

## **My Mind is Bad to Wander: Balds, Cabins, and Encounters with the Law**

**Don Casada, December 2020**

I often laugh at myself when I do something like I did the other day; otherwise I'd cry. I was working at the computer in the living room, and got up to go to the kitchen to get a refill of my glass of sweet tea. When I saw that one of the kitchen light bulbs was burned out, I went down to the basement to get a replacement. While down there, I noticed that I'd failed to complete the finishing touches on a new frame for the basement door rain-shedding contraption that my father built. So I took care of that, collected the sawdust residue and carried it outside to throw on the lower garden area. While there, I was reminded that I'd been meaning to trim the semi-dwarf apple tree water sprouts, so went back to the basement, got the pruning shears, and took care of things. About this time, I noticed that I was getting thirsty, so went to the kitchen to get the empty tea glass I'd left there – and saw that there was still a burned out light bulb. This time, I switched from automatic to straight drive, retrieved and replaced the light bulb, and finally got my glass of tea.

I was trained in engineering, and made a living from that profession, which I consider to be a mostly noble one. By and large, I enjoyed the work, and hopefully some of the folks I worked for might agree that I was a helpful every now and then.

That work required mental discipline – recognizing a challenge, collecting and analyzing data, and developing a solution. It was never a rote process; each problem confronted had to be dealt with on its own merits. Often it was necessary to pursue tangents. In many cases, those tangents proved to be of no consequence; but on occasion, the tangent would turn out to lead to a solution which was superior and would have never even been considered had the tangent not been followed. So even in that fairly strict discipline, a bit of wandering never hurt.

So I've come to accept that, to use Appalachian phraseology, a mind that is bad to<sup>A</sup> wander can be a positive attribute. So these days, as frustrating as it can be in terms of completing a project related to the history of our area and our forebears, I regularly stop when I see a little hint, and go a-wandering just to see what there is to see.

The story I set out to tell isn't mine, but my father's, and it proved to lead to quite a bit of just such wandering. I probably enjoyed the trip more than anyone else possibly could, but let me invite you to come along for this ride of many tangents; you can get off wherever you want – and maybe pursue your own tangent(s).

### Hunting for Fischer Black, but finding Pauline Francis, Jack Franklin, Siler Meadows and more

This all got started when I picked a book from the shelf (more about it below) recently in search of a name. I was looking for Fischer Black, the youngest son of [Stanley](#) and [Marianna Fischer Black](#). He grew up and attended school here in Bryson City, went off to study engineering in college and developed a career in the electric utility business which concluded with his being President and Vice Chairman of Tampa Electric Company. I provided a brief biographical overview on Fischer for a wonderful collection of photos taken by [IK Stearns](#)<sup>B</sup> which were recently donated to Western Carolina

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<sup>A</sup> For those who are not educated in Appalachian ways, the use of "bad to" is equivalent to "prone to."

<sup>B</sup> The Stearns-Grueninger collection was donated by Carl Grueninger III and his sister, Ann G. Ferguson. Documentation is still being added, but for the moment, that work in progress can be seen [here](#).

University. But as I read through the list of names, it was the name of Pauline Francis that brought a different thought to mind.

The book I went in search of was one entitled *New Handbook of Composition*. Several years back, a dear friend, Christine Proctor, was looking through books at the Friends of the Marianna Black Library bookstore and noticed one which may have been new at one time, but although it was in good shape, clearly had some years on it. She opened it up, found Daddy's name printed inside. Christine is a knowing woman when it comes to such things, realized I would cherish it and bought it on the spot as a gift; it is one I do, in fact, treasure. The book is small – about 4.75 x 6.5 inches, and although it's only about ¾ inch thick, it has a whopping 343 pages. In Figure 1 below is the inside title page and on the blank page preceding it, Daddy had handwritten the names of his class.

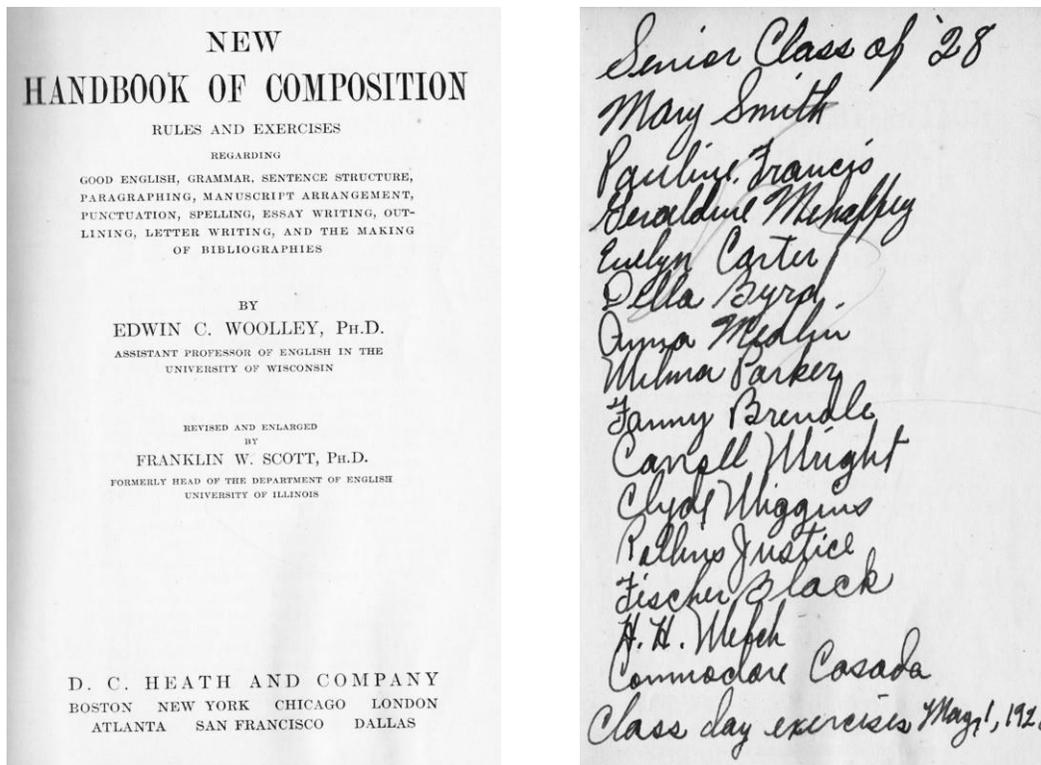


Figure 1. Inside cover of the composition book and 1928 Bryson City High graduates

While I verified that Fischer Black was, as I recalled, a classmate of my father's, the name which caught my attention and led me on a journey was that of Pauline Francis.

My father, Commodore Andrew Casada was born in the Tusquitee or Shooting Creek section of Clay County, NC on August 7, 1909, and lived a wondrously full life here in western North Carolina, dying at the age of 101 years and 175 days in the place he called home, Bryson City.

He graduated from Bryson City High School on May 1, 1928 at the age of eighteen. This was back when there were only eleven grades in elementary plus high school, so he should've finished a year earlier (perhaps two), but after completing what was then the mandatory six grades (common school), he dropped out. Perhaps part of his thinking was that six grades of education was all that his own father had. Daddy never spoke to whether his parents explicitly encouraged him to go back to school or not, but I suspect there was plenty of implicit encouragement by the extra work that he was

assigned to do around the farm. Whatever the case, he realized that he'd made a bad choice, and returned the following year.

Daddy was a good story teller, and his experiences remained so vivid that no embellishment was needed. I've been reminded of a particular one several times lately – from altogether different directions – including Pauline Francis; and realized maybe I was being prodded to record it in writing.

The story is one my father related to me several times in his last years. He may have told it years before; if so, I didn't recall it. My sister doesn't remember it at all, and my brother's memory is foggy, so I'm inclined to think it was only in his later years that this tale came to the fore. During his final four years, I spent more than half of each year here with him at home, in Bryson City. To give us each a break from one another, I routinely took day-long hikes in the Smokies. Daddy, who had traveled many miles by shanks mare in earlier days, always asked me about where I'd been and what I'd seen. In some cases, he had recollections of his own about the places I'd been to and shared them. One of those was what is now shown on maps and known to folks of my generation as Silers Bald, but to him was Siler Meadows. Pretty much any time I mentioned Silers Bald, it would evoke a retelling of the time "Old Man Jack Franklin" hired him to build a cabin at Siler Meadows

Right there in that last sentence are four separate threads I thought worth pursuing – Old Man Jack Franklin, the building of the cabin, Silers Meadows vs Silers Bald naming, and Smoky Mountain Balds in general. Put your traveling shoes on, here we go.....

