

# Pining for Turpentine

## Critical Nostalgia, Memory, and Commemorative Expression in the Wake of Industrial Decline

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Folklore Program, Department of American Studies.

Chapel Hill  
2009

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## **Abstract**

TIMOTHY C. PRIZER -- Pining for Turpentine: Critical Nostalgia, Memory, and  
Commemorative Expression in the Wake of Industrial Decline  
(Under the direction of Patricia E. Sawin)

The late twentieth-century decline of the turpentine industry in south Georgia and north Florida has inspired efforts on the part of former workers to memorialize their industry. Because the production of turpentine involved the tapping of pine trees for the extraction of resin or crude gum, the industry made a significant and conspicuous impact on the landscape. Today, former turpentiners employ this landscape – in addition to collecting and displaying turpentine’s material culture – to commemorate the disappearance of their industry. This thesis explores the intersection of work, memory, and nostalgia in commemorative expression. It argues that nostalgia is often misunderstood as idle longing for an irrecoverable past when in fact it inspires commemorative action, exhibits critical thought, and offers paths for the future. The thesis also addresses conflicting interpretations of the industry’s past as a result of race and differential identity.

*To those, living and departed, who labored among the pines in the turpentine woods of the American South. Special dedication goes to the men and women who so graciously welcomed me into their homes, fed me meals, and opened their minds and their hearts as we talked about their lives.*

*And to Archie Green (1917-2009), whose infectious passion for workers' culture graces every page herein. May his passing bring a sense of urgency and a deepened purpose to carry on in his legacy.*

## **Acknowledgements**

The words inked upon the pages of this thesis tell an important story, but they are only a portion of one that remains untold – the story of its writing. This work would never have been possible were it not for the love, guidance, support, encouragement, and reassurance from some very special people. In the interest of chronology, it was my dad, Herb Prizer, who, in May 2008, sent me an email that shook me out of the state of idle comfort I had assumed since completing my Master's coursework. His note urged me to plunge into the task of writing this thesis without further delay. It would be difficult to exaggerate the impact of his message. "Begin to focus on the task day-in and day-out," he wrote, and "set forth to do it with the dogged tenacity of a bulldog – nothing will get in your way." Alongside urgent, stirring quotations about the perishable talent of youth and the weariness brought on by work not done – all from Eric Hoffer, one of his favorite contemporary philosophers – my dad vowed to "be there to back you up with encouragement, advice and money as you need it." His were not empty promises. Indeed, he has lovingly pledged and unfailingly delivered these things throughout my life, in every endeavor I have ever undertaken, and this time would be no exception. In fact, aside from the members of my committee, he is this thesis' editor-in-chief. I know how lucky I am.

There is no doubting it in the tireless support of others as well. More than anyone else, my love, Lindsay Penny, assumed the tasks of supporting, reassuring, loving, and simply tolerating someone engaged in the writing of a thesis. She met these challenges daily for well over a year, and she did so not only without complaint but with

selfless patience, steady encouragement, and indefatigable support. There are not words to express to her how crucial she is to this work, but I will forever do all in my power to return the love and encouragement she has shown me throughout. Special thanks are in order as well for my mom, Claudia Prizer, whose unfailing love and support in all realms of my life carried over into this endeavor too. On a number of occasions throughout my writing, my mom served as a sounding board – fresh ears, if you will – for me to test out a new paragraph or page here and there. Her reassurance helped me to continue pushing through. I must also thank my sweet sister, Katie, who, while having no *direct* influence on this document, ultimately influences and positively impacts every aspect of my life. Her love for me is real and always felt.

Finally, I owe enormous thanks to the members of my committee – Drs. Patricia Sawin, Bill Ferris, and Laurie Sommers. Each of them brought a unique perspective to my work. Patricia Sawin provided theoretical guidance in a way few people could have. Her grasp on the most opaque of ideas – and her ability to put them in plain language – has long amazed me. As Chair of my committee, she made herself continually available and was eagerly responsive to my requests for advice and direction. Bill Ferris, as anyone who knows him will attest, is a walking encyclopedia of any and all aspects relating to the culture, history, and folklore of the American South. He is also a man strongly rooted in place and an articulate observer of the Southern places that have shaped him. The power and poetry he finds in his everyday surroundings – and in his memories of places past – have influenced me to such a degree that they permeate virtually every page of this thesis. Last, but by no means least, is Laurie Sommers. She has supported, advised, and directed my research since the formative days of my interest in folklore as an academic discipline. It is impossible to overstate her contribution. Indeed, I owe my awareness of the turpentine industry's existence to her. Her local

knowledge of the industry and her networks with many of the industry's people have been invaluable to me over the last seven years. Along with the workers and their families who kindly made me at home in theirs, she is the bedrock of my research.

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Figure 1.1

Timothy C. Prizer

## *One* To 'Pine' for Turpentine: An Introduction

Until the twilight of the twentieth century, turpentine was for south Georgia and north Florida what automobiles have been to the upper Midwest, what coal is to the southern Appalachians, and what railroads were to the eastern seaboard. For more than a century, work in the piney woods for the extraction of crude gum and the production of turpentine was an economic and social anchor that defined local character, textured a landscape, and forged a distinctive regional culture in the pine belt along the border between Georgia and Florida. When the industry began its decline in the 1960s and 1970s, many of its workers were forced to terminate turpentine operations that had been

passed through their families for three generations or more. Even those with no occupational inheritance had to let go of what was often the only line of work they had ever known. The industry's demise signified more than economic change; it meant the reconsideration of occupational identities and the redefinition of the meaning of work and community in a postindustrial era.

