

# The Bryson Place and beyond

Don Casada for FBCC, Feb 3, 2022

A commentary which accompanies these slides can be found [HERE](#).

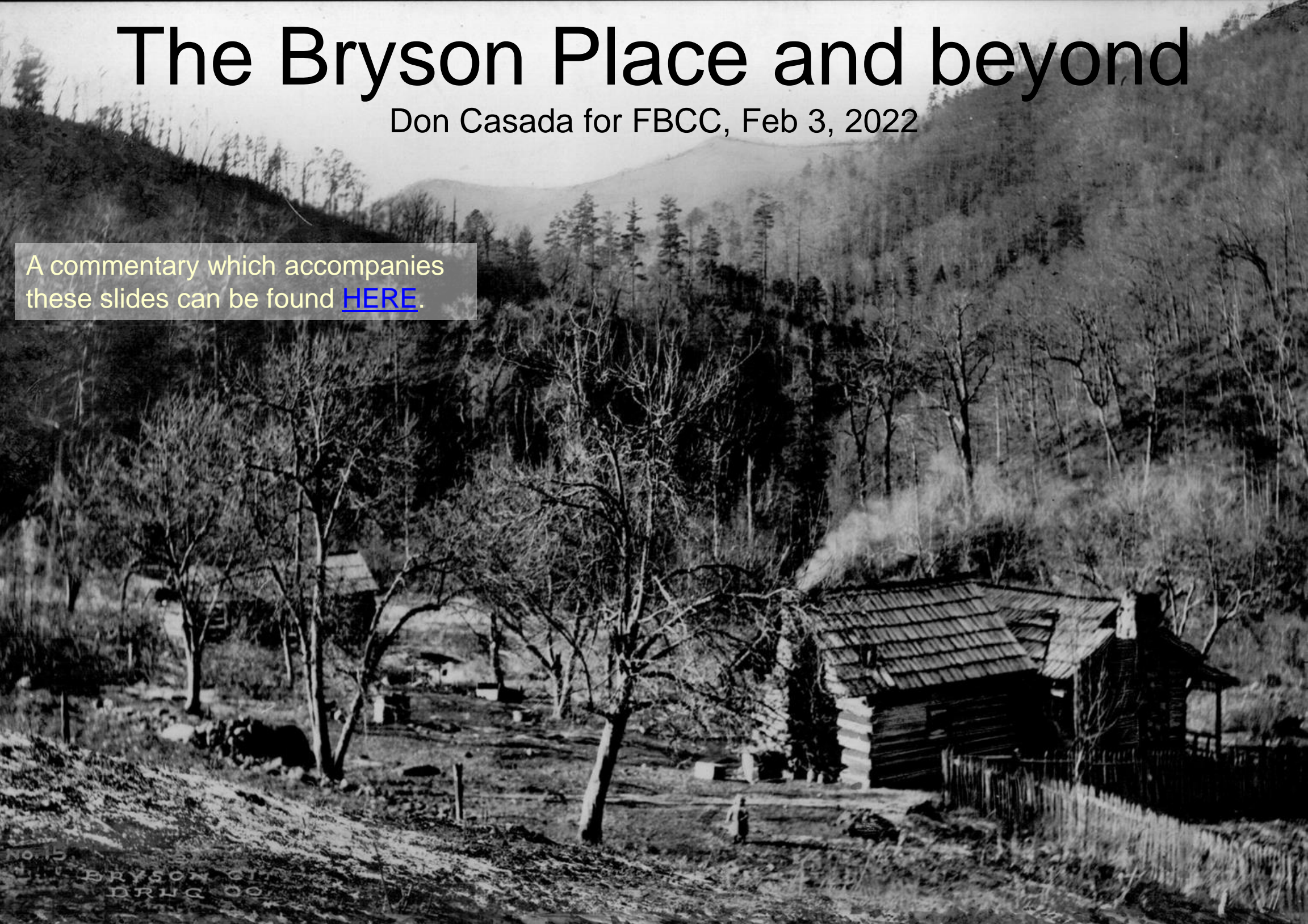


Photo by Kelly or A.M. Bennett; notice the Bryson City Drug Company label at lower left

# Subjects to touch on

- The land – historical ownership
- Actors involved in the Bryson acquisition
- Speculations on residents
- The cabins
- Surrounding area
- Getting there
- Guest registry
- CCC lodges
- Some stories
- Rabbit trails along the way



This empty old cup runneth over  
with precious memories – how  
they linger

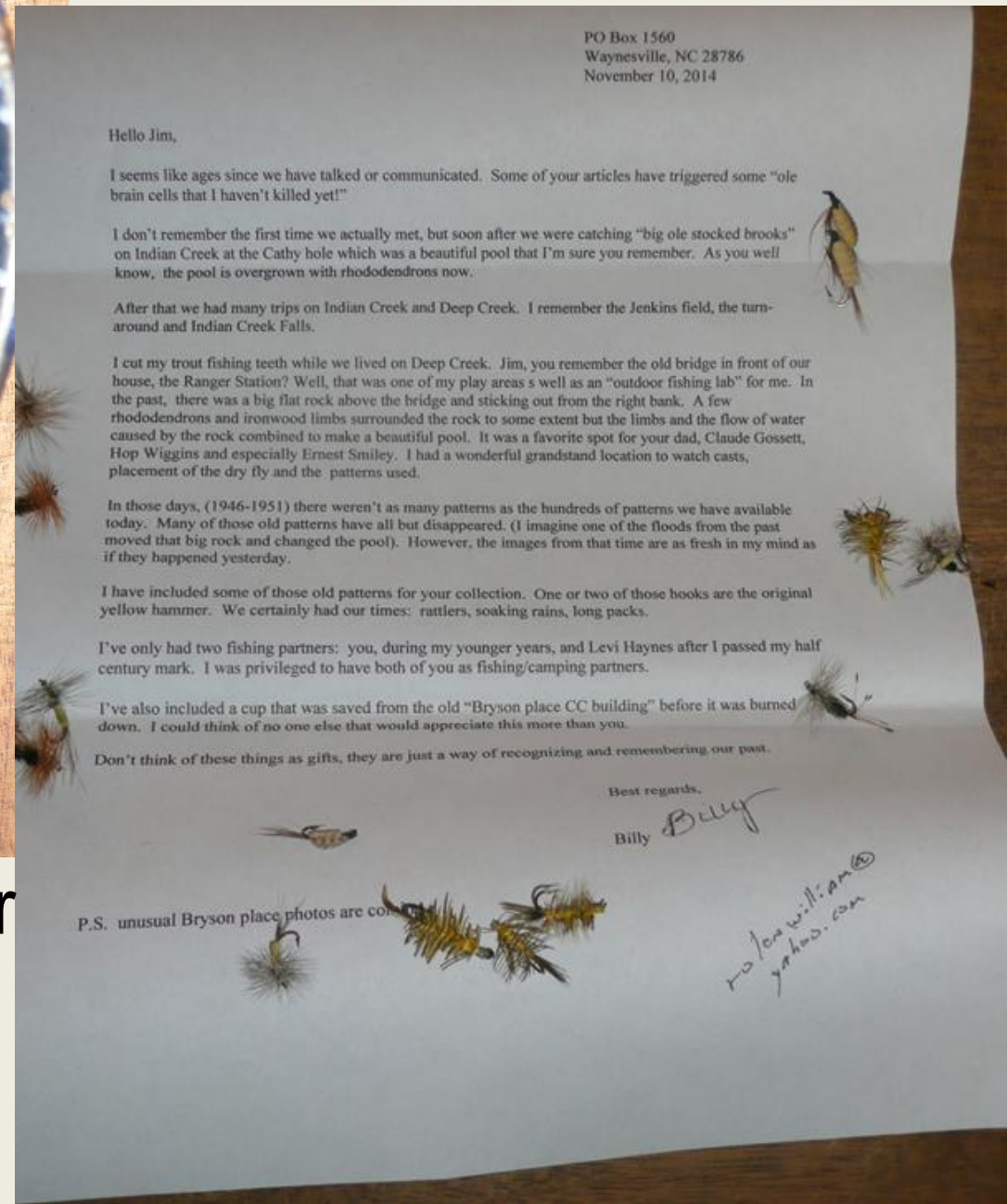
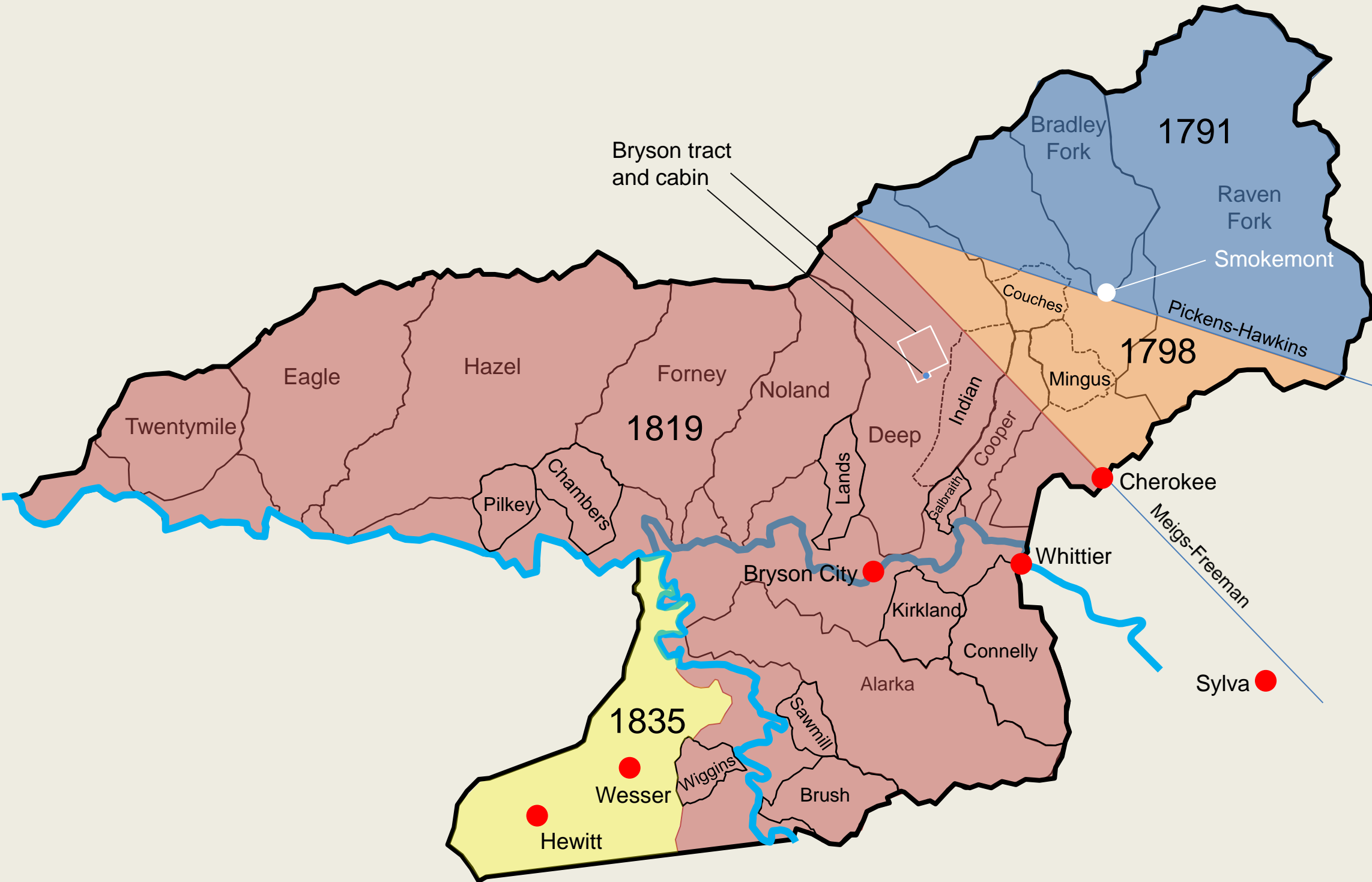