#### Old Man Jack Franklin

[Andrew Jackson Franklin, Sr](#) (1865-1940) was a native of the Fines Creek area of Haywood County, but made Bryson City his home for most of his life. He married [Sarah Josephine "Sallie" Keener](#) (1873-1960), a granddaughter of early Methodist missionary, Ulrich Keener, who had served as a minister to the [Echota Mission](#) Church, and was the first superintendent of the Echota Mission School, located at the present-day Cherokee United Methodist Church in the Soco Valley. The restored Keener log cabin stands nearby.

The moniker "Old Man Jack Franklin" was one which my father used, and no doubt came about as a local way to clarify which of the Jack Franklins was the subject, since the first son of Jack and Sallie was [Andrew Jackson Franklin, Jr.](#) In a recording of Smoky Mountain icon [Mark Cathey](#), Uncle Mark referred to A.J., Jr as "Little Jack Franklin."

Jack and Sallie met when both were school teachers and were married on August 23, 1896. The couple first made their home on Everett Street<sup>C</sup>, apparently renting, before moving to what would be their home for decades on west Main Street in a rambling, two story home near the foot of School House Hill. Portions of the Franklin home and the Rhododendron Motor Court are shown in Figure 2. That home was removed in the 1970s when road changes were made to straighten the road from the lower bridge across Main Street and up the four-lane Veterans Boulevard, and the hotel was later razed and replaced by a gas station. The road sign seen in the left foreground faced the intersection

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<sup>C</sup> That the Franklins lived on Everett Street comes from the profile of A.J. and Sallie Franklin in *Heritage of Swain County*, which was written by granddaughter Doris Thomasson Brown. The only property of record which the Franklins acquired on Everett Street was north of the railroad tracks, and included the property where Dollar General and the buildings north of Bryson Walk, east of Toot Hollow Branch and west of Everett Street are today. The *Heritage* piece indicates they lived across from Dr. Davis. This was Dr. R.L. Davis, whose residence stood across Everett Street from the Calhoun House Hotel

where Main Street and US 19 joined. The oak tree atop the hill at the far right stood near the entrance to the Bryson City Cemetery. That tree was taken down more than a decade ago. At its base, it was close to six feet in diameter. The remains of the stump have mostly been removed by Friends of the Bryson City Cemetery, but vestiges remain.



Figure 2. Jack and Sallie Keener Franklin home and Rhododendron Motor Court. Source: Jim Casada

Jack and Sallie raised a bright, accomplished family. In Figure 3 below they are shown with their children and their spouses and grandchildren.

Jack Franklin studied law under Fred Fisher, passed the NC bar exam in 1899, and practiced law literally until the very day he died (collapsed and died suddenly outside of the courthouse on the town square). He was actively involved in not only the legal profession but in multiple businesses and real estate ventures. Franklin Street, which connects US 19 across from the Bar-B-Que Wagon in east Bryson is named for him; the development on Bennett Hill through which the road passes is part of the Franklin-Shope addition to the town, which dates to 1908. His partner in that venture was Thomas Vance Shope. Or more accurately, I should say that Jack and Sallie Keener Franklin were partners with TV and Etta Grant Shope<sup>D</sup>. While it was the men who bought the property, their wives were equally involved in selling it.

Interestingly, along this line, the property where the Franklins built their home on west Main Street was not acquired by Jack; rather, it was purchased by his wife Sallie. This brings to mind the fact that the place where [Dr. A.M. Bennett](#) and his wife, [Mary Charlotte Hyatt Bennett](#) built their home<sup>E</sup> was purchased not by Dr. A.M., but by Mary Charlotte. It is abundantly clear who was in charge of not just the home lives of those prominent families, but where the homes that housed them stood.

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<sup>D</sup> The widowed [Etta Grant Shope](#) would later marry widower [O.P. Williams](#), whose first wife was Etta's sister, [Artie](#).

<sup>E</sup> The Bennett home stood on east Main Street, where the Stonebrook Lodge, which looks like it ought to belong in Cherokee or Gatlinburg, now stands.



Figure 3. Jack and Sallie Keener family, 1933. L-R standing: Dr. Grover Wilkes, Edith Bryson Franklin, [Sallie Keener Franklin](#), [Jack Franklin, Sr](#), [Nell Franklin Johnson](#), D.H. Johnson holding Alva, [Daisy Franklin Wilkes](#), Jean Franklin.. L-R seated: Helen Franklin, [Lillian Franklin Thomasson](#), [Dr. Berlin Thomasson](#) holding [Doris](#), Amy Franklin, [Jack Franklin, Jr](#) holding A.J. Franklin III, and [Gloria Johnson](#). Source: *Heritage of Swain County*

The Franklin-Sandidge development, which included land east of town along what is now US 19, including along the river and Carringer Street as well as on the south side of the highway, was created shortly thereafter, with the first lots being sold in 1913. His partner in that venture was [Robert L. Sandidge](#). Another local individual he partnered with was [Robert Levi Snelson](#), the grandfather of my father's classmate, Pauline Francis, and her younger brother, who will be encountered below, [Joseph Snelson Francis](#). Jack was also involved in manufacturing ventures and acquired land throughout the county.

I am uncertain as to whether he was acting on his own initiative or at the behest of a client, but it was in the summer of 1928 that Jack Franklin decided to have a cabin built at Siler Meadows, on land which was going to be included in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The idea behind building a cabin was to show an improvement on the land, increasing its value. The financial question was whether the increase in value would more than offset the cost of construction. Jack Franklin apparently decided that if he could hire some cheap labor – say, in the form of youngsters who might even consider it something of a lark – the likelihood was that he would come out ahead.

And so it was that my father, whose family lived up Spring Street from the Franklins, came into the equation. From here on, I'm going to let Daddy tell the story, just as I remember him telling it to me.

The words in italics below aren't quoted from Daddy, but they're as close as I can get to telling the story the way he did.

### Building a cabin at Silers Meadows

*I spent some time at Silers Meadows. Old man Jack Franklin hired me and [Joe Francis](#) to build a log cabin there. Neither one of us had any experience at building cabins, although I'd helped Papa with a bit of logging – getting acid wood to sell for money and the like – and in raising some of the outbuildings on Juney Whank Branch, which were of log construction. An older fellow went along with us to help get us started, but after that we were on our own. The two of us worked at it and were making pretty good progress. We had all four walls up as high as the top of the door, and were busy at it one morning when three fellows all of a sudden came out of the woods. There was a Ranger Needham and with him were [Granville Calhoun](#) and [Will Wiggins](#). Needham arrested us on the spot and hauled us down to Hazel Creek, where he had a truck, and then on down to Proctor.*

*We'd been out there several days, and neither one of had taken a bath or had a change of clothes. They took us into a little restaurant at Proctor to eat dinner. I'd never eaten in a restaurant and didn't know how to act, so just sort of watched what they did and followed along. But it really embarrassed me to be in there among folks and knowing that I was filthy looking and had to have smelled worse.*

*After we ate, Needham loaded us into his truck and drove to Bryson City. He was a sour sort of fellow, but Joe and I got to telling jokes and by the time we got to town, he had sort of loosened up. We had a few tools, including an axe and a saw, but I also had a shotgun and I was scared to death that he was going to confiscate all of that. But he told us we could take the tools and go home as long as we promised to show up for a hearing before the U.S. Commissioner the next morning. Boy, now that was a relief, because I knew we wouldn't get in trouble since we were just hired hands, and I also wouldn't be in trouble with Papa, since it was his shotgun.*

*The U.S. Commissioner was Charlie Meadows, Harry's father. Harry was a good athlete and awful limber; he could do a standing backflip. The hearing was held in Charlie Meadows' store, down here at the bottom of the hill. Needham, Will Wiggins and some others with the Park presented the case. They wanted to make an example out of us, you know, to show that the Park was in charge of things and we couldn't do things like we were accustomed to doing anymore.*

*They told about how they'd caught us building the cabin up there, and then Charlie Meadows asked "Now was the cabin on the North Carolina or the Tennessee side of the mountain?" They talked with each other, "Chit-Chit-Chit," and Needham said "Well, your honor, it was right on top of the mountain – right on the state line." Charlie Meadows said "That won't do; you need to tell me if it was in North Carolina or Tennessee." They talked among themselves - some more "Chit-chit-chit" but admitted that they couldn't say which state it was in - it was right on top of the mountain, on the state line.*

*At that point, Charlie Meadows, who probably got exactly the answer he wanted from them, said "Well, if it was on the North Carolina side, that property has not yet been purchased by the North Carolina Park Commission, let alone transferred to the federal government. If it was on the Tennessee side, that's outside my jurisdiction." Then with a bang of his gavel said "Case dismissed!"*

Daddy would chuckle at the conclusion of that story; I think a good part of it was because it was his one and only encounter with the law and the feds, and he got off scot free.