My research explores the expressive culture of former workers in a defunct industry, looking especially to the interplay of memory and place in a situation of industrial decline and regional change. Today, former turpentiners remember their industry through a variety of channels: in story and song; through the collection of tools and artifacts; in the manipulation of the landscape; in community festival and celebration; even in family naming traditions. Though turpentiners' commemorative activities are a form of nostalgic expression, they do more than lament a bygone industry and way of life; they make important observations on the current state of their communities and of society at large. Each form of remembrance is a dynamic narrative formulated in the present that acts as a bridge to unite the past with the future – to remind communities of their foundations, to comment on present concerns, and to express both anxieties and aspirations for times to come. Former turpentiners are most articulate when discussing the moral and social impact of their industry's decline. These narratives therefore provide a form of local and community-based empowerment for those who create and use them. Importantly, however, no two turpentiners recall identical experience, and thus their commemorative expressions often relay very different – and at times deeply contested – messages. This becomes most clear in looking to the industry's factious history of race relations and to the differential identities of interpretive audiences.

I began this research in 2002 as a volunteer fieldworker for the South Georgia Folklife Project, headed by Dr. Laurie Sommers at Valdosta State University. At the time, I was between my sophomore and junior years at Georgia Southern University and had a budding interest in folklore and expressive culture. One of the many efforts of the South Georgia Folklife Project was to document the decline of the turpentine industry through the words and memories of former workers who remained in the small towns of southern Georgia. Our focus was on the traditional knowledge, customs, and beliefs of former workers, and our goal was to present this as local historical information in a format easily accessible to the public. As a member of a team of fieldworkers, I conducted interviews with several former woodsmen and wrote a project report entitled *Faces in the Piney Woods: Turpentine and Folklife in South Georgia* (Prizer 2004). Essentially a compilation of oral histories, the report was published online to accommodate a public audience.

Through publications, exhibits, and project websites, the South Georgia Folklife Project endeavored to bring valuable cultural and historical information further into public awareness. Most importantly, it helped document the decline of an industry through the words of former turpentine woodsmen themselves. Yet, over the next several years, my understanding of turpentiners' words and actions became more complex as a result of continued ethnographic research and my own academic endeavors. Through many rich conversations with former turpentiners and equally rich theoretical readings in my graduate studies, what began as a documentary effort became for me an analytical pursuit. It is this complementary dialogue between the practical and the theoretical that I hope to represent here. To be certain, throughout the development of my thinking about industrial decline and memory, the words of my consultants have remained centrally important. Former turpentiners' words resonate on their own, and I

strive for their words to guide my application of theory rather than the reverse. I agree with Henry Glassie that “culture is not a problem with a solution. There are no conclusions. Studying people involves refining understanding, not achieving final proof” (Glassie 1995[1982]:13). In this respect, my goal has been to position myself in dialogue and collaboration with former turpentine woodsmen and to collectively interpret and understand their lives. I find that we create meaning together, that I am forever learning from them, and that, in conversation, we jointly refine the meaning of work, place, and memory.

## **A Theoretical Foundation for Studies of Memory and Place**

Many studies of place and identity, in folklore and other disciplines, have demonstrated ways in which human investments in place are intensified among groups under siege (Abrahams 1993; Bohmer and Shuman 2007; McKittrick and Woods 2007).<sup>1</sup> These studies have explored the heightened emotional connection with the land that dispossessed peoples, uprooted refugees, and other vulnerable groups express under threat of warfare, diaspora, xenophobic government rule, and religious conflict. Such large-scale investigations of forced migrations and other cultural and political conflicts have been valuable in calling attention to the ways global forces reshape and redefine local relationships with the land and with defensive claims of land ownership. Yet, fewer studies have used the same lens to explore similar phenomena on a smaller scale, such as in realms of industrial decline that have left occupational groups and communities in situations comparable to the ethnic and religious factions more common in academic scholarship.<sup>2</sup> Modernity and globalization have directly impacted and threatened communities that depend on work in trades – mostly industrial or agricultural – that

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<sup>1</sup> See the ‘References Cited’ section for more examples.

<sup>2</sup> This is, of course, with notable exception. See the work of Kathryn Marie Dudley (1994; 2000), Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo (2002), among others in the list of references.

have come under “siege” by a variety of forces beyond their control. These communities, like all groups, have found that this unwelcome infringement occurs not only upon the intangible concepts of “work” and “community,” but also upon the physical spaces in which these concepts are realized.

Folklorists today understand the concept of place as a complicated amalgam of tangible physical space and imagined cultural construction (Shuman, n.d.). The interplay of these related parts often surfaces in the words and actions of individuals in the form of what some see as mere sentimentality for a “homeland” and an irrecoverable past that unfolded upon that land. While most scholars rightly recognize that attachment to the land is a “common human emotion” (Yi-Fu Tuan 1977:158), many, as folklorist Amy Shuman points out (n.d.), too quickly disregard its expression as “an indulgence or even a veneer of emotion” that resists critical thought. The resistance among some folklorists to focus upon and effectively evaluate the creative expression of ostensibly threatened groups stems at least in part from a fear of reverting to the Romantic legacy of folklore scholarship. From its inception, folklore as an arena of intellectual inquiry held that those worthy of study (i.e., “the folk”) were groups on the margins of society who managed to cling to ways of life quickly vanishing under the strains of modernity. Folklorists thus romantically positioned themselves as rescuers of cultural vestiges of a purer past that survive among groups who, like their lore, are sure to buckle under forces erosive to “traditional” ways of life (Abrahams 1993; Bendix 1997; Bronner 2002; Wilson 1973).

Indeed, the development of folklore as a topic of academic research was in part a response to amateur antiquarianism carried out by individuals with similar interests but who “serious” folklorists believed somehow unqualified. And yet, in practice and perspective, early folklorists differed in few evident ways from the amateur antiquarians

they often criticized. In fact William Thoms, who proudly claimed to have coined the term “folk-lore” in 1846, created the word to supplant the then-used designation “Popular Antiquities” but still maintained that it was the cultural remnants of “the olden time” that his word sought to describe (Thoms in Dundes 1999:9-15).

