

RMU-01

CB-0525 to 0527

LC-0003 to 0008

WA-0022-0001 to 0009

COUNTRY STORES SURVEY
FY 83/84
CABELL, LINCOLN, WAYNE Co.'s

CB - 0525-0527, LC - 0003-0008

DO NOT REMOVE THIS FORM FROM THIS SURVEY FILE!

COMPLETED SURVEY DATA

NAME: COUNTRY STORES SURVEY FY-83/84

COUNTY: Cabell, Lincoln and Wayne

☐ ON-GOING SURVEY

☒ COMPLETED SURVEY

LOCATION OF SURVEY INFORMATION: *

GRANT: Yes - FY-83/84

CONTRACTEE:

CONTRACTOR: Mrs. Freda Nobel Paul

Wanda Cummings (Photographer)

Huntington, WV

*This survey was completed in the counties above in '84;

Survey material contents are of general history narratives for each county, as well as individual inventory forms; color slides should be located in Color Slide Inventory. These materials located in the State Inventory file by county.

Report located in Cabell County file.

"COUNTRY STORES SURVEY"

During the Fall of 1983, Winter of 1984, Mrs. Freda Nobel Paul of Huntington, West Virginia conducted a survey of Contry Stores still extant in Cabell, Lincoln, and Boone Counties, West Virginia. This survey was funded by the Historic Preservation Unit. The results of this survey are housed in the County-by-County Inventory Files of the Historic Preservation Unit. There is a general narrative including history, anecdotes, etc. for each county, as well as individual inventory files for each of the stores surveyed, as listed below. Color slides of each store are in the Color Slide Inventory.

"COUNTRY STORES OF CABELL, LINCOLN, AND WAYNE COUNTIES"

CABELL COUNTY

Coopers General Store
Meadows Grocery Store
Harless Grocery Store
P & D Grocery Store

LINCOLN COUNTY

Adkins General Store
Goode's General Store
Lucas Grocery
Osborne Brothers General Store
This and That Country Store

WAYNE COUNTY

Browning Grocery
B.H. Blair General Store
Troy Copley's Market
Old Corner (Kendricks) Store
Old Ruth Branham Grocery Store
Dameron Grocery
Old Perdue Grocery Store
Old Harless Grocery Store
Sword's Grocery
Variety Store
Varney's Hardware

COUNTRY STORE PROJECT

P_R_E_F_A_C_E

This research effort shows the place of the old-time country store in the cultural life of the small rural and mining communities that make up Cabell, Lincoln and Wayne counties.

THE COUNTRY STOREKEEPER was his community's leading citizen and first great civilizer. A scattering of houses would get along without a doctor or lawyer, but had no hope of becoming a village without a store.

THE COUNTRY STOREKEEPER in the early times was sometimes its only literate resident. He would write letters, draw up papers for others, prescribe health remedies and serve as banker. He could give and deny credit, call out "the law" and take a hand in politics. The practice of selling groceries and clothing to weekly wage earners on credit gave the country storekeeper enormous power and prestige in his community.

COUNTRY STORE PROJECT

PREFACE - Continued

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COUNTRY STORES are an important part of West Virginia's colorful past. The merchants provided important services for the country residents and the store served as a community meeting place, often housing the post office.

Better ways of distributing goods have come along. None, however, can take the place of the original country store as a social institution. The open cracker barrel .. and the friendly checker game nearby .. is a tradition that West Virginians will ever hold dear in our remembrance of things past.

WEST VIRGINIA COUNTRY STORE PROJECT

CABELL COUNTY HISTORY

Created in 1809 from Kanawha County and named in honor of William H. Cabell, Governor of Virginia from 1905 to 1808.

County seat moved from Barboursville to Huntington in 1887.

Leading Industries and Chief Agricultural Products:

Glass and Glassware

Alloy of Nickel and its products

Railway and Mine Cars

Clothing

Steel Rails

Chemicals

Shoes

Lumber and its products

Natural Gas

Tobacco

Dairying

Fruit

Poultry

Sorghum

C O N T E N T S

Tall-Tales and Folk Stories
"Old-Time" Country Stores

(Cabell, Wayne, and Lincoln Counties)

BE SURE TO BRAG ABOUT "GOOD WELL WATER"

WHO IS SHE THEN?