### About the Silers

When talking about places, I like to get a better feel for them – why they carry the names they do, and when those names involve people, something about those folks. Often that research leads to its own story. That proved to be the case here, so I thought I'd wander on this path.

The North Carolina – Tennessee state line does, in fact, pass right across the crest of Silers Bald at 5,607 ft elevation. It is located about four crow flying miles west of and more than 1,000 feet below the highest point in the Smokies, Clingmans Dome. The bald is not only a dividing point between states, it is the highest, and terminating (or beginning, depending on which way you're heading) point of Welch Ridge, which separates two celebrated Smoky Mountain streams – Forney Creek on the east and Hazel Creek on the west. See the county map with drainages in Appendix A [Fig A1](#).

It is named for Jesse Richardson (J.R.) Siler, an early and prominent settler in the Franklin, NC area who acquired the peak and considerable surrounding land through the North Carolina State Land Grant process. J.R. Siler acquired over 11,600 acres of land throughout western North Carolina via land grants. He acquired this particular tract, and several others in the Forney and Hazel Creek drainages totaling over 3,000 acres, in the 1850s. A fellow Franklin resident, Joab Lawrence Moore acquired over 10,000 acres in the Forney to Hazel Creek area in the same period. It would be surprising if either man ever set foot on these properties. Like many others of the period, they were land speculators, and in many cases turned a tidy profit for their ventures. But in the case of Siler, the family held onto the property for long enough (his son and estate executor, Thaddeus Siler, sold it in 1882) for the peak to take on his name.

Another peak in Macon County, near the head of the Nantahala River drainage and part of the Nantahala National Forest land, is named Siler Bald (without the "s" on the end of Siler). That bald is named for J.R.'s older brother, William Siler, who acquired property in that vicinity, including along Siler Creek, whose headwaters form below the southwestern shoulder of Siler Bald. The Macon County Siler Bald is 423 feet shy of the heights of the Silers Bald of Swain County and the Great Smoky Mountains. The Appalachian Trail skirts the eastern slope lee of Macon County's Siler Bald, but passes directly across the top of Silers Bald of Swain, NC and Sevier, TN Counties.

William Siler's wife was Althea Swain, the older sister of Swain County's namesake, David Lowry Swain.. It was not at all unusual for a pair of siblings to marry another pair of siblings from another family in the early days of settlement, and such was the case with the Siler and Swain families. William Siler's brother, Jacob, married Matilda Swain, the older sister of Althea.

An intriguing element of the Siler family connections to the Smokies and Silers Bald in particular involves the North Carolina Park Commission's survey of tracts to be acquired by the Commission. These tract surveys, were carried out exclusively with the assistance of local men, most of whom had plenty of backwoods experience, such as Mark Cathey and Sam Hunnicutt. Cathey, Hunnicutt and others were chainmen and brush clearers. The surveyor who oversaw surveying for the North Carolina portions of the Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway was William Neville Sloan, a native of Franklin and civil engineering graduate of the North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts (now NC State University) in 1909. Clearly an extremely bright, well-rounded man (editor of the

school newspaper and annual, president of a school literary society and a math and hydraulics whiz, he was given the nickname “Nubbin” – no doubt because of his size (5 ft 8 inches tall, 130 pounds his senior year in college). That size and physique – remarkably similar to that of Mark Cathey – no doubt served him well when he surveyed the rugged areas of the Smokies in his late 30s. Every North Carolina Park Commission property tract map, from Deals Gap in the west to the Pigeon River in the east is marked as having been surveyed by W.N. Sloan.

As to his connection to the Silers - W.N. Sloan was a great-grandson of the first owner of Silers Bald, J.R. Siler. Sloan was called on to testify in a case involving land formerly owned by his great-grandfather – and specifically the area at Silers Bald. It had to do with mineral rights ownership. Granville Calhoun was also called as a witness in that trial.

A copy of Sloan’s sketch in the 1909 Agromeck (school annual) is shown in Figure 4. An example tract survey for the NC Park Commission is shown in Figure 4a.

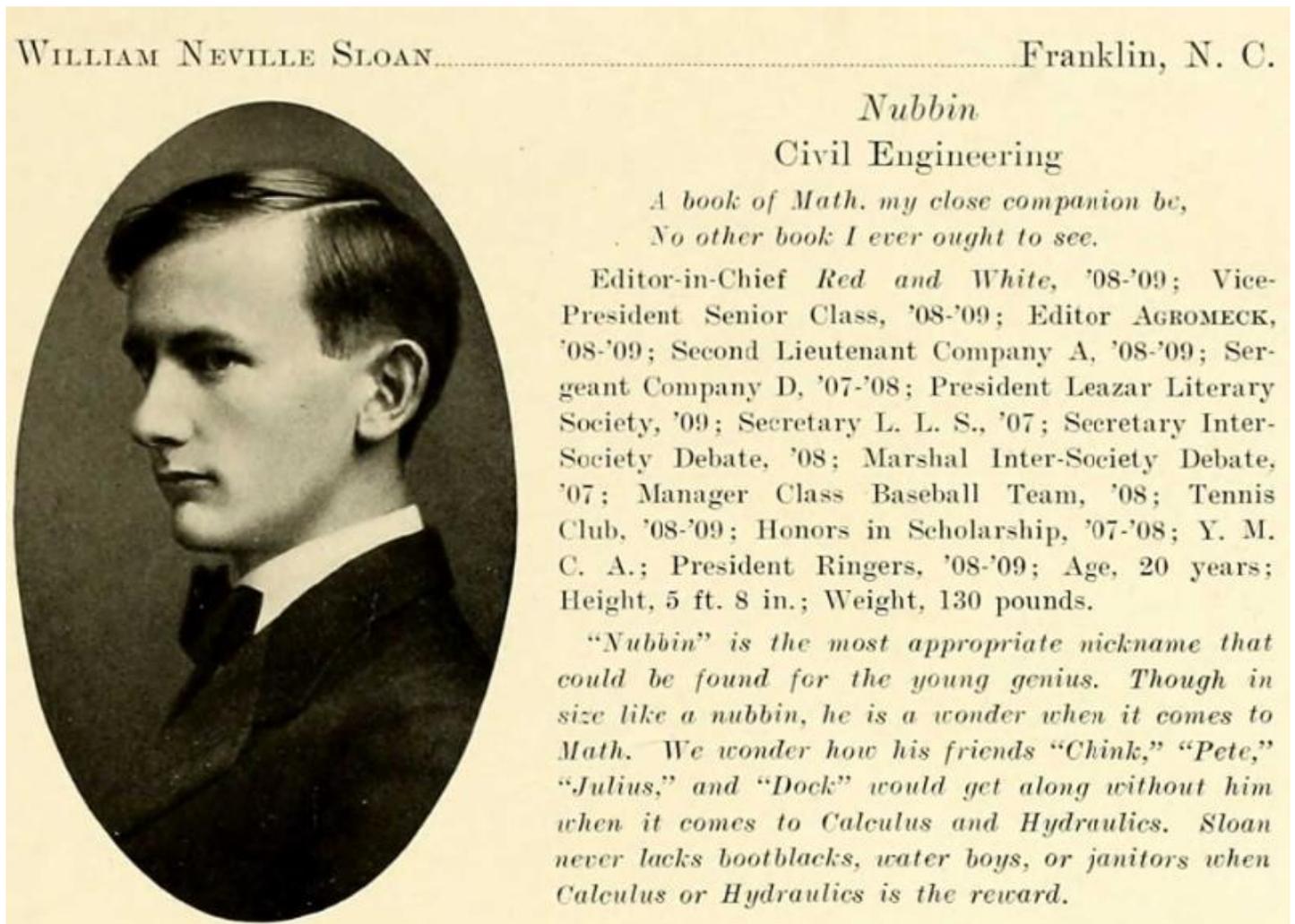


Figure 4. W.N. Sloan sketch in the 1909 NC College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts *Agromeck*