Photo of Ernest Smiley  
(1907-1996), taken by IK  
Stearns on Nov. 28, 1941

[Stearns-Grueninger Collection,](#)  
[Hunter Library Special Collections](#)

# Some earlier context: Cherokee land cessions



# Agreement between William Holland Thomas and Thaddeus Dillard Bryson

*“I agree to let Col Thadeus D. Bryson have the unimproved Martin tract of land on Deep Creek including one hundred acres to be run in a square or oblong square to include the Martin improvement for the sum which the land and improvements may be valued to be worth at green back prices by John Millsaps, Wm Cathey, & Lt Wm Morris or a majority of them.*

*And I agree to make a title for said land to the said Bryson or his Assignee upon credit being given on our contract green back rates.”*

*Sep. 21 1868*

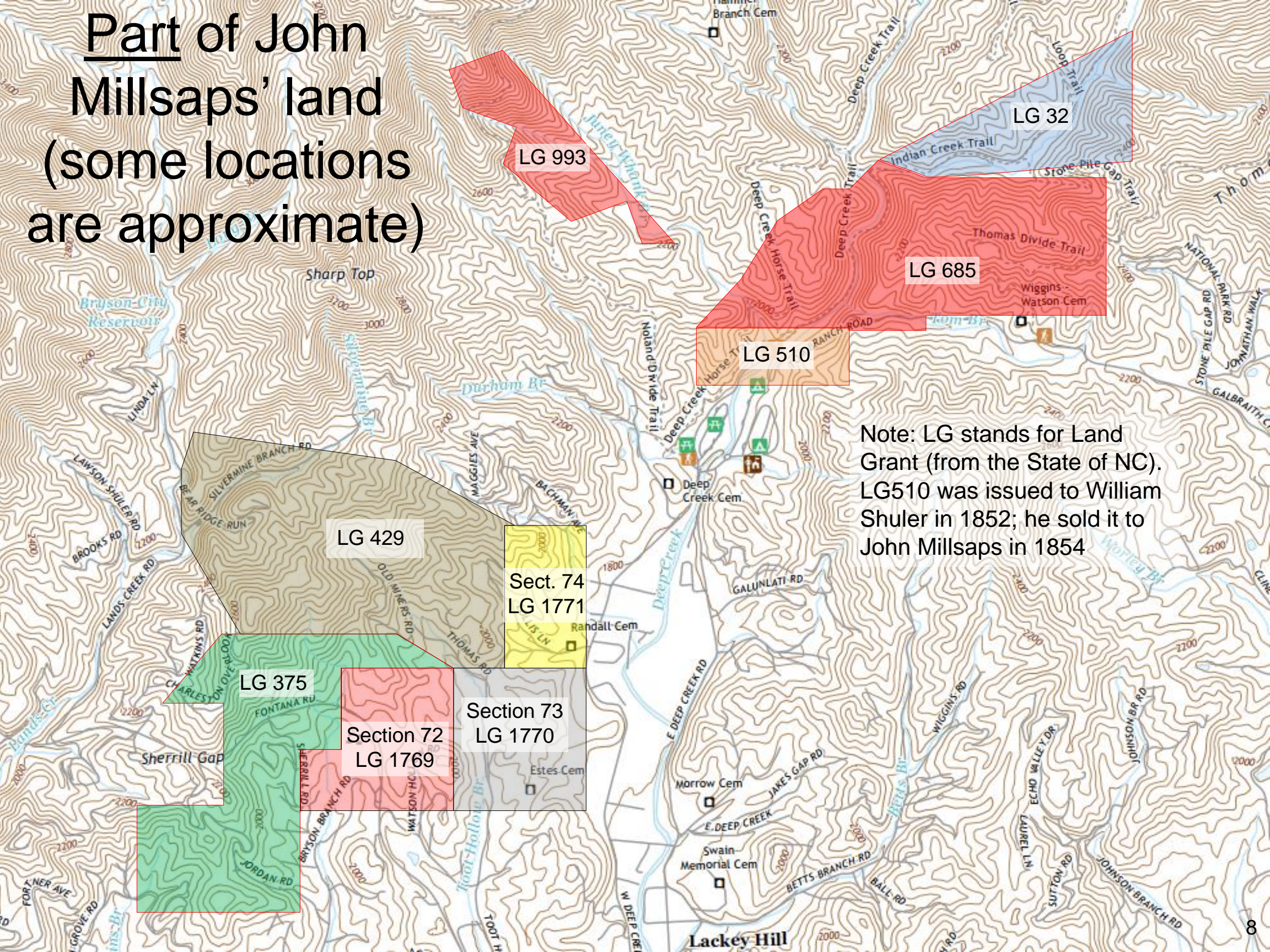
*Wm H. Thomas*

## About the appraisers (1): Dr. John Millsaps

- Little is known about his background, but is listed as a *Doctor of Physic*\* in the 1870 Deep Creek section of Jackson County
- Was second only to T.D. Bryson in the value of real estate in 1870 (tied with William Coleman, who owned the bottoms at Kituwah/Governor's Island)
- He owned extensive tracts on Deep Creek and beyond, ranging from inside the Park to at least a mile below the Park line. Some of his land was sold to Billy Morris by his estate executor, Epp Everett. He died in 1872.

\* Recall that one of the tale-tellers in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* was the Doctor of Physic

# Part of John Millsaps' land (some locations are approximate)



LG 993

LG 32

LG 685

LG 510

LG 429

Sect. 74  
LG 1771

LG 375

Section 72  
LG 1769

Section 73  
LG 1770

Note: LG stands for Land Grant (from the State of NC). LG510 was issued to William Shuler in 1852; he sold it to John Millsaps in 1854



## About the appraisers (2): William Lee “Billy” Morris

- Civil War – enlisted as a corporal, discharged as lieutenant in 29<sup>th</sup> NC Infantry.
- Shot in the lower left leg in battle, making walking or standing difficult; listed as  $\frac{3}{4}$  disabled in 1905 by Dr. A.M. Bennett
- Owned considerable land on Deep Creek, including most of what is now the campground area as well as where he made his home – at the mouth of Juney Whank Branch.

# Billy Morris home place, Juney Whank Branch



Photo sources:  
Home: Open Parks Network  
Billy Morris: Jim Estes

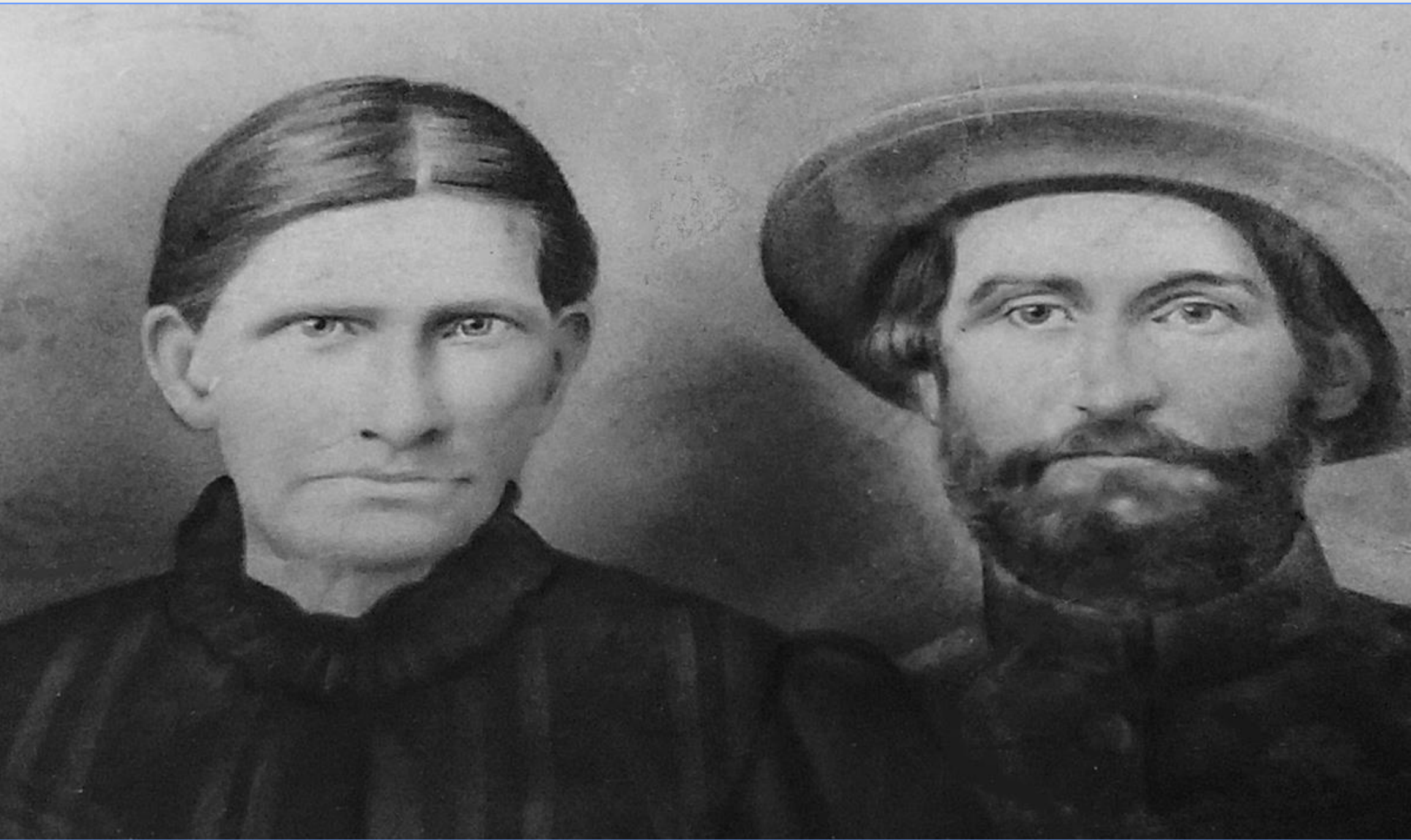
# Morris home from east side of bridge to Galbraith Creek



