
Reviewed by Ormond H. Loomis.

This is a pleasant book. It is the sort that would appeal to most North American nostalgia addicts, especially those interested in the rural southeast. "Folklore at its best" reads a comment on the jacket, but this billing is a bit too grand. Tradition based people and components of their culture provide the subject matter, and, for the casual reader, its presentation will be a delight.

Yesterday in the Hills depicts life "in the northern half of Cherokee County, Georgia," a section along the interface of lowland and upland South, before the area began to respond markedly to the influences of modern American mass culture. The outside limits mentioned for the time considered are 1877 and 1940. Embedded in sketch after sketch of local characters, institutions, and events is an abundance of information. Researchers with genre interests can find mention of topics from soap making to song singing. The emphasis is on context, and the authors' retrospective impressions are most interesting.

The father and son authors appear to write primarily from their personal recollections. Material is not grouped into standard folkloric categories, and the rambling presentation on any given page resembles unstructured reminiscing. Descriptions like the one of tobacco stains on mustache hair, and stories like those about a Pete Jorden who emptied privies have an air of authenticity. The chapter entitled "Sickness and Homemade Remedies" even communicates a feel for hardships, such as those associated with cob toilet tissue, and danger, like that accompanying a scarlet fever epidemic. These and other elements often give the reader the impression that he has in Hills the outpouring of a fluent informant. The effect is fascinating.

Yet this effect is simultaneously frustrating. Details that can be picked out during a face-to-face interview or by first-hand observation are not available to the reader. We are told, for instance, that hogs are slaughtered during "the proper sign of the moon and cold weather." When is that, for us that don't already know? As bad, when a tale or event is remembered, it is usually impossible to discern whether the narration is first, second, third telling, or more. These frustrations, inherent in the printed source, could have been alleviated by the use of scholarly aids. But there is not even a general index, to say nothing of reference notes, bibliography, glossary, and so forth. And the only informant cited is identified simply by name.
Charles Hubert Watkins, the senior author, was a school teacher at one time. Floyd C. Watkins, his son, is an English professor. Consistent with their backgrounds, the treatment in Hills is more literary than folkloric. There is no overview of the community—historical, demographic, or otherwise. The overall organization is contrived: alternating cameos of memorable individual(s) with discussions of broad neighborhood themes. The characterizations, for example, of conservative farmer General Wheeler, overly attractive shape-note singer Viola Sexton, and misplaced mountain preacher A.L. Murphy resemble almost stereotypic literary creations. The accounts of writing with slate, plowing early in the day, and some other descriptive passages sound like the careful prose of James Dickey or Flanery O'Conner. To top it off, the authors' introduction and acknowledgements imply that they have made no great effort to adhere to facts, as much as stating that an accurate representation of life in the hills would be impossible.

Thus, this book is more a portrait than a documentary. While the main purpose of the work is never directly stated, Hills clearly pays tribute to the Watkinses' native culture. Those wanting a close look at a traditional society may be disappointed by what this father and son offer. We must thank them, however, for reminding us that there are places between the Appalachians and the deep South which have still not received adequate attention from folklorists.


Review note by Peggy Bradley Boaz.

A reprint of Edward D. Andrews' The Community Industries of the Shakers is now available from Emporium Publications Inc. (78 Slackville Street, Charlestown, Massachusetts 02129). A valuable asset to anyone interested in regional folklore or material culture, Industries of the Shakers covers the industries of weaving, broom making, chair making, and the tin, seed and herb processes.

Beginning with the rise of Shakerism and Mother Ann Lee, the reader is acquainted with the historical background in the initial development of the United Society of Believers. In 1758 Mother Ann joined the religious society and was soon the accepted leader. Arriving in America in 1774, the Shakers began a new way of living and they flourished in the states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Kentucky, Maine, New Hampshire and New York.