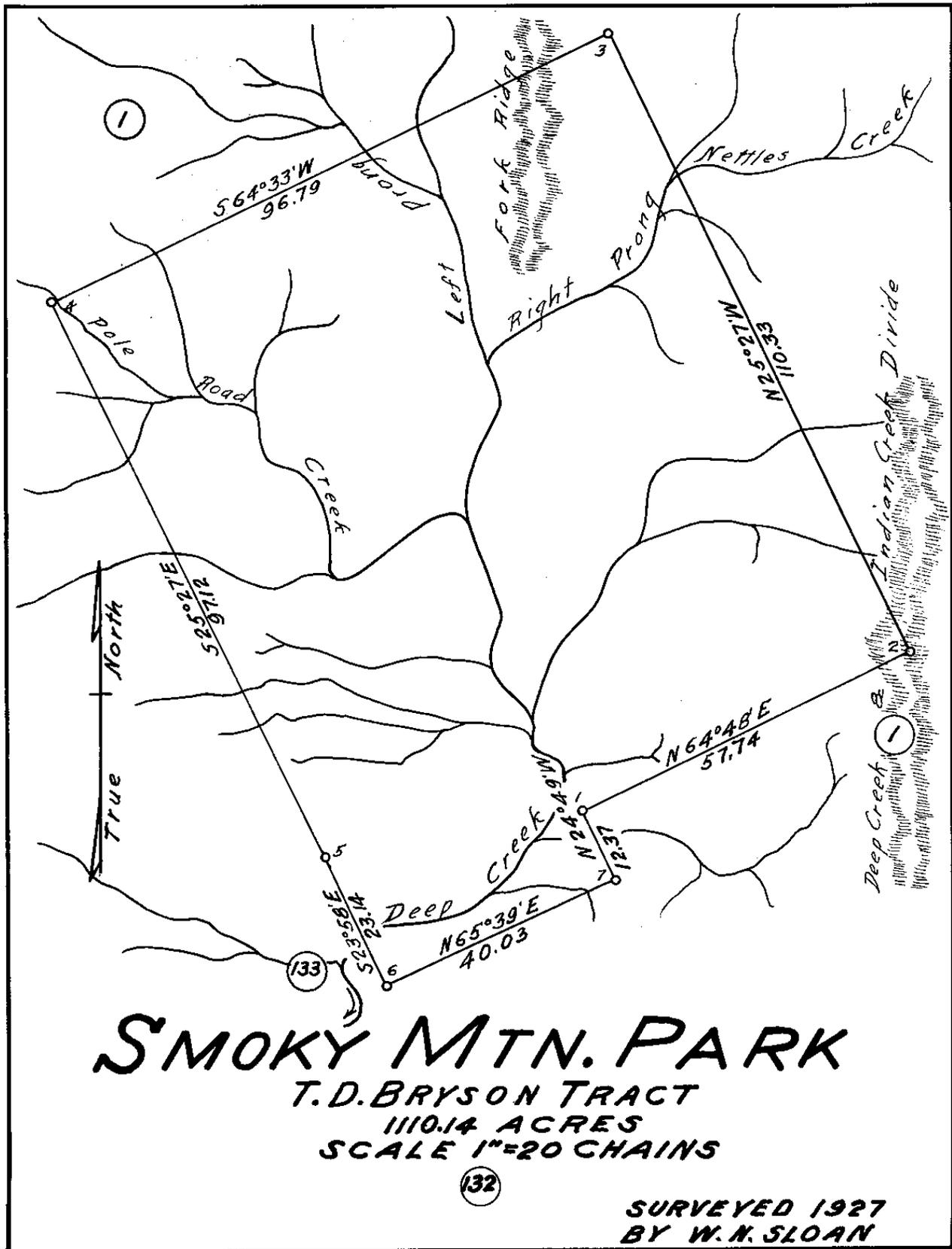


Figure 4a. WN Sloan survey plot of the “Bryson Place” land owned by the heirs of [T.D. Bryson](#): [Judge T.D. Bryson](#), [Dr. D.R. Bryson](#), and Mary Bryson Tipton. Source: NC Park Commission Records, Great Smoky Mountain National Park archives.

The Figure 5 photo is a view to the east from Silers Bald. In addition to the grassy area around the photographer's feet, a couple of other "bald" spots can be seen along the Smoky crest which divides Tennessee on the left from North Carolina on the right. Overall, the Smoky spine meanders on a southwest to north east course. You can see that between Silers Bald and Clingmans Dome, it does a bit of wandering, but mostly stays on a west to east course. At Clingmans Dome, it bears to the left across Mt. Love and then Mt. Collins, which also straddle the state line. Figure 6 is taken from the location noted in Figure 5. Everything seen in Figures 5 and 6 is inside the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

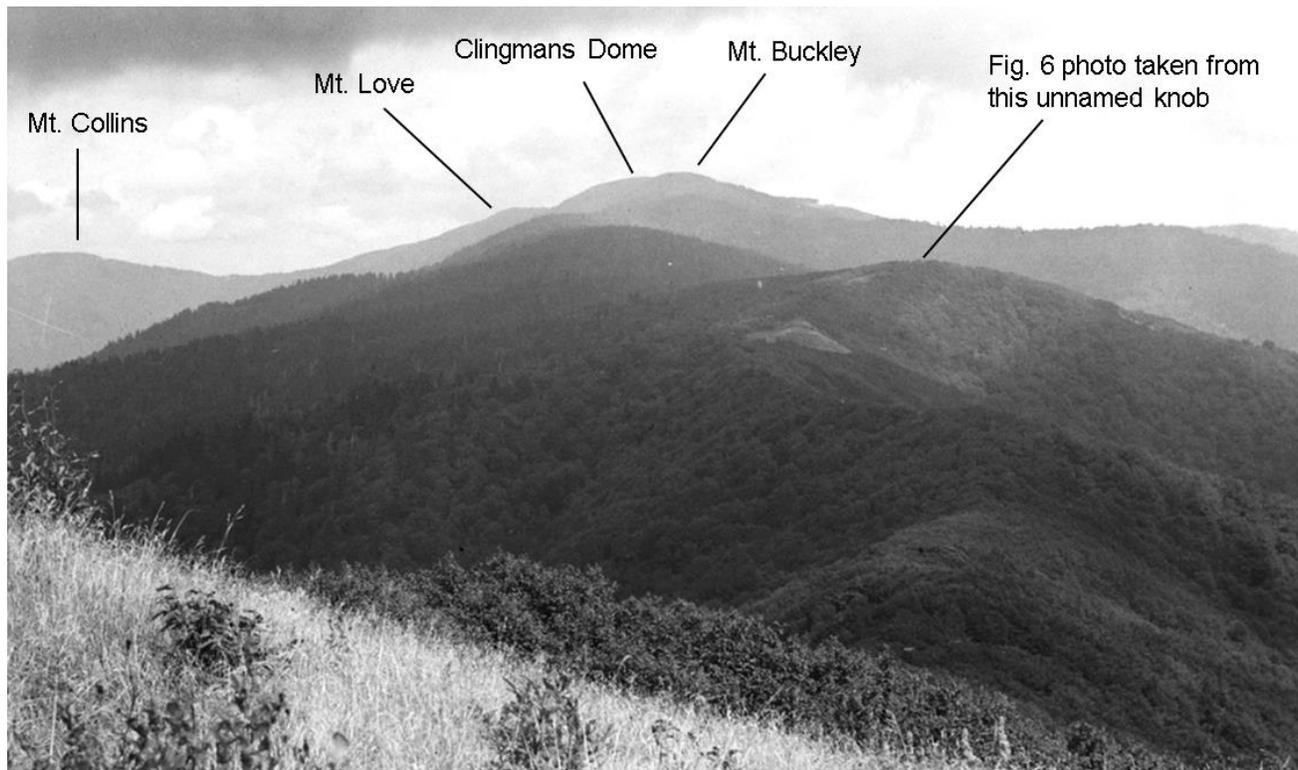


Figure 5. View from Silers Bald to the east in 1938. Source: [Open Parks Network](#)