A PLUG OF TOBACCO, WHY?

THE WIFE PASSED AWAY

SELLING MOONSHINE

REVIVALS

ONE OF THE STRANGEST STORIES TOLD

ABIDING BY THE PLEDGE WORD
"A deal is a deal"

FOOTWASHING

"Old-time" Country Store Survey

TALL-TALES AND FOLK STORIES

In the country stores of West Virginia in the 1920's one had to take time to stop and chat especially with the country storekeepers who were farmers about the condition of the crops, the foibles of the weather and the necessity of hard work on the farms. A farming background came in handy many times, as told by Ted E. Arrington (author of Salesman of Appalachia) and his friend J. H. Forester, who sometimes accompanied him on some of his rounds.

Tall-tales stories abounded far and wide over the pot-bellied stoves and store porches of the country stores.

To be able to tell a good story and get a hardy laugh was a "must" to the drummer's creditability. The louder they laughed the larger the orders were forthcoming to the drummer.!

The following selections are a composit of yarns which depicts the customs and superstitions during the ara of "the old" COUNTRY STORES of Cabell, Wayne and Lincoln Counties:

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BE SURE TO BRAG ABOUT

"GOOD WELL WATER"

In the 1920's there was no electricity in the rural areas of West Virginia; therefore cold soft drinks were not available.

Drummers asked the country storekeepers for drinks from their wells and a routine procedure was to brag about the quality of the water, for all country storekeepers prided themselves on the good water they had. The drummer, who had told the story about the chewing tobacco incident, stopped with me one afternoon to ask a country storekeeper for a drink. Instead of merely saying, "Thank you for the fine water," this drummer commented further, "With good water people around here don't die very often, do they?"

The drummer had left himself open for the classic remark "No, just once."

WHO IS SHE THEN?

One of the stock stories that Mr. Forester, the master story teller, used concerned a dealer in a distant section. This man who was wise in the ways of drummership, would never allow himself to appear superior to the country storekeeper.

The week before, when he was calling on a merchant in the early afternoon, Mr. Forester said that he noticed that several people were gathering at a cemetery on a neighboring hill. In a little while the merchant informed Mr. Forester that he would have to close the store for an hour although he was reluctant to do so. Mr. Forester asked him if he were going to attend the funeral. The storekeeper said that he was. Mr. Forester then asked who was dead. The dealer replied, "My wife."

Mr. Forester related that he accompanied the dealer to the funeral. By the close of the service the merchant was extremely upset. He sobbed that he had no one to love him now that Mary was gone. According to the drummer friend, the minister walked over to the grieving husband and placed his hand on his shoulder. In a subdued voice the minister spoke, "Remember, brother, there is One who loves you."

The country storekeeper looked up and stopped crying. "Who is she then?" he asked.

A PLUG OF TOBACCO, WHY?

This scene occurred in a section where were selling a great quantity of plug tobacco. A buyer asked a salesman (drummer), who was chewing at the time, why he chewed tobacco. The drummer ambled to the door, spit tobacco juice, and started recounting the story in a slow drawl, "Well, I'm glad you asked me that question," he said. "I was raised on a farm just like you folks. When I was about seven years old, my daddy sent me to feed the hogs that we was tryin' to fatten up. I had a plug of tobacco in the pocket of my overalls because we started to chew young in those days. I wasn't sure that I ought to be chewin' so, as I was startin' out, I fell on a plan to help me decide once and for all. I cut a plug of tobacco and threw it in to the hogs. Not one of 'em touched a bit. Right then and there I decided to keep on chewin' tobacco because I didn't want to be like hogs and I've been a chewin' ever since"

All the folks in the country store had a hearty laugh after which the drummer sold a large order!