# About the appraisers (3): William Hillman “Hill” Cathey

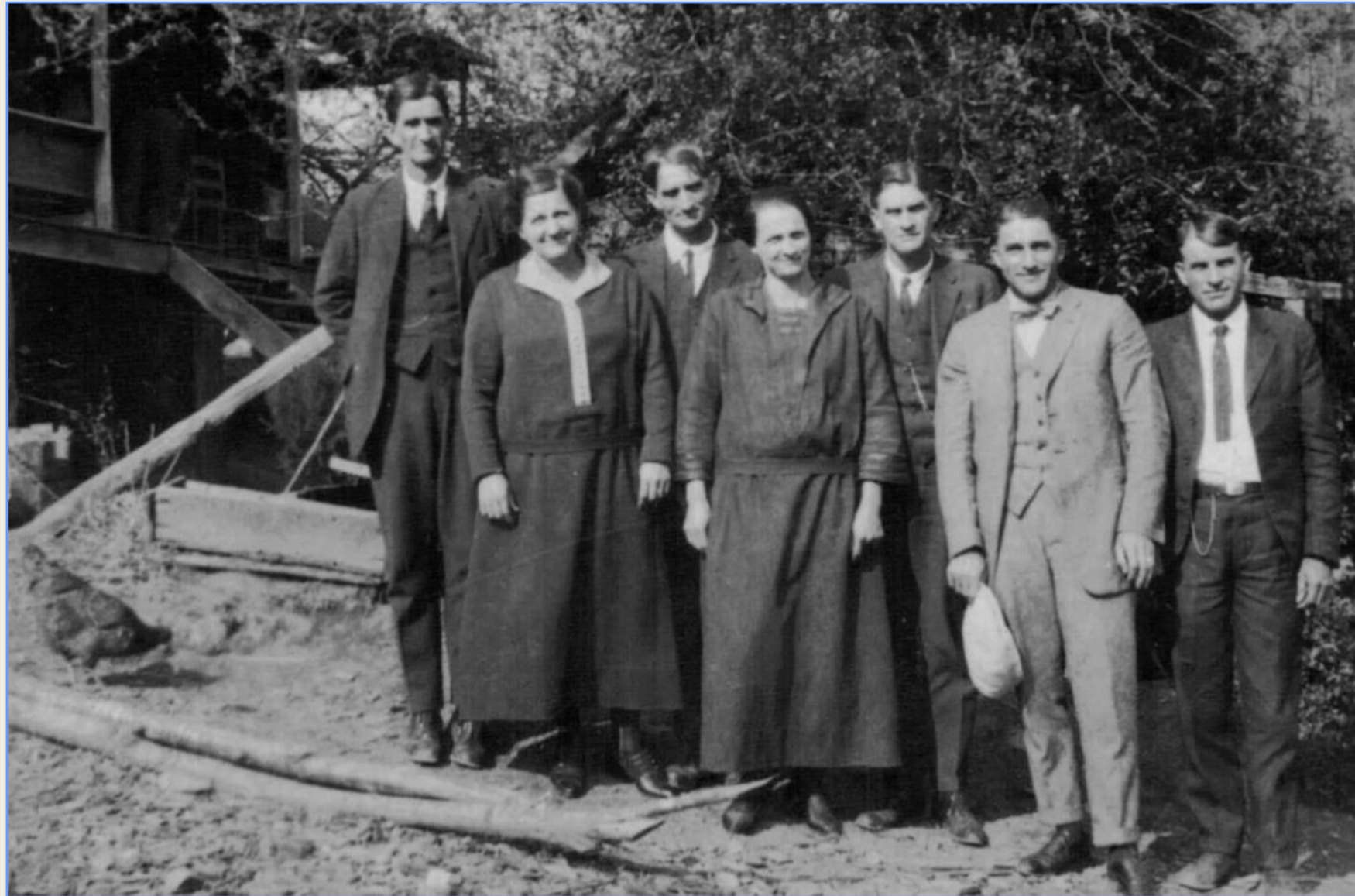
- Civil War – Served in multiple regiments (Thomas’s Legion, 16<sup>th</sup>, 39<sup>th</sup> Infantries)
- Moved from the Qualla area to Indian Creek between 1870 and 1880.
- His wife Nancy was the sister of Billy Morris.
- The family property on Indian Creek covered from just above Indian Creek Falls to above the Loop Trail connector, and to the top of the ridge between Indian Creek and Toms Branch.
- Father of Smoky Mountain icon, Mark Cathey.

# Nancy Moore Morris and William Hillman Cathey



Portrait Courtesy of FBCC member Sam Ainsworth, great-grandson of Nancy and Hill Cathey

# Nancy Cathey at left; her children assembled at right, most likely for her funeral service



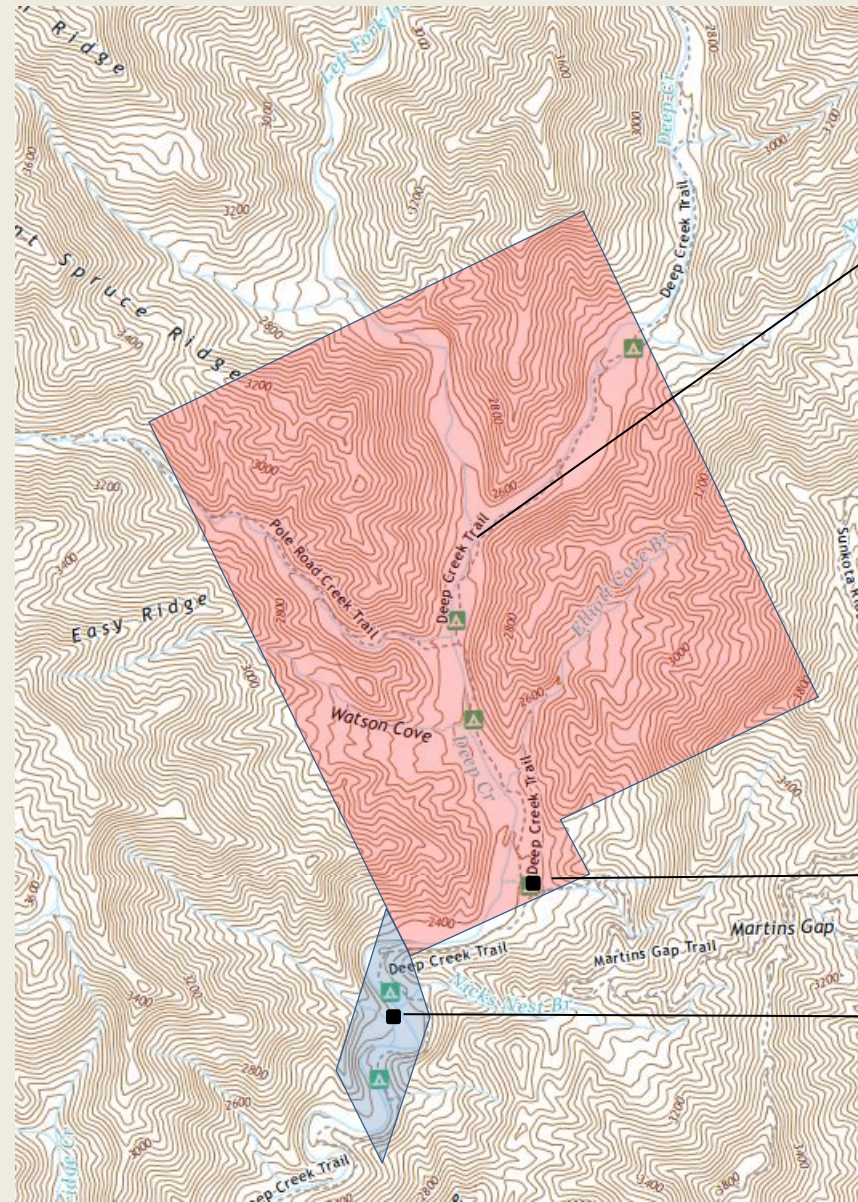
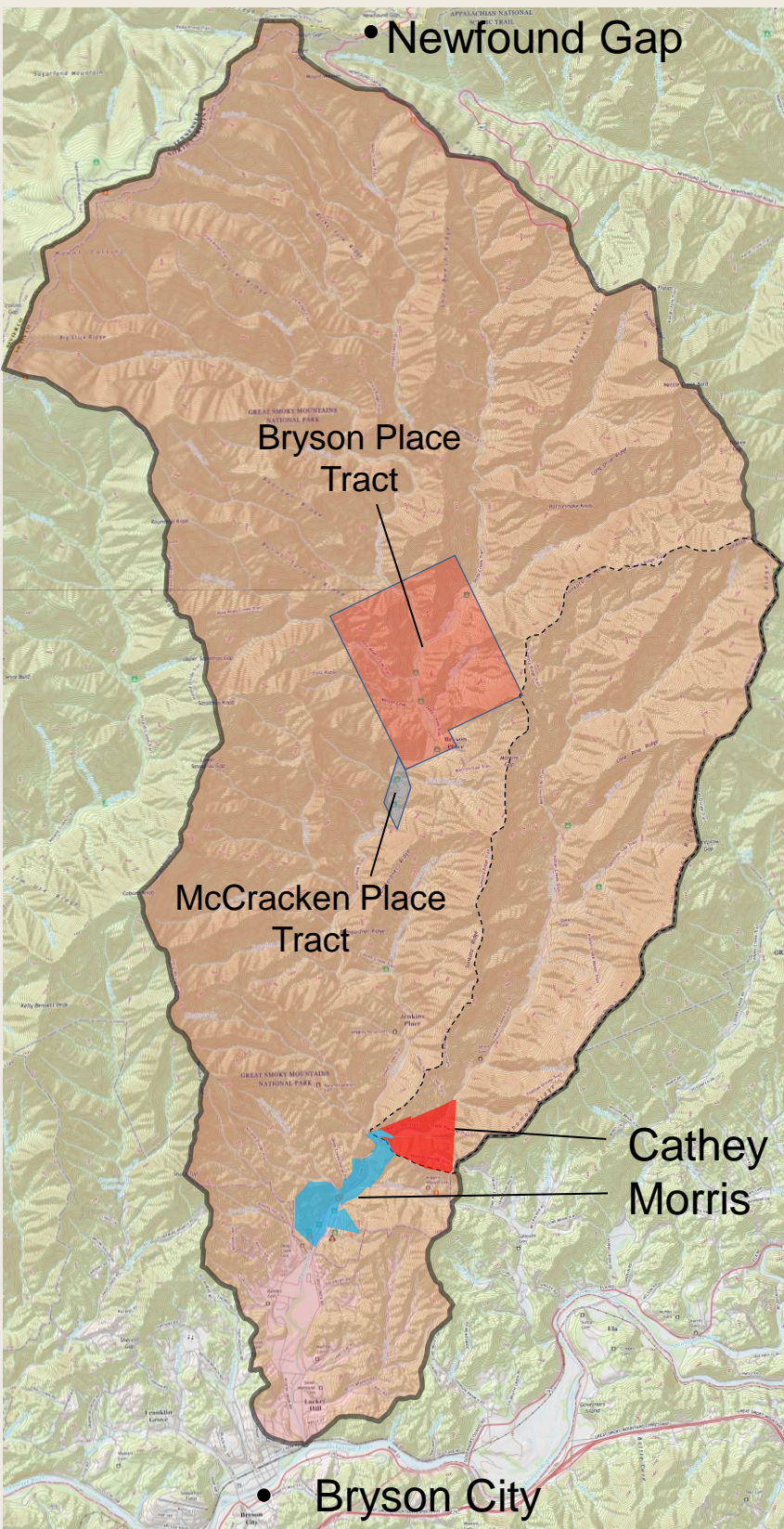
My guess of the identities of the Cathey children (range from 100% sure to speculation), L-R: Mark Cathey, Rebecca C. McCracken, Sam Cathey, Nicie C. Beck, John B. Cathey, Grady Hillman Cathey, James L. Cathey. Both photos courtesy of Sam Ainsworth.

# Ruby Lee Cathey behind the Cathey home on Indian Creek



Ruby (1915-1979) was the daughter of Samuel Taylor Cathey, son of William Hillman and Nancy Morris Cathey, and brother of Mark Cathey. Photo courtesy of Sam Ainsworth.

The Deep Creek drainage is outlined at left, with the Indian Creek portion marked with a dashed line. As can be seen, the Bryson tract was in the geometric center of the drainage. Below both the Bryson and McCracken Places are marked by dots. The Bryson family owned 1/3 of the McCracken Place tract when taken by the NC Park Commission; the other 2/3 was owned by Hoy Thomas.