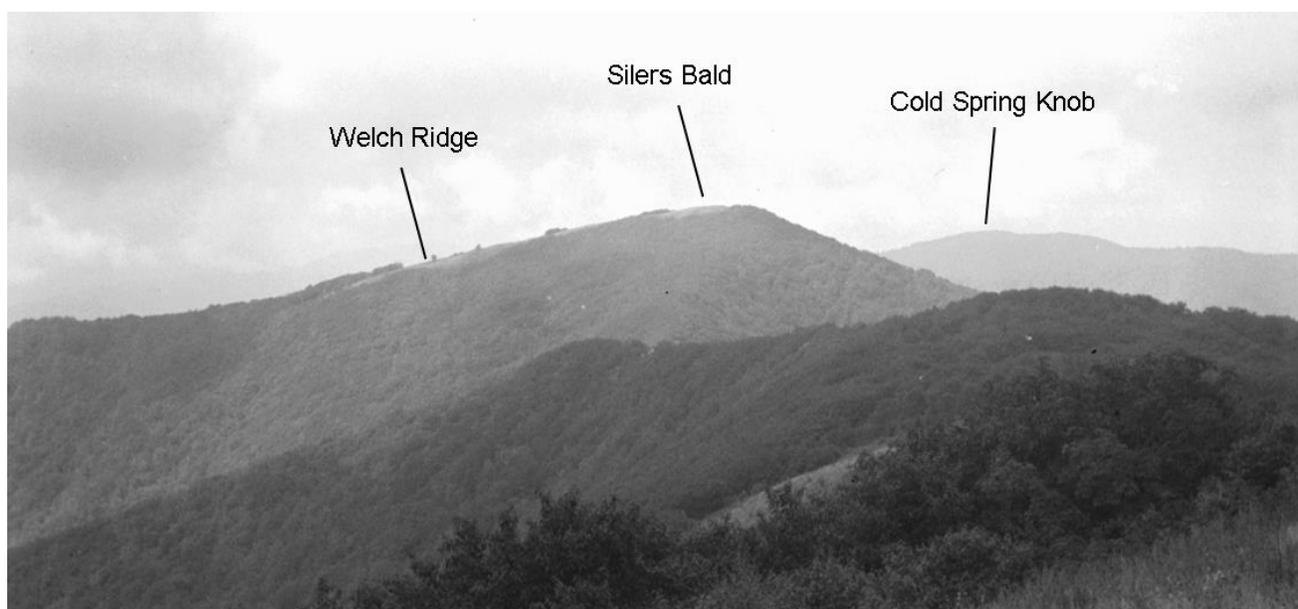


Figure 6. Silers Bald, from the unnamed knob of Fig. 5, 1938. Source: [Open Parks Network](#)

To give a sense of how things have changed in the more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a century since these photos were taken, see Figure 7, a photo I took from Silers Bald a few years back and compare it to that of Figure 5. Similarly, compare Figure 8, taken along the trail to Silers Bald from the same general area as the Figure 6 photo. There is now but a small patch of clearing, and it shrinks by the year. But in areas around the bald which isn't bald anymore, there is still abundant evidence of its former use for grazing (Figure 5). The same type of grassy understory survives on some – but not all – former grazing spaces in the Smokies.



Figure 7. View from Silers Bald to the east in 2010. Source: photo by author

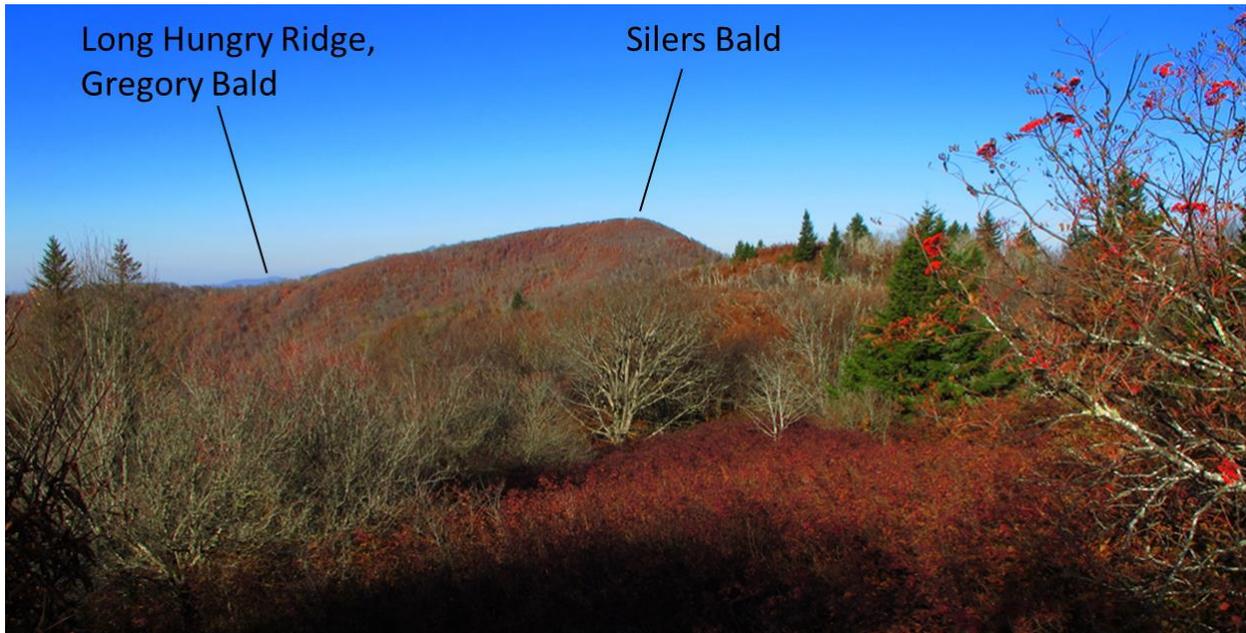


Figure 8. Silers Bald from 0.7 miles to the east, near the head of Suli Ridge. Long Hungry Ridge, noted in the photo, is 15 miles from where the photo was taken. Source: photo by author.

## Silers Bald – or Siler Meadows?

It is unclear when the name Silers Bald began to be used. Arnold Guyot<sup>F</sup> measured its height in the 1850s to within 7 feet (0.12%) of modern estimates, and named it Big Stone Mountain. Gregory Bald was listed as “Bald Spot” as early as 1833.<sup>1</sup> But there is no notation on maps of another bald along the Smoky Mountain part of the state line for over half a century after that. The large scale (1/125,000) [1886 USGS Knoxville quadrangle map](#) designates the peak as Silers Bald. In an 1888 newspaper account, [Eben Alexander](#), a Knoxville native and professor of ancient languages at the University of North Carolina, also called it Silers Bald.<sup>2</sup> The name was officially sanctioned on June 30, 1932 by the U.S. Geographic Board, based on the recommendation of the North Carolina Nomenclature Committee, whose members included [Horace Kephart](#), George Masa and Verne Rhoades. The Geographic Board decision card claimed that the “Local usage” was Silers Bald.

The Geographic Board clearly didn’t consult with *actual* locals, at least not from Swain County, North Carolina side. While I don’t think anyone would object to the name Silers Bald, the fact that it was *not* local usage at the time is aptly demonstrated in a set of 1970’s interviews concerning balds in the Smokies.<sup>3</sup> Three of the interviewees were Swain County men: [George Monteith](#), [Seymour Calhoun](#) and [Lawrence Crisp](#). In every case, they referred to the area as Siler Meadows (or, in Smoky Mountain dialect, Siler Meaders). The same was true for Seymour Calhoun’s father, Granville, who consistently referred to it as Siler Meadows in newspaper columns by John Parris as well as when he was called as a witness in a condemnation proceeding<sup>4</sup> of the NC Park Commission related to mineral rights in the area. Two other witnesses at the condemnation proceeding, brothers Chris and Zeb Laney, also referred to it as Siler Meadows. Monteith grew up on Forney Creek, the Calhouns and Laney on Hazel Creek, and Lawrence Crisp was from the Patterson Springs area near the mouth of Alarka Creek. My father, who grew up on Deep Creek and closer in to Bryson City also called it Silers Meadows, and according to Ivan Gibby, grandson of Doc Gibby of the Bushnell area, Silers Meadows was also the name used by Doc and his compatriots. Prior to its purchase by Norwood Lumber, Silers Meadows Mining and Lumber Company, a NC corporation, owned the bald. Horace Kephart, a member of the North Carolina Park Commission’s Nomenclature Committee which was responsible for the naming or renaming of features on the North Carolina side of the Smokies, referred to it as Silers Meadows in his earliest references in *Our Southern Highlanders* before switching over to Silers Bald, which appears to have been more of a Tennessee construct.