THE WIFE PASSED AWAY

The man and woman in this particular story lived far back in the rural district away from river and rail traffic. This couple had few neighbors. The wife passed away and the small band of neighbors rallied around to give what help they could. The woman had requested that she be buried in a white gown and that her body be wrapped in a clean white sheet. She did not want a casket. The sheet was wrapped around the woman's body so that four corners protruded. Four mountain men started to carry the body up the mountain side to the cemetery. At the side of the narrow haul road, which furnished the only access to the remote burial ground, a thorn bush was growing. The branches of this bush jutted out over the road. As the pallbearers rounded a curve in the road and approached the thorn bush, the foot of the corpse slipped out of the sheet in which it was encased. A thorn pierced the heel, and the woman seemed to be dead came back to life.

She lived for seventeen years and again appeared to be dead. She had left the same instructions concerning her burial that she had seventeen years before. As the second funeral procession rounded the bend where the thorn bush still grew in all of its glory, the loving husband stopped the group and said in a plain voice, "Gentlemen, be careful of the thorn bush. Stay clear."

SELLING MOONSHINE

During the Prohibition era there were many strange events occurring in West Virginia. A small country store may have a fruit stand or a confectionery as a front for its real business of selling moonshine. Tobacco salesmen called on all of the trade which meant that we were in close dealings with these people. The bootleggers soon learned that I did not drink so they would soon stop trying to sell me their valuable product. A drummer who was in good standing with the bootleggers would find out anything he wanted to know about the operation of his enterprise.

Government officials dealing with Prohibition knew that this could be done also; therefore, agents would often pose as drummers. The drummers would make several trips through the territory so that he would get on the good side of the bootleggers. The agent would soon learn which country storekeepers were selling whiskey and which were not. He would then restrict his activities to the bootlegging. After working the trade for awhile, the agent would come into the country storekeeper's establishment faking a hangover and remarking how much he needed a drink to relieve him of his distressing ailment. The agent would then be offered the necessary relief. He would buy a pint of moonshine at each store that he called on. He operated quickly before the country storekeepers could consult with each other.

One day when I was working the Guyan River territory, I learned that all of the country storekeepers who had been selling liquor had been apprehended. Some days before warrants were served on these storekeepers, an agent had come through buying whiskey using the method that I have described. When they appeared in court all of the storekeepers except one pleaded guilty. The judge explained to this storekeeper that the court could not appoint an attorney to defend him. The storekeeper replied that he could afford an attorney if he needed one, but he did not feel that he did.

The storekeeper next turned to the judge and said, "Judge, I know all of these people you have here for selling moonshine. They all said that they were not guilty. Everyone is guilty of selling liquor just as I am. I know that the insurance salesman who came around for so long was a Federal agent. Now, I admit that I sold him some moonshine, and I'm going to tell you the truth. I sell moonshine, but outside of that I'm an honest man. Your agent claimed that I sold him a pint of moonshine for three dollars. I charged him only fifty cents. I know what these other storekeepers charge, and they sell for the same price that I do. Now it seems to me that your agent is far more crooked than I am."

The court was obviously disturbed by the speech of the bootlegger. The speaker and his fellow bootleggers were all put on six ~~months~~ probation. I do not know what happened to

the Federal agent. I might add that this is the only instance that I heard about during Prohibition of a Federal agent's being less than an honest citizen.

* 63-64

REVIVALS

On Berry Creek near the Lincoln County border lived some of the best and most sturdy mountaineers of the Mountain State. They had many tall stories to tell, some of which date back a generation or two. One of the stories, which was popular in the early 1930' stands out in many a memory of the country store era.

The people on Blackberry Creek were fond of holding revivals. When the mountain winter set in, there was not much work to do. The church seemed to furnish a good place for the mountaineers to go to meet their friends. Far up on the creek was an old log church where a revival meeting was being held in the early part of the century. The mountaineer preacher, who was conducting the services, became ill. The people of the area were distressed not only because of the illness of the minister but because they wanted to continue the revival.

One of the younger citizens of the community knew of a well educated young preacher, who lived in Louisville, Kentucky. The young worshiper was asked to invite this educated minister to continue the meeting. The young man was delighted with the opportunity to come to the hills and bring the word of God to the mountain people. There was a great deal of excitement on the creek when the young minister arrived; all came out in an effort to decide if this young man really had religion.