Since at least the early 1970s, folklorists have eagerly distanced themselves from “survivals” and questions of origin, relinquishing their discipline’s “antimodern mission” in favor of viewing folklore as artistic, communicative, and performative events that happen in the course of everyday life (Abrahams 1993:7; Bauman 1977). Recognizing the egregious irony of a field dependent on the disappearance of its subject, folklorists have abandoned the conceptualization of folklore as residual culture and replaced it with the notion of *emergent* culture (Ben-Amos 1972:14; Williams 1977:121-7). Rather than nostalgic remnants of a purer past, folklore is now understood as a phenomenon that emerges in the present and uniquely unites past experience with future aspiration. It is now seen as a part of the human condition that plays a vital role in the lives of all people regardless of ethnic, religious, or socioeconomic background (Dundes 1980).

Thus, in wishing to avoid a lapse into the romantic, the sentimental, and the nostalgic, folklorists today find plenty of reasons to be apprehensive about working with groups under outside strain. Fueling this apprehension, Roger Abrahams admonishes us to remember that, as folklorists:

We have fought a virtuous rearguard action..., serving to remind the present of past ways of doing and thinking, while we make these old ways somehow more useful, precisely because they are tied to antiquity or to that sturdy time when people were somehow more self-reliant and perhaps even kinder to one another. (1993:20)

By extension of Abrahams' warning, folklorists' hesitance is also the result of hoping to resist engaging in what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998b) has called "salvage folklore" and "eleventh hour ethnography," by which "romantic hunter-gatherers of folklore ephemera" (Brady 2002) urgently venture from their offices at the university and into the field to "catch and embalm specimens of culture" before they die out (Milburn quoted in DePastino 2003:192). Under the heading "A Poetics of Disappearance," Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes that in the minds of folklorists mired in older models of thought:

The time of our operation is the eleventh hour. Before the eleventh hour there is life, after the eleventh hour death. But in that threshold moment between the two is the disjuncture from which our disciplinary subject has historically emerged. It is for this reason that the eleventh hour is always with us, shifting its location with the imminence of the next disappearance. (1998b:300)

Her comments here concerning what Abrahams' calls folklorists' "saved-from-the-fire" mentality are no mere observation (1993:11); they are rather a scathing critique of the discipline's conception of its own subject.

Folklorists' reflexivity and self-consciousness about these issues have made them especially cautious in the ways they address and conceptualize their work with groups ostensibly threatened by forces of modernity. Additionally, postmodern folkloristic scholarship that challenges notions of "the group" and calls into question the assumptive reality of "insiders," "outsiders," and a bounded "Other" (Noyes 2003), has given rise to an environment in which folkloristically-minded scholars might hesitate to undertake research initiatives that seem to lend themselves to oversimplification and romanticization. Indeed, in studies of land and the relationships people forge with it,

contemporary folklore theories often balk at effectively addressing sentimentality for fear of recalling the Romantics' agrarian compulsion "to assert that there is something natural about the human community and its attachment to particular bodies of land" (Abrahams 1993:5). Roger Abrahams again admonishes us to remember and resist reversion to a time when the human subjects of folkloristic inquiry were readily "typed, if not as noble savages, then as gentle shepherds or yeoman farmers, all somehow living in harmony with the seasons by remaining closer to the land" (1993:21).

My fieldwork with former workers in the turpentine industry highlights many of these issues and provides a practical example of what happens when one dares to engage the apparently sentimental without being controlled by preconceptions of where such a study might lead. I admit that when I began this research in 2002, I approached the subject with an eye toward the romantic. In my three years of fieldwork with the South Georgia Folklife Project, our effort was focused on documenting the decline of the industry through the oral histories of workers themselves. Our focus was almost entirely historical. We sought to record traditional knowledge, custom, and belief associated with ways of life that I assumed were doomed to disappear with the passing of the last living turpentine worker. I recall fish-tailing along sandy roads as I drove deep into the woods to find the homes of former workers and feeling as though I was on an important mission to capture on film and magnetic tape glimpses of a vanishing way of life. In retrospect, despite my naïveté, our endeavor was indeed an important one. Only my conception of the research needed rethinking.

I would eventually shed my romantic notions about former turpentiners and their expressive culture, but for some time I fought the discomfort of working with a group of people who seemed to fit all-too-comfortably into theories of survivalism and residual culture (Prizer 2006). After all, these were "rural people" who found themselves

succumbing to pressures beyond their control. Their centuries-old agricultural livelihood was fading at the hands of postindustrial influences of a global magnitude. In predictable fashion, a heightened sense of sentimentality and nostalgia prevailed in many of their narratives, and the land became central to their feelings of loss. However, despite these apprehensions and hesitations, at no point did I question the importance of workers' responses to the decline of their industry. Just as ironic as an academic discipline reliant upon the disappearance of its subject, I recognized, is a field that impedes itself with its own reflexivity while ostensibly aiming to represent human expression in the words of the people themselves.

The reality is that certain groups have indeed come under forms of economic, political, or social pressure that have drastically redefined the way they live their lives, if not threatened their very existence. These groups deserve no *greater* amount of attention from folklorists than others, as has been the case in our discipline historically, but they certainly warrant *equal* consideration. Theirs are important stories that give us valuable insight into human experience in a way that not all subjects of folkloristic significance can or should.