Back in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Siler Meadows extended east and more so to the southwest along the Smoky spine from the peak and also south along Welch Ridge for a ways. The size of the clearing has significantly diminished. As seen in Figure 7, beeches, sarvis (serviceberry) and blackberries are closing in on the crest itself. In Figure 9, satellite imagery from April, 2013 is shown with GPS tracks from two different hikes. The magenta track is part of a walk from Clingmans Dome to Cades Cove which followed the Appalachian Trail from Clingmans Dome to Spence Fields. As can be seen, the most clear area is a little southwest of the peak of Silers Bald – between the peak and the Silers Bald shelter. The bit of a side track from the shelter was to filter water from the spring to fill water bottles. The green track is part of a trip from Clingmans Dome which turned off on

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<sup>F</sup> Guyot’s measurements, given the equipment, physical elements and conditions that he, his guide Robert Collins, and Collins’ sons had to deal with are truly amazing. A good part of my professional engineering career involved field measurements. I think it is fair to say that only someone who has dealt with the challenges of this sort of work can come remotely close to appreciating just how spectacular Guyot’s work was.

the Welch Ridge Trail. The portion of the Welch Ridge Trail in the vicinity of the pointer passes through the cleared area at roughly the location of the Welch Ridge pointer in Figure 6.

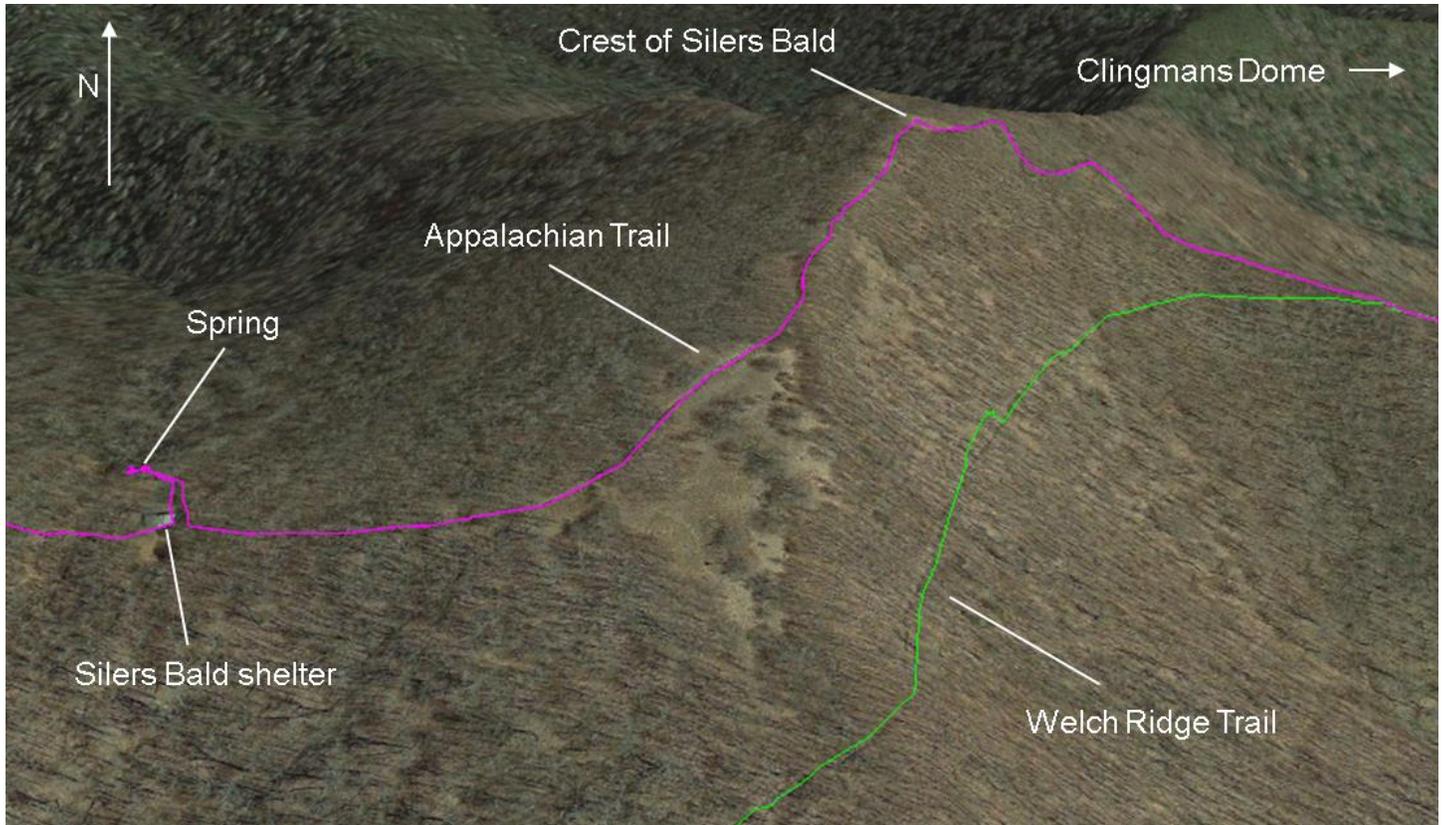


Figure 9. April 2013 satellite view of the Silers Bald area, with GPS recorded tracks from 2010. Image source Google Earth; tracks recorded by a Garmin 76CSX GPS unit.

Even decades after trees have taken over the formerly cleared zones, evidence that this was once a grassy meadow is abundant, as indicated in Figure 10, on the southwest shoulder of Silers Bald.



Figure 10. Lush grassy undergrowth, a Siler Meadows remnant. Photo source: author.

## Other area balds

Siler(s) Meadows or Silers Bald was principally used for grazing by North Carolinians from Forney and Hazel Creeks. Folks from Hazel Creek also used the area around what is now Derrick Knob Shelter for summer graze. It is the former location of the Hall Cabin, built circa 1898 by Crate Hall and his son-in-law, Granville Calhoun, according to the provisions of a lease the men had with Taylor and Crate (Lumber barons from New York who owned the property at the time). That lease<sup>5</sup> called for them to “build a cabin, clear, fence and cultivate about two acres of land.” Photos of the area, such as that seen in Figure 11, suggest that the clearing was not substantially larger than the requisite two acres, but the absence of lower limbs on the trees beyond hint at cattle grazing.

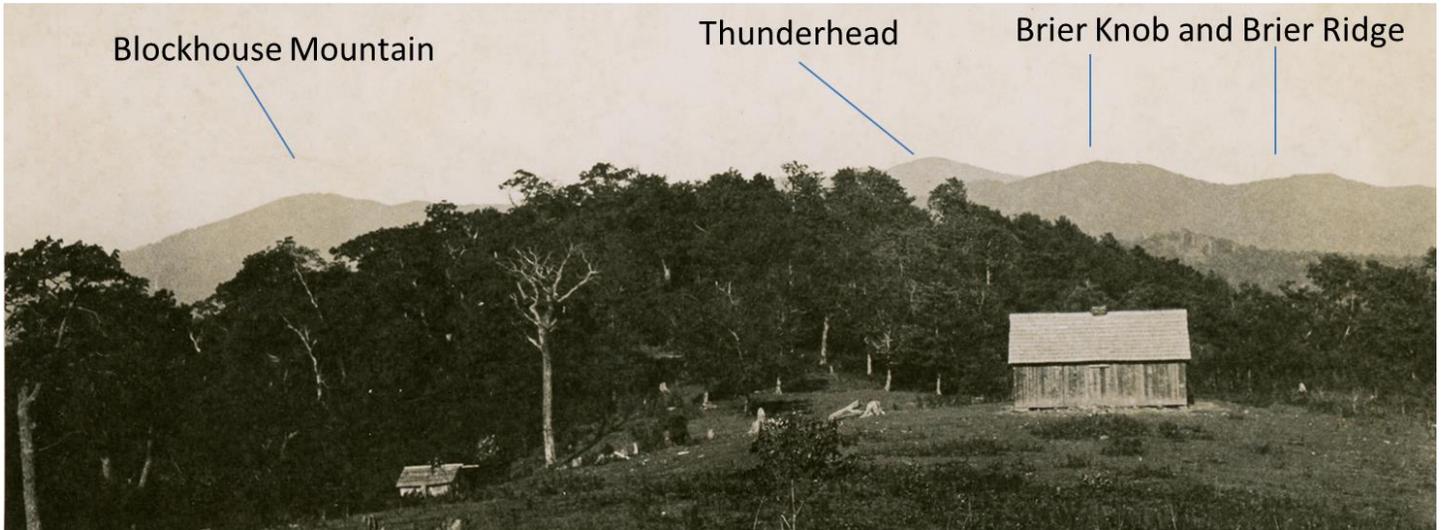


Figure 11. The Hall Cabin in 1919. Photo by S.H. Essary, courtesy of Mike Aday, GSMNP Librarian.

