music, an interview with a pioneer in the soft drink bottling industry, the story of the Southwest Virginia Growers' Coop, and memories of early school days at Martha Washington College. Director of the project was Dr. George J. Stevenson and I suspect copies of Highland Heritage can be obtained through him at Emory and Henry College, Emory, Virginia.

Also happy to find Home-spun (number 3) in my mail. Hope to swipe an item or so from this interesting Davidson County student magazine.

Hope you readers will not wait for specific invitations to send material to this column. I'm always pleased to get information about games, superstitions, remedies, customs, songs -- anything about the past of Appalachia.

All letters should be addressed to Rogers Whitener, Folk-Ways and Folk-Speech, Box 376, University Station, Boone, North Carolina 28606.



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'And The Rains Came'

The rains came! On Thursday, April 4, a weather front which had caused some showers on Wednesday intensified Wednesday night into a heavy thunderstorm. Wind blew down service lines and lightning played havoc with electric power, and on Thursday, the swollen waters

of streams and rivers overflowed their banks and caused flood damage throughout the county. Especially hard hit were some county roads which sustained washouts and erosion of the shoulders. Shown above, the flooding waters of Prices Creek swirl over fields after Thursday's storm.



In Arabia, arrow-shaped amulets of agate are worn for the good of the blood!

Library Lists New Books

New books added to shelves of the public libraries of Avery, Mitchell and Yancey Counties include the following:

The Habsburg Curse, by Hans Holzer. Can a nine-hundred year-old curse affect not only the life and fortune of the person against whom it is directed, but also his descendants, his country and in essence -- the pattern of today's world? Holzer says yes -- do you?

Sweet Dreams, by Michael Frayn. Relax and let Frayn-Baker be your guide to a world wildly conceived yet devastatingly recognizable -- splendid, human, silly, and where everyone will laugh at your jokes and your dress is always perfect.

Your Mind Can Stop The Common Cold, by Lucy Freeman. How to live without psychoanalysis and without colds? If you're depressed, use the healing power of tears. Many

psychosomatic research studies are made available to the lay public for the first time.

I Gathered The Bright Days, by Lee Lane with Suzanne Gleaves. This is the true account of Lee Lane's 27 year marriage abruptly ended by her husband's death in open heart surgery, the very operation he himself, one of the most brilliant surgeons in the country, had worked to perfect.

The Coming Dark Age, by Roberto Vacca. What will happen when modern technology breaks down? Vacca, who is a computer wizard and systems expert, says it will be between 1985 and 1994 and will begin in the U.S. and Japan.

Hazard, by Gerald A. Brown. The background is the Middle East tensions. Hazard is the story of a free-lance intelligence agent whose personal vendetta against his brother's killers carries him to the nerve

center of something global and deadly.

Childhood Illness A Common Sense Approach, by Jack C. Shiller, M.D. This book deals exclusively with the sick child, from infancy to adolescence. The author's entertaining, non-technical style and numerous clear illustrations make the information accessible to any reader.

As We Are Now, by May Sarton. This short swift novel deals with an old woman trying to keep alive in a nursing home in a remote country place. It is told with dignity, intelligence and wit.

From The Land And Back, by Curtis K. Stadfeld. What life was like on a family farm and how technology changed it. What was life really like. Those of us living in the city who want to go back to the simple life need this realistic look at the difficulties to face too.

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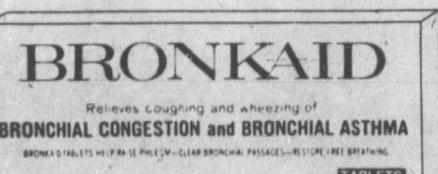
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