Forks of Deep Creek

Bryson Place

McCracken Place



# Assessment by the referees

*We the undersigned referees have examined the Land and value the same at one hundred and fifty dollars in Green Back.*

*Oct 24<sup>th</sup> 1868*

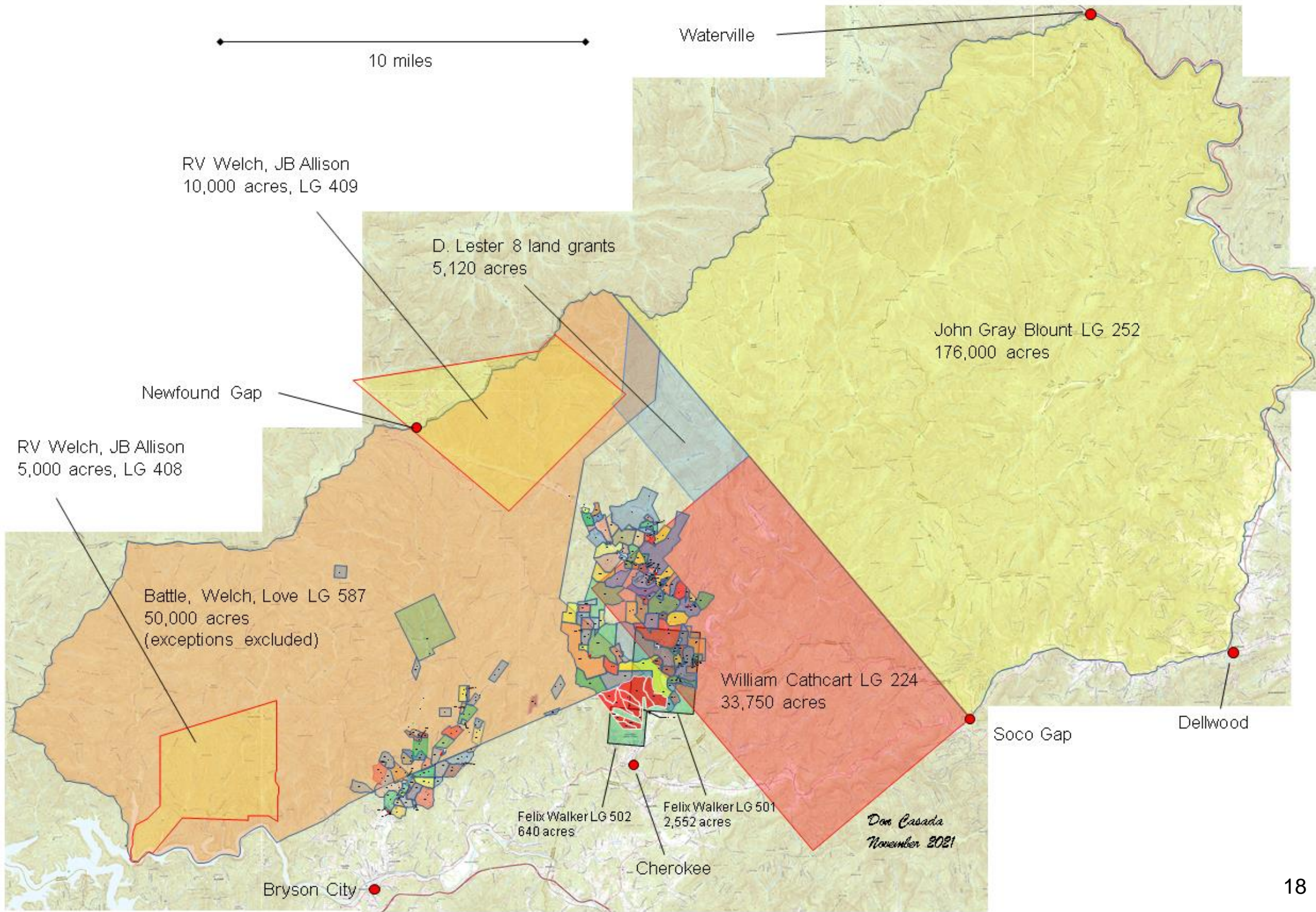
*Wm L Morris*

*John A. Millsaps*

*Wm H. Cathey*

Note: The \$150 value applied to the Martin Improvement

# A Land of State Land Grants Speculation



# A rabbit trail....the Battle/Welch/Love tract

- The 50,000 acre tract covered the majority of Forney, Noland, Lands, Deep, Cooper, smaller stream like Peachtree, and a sizable chunk of upper Lufty.
- It went through several owners including:
  - Clarke Whittier (1885-1890)
  - Private owners in Asheville (1890-1894)
  - Foreign Hardwood Log Company (NY) (1894-1895)
  - Tuckaseige Timber Company (NY) (1895-1896)
  - Whittier Lumber Company (1896-1906)
  - Harris-Woodbury Lumber Company (1906; sold in parts from 1910 to 1918)
- There were dozens of exceptions for tracts which either pre-existed the original land grant or which were cut out and sold
- The Harris of Harris-Woodbury was C.J. Harris, who had multiple businesses in the Dillsboro/Sylva area, including kaolin clay.
- In 1905, Harris struck deals with Tom Lollis and Billy Morris for “all the kaolin white and colored, china clay and potters clay, and flint and feldspar” on their land which included sections from Juney Whank and Durham Branches.
- Speculation: pits and tunnels along the Noland Divide Trail, all of which are on the Billy Morris property, are the result of exploratory digs by CJ Harris

# Entrance to a tunnel on the east side of the Noland Divide Trail – a remnant of CJ Harris?



A peek into the tunnel from the entrance





Creeden Kowal took a shot from the opposite end of the tunnel

The swirling vein colors are strikingly beautiful.

# One of around sixteen excavations along the lower Noland Divide Trail



# Back to the Bryson Place:

RV Welch, RGA Love, WL Hilliard, Samuel L Love to TD Bryson:

*“The undersigned do this day sell to TD Bryson one thousand acres of land on Deep Creek in Swain County and adjoining lands lately purchased from Wm H Thomas and now occupied by Samuel Elliott at 33<sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> cents per acre and also one hundred acres adjoining George Shuler on Deep Creek where Joe Feather lives at one dollar and fifty cents per acre and we authorize E Everett to make deeds in pursuance to a power of attorney now effected reserving <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of the minerals in the lands this 23<sup>rd</sup> day of May 1878. The said parties acknowledge payment (therefore by a credit of one hundred and twenty dollars on RV Welches note and three hundred and sixty three on Samuel L Loves note to be surveyed at the costs of the undersigned this 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1878.”*

*Attest: E Everett  
RM Henry*

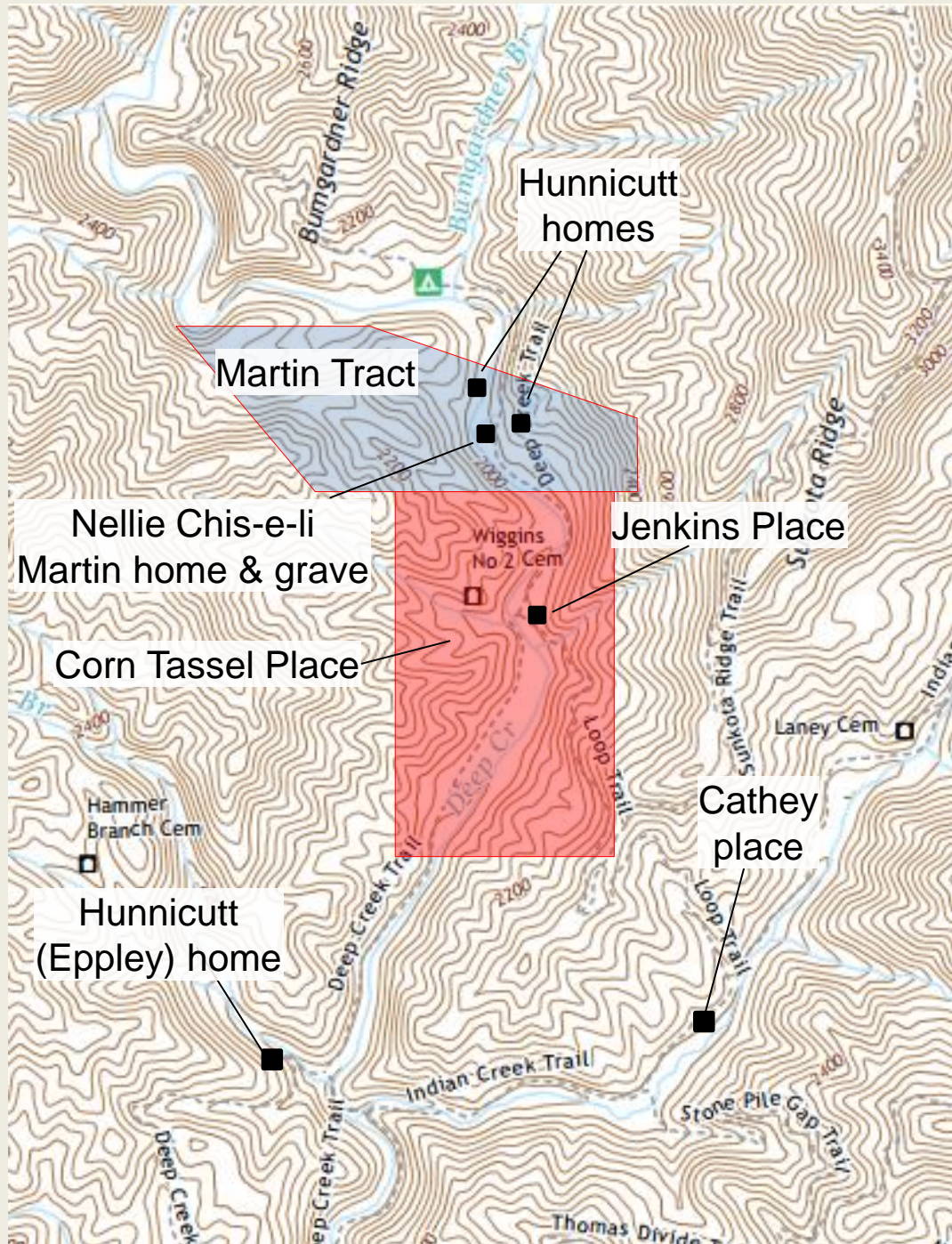
*Signed: RV Welch  
RGA Love  
WL Hilliard  
Saml L Love*



A second rabbit trail....with a connection to the Bryson Place  
Another Deep Creek deed was filed the same day

*“Know all men by these presents that we, Wm L Hilliard, SL Love and RGA Love as executors of James R Love and RGA Love and RV Welch for themselves by their Agent E Everett have this day bargained and sold unto Nelly Chis-esli (Indian) one hundred acres of land in the count of Swain....on both sides of Deep Creek above and adjoining tract of land known as the Corn tassel place for the sum of one hundred and fifty dollars paid to said parties of the first part by TD Bryson.”*

# Nellie Chis-e-li Martin and family made their home in the middle of what later became known as the Turnaround

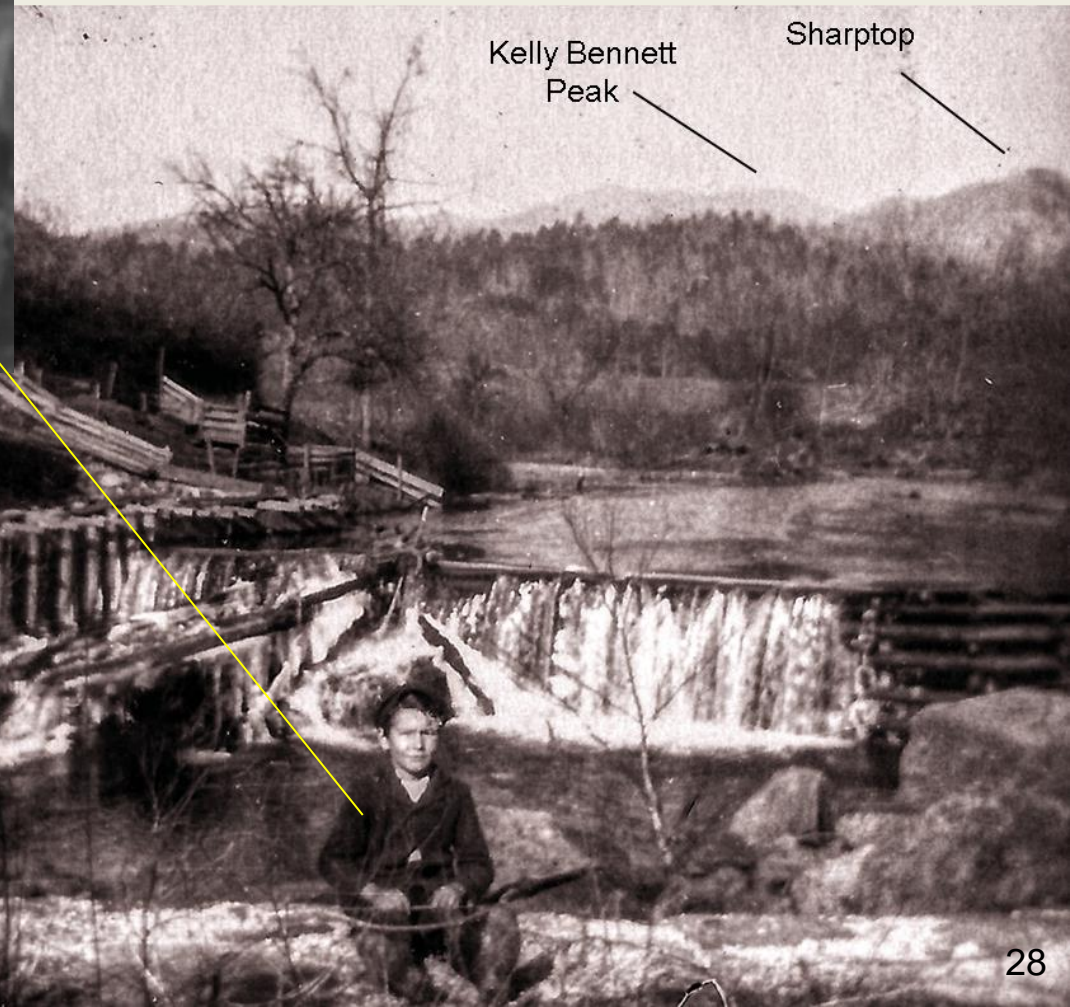


## The Bryson Place property – passing it on

- In September of 1884, Mary and TD Bryson deeded three tracts to their four children, Harriett Artie, Thaddius Dillard Jr, Daniel Rice and Mary Greenlee Bryson
- Stipulated that the lands were not to be sold until all had reached adulthood
- The cost: \$1 and natural love and affection
- Tract one: the one hundred acre tract
- Tract two: the one thousand acre tract
- Tract three: tract at the mouth of Deep Creek, including the saw mill and grist mill.