For one, we stand to learn from groups under pressure about how human beings use expressive culture as a means to comment upon and cope with the change they perceive around them. Once we approach our inquiries from this foundation, a whole host of fascinating realizations emerges that frees us from eleventh-hour urgency and the problematic romanticization of communities in transition. I have come to realize in the case of former turpentine woodsmen in the American South, for instance, that far from constituting a well-integrated culture existing "apart from larger than local institutions and processes," these workers are indeed articulate and informed observers of the global forces that have fueled the overwhelming amounts of change they have witnessed in

recent years with the decline of their industry (Brady 2002:6). Their powerful observations – and the profound manifestation of them in turpentiners’ expressive culture – are the focus of this thesis. I remember the exhilarating rush that ran through me with the realization that former turpentine woodsmen were not merely sitting stagnantly, reminiscing about the past and mourning the disappearance of their trade. On the contrary, they were very actively doing, making, creating, and formulating tangible statements *on* the land and *with* the land as a means of commenting upon and coming to terms with the change they saw before them.

Over time, it became clear that what is most important is not the history these workers *know* but rather the futures they *make*. If tradition is not, as Henry Glassie and Raymond Williams argue, a superorganic artifact from the past but rather a living creation of the future *out of* the past, we must look at the ways in which former workers in now-defunct industries like turpentine comment upon their current situation in present contexts (Glassie 2003; Williams 1977). In turpentiners’ efforts to memorialize their industry through story and song, through the collection and display of the industry’s rich material culture, and through the manipulation of the landscape, it is evident that remembrance is not stagnant recollection but rather kinetic action – a phenomenon Della Pollock has appropriately characterized as “making history *go...* when history seems to *go away*” (1998:1, italics in original). Turpentiners’ responses highlight the oversight in notions of cultural erosion at the hands of globalization and instead reveal the emergence of renewed local identity formations (Shuman, n.d.). Former workers cope with and respond to change through new channels of vernacular expression that debunk any notion that they may be somehow separated from the political realities of their daily lives. In doing so, they also underscore the fallacies inherent in “the poetics of disappearance” and reveal a renewed vibrancy in vernacular

activity inspired by the very global processes that led to their industry's demise (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998b:300; Handler and Linnekin 1984).

Understandably, even in accepting that forces of modernity spawn rather than endanger folk expression, the temptation remains for many to dismiss the creative and emotional responses of groups in decline as “mere nostalgia.” The view in many studies of nostalgia is that such expressions reach longingly and futilely for a past – at once idealized and irrecoverable – in hopes of transporting it into the present (Chase and Shaw 1989; Hewison 1987; Lowenthal 1985, 1996; Nora 1989; Stewart 1993). This conception presumes that nostalgia is at once myopic and temporally unilateral, that it speaks only to the past and remains blind to the present and future. Susan Stewart, for one, reflects on what she calls “the social disease of nostalgia,”<sup>3</sup> noting that nostalgia “of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience”:

[T]he past it seeks has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack. Hostile to history and its invisible origins, and yet longing for an impossibly pure context of lived experience at a place of origin, nostalgia wears a distinctly utopian face, a face that turns toward a future-past, a past which has only ideological reality. (1993:ix, 23)

Nostalgia, in these terms, is thus a sort of desperation that constitutes nothing productive and in fact “forecloses on the future” in its obstruction of progress (Cashman 2006:137).

Folklorists themselves have accepted these notions as well and, as a group, have a unique proclivity to tiptoe around the concept of nostalgia because it flirts uncomfortably

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Stewart's diagnosis of nostalgia as a form of “disease” is indeed in line with the history of the concept. The term *nostalgia* was coined as a medical condition by Swiss physician Johann Hofer in 1688 in response to what he deemed a “potentially fatal form of homesickness... observed among Swiss mercenaries serving abroad” (Cashman 2006:139). Hofer devised the term by combining the Greek *nostos*, “to return home,” and *algos*, “a painful condition” (Cashman 2006:138-9).

with the Romantic legacy of their field (Abrahams 1993; Bronner 2002; Wilson 1973). But the work of some folklorists and other like-minded scholars has revealed a valuable complexity in the concept of nostalgia and has served to highlight the many important roles it plays in communities in transition (Battaglia 1995; Behlmer 2000; Blunt 2003; Cashman 2006; Smith 2000; Tannock 1995). Folklorist Ray Cashman, for instance, has reconceptualized nostalgia as a dynamic process by which individuals and communities draw from the past to critically evaluate the present and to express hopes and concerns for the future (2006). Thus *critical* nostalgia, as opposed to “mere” nostalgia, is temporally complex and serves as a powerful means of communicating emotional response to change. As Southern Agrarian John Crowe Ransom observed as early as 1930, and as historians David Anderson and Melissa Walker correctly note today, nostalgia is an “instinctive reaction to being transplanted” and a means of preserving “‘a thread of continuity’ in the face of present-day change and upheaval” (Ransom and Anderson quoted in Walker 2006:3). Henry Glassie reminds us further that “The story of change is double, simultaneously a matter of gain and loss” (1999:15). Nostalgic expression, then, under closer consideration, seldom blindly idealizes; nor does it always indicate even a desire to return to the past. Just as often, nostalgia’s gaze is to the future and to hopes of initiating positive social change for generations to come.

Cashman points out that individual efforts to collect, preserve, and display material traces from the past help us to “better appreciate how nostalgia can be critical in both senses of the word. Nostalgia can be critical in an analytic sense for instantiating informed evaluation of the present through contrast with the past. Nostalgia can also be critical, in the sense of being vitally important, for inspiring action of great moral weight, action that may effect a better future” (2006:137-8). In the case of former woodsmen in the turpentine industry, I will show, nostalgic expression often aims to address the

environmental and moral concerns raised by the commercial and residential destruction of pine forests – issues that will saddle future generations. Additionally, even when nostalgia does look upon the past, it does not always do so favorably. For some turpentiners, nostalgic expression can be an effective means of criticizing and even apologizing for the painful and controversial racial history of the industry. In this sense, we begin to see the ways that remembering can act also as a means of healing. Moreover, nostalgia reasserts the ideal of community, drawing important observations on the perceived transformations in the social and moral fabric that many former turpentiners feel have resulted from their industry's disappearance (Cashman 2006).