The newly-arrived preacher spoke well; his vocabulary was extensive but little understood by those who heard him. This minister did not raise his voice. He did not point to various members of the congregation and talk of a loved one who had gone before and cautioned the worshiper to live well so he could meet the departed one in heaven. There was no shouting while he preached.

As the minister delivered his sermons from night to night, he noticed the congregation grew smaller and smaller. He became concerned about the sparseness of the worshipers in the pews, for he knew that no other activity in the community was drawing the people away. Because he was a devout Christian, he decided to probe to learn how he had failed these people who had so earnestly desired to have him come. He set aside one day to go around visiting the homes of the church members. These mountain people had been well schooled in the art of hospitality, so their reluctance to discuss the dearth of the congregation was understandable. Finally, late in the afternoon he pleaded with one of the younger hill couples to tell him what was wrong. The young mountaineer said that he would tell him but that he did not want to hurt his feelings.

After another entreaty the young parishioner said, "You are not making your sermons sad enough. You do not talk to us about the loved ones who have passed on into another world. You

never say a word about hell and damnation. When you pray, you stand up; you're never down on your knees. Many think you don't want to get your store-bought clothes dirty. You do not sing any of the old-fashioned hymns that would start us shouting. You're a complete flop as a preacher here, and unless you change your ways, you will never do any good."

That night the minister preached his usual type of sermon to a small group attending. The next day was Sunday, a day when a great number of mountain people usually swelled the ranks of the regulars at the revival. At the conclusion of the service the minister asked the few people who were there to contact others along the creek and inform them that he would preach one of the finest sermons that they would ever hear. The people in the congregation felt that they had reformed the young minister, so they did as they were bid. The next day every pew in the church was filled; people stood around the sides of the building; others gathered outside the doorway.

The minister rose and announced that his text would be on five orphaned groundhogs. He then began preaching. "When I was about five years old, we lived on a farm down in the Bluegrass section of Kentucky. My mother, who has since passed on, bless her heart, would take me by the hand and lead me along the grassy pathway every morning to tend the cows."

By this time the minister's voice had assumed a sing-song characteristic. "One morning my mother was carrying an ax with

her to fix a gate. On this path this particular morning we met a groundhog and her little innocent baby groundhogs. My mother hit the poor mother groundhog with the ax before she could think. The mother groundhog was killed."

Now tears were rolling down the cheeks of the minister. Members of the congregation were beginning to wail. The preacher continued, "We began to pray, "What will happen to the poor little orphaned groundhogs. There is no mother to look after them. They are turned out in the cold world without a mother's love to go and to stray and to suffer." Oh, how sad!"

The congregation was now shouting. The young minister stopped suddenly and spoke in a subdued voice, "If this is the kind of preaching you people want and not the sermons that I have been giving you based on the Bible, get yourselves a groundhog preacher. I'm going back to Louisville." Thus the revival was abruptly ended. * 60-61-62-63

ONE OF THE STRANGEST STORIES TOLD

One of the strangest stories that I came in contact with in my territory in the early '30's was related to me by a friend. This happened on a remote creek of West Virginia along with eight or ten families lived. The husbands all believed in using the rod on all members of the family, especially the wife.

One of the mountaineers came to town one day and bragged to this friend of mine that he was the only one in his community who did not whip his wife each day. He explained that he believed in exercising control over his family by whipping, but he had made up his mind before his marriage that he would beat his wife as little as he possible could.

He then related a method he used to make whipping his wife about once every two weeks practicable. He said that when he was first married he came to the house after he had completed his farm chores. This was between sundown and dark. He saw that his supper had not been started at this late hour. Because everything had to be prepared from scratch in those days, he knew that it would be at least two hours before his cornpone and beans would be ready for consumption. He called to his new wife and asked her why she did not have his evening meal ready. She informed the groom that he did not have any stove wood prepared and placed in the wood box. The young husband felt

that he should not be harsh with his bride. He realized that because she was not a native of this section she was ill informed concerning the duties of a housewife. The mountaineer told his wife that he would not thrash her this time; but if she ever failed in her duties again, he would have to give her a thrashing that she would never forget.