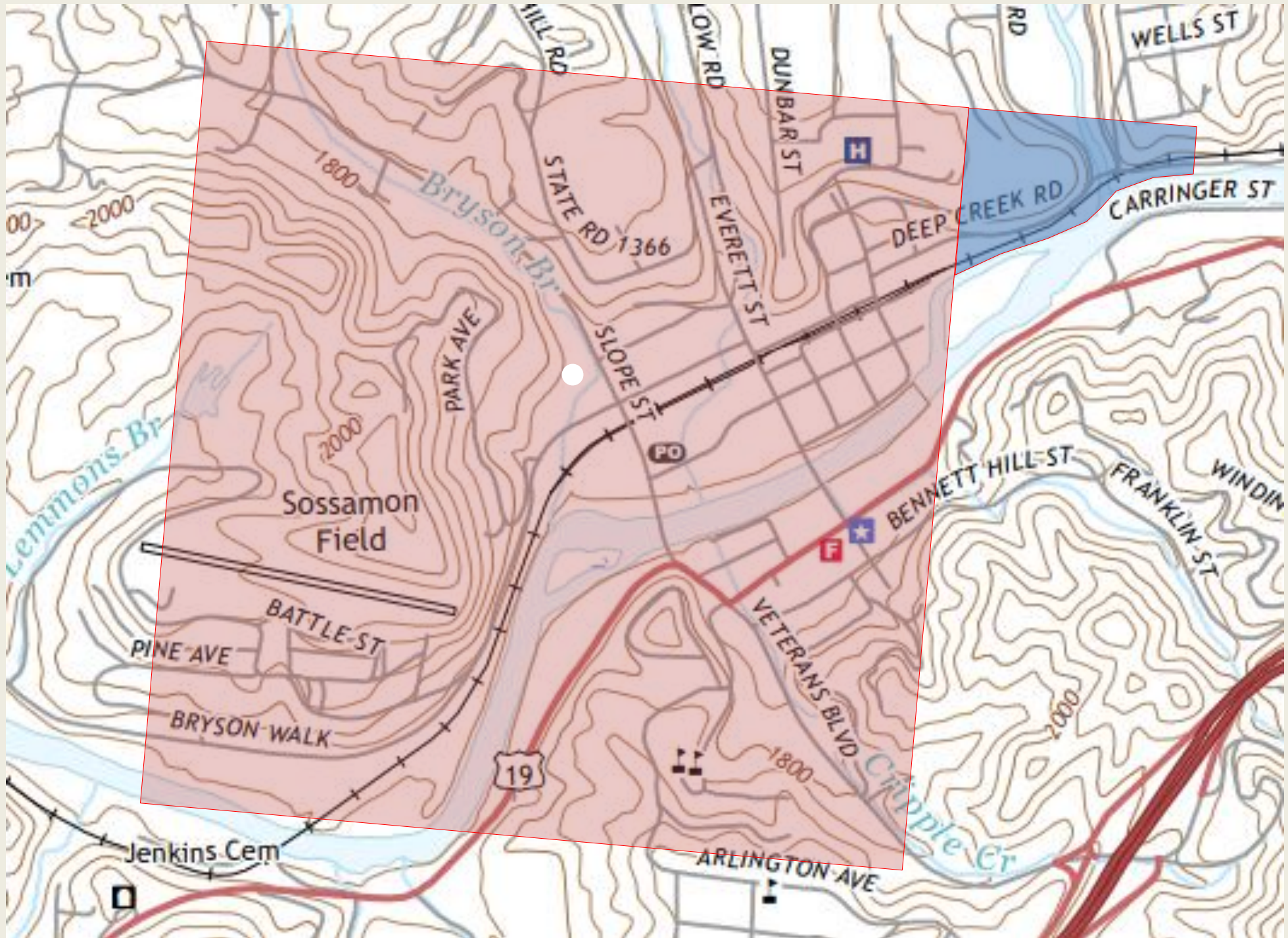
# The Bryson saw and grist mill building and the mill dam and flume

The boy who appears in both photos is young IK Stearns (born in 1895, so the photos date to around 1905)



Source of both photos: Carl Grueninger III. These will ultimately be a part of the [Stearns-Grueninger Collection at Hunter Library](#) (the entire collection was donated by Carl).

Big Bear Reservation (red square),  
Bryson home, Yonah Spring (white dot),  
Deep Creek mill tract (blue tract)



# Bryson Place Land timbering agreement

- On January 1, 1890, an agreement to sell the marketable timber on up to 600 acres of the Bryson Place land was struck between TD Bryson\* and the firm of McDonald and Fensom; for each acre cut, \$4 would be paid
- The area cut would be one contiguous body
- Cutting would be done one acre at a time, and payment for each acre would be made as soon as the timber was cut and on the bank of the creek
- Given three years, with at least a third to be removed each year
- TD Bryson, Sr died the following day

\* I assume that the timber deal was signed by TD Bryson, Sr on the day before his death. TD Bryson, Jr would have only been 17 years old at the time. This was presumably a mechanism to ensure that there would be ongoing income for the family after the death of the elder Bryson; it was clearly a thoughtful move on his part.

Logging was limited on the Deep Creek drainage, particularly in the upper section (above the junction of Left and Right Forks)

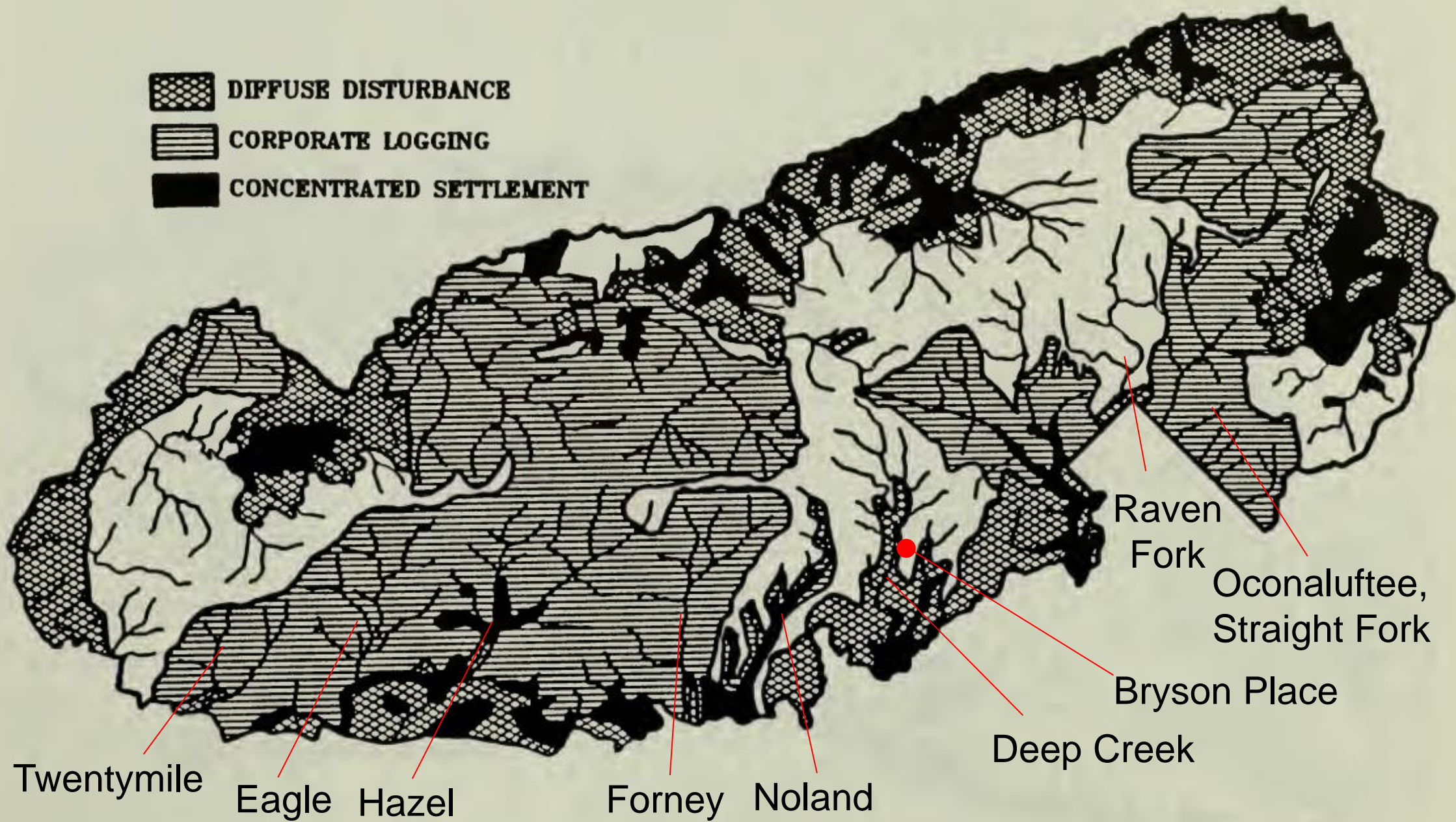


Figure 2. Diffuse disturbance closely associated with settled areas of GRSM prior to park establishment in 1934.

Source: Charlotte Pyle, [Vegetation Disturbance History of Great Smoky Mountains National Park: An Analysis of Archival Maps and Records](#), National Park Service, 1985.