My aim in this thesis is to show that nostalgia, as it is found in the commemorative expressions of former woodsmen in the turpentine industry, serves a significant purpose beyond an attempt to represent loss. It is less of a “rearview mirror” blind to the immediate present and times to come as it is an important tool of critical thought. It reveals an important and complicated picture of south Georgians’ *investments* in the past and plays a significant role in critical thinking about time, space, and place. In using material culture and the landscape as primary vehicles for the expression of memory, turpentiners conflate time and space and use nostalgia to create meaningful cultural and personal spaces. They also reveal that an intensified feeling of sentimentality for the land upon which they worked represents much more than a “veneer of emotion” that impedes progress and critical thought. In fact, it *facilitates* both.

## A Relationship with the Land

*My homeland is about as ugly as a place gets. There's nothing in south Georgia, people will tell you, except straight, lonely roads, one-horse towns, sprawling farms, and tracts of planted pines. It's flat, monotonous, used-up, hotter than hell in summer and cold enough in winter that orange trees won't grow. No mountains, no canyons, no rocky streams, no waterfalls. The rivers are muddy, wide and flat, like somebody's feet. The coastal plain lacks the stark grace of the desert or the umber panache of the pampas. Unless you look close, there's little majesty.*

– Janisse Ray, *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood* (1999:13)

In south Georgia, as with many parts of the world historically associated with work on the land, the ground beneath one's feet is one of life's most sacred gifts. It infuses people's very bodies – the minty smell of pine resin, the hardpan soil of dirt and sand, and the shadows of towering pines cast long by an oppressive sun. To people not from the region, as Janisse Ray (1999) so eloquently states in her ode to her homeland, this patch of our planet is unmemorable at best. In fact, they call it the “pine barrens.” And yet, to those who were born among these worlds, such a term is a blatant oxymoron. To suggest infertility on land that naturally birthed one of the world's greatest expanses of natural standing timber is a barefaced contradiction. And to workers in the timber industries that have served as the economic backbone of this region for centuries, pine trees are like succulent fruits that have afforded sustenance and any modest luxury to speak of to them and their families. Indeed, as one worker recalled to me, the scent of pine resin cooking as it becomes turpentine through distillation has always been tantamount to the smell of money in the billfold (Music, Jr. 2002).

This is a region in which we can powerfully witness the notion of “sense of place” and its convergence with “sense of self.” South Georgians' love of their land is often spoken of anthropomorphically, as if the earth is one's mother, as if it is the product of a higher power graced upon us as nurturer and provider. Similarly, in the words of many of the region's people, we have also been placed upon the land to return the favor, to nurture it as it has us. Again, I appeal to Janisse Ray:

Not long ago I dreamed of actually cradling a place, as if something so amorphous and vague as a region, existing mostly in imagination and idea, suddenly took form. I held its shrunken relief in my arms, a baby smelted from a plastic topography map, and when I gazed down into its face, as my father had gazed into mine, I saw the pine flatwoods of my homeland. (1999:15)

The landscape Ray describes in her prose is one of the most powerful elements in the identities of the region's people, and it has been for centuries since settlers laid claim to it as they moved from points north in search of new frontiers. As late as March 2007, in fact, the obituary listings of the *Macon Telegraph* included that of a man whose legal name was George *Piney* Woods. More profoundly, he was the fifth generation in his family to bear this name, and one of his sons currently carries the torch as the sixth (*Macon Telegraph* 21 March 2007).

The strong sense of pride many south Georgians find in the seemingly bleak landscape of their region is rooted in the work they have done upon it, and much of this labor throughout the region's history has been in the turpentine or naval stores industry. The industry dominated local economies in south Georgia and north Florida for over ninety years, a period stretching from the 1880s to the early 1970s. From small family operations to large-scale camp communities, labor amongst the pines for the production of turpentine long served as the economic infrastructure for the region and its families. In the early 1970s, the industry sank into complete decline as a result of technological advancement, the advent of alternative industrial sources of turpentine, and cheaper foreign labor. With rising labor and timber costs and other forces detrimental to work on the land, the industry tapered (Prizer and Sommers 2004).

Despite these hits, traces of turpentine remained in the American South even into the new millennium. In 1998, when the South Georgia Folklife Project began its effort to document the industry's decline through the lives of those who had worked in it, there were approximately two dozen active independent turpentiners in south Georgia. The last bucket of pine gum in the United States for the commercial production of turpentine was dipped in August 2001 by Major Phillips, an African American turpentine from Soperton, Georgia (Prizer and Sommers 2004).

This thesis focuses on the decline of an industry that provided a majority of a region's people their livelihood for several generations. I look not only at the economic consequences of industrial decline on a region and its people, but more importantly on the *human* consequences that result from the disappearance of work. For over a century, turpentine had been a dominant force among timber industries and the principal source of income for southern Georgians and northern Floridians. In fact, when Major Phillips hauled that last bucket of gum from the woods in his hometown of Soperton to the still in Baxley, Georgia, the *Georgia Forestry Magazine* marked the moment with an article entitled "End of an Era" (2003). Thousands watched the woods that had served as the arena of their toil grow useless to the worker trained to labor with his hands. With the last bucket of pine gum went the only work many people had ever known. So too, many former turpentiners feel, went a way of life rooted in honest labor and community wellbeing.

Today, as a result of these feelings of loss, we find intense expressions of pride at the intersection of work and landscape in the words and actions of everyday south Georgians. Whether in the poetic musings of award-winning authors like Janisse Ray or in the vernacular expressions of former turpentiners that are the subject of this thesis, south Georgians powerfully confront the forces of modernity that have rendered their

trade obsolete and their forests residential and commercial construction zones. In doing so, they memorialize the passing of an industry, make observations on present-day concerns, and express fears and hopes for the future.