In about two weeks the young mountaineer came in just after sundown and observed that his evening meal was not ready. He called to his wife, and again she informed him that stove wood had not been cut. The young husband took his wife by the arm and led her to an apple tree. Here he gave his wife the whipping that he had promised her. The wonderful part about the whole affair, according to the husband, was that from that time forward he had only been forced to whip his wife about every two weeks. He knew that his neighbors found this hard to believe, but he contended that it was true..

ABIDING BY THE PLEDGED WORD

"A deal is a deal"

One aspect of the American selling game that almost all country storekeepers and drummers observe is abiding by the pledge word. "A deal is a deal,". Some times a deal goes against the grain. For example, a young drummer came to Mr. Holschue, a country storekeeper, with a musical instrument that he could use for his own enjoyment or for sale. The drummer remarked that musical instruments were not selling at this time, and, as for using the instrument for his own enjoyment, that would be an impossibility since he could not even carry a tune. The salesman declared that the store owner could undoubtedly play this instrument. Mr. Holschue assumed a "show me" attitude. The drummer then brought a box eight inches wide and three feet long into the store. He made a bargain with Mr. Holschue that if the proprietor could not play the instrument, he was to buy two for twenty dollars each. The country storekeeper agreed and a signed contract was made. The drummer then produced a card with the numbers one to one hundred under the strings and gave the dealer (country storekeeper) a piece of paper with a series of numbers on it. The country storekeeper was instructed to pluck the strings at the points indicated by the sequence on the paper. After a few minutes the drummer asked

the storekeeper what he was playing. The country storekeeper
looked up as he plucked and remarked, "Old Black Joe, by God."
In this store there was one happy drummer and one angry
country storekeeper * 25

FOOTWASHING

In a small town of Crum, West Virginia (Wayne County) about fifty miles distant from Huntington, I stayed at the home of Uncle Will Crum two or three days at a time while I worked Jennie's Creek and the surrounding territory. Uncle Will had a large house and a neighboring three room house which he rented to drummers. This old gentlemen lived to be ninety-six years old and all his brothers and sisters except one and his mother and father had donated the land on which the old Silver Creek Baptist Church was built in 1830. Uncle Will, of course, was a devout member of the church all his life. He was one of the song leaders and he bragged about knowing one hundred ten songs by heart.

At the time of one of my trips to Uncle Will's the Reverend Mr. Hall, a Christian minister, had asked if he might preach a sermon concerning foot washing in the Baptist Church. He was not allowed to do this but he had been given permission to preach in the community school. Uncle Will asked me to go with him to hear this fellow try to get around the fact that foot washing should be a part of the ceremony of the church. Uncle Will was nearing ninety, and I felt that this elderly leader of the conservative church was set to cause a disturbance, I agreed to go with him if he promised to be quiet. He did, and we walked

through the dark night the mile to the school. The building was crowded, not because those attending had adopted the modern philosophy of the minister, but because there was no place else for entertainment on this night. Uncle Will and I found seats near the center aisle.

In due time the Reverend Mr. Hall arose to give his sermon, which I thought was a good one. I looked around and noticed that the eyes of most of the people were not directed to the pulpit; they were glued on Uncle Will. The minister picked up his Bible from the lectern and said, "My friends, this Book is a way bill to heaven. My Saviour does not ask me to do one thing in this Book that is not right, and he does not ask me to do anything impossible to do. I have a friend who lost both legs in an accident. If footwashing is essential to salvation, do you mean to tell me that my good Christian friend is lost?"

~~Uncle Will could take no more.~~ He was determined to live up to his agreement of not making a scene, so he punched me with his elbow and said in a low voice, "Let's get out of here. I don't want to listen to any more of this nonsense."

Everybody watched Uncle Will walk out of church, shaking with anger but silent. As we were walking along, I made the mistake of questioning my old companion, "Sure enough, Uncle Will, how could that man have his feet washed in church if he didn't have any?"

Uncle Will turned to me, shook his finger under my nose, and muttered, "Young man, he could have washed the stumps."

I said no more. * 36-37-38

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

*Salesman of Appalachia
Ted E. Arrington (tall tales)

** West Virginia Blue Book (county history)