# Remains of a splash dam, just below the mouth of Pole Road Creek (on the Bryson tract)



Source: Hiram Wilburn, [Open Parks Network](#)

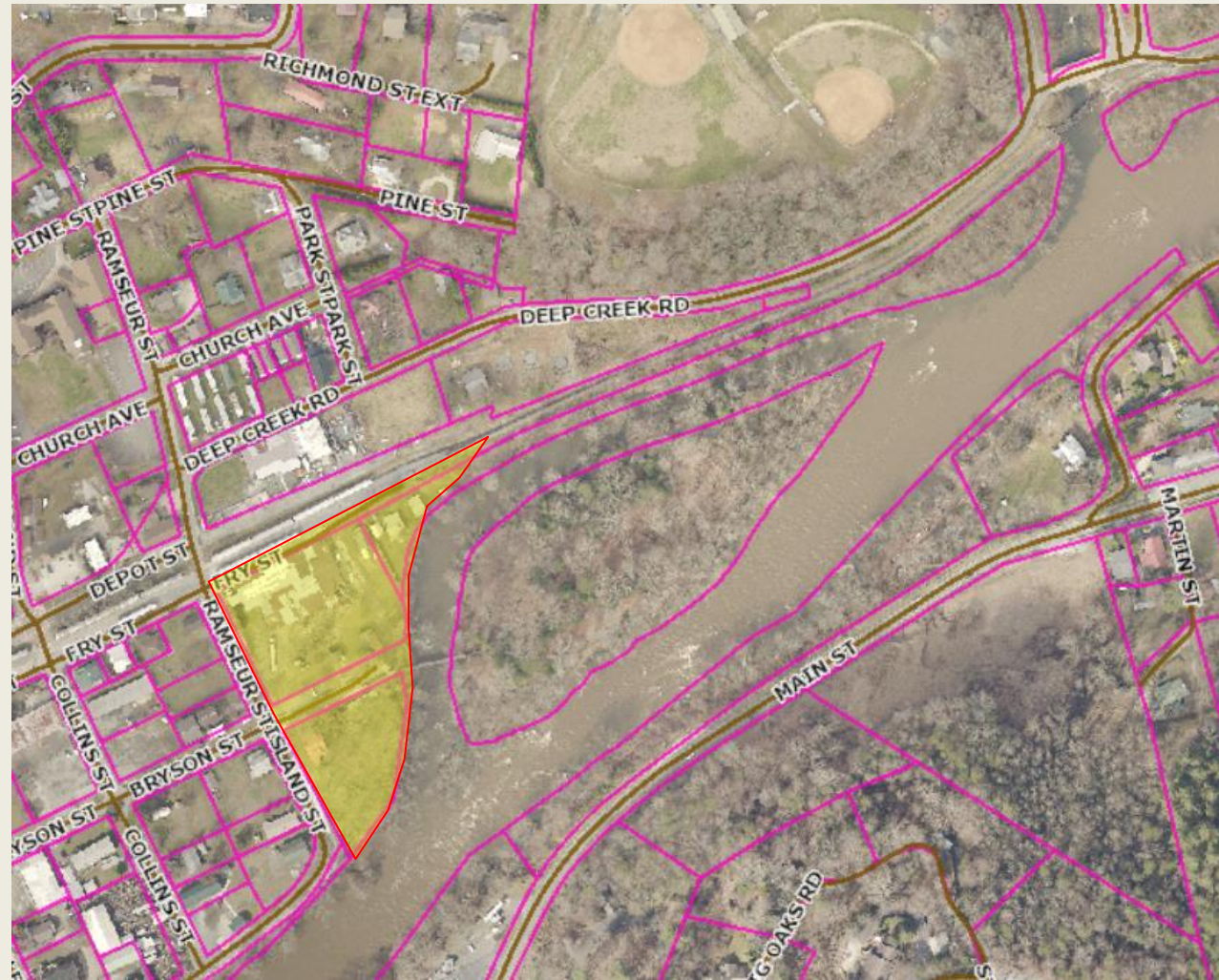


# Any of the floated logs which made it to the mouth of Deep Creek went to the Coffin & McDonald mill

- The Bryson Dam was presumably removed prior to this
- The Coffin/McDonald Mill stood near the Bryson City Island

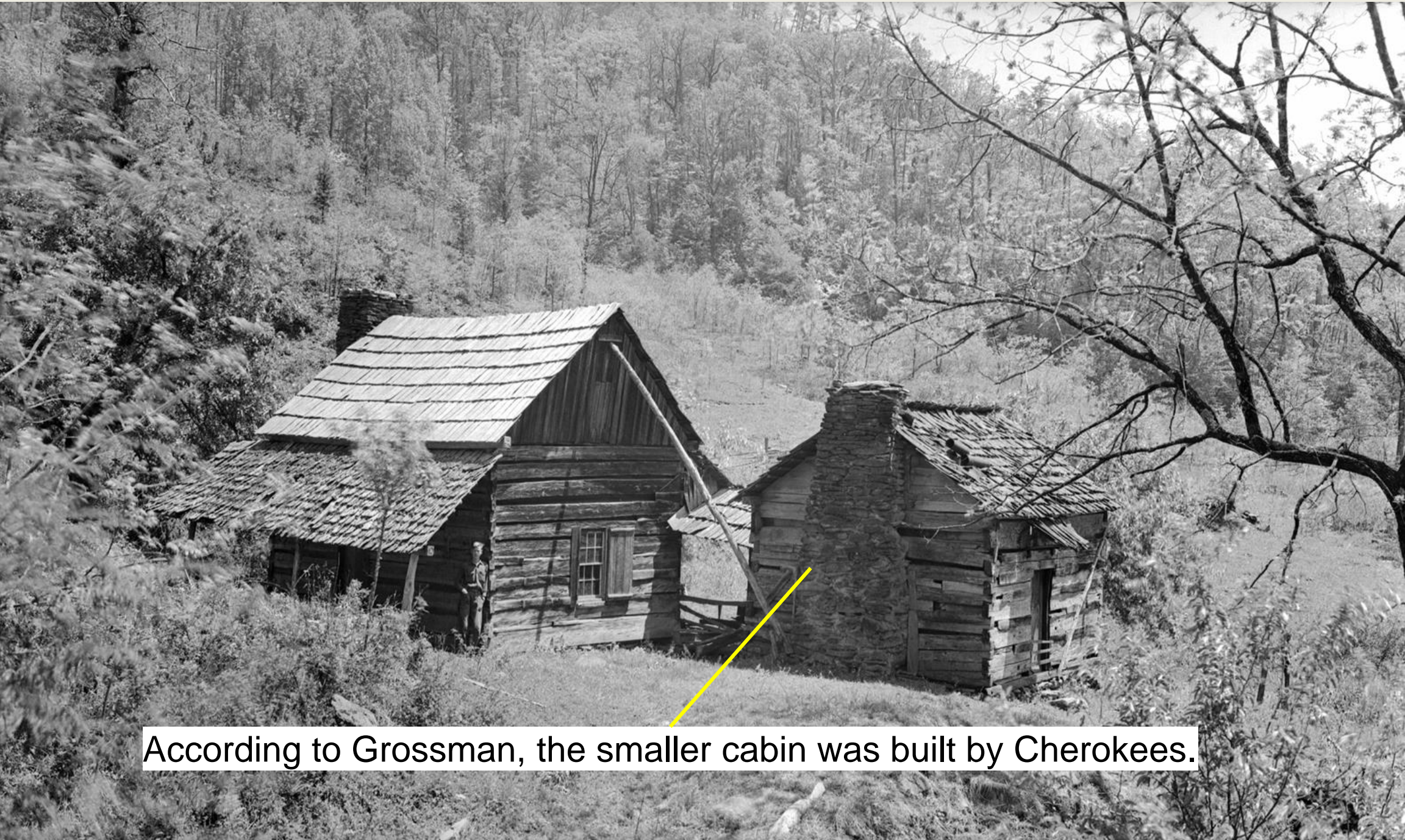
Coffin & McDonald acquired lots along the NW side of the island (not all of the highlighted section, but all of the southern and northern triangles and part of the Maness tract).

In 1894, they signed an agreement to sell 2,400,000 board feet of sawn logs to George Hagemeyer & Sons of New York. Of this, 2,000,000 feet had been cut from the Whittier lands and 400,000 was “of their own logs” – which presumably meant the from the timber they had purchased from the Brysons in 1890.



# Some details on the Bryson Place Cabin

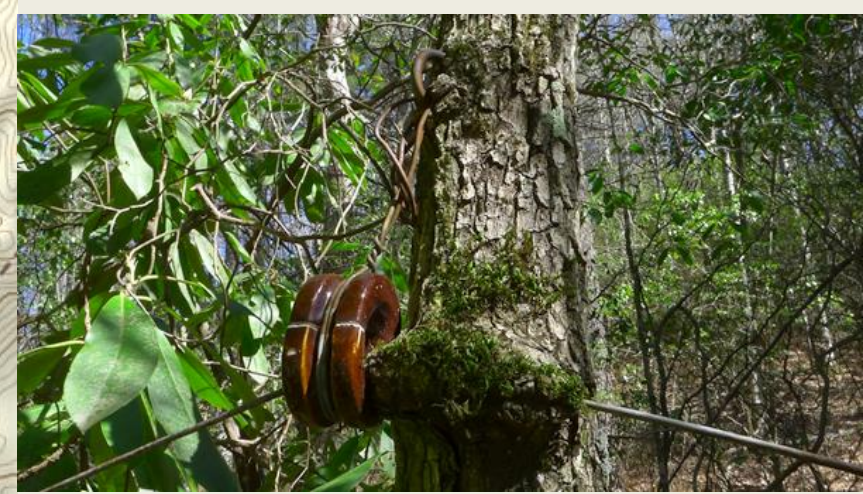
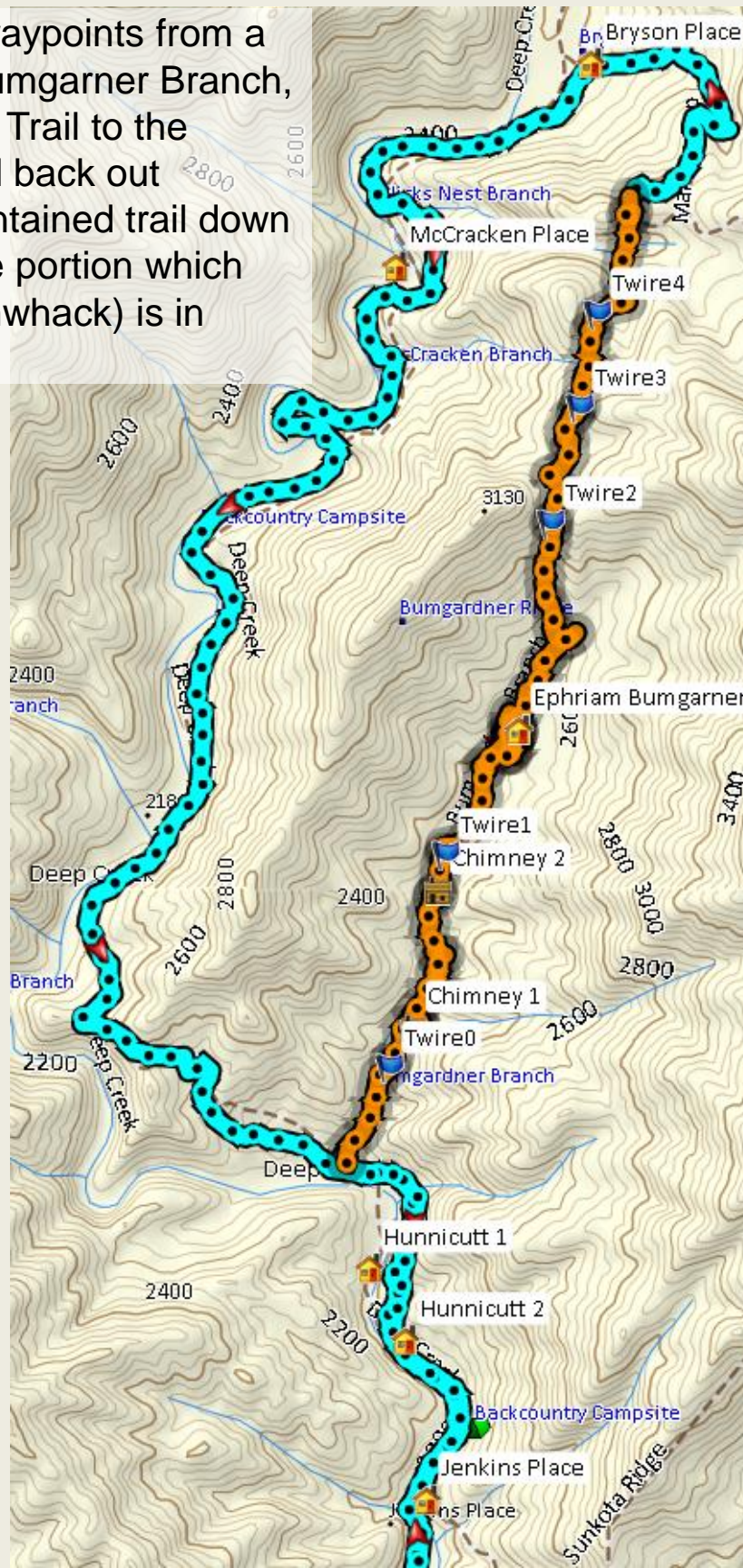
The Bumgarner Place, a mile and a quarter south of the Bryson Place, had a pair of dogtrot-connected cabins



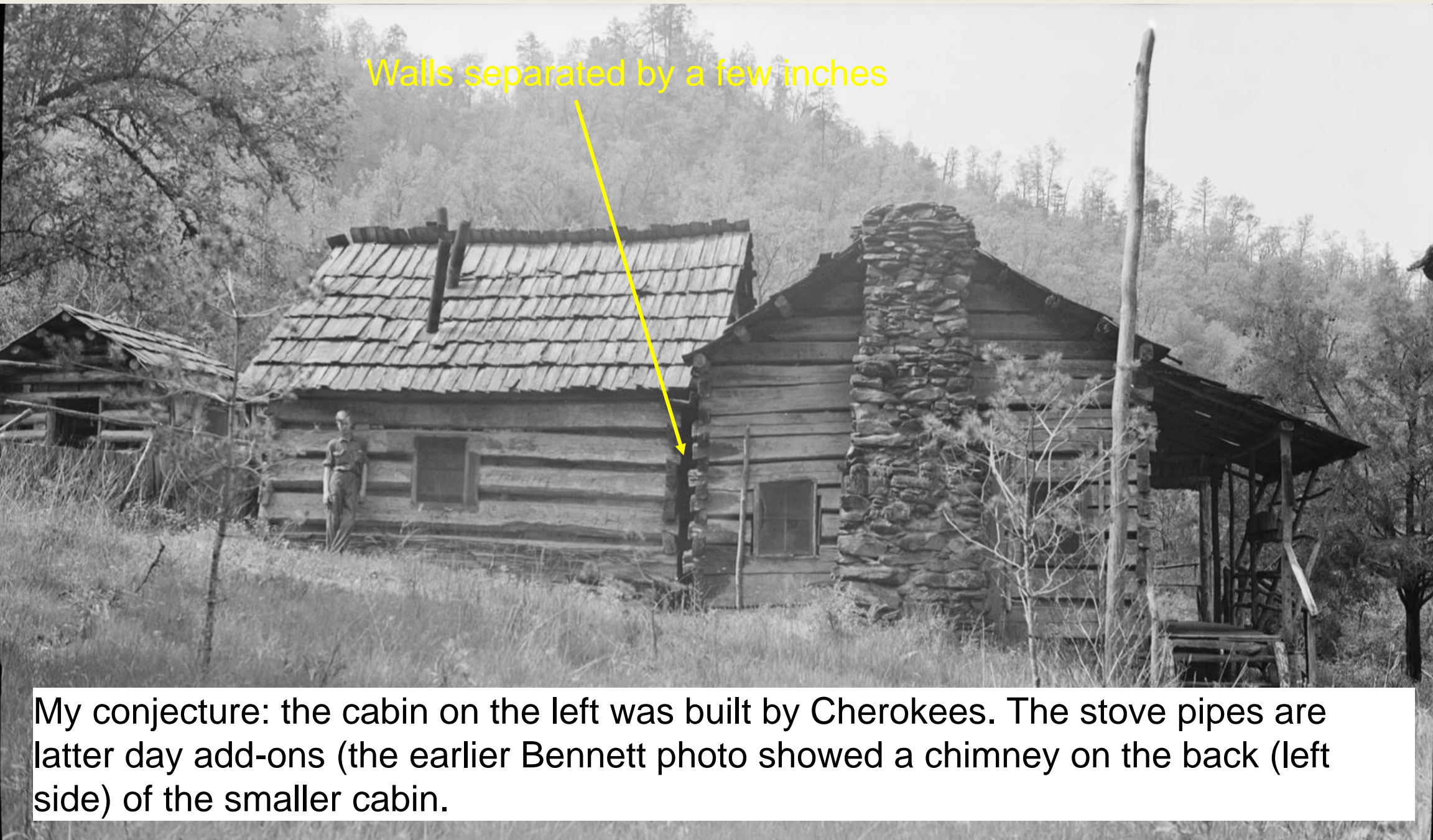
According to Grossman, the smaller cabin was built by Cherokees.

1937 Photo by Charles Grossman, [Open Parks Network](#)

GPS Track and waypoints from a bushwhack up Bumgarner Branch, over the Pullback Trail to the Bryson Place and back out following the maintained trail down Deep Creek. The portion which was off trail (bushwhack) is in orange.

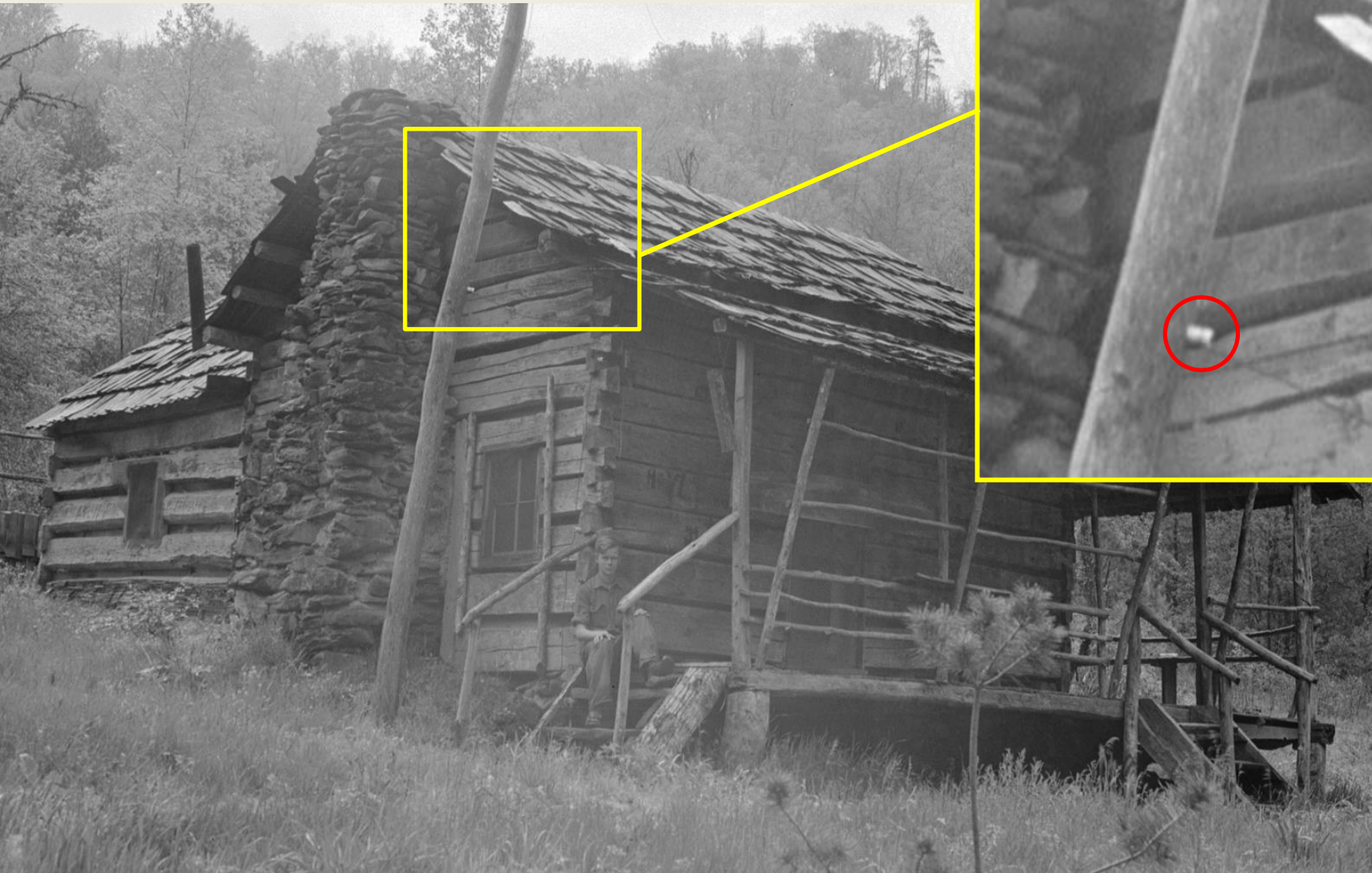


# The Bryson Place cabin was also clearly two cabins, built at different times (view from the north)



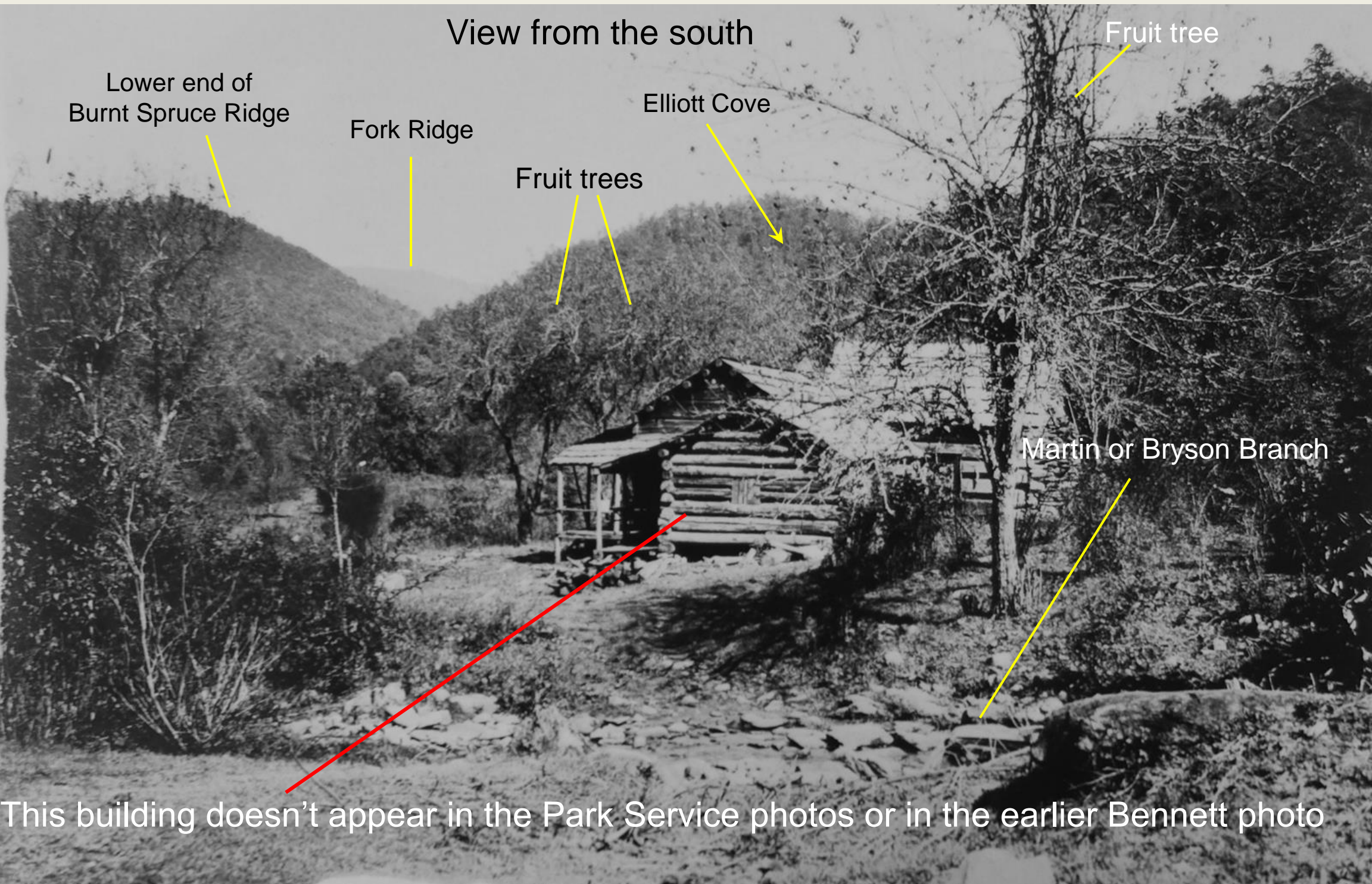
# There was telephone service to the Bryson Place