While industries involving the extraction of pine gum have an equally extensive history in other southern states, it is in south Georgia and north Florida where this labor has its most recent history (Outland 2004). It is thus here that we find individuals with firsthand experience in, and memory of, work in the woods. In states further north, other industries replaced naval stores not long after the Civil War. As work that relies on the exploitation of timber ultimately leads to the destruction of the forests on which these industries depend, naval stores and turpentine followed a continuous path southward that led them ultimately to the border of Georgia and Florida. In this area today, we find not only “old-timers” with immediate knowledge of working turpentine, but also their middle-aged children who count work in the woods among their earliest memories.

These very memories – and the expression of them in varying forms of vernacular narrative – concern me here. I explore the ways in which experience becomes memory and memory in turn becomes action. As I have mentioned, in the case of former woodsmen in the turpentine industry, commemorative activity emerges in story and song, in the manipulation of the landscape, in the collection and display of tools and equipment once used in the woods, and in community festivals. Since no two workers share identical experience with concern to life and labor in the woods, each commemorative expression is textured by the individual experiences and identities of the person who forms the narrative. The expressions are also profoundly shaped by the *goals* of the narrator – that is, the rhetorical message he or she intends to relay and the impact the narrator hopes to leave on an “audience” (Prizer 2006).

Turpentiners document their past in oral narratives as they recount stories of life and work in the woods. These stories relate occupational wisdom, local knowledge and custom, and many other aspects of occupational culture. They describe initiation rituals and pranks played on new workers, competitions between workers in the woods, and traditional remedies that draw on the medicinal qualities that turpentine is believed to hold. Also included are jokes about “boss men,” women in the camp community, and fellow workers. Of course, there are stories of oppression and autonomy, of hard luck and good times, of honor and degradation. Running as a consistent thread through all is a sense of pride in adversity endured and of dignity in having worked hard and honestly on the land. Importantly, the majority of the oral accounts speak also to feelings of loss in the face of overwhelming change.

Perhaps the most powerful, and certainly the most conspicuous, commemorative statement among former woodmen in the turpentine industry is the manipulation of the landscape. This often involves the simple refusal among some to *stop* working turpentine. The extraction of crude gum for the production of turpentine required a unique scarification of the trees in which a combination of hacks was used to remove the bark and to tap into the “veins” of the tree. Once wounded, pine trees secrete resin onto the external surface of the wound, which acts as a protective coat to seal the opening, to prevent sap loss, and to resist exposure to pathogenic micro-organisms (Shanley et al. 2002:192). Commercial turpentiners wounded trees in V-shaped streaks down the length of the pine so as to channel the resin into cups where it was collected and processed into turpentine. The V-shaped streaks – referred to colloquially as “catfaces” for their resemblance to a cat’s whiskers – are unmistakably the marks of a turpentine, and such trees were ubiquitous along highways and rural roads along the Georgia-Florida border for much of the twentieth century (see Figures 1.2-1.3).



Figure 1.2

Timothy C. Prizer

Turpentine trees, like this one on former turpentine George Music, Jr.'s property in Waycross, Georgia, are referred to as "catfaced" trees because the marks of turpentine labor are said to look like cats' whiskers.



Figure 1.3

Timothy C. Prizer

Catfaces like this one in the front yard of former turpentine Gillis Carter (Willacoochee, Georgia) have become increasingly rare since the decline of the turpentine industry and the rise of industrial deforestation.

As the most visible evidence of turpentine's long and significant history in the region, catfaced trees are an important part of the region's cultural landscape. Over the last several decades, however, catfaced trees have become increasingly scarce as a result of the decline of the turpentine industry and the forest-clearing efforts of timber and construction companies.

With the disappearance of these cultural and historical markers comes a strong sense of loss and visible evidence of the massive amounts of change the region has undergone over the last quarter century. This sense of loss has inspired efforts on the part of some former woodsmen to keep catfaced trees at the center of the cultural landscape. George Music, Jr. of Waycross, Georgia stands firm in the face of demands from outside interests to surrender his vast acreage of natural standing timber for commercial use. His efforts address concerns at once environmental, moral, historical, and deeply personal. Indeed, among Music's many acres are thousands of catfaced trees, some of which were last worked over a century ago by his grandfather.

Equally profound are the activities of a handful of former turpentiners who continue to work trees on their own land and on their own time, not for profit or even for the production of turpentine, but for the message and the historical reminder that the catfaces send to those who see them. This thesis explores in depth the efforts of former turpentiner Gillis Carter of Willacoochee, Georgia. Carter, now in his late-60s, continues to work several trees in his front yard so that passersby will see them and be reminded of turpentine's invaluable contributions to the region. Carter remembers as a small child playing in the woods alongside his father who ran a turpentine operation on the same plot of land where he lives today. Just as soon as Carter was old enough to lift a hack, he remembers, he was a turpentiner as well. Though in his late teens he left to attend college at the University of Georgia in Athens, Carter returned to life as a turpentine

farmer in Willacoochee. The woods that surround his home have provided three generations of his family with the basic essentials of life, and his love for these woods is palpable in eloquent reflections that I have recorded over the last six years.

Carter puts his pride and nostalgia for the turpentine industry on public display. Disturbed that the scarred trees that once lined the south Georgia roadsides are now virtually nonexistent, he has converted four of the pines in his front lawn into turpentine trees to express his feelings of loss through visual narrative. He selected the trees in front of his house because of their visibility from the highway. Carter understands that when landscapes change, memories strengthen through nostalgia. As large timber companies continue to uproot natural pine trees and plant shipshape rows of them along the highways and backroads of the South, Carter seeks reprisal in the symbol of the natural-standing pine, slashed into the veins to convey the intersection of work and memory. One of the last people in the United States to continue tapping pine trees for the extraction of crude gum, he marks the trees as a persuasive technique to jog the memories of those who see them in hopes of creating a sense of a communal past. In so doing, he literally *carves* out meaning and uses the landscape as a canvas for the depiction of memory (Prizer 2006).