It might be noted that the cabin shown in Figure 11 is not the original Hall cabin, which had a pair of enclosures connected by a dog trot, with one enclosure in Tennessee and the other in North Carolina. However, the location of the Fig. 11 cabin does appear to be on the state line – with a single chimney right on the line, possibly with separate fireplaces in the two states.

There is perhaps no better extant example of the disappearance of former grazing territory than is evidenced by the Spence Fields, located along the Smoky spine at the head of Eagle Creek on the NC side and Anthony Creek on the Tennessee side. The photo in Figure 12 was taken at the Spence Fields in 1935. In the background is Rocky Top to Thunderhead. The photo in Figure 13 is one I took from about the same location in November 2007. There has been additional meadow shrinkage since.

The Spence Fields were named for Tennessee settler James Spence, and was principally used by Tennesseans, being close to the eastern end of Cades Cove. Similarly Gregory Bald, located closer to the western end of Cades Cove, was named for Cove settler Russell Gregory (as are the Russell Fields, located between Gregory Bald and the Spence Fields). The principal reason that the Spence Field and Gregory Bald weren't used to an appreciable extent by North Carolinians is the fact that the two NC drainages which have their heads there are Twentymile and Eagle Creeks. In 1900, only a single family – that of James Proctor – was living on Twentymile Creek. Quill Rose and less than a handful of others lived on Eagle Creek at the time.



Figure 12. Spence Fields in 1935. Photo Source: Open Parks Network, GRSM04477.



Figure 13. Spence Fields in 2007. Photo Source: author.

The amount of effort which would be required to maintain the Spence Fields as seen in Figure 12 would be immense. The meadow state may not be natural, but in this viewer's eyes, the lovely meadow with Rocky Top and Thunderhead to the rear in Figure 12 is simply glorious.

Two areas - Gregory and Andrews Bald in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park are being mown by the Park Service to keep them "bald." Both have significantly changed in size over time. In Mary Ellen Bruhn's 1964 Master's Thesis<sup>6</sup> she cited previous measurements which indicated that Andrews Bald's area was 12.50 acres in 1937, 9.67 acres in 1952, and 9.17 acres in 1961. A measurement using Google Earth indicates that in 2015, the area was less than 5 acres. Bruhn recorded that Gregory Bald was 15.70 acres in 1944, 13.34 acres in 1952, and 11.71 acres in 1961. The area in 2015, using Google Earth, was about 8 acres. Spence Fields was over 35 acres in 1952, but the cleared area of today is so spotty that many measurements would be required, and the total is likely less than 10% of its former size.

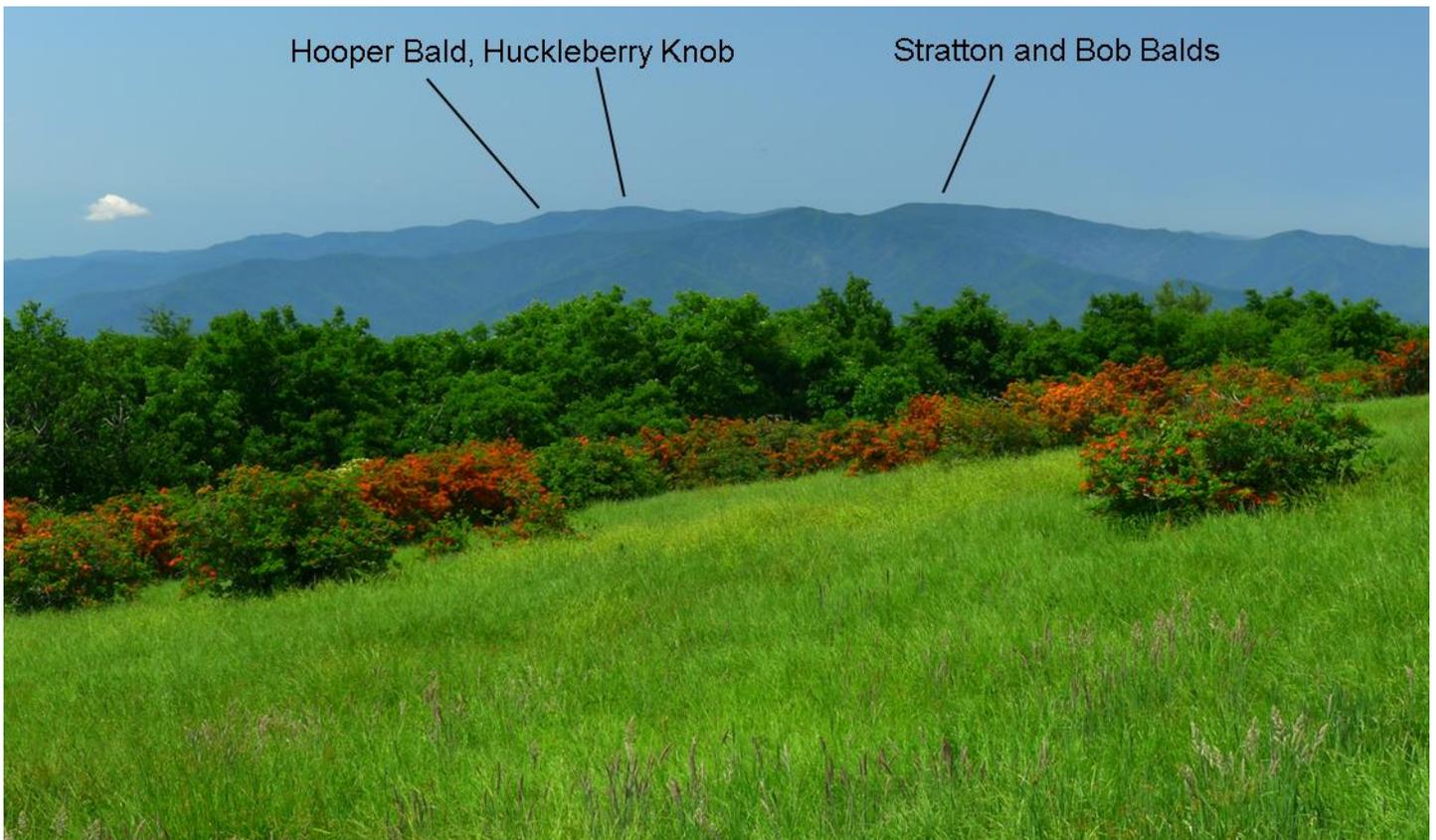


Figure 14. View to the southwest from the western portion of Gregory Bald. Photo source: author.

In addition to the shrinking of sizes of Gregory and Andrews Balds, the vegetative character is changing. On Gregory Bald, for example, crews cut back most woody plant growth, but leave the hybridizing azaleas alone, as illustrated by the photo in Figure 14, which looks to the southwest from Gregory Bald. The peaks noted in the background are all in the Nantahala National Forest. The Forest Service mows portions of Hooper and Bob Bald and two separate sections of Huckleberry Knob – the peak itself and an adjacent section to its totaling about 13 acres are kept mown (Figure 15), but the Forest Service is able to access these with a tractor, and the bush hogging work is considerably less labor and time intensive than the work on Gregory and Andrews Balds by the Park Service, which is done by hand, on foot.



Figure 15. View to the southeast from Huckleberry Knob. The mountains in the distance on the far right of the photo are 17 miles below the Georgia – North Carolina line. The rows of grass trimmings speak to tractor work. Photo source: author

There are over 90 peaks in western North Carolina which have “Bald” as second part of the name. That does not include other peaks, such as Huckleberry Knob, which have been, and in some cases still are, meadow-like. In Swain County alone, there are 25 labeled balds, eighteen of which are inside the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Most of these Park balds, which have not been grazed in almost 90 years, now show little or no evidence of having once been used for grazing.

Before leaving the subject of balds, let me say that Gregory Bald is a place which anyone who loves the Smoky Mountains should strive to see, particularly in mid-to-late June when the azaleas are in bloom. They range in color from pure white to dark red, along with pretty much everything in between. The views such as that shown above (Figure 14) combine with the azaleas (Figure 16) to make for a visual wonderment.