View from the northwest



1937 Photo by Charles Grossman, [Open Parks Network](#)

# View from across Martins Gap Branch to the cabin



View from the south

Lower end of  
Burnt Spruce Ridge

Fork Ridge

Elliott Cove

Fruit trees

Fruit tree

Martin or Bryson Branch

This building doesn't appear in the Park Service photos or in the earlier Bennett photo

The building does appear in this hunting group photo



View from the south



# View from the south

Phone line

“THIS STREAM  
CLOSED TO FISHING”

CCC Bunkhouse

1937 Photo by Charles Grossman, [Open Parks Network](#)

# CCC Barracks; note the planted shrubs



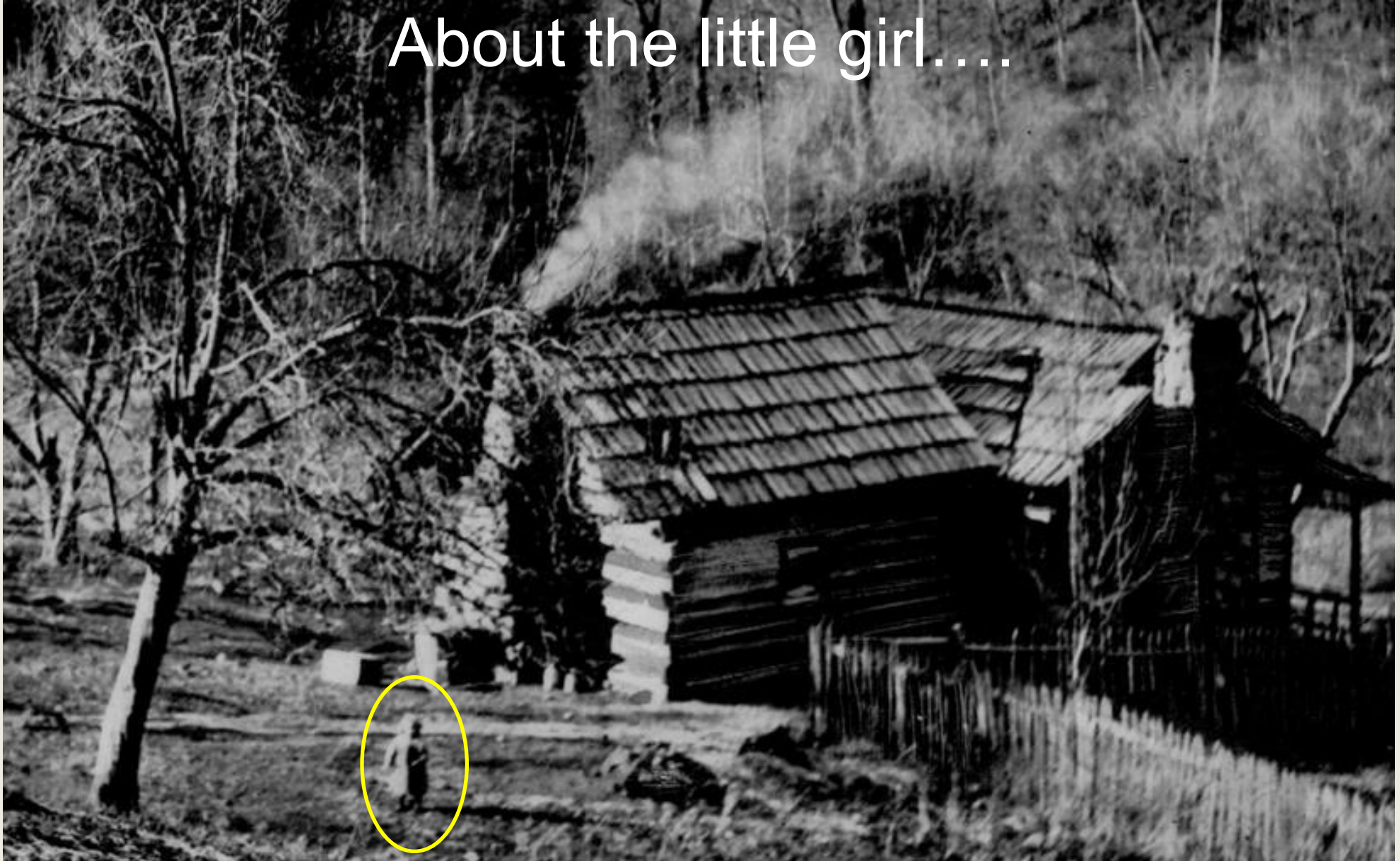
Source: Open Parks Network

# Levi Haynes, Bill Rolen in front of the CCC barracks



Source: Billy Rolen

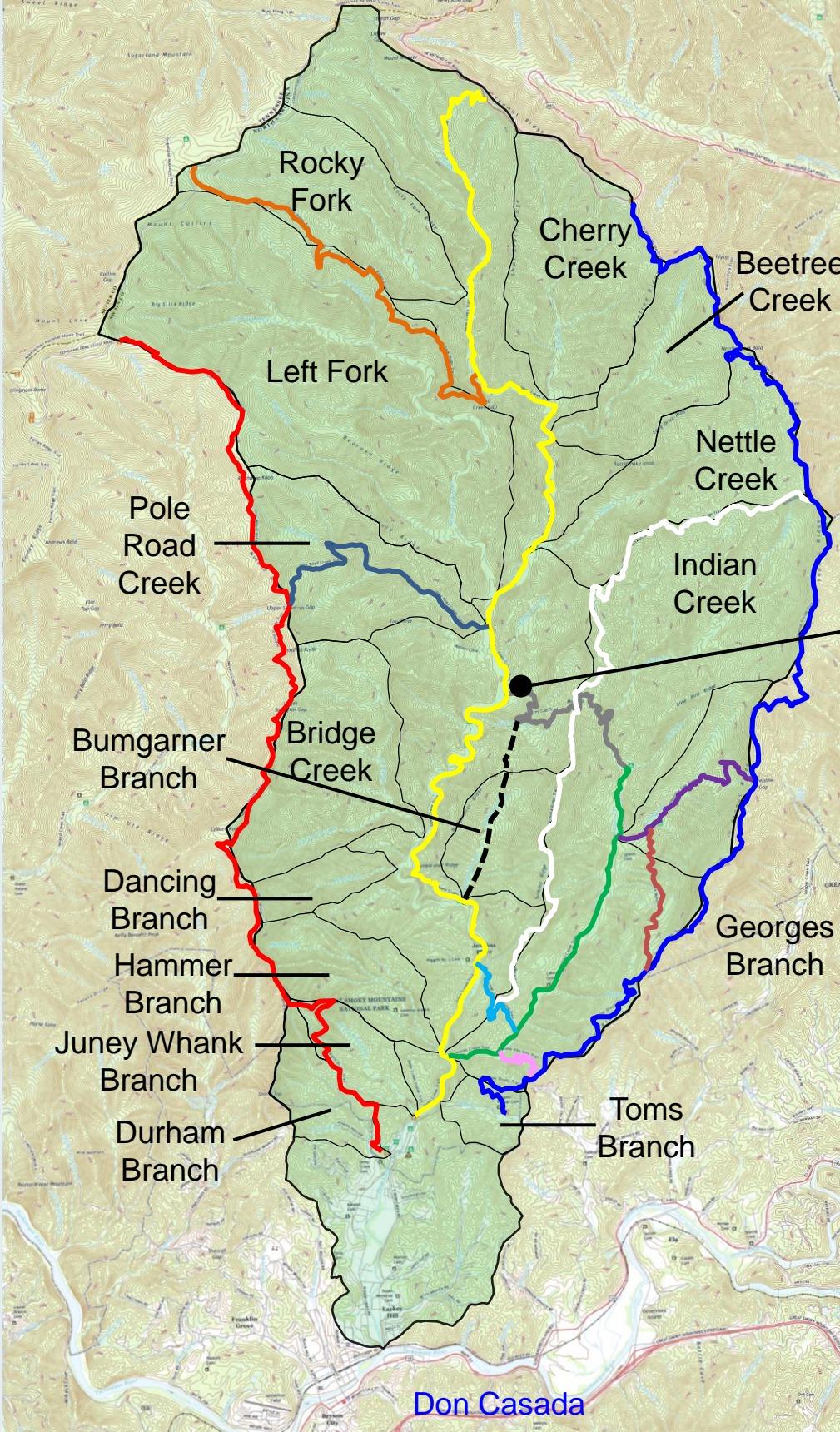
# About the little girl....



In the autobiographical sketch of Ed Bryson, son of TD Bryson, Jr, a copy of this same photo is included. He reported: *“The house actually had three rooms – two ‘all purpose rooms,’ each with a fireplace, and a third room or kitchen with a small ‘cook stove’ and a table with benches instead of chairs.”* He also pointed out the child and noted *“She was the adopted daughter of Bob and Sarah Barnett who lived there at the time. I have heard that my grandfather paid the Barnetts fifty dollars per month, but I do not recall the purpose of their occupancy.”*

*My speculation: the Barnetts were employed to keep an eye on the timbering operations. It would not have been his grandfather who did the hiring, however; it would have been his father, uncle and/or aunt.*<sup>44</sup>

It's at least a six mile walk to get there, no matter where you start



**Hiking Trails Legend**

- Noland Divide
- Deep Creek
- Thomas Divide
- Fork Ridge
- Indian Creek
- Sunkota Ridge
- Indian Creek Motor
- Deeplow Gap
- Pole Road Creek
- Martins Gap
- Deep Creek Loop
- Stonepile Gap
- Pullback (not maintained)

# Some permanent residents

- Martin family: George, Nancy, Nellie, Jonas
- Joe Feather
- Samuel Elliott (nearby, namesake of Elliott Cove Branch)
- Bob and Sarah Barnett and their adopted daughter – the small girl in the Bennett photo

# Some signatures from the Bryson Place Guest Registry

Joe Almond

Petey Angel

Charlie Beck

Print Blevins

Dr. Dan Bryson

Ed Bryson

TD Bryson

Jim Cagle

Granville Calhoun

Dr. Carr

Commodore Casada

Mark Cathey

Hill Cathey

Tom Clark

Hardy Clark

Nat Cline

Marion Eppley

Ethelberta Eppley

Ellis Estes

Joe Estes

John Everett

Claude Gossett

Mack Gossett

Levi Haynes

Columbus Hunnicutt

Waitsell Hunnicutt

Andrew Hunnicutt

Spurgeon Hunnicutt

Jeff Hunnicutt

Charlie Hunnicutt

Van Hunnicutt

Edd Hyatt

Mack Hyatt

Ralph Hyatt

Ralph Hyatt, Jr

Walter Hyatt

Horace Kephart

Back Laney

Wess Laws

Britt McCracken

James McAlpine Pyle

Joe Morris

Billy Morris

Eugene Portwood

Bill Rolen

Billy Rolen

Hugh Seay

Noah Seay

Robert Snelson

Irvin Thomas

Jim Thomas

Mack Thomas

Dave Wiggins

Hop Wiggins

Charlie Wilhide

Wess Wiggins

O.P. Williams

Claude Williams

Wayne Williams

Wade Wilson

Charles Woodard

# Finishing up with hunters and dogs assembled on the west side of the Bryson Place Cabin



1. Charlie Hunnicutt
2. John Everett
3. Noah Seay
4. Mark Cathey
5. Eugene Portwood
6. Sam Hunnicutt

Photo Source:  
Jim Estes

This photo likely went with [Sam Hunnicutt's story # 38](#) – the same hunt which [Mark Cathey told about to Joseph Hall](#).