In Racepond, Georgia, Alton Carter<sup>4</sup> provides another example of how the continuation of work on the land can serve commemorative purposes. Like Gillis Carter, Alton Carter continues to work his own trees for the small-scale production of turpentine. Alton Carter's form of memorialization, however, does not so much use the landscape as a medium to transmit a message as it does attempt to keep the literal substance of turpentine in people's lives. Carter makes a concerted effort to maintain the tradition of using turpentine as a medicinal aid, which was common on turpentine

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<sup>4</sup> No known relation to Gillis Carter. The surname Carter is common throughout the turpentine industry and does not always indicate familial relation.

camps and in surrounding communities throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By tapping his own pines and converting the gum into turpentine, Alton Carter resists the industry's decline through his development of new medicinal products such as a spray for arthritis, which he makes available to the public, and a salve for cuts and abrasions.

The most common form of memorialization is the artifactual collection and display of tools and equipment unique to work in the turpentine woods. This commemorative activity ranges from the deliberate use of turpentine memorabilia as home décor and/or educational display to the passive collection of these materials in a backyard or garage. Nearly every former turpentine woodsman that I have met simply refuses to part ways with the rusted hacks, cups, and tins they amassed over the years. Sometimes these collections take the form of an unorganized pile while others serve as wall hangings and ornaments for the mantel. Some former turpentiners have even turned their barns and sheds into museums that chart the history of the industry through its material culture. Gillis Carter, for example, converted the loft of his barn into a museum that traces the roots of the naval stores industry through tools and equipment that correspond to different eras of work in the woods. The late Milton Hopkins of Osierfield, Georgia<sup>5</sup> maintained a maze-like display of his vast collection of tools and equipment as well as press clippings, photographs, and the historical writings of ecologists and chemists who sought ways to make turpentine more profitable and eco-friendly. These commemorative actions, as Ray Cashman has observed of other groups, “grant seemingly obsolete objects new life as symbols necessary for inspiring critical thought” (Cashman 2006:137). For former turpentiners, rusted equipment once used in

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<sup>5</sup> I interviewed Mr. Hopkins in 2006, less than a year before his death in March 2007 at the age of 80. He was a farmer, a conservationist, an environmentalist, a naturalist, a birdwatcher, and a published author.

the woods encapsulate a lifetime of work and experience while also serving to relay important lessons of the past as a means of effecting a better future.



Figure 1.4 Timothy C. Prizer

Bark hacks and pullers rest in a dip bucket upon the mantel at former turpentine Bubba Greene's home in Madison, Florida.



Figure 1.5 Timothy C. Prizer

Cupping axes and dip irons were hung on the wall above the mantel at the home of the late Milton Hopkins in Osierfield, Georgia.

Another major category of commemorative activity is collective community efforts in the form of festival and organized celebration. A handful of communities in south Georgia hold annual gatherings that bring large numbers of people together to celebrate turpentine's monumental role in the history of their communities. These festivals are public expositions of the industry's folk culture, and they offer a setting in which the various themes of this thesis come together in microcosm. Workers gather to swap stories of work in the woods, while others publicly demonstrate methods of working trees for the production of turpentine. The festivals also feature exhibits of the

industry's material past. On display are cups, gutters, hacks, and other tools once used in the woods, along with other pieces of turpentine memorabilia. Nostalgia is also on full display. Former woodsmen gather to reminisce about work in the woods, but for many in the community, these events are as much about remembering and commemorating the passing of a time as it is the passing of an industry. A consistent theme in conversations at these events is that of a simpler, more honest time before the prevailing value system of the community underwent the changes that have come to define modernity. These sentiments are magnified in the language used to market the events as cultural tourism attractions. Take for example an advertisement for the annual turpentine still firing at the Agrirama, a living history museum in Tifton, Georgia:

...journey back to another time, and for a little while, enjoy exploring a different and more peaceful world... It was a simple, but good life. Days of hard work carried with them the satisfaction of a job well-done and nights followed with peaceful sleep. It was a period when values were important, a man's word was his bond, and there were no locks on doors. (Georgia Agrirama 2006)

The festivals, then, aim in part to recreate community ideals that ostensibly comprised the shared value system of the region's past. They also provide an arena in which these values are played out in an immediate and romantically exaggerated context. Every year, for the duration of at least one Saturday afternoon, the communities not only recall these values but also practice small-town togetherness and face-to-face community interaction central to the community ideal.

Yet just as the other forms of memorialization discussed here do not merely reach for an irrecoverable past, commemorative turpentine festivals do much more than promote an artificial picture of a purer time. Amidst the backdrop of religious song in

live performance and the smells of fried food and boiled peanuts, festival-goers gather to at once reminisce about the local past and evaluate their current situation. Their communities indeed have undergone vast amounts of local socioeconomic change in the wake of global trends, and these trends have reorganized the everyday social order of the community. What is most important about interpersonal interaction in the festival environment, I argue, is that the concentrated conversations provide a running commentary on the future hopes and anxieties of the local community.

For the purposes of this thesis, I explore commemorative festivals in less depth than I do commemorations involving the landscape and material culture. To be certain, the subject of community festival as a form of commemorative activity warrants an entire study of its own due to the microcosmic nature of the festival and the vast-and-growing body of scholarship on the subject. For my purposes here, I use commemorative turpentine festivals only as a backdrop for discussing other themes and plan to devote more extensive research to the subject at a later time.

## **Race, Nostalgia, and Industrial Decline**

Work in the pine forests of the American South began as a form of slave labor in Virginia and the Carolinas, and racial privilege and exploitation remained central to turpentine through the industry's final stages in the latter half of the twentieth century (Outland 2004). As with most southern industries that began with slavery and continued after it, freedom did little to unshackle black turpentiners from hard labor and the conditions of abject poverty. With Emancipation, many African American workers in the turpentine industry merely shifted into an oppressive system of debt peonage that kept them and their families bound to specific turpentine camps and operations for the

remainder of their lives.<sup>6</sup> Most camps housed workers in ramshackle shanties a short walk or mule-drawn wagon ride from the woods. Some camp commissaries charged more for basic rations than workers could afford given their earnings in the woods, and as pay some camps issued tokens – only redeemable at the camp commissary – in place of official currency. Physical abuse at the hands of white woodsriders and “boss men” was an all-too-common experience in the lives of black turpentiners (Prizer 2006). Stetson Kennedy conducted fieldwork with Zora Neale Hurston for the WPA on a Cross City, Florida turpentine camp during the late 1930s, and wrote of his findings:

More than any other occupational group, these Negroes are denied the rights for which the Civil War was supposedly fought. As one who knows told me, “A Negro who is foolish enough to go to work in a turpentine camp is simply signing away his birthright.” (Kennedy 1989[1942]:261)

His account is echoed repeatedly by other observers and often by workers themselves.

This system and its conditions lasted from the post-Emancipation period until the 1950s, when the turpentine industry began its initial decline. The Civil Rights Movement exposed the inhumanity of some turpentine operations, resulting in anti-Jim Crow laws that improved working conditions for black workers but made turpentine much less profitable for those white producers who for many years – and perhaps for generations – had found relative comfort in the business at the expense of African American labor (Outland 2004; Prizer 2006).

It is thus the case that turpentiners’ nostalgic efforts at commemoration are deeply textured by the industry’s controversial history of racial inequality. The emergent discourses in turpentiners’ commemorative activities by no means represent the “collective memory” of everyone involved. What we find, rather, are multiple

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<sup>6</sup> The term *peonage*, as defined by Anthropologist Gay Goodman Wright, “refers to any system in which an employer uses the laborers’ legal obligation to repay debts owed to him as a tool to control his entire labor force” (1979:80).

communities of memory that have formed and are continuously negotiated among former workers. Given the racial history of their industry, turpentiners' commemorative efforts highlight differential relationships to, and conflicting interpretations of, the industry's past. For many, commemorative expressions address a fading agrarian lifestyle and an industry to be memorialized collectively, but others deem them unwanted reminders of labor in an oppressive Jim Crow system. Gillis Carter's catfaced trees, for instance, serve as symbols of collective memory in that they stimulate recollection among all once directly or indirectly involved in the industry, but they do not produce uniform agreement on the composition of that memory. They are symbols with indexed meaning and, like all forms of commemorative expression, underscore the deep divisions in memory of work in the turpentine woods (Prizer 2006).

It would also, however, be an unfortunate oversight to suggest that there are only *two* communities of memory – a collective “white” and a collective “black.” By no means do all white former workers wax nostalgic, and nostalgia is indeed a central component in the reflections of many African American workers. It is true that a general *pattern* has emerged in race and memory wherein the white population – many of whom are former producers, woodsriders, and “boss men” – generally expresses their feelings of loss in nostalgic terms. Meanwhile, former woodsmen and turpentine hands – the vast majority of whom are African American – often convey mixed emotions of loss, relief, and pride in their own survival in the face of hardship. But we must also recognize that, as indexed expressions, commemorative activities often carry more than one meaning for the narrators as well. In no realm is this clearer than in the commentaries on race that turpentiners powerfully deliver to accompany and explain their commemorative expressions. Often, turpentiners' nostalgia critically evaluates the industry's racial history and aims to bridge the very divisions that factionalized the industry. Rather than

portraying a purely idealized version of the past, turpentiners often use memory as a way of healing. Under the banner of shared struggle and a common past, former workers strive to find methods of remembering that neither idealize nor dismiss the complex and painful racial history of the industry (Prizer 2006).

In this thesis, I explore in depth several examples of this complex negotiation over racial issues. For one, I look to Gillis Carter's roadside catfaces and his powerful spoken reflections on race and the history of turpentine. I also discuss a song written in 2003 by the late Dub Tomlinson, a white former woods rider from Echols County, Georgia. The song (keep in mind, composed by a former woods rider – one of the most formidable characters in the turpentine drama) is a traditional African-American blues arrangement and is sung in the first-person narrative of an African-American turpentine worker begging for mercy and compassion from his white overseer (Tomlinson 2003). An important act of memory, commemoration, and understanding occurred when Tomlinson wrote his song. It is a powerful example of how turpentiners use the past as a form of present-day reconciliation.

In another interesting example, Bubba Greene of Madison, Florida maintains an enormous collection of turpentine tools and artifacts, and he speaks at length about fairness in historical recollection – that is, how the history of turpentine is told and who has the right to tell it. Turpentine's master narrative, with its focus on racial injustice, Greene feels, is an important story. But he also reflects on how this version of history neglects the stories of thousands of rural families and small farmers who worked turpentine on their own to supplement an income based primarily on other forms of agriculture. Countless rural families worked turpentine as "a cash crop on the side," Greene remembers, and he rightly points out that their story is virtually nonexistent in the historical record. In his view, rural families of southern Georgia and northern

Florida could rarely afford cameras, and thus their stories are absent in image as well as in narrative. Meanwhile, he feels, photographers and documentarians from the North eagerly photographed poor black turpentiners in tattered clothing because their images told a more dramatic story. Greene's conviction that someone