Figure 15. Examples of Gregory Bald hybridizing flame azaleas. Photos source: author

## The cabin

As far as I know, the cabin that Daddy and Joe Francis had partially completed before being arrested was never finished. There was a much earlier cabin about a mile south (well inside North Carolina) of Silers Bald, near the Mule Gap, known as the Monteith Cabin. John Clingman Monteith and at least one of his sons, George, tended to cattle at Siler Meadows; in Mary Lindsay's interview (Reference 3), George proudly noted that this was for *cash money*. They were paid by Norwood Lumber, which acquired and logged the vast majority of Forney Creek and kept the cattle to provide food for their employees. However, the Monteith Cabin was apparently no longer in existence when George and his father tended cattle in the 1920s, since he made no mention of it when explicitly asked about cabins. There is a photo of a cabin indicated to be at Siler's Meadows in the Kephart Special Collection at Western Carolina University; see Figure 17. Clearly, there was no meadow surrounding the cabin and it is well under the ridgeline. It may or may not be the former Monteith Cabin near Mule Gap.



Figure 17. Siler's Meadows cabin, per Horace Kephart. Source: [Western Carolina Special Collections](#)

This cabin is typical of those located near the crest of the Smokies and used by herders and hunters – rough and pieced together in hodge-podge fashion, using whatever was handy. It appears to employ some rough sawn lumber, presumably carried from below by pack animals. Photos of

cabins located near two other grazing areas, Gregory Bald and Spence Fields, are shown in Figures 18 and 19. In all three cases, the cabins were located away from the cleared areas used for grazing, but like normal dwelling places, had spring water nearby.



Figure 18. Moore Spring cabin, near Gregory Bald. Source: [Open Parks Network](#)



Figure 19. Spence cabin, near Spence Fields. Source: [Open Parks Network](#)

### Some of the characters

Photos of the arresting ranger, the two erstwhile cabin builders and several other folks mentioned in the preceding discussion are shown in Figure 20. Some notes are in order. Needham was an early Chief Ranger of the Park. Joseph Snelson Francis graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1938 with a degree in Mechanical Engineering, and was President of Tau Beta Pi Engineering Honor Society.<sup>6</sup> Commodore Casada and Anna Lou Moore were married in April, 1941, about a month before their photo was taken by I.K. Stearns, President of Carolina Wood Turning, a plant where Commodore worked for four decades. Anna Lou was the great-granddaughter of Joab Lawrence Moore who, together with fellow Franklin resident J.R. Siler, had acquired over 20,000 acres of land from Forney to Hazel Creeks. George Monteith was born near Bushnell but lived for four decades on Forney Creek until forced to leave when Fontana Dam was built. He spent the rest of his life on Bryson Branch, never drove a car, and could leave college age hiking companions sucking wind when he was 70. Will Wiggins came from the long line of the Wiggins family, one of the earliest area settler families. He worked for the North Carolina Park Commission while the Commission was acquiring land in the original Park boundary. Granville and Lillie Hall Calhoun were long-term residents of Hazel Creek. Granville became known as the “Squire of Hazel Creek.” Joe Francis, Will Wiggins, Granville and Lillie Hall Calhoun are all buried in the Bryson City Cemetery.

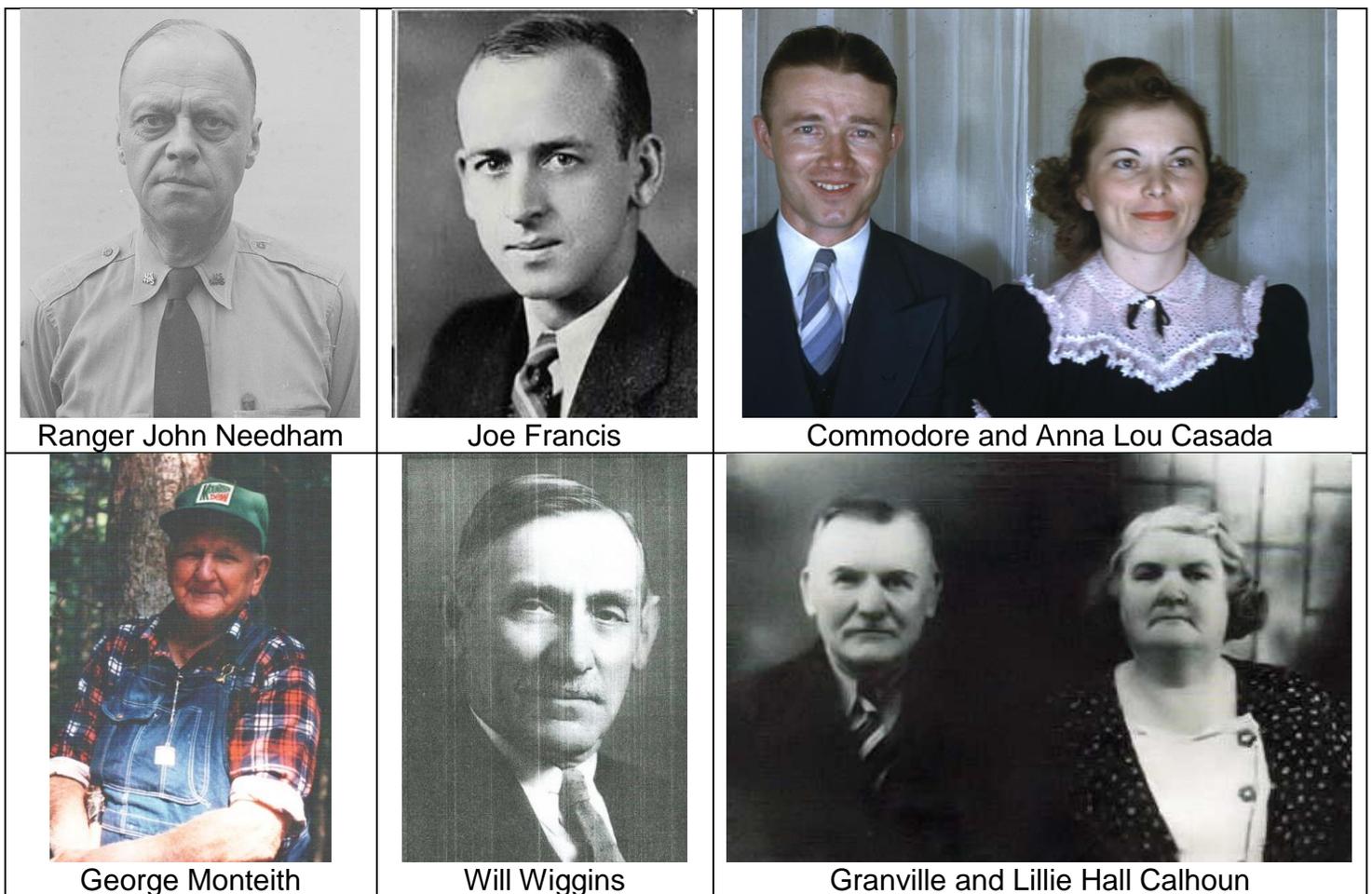


Figure 20. Photographs of a few folks

<sup>6</sup> The author was inducted into Tau Beta Pi at N.C. State a third of a century later.

### Figure 20 Photo sources

- [Open Parks Network](#) (John Needham);
- 1938 Yakety-Yak (Joseph Snelson Francis, who graduated with a degree in Mechanical Engineering and was President of the Tau Beta Pi Engineering Honor Society at the University of North Carolina);
- Stearns-Gruening collection at Western Carolina University (Commodore and Anna Lou Casada);
- Pete Prince Collection, University of Tennessee (George Monteith);
- Rev. Bryan Jackson (Will Wiggins);
- Calhoun family collection (Granville and Lillie Calhoun)

### References

1. Robert H.B. Brazier, [A new Map of the State of North Carolina](#). Published by John Mac Rae, 1833.
2. Eben Alexander, "The Old Smokies." *Knoxville Daily Tribune*, Sep. 2, 1888
3. Mary Lindsay, *History of the Grassy Balds in Great Smoky Mountains National Park*. Uplands Field Research Laboratory, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, April 1976. An on-line html version is [here](#).
4. Condemnation Proceeding, State of North Carolina vs Norwood Lumber et al, Buncombe County, October 10, 1929, per transcript in the North Carolina Park Commission records, NC State Archives, Raleigh, NC.
5. Swain County Deed Registry, book 19, pp 147-148.
6. Mary Ellen Bruhn, *Vegetational Succession on Three Grassy Balds of the Great Smoky Mountains*. Masters Thesis, University of Tennessee, June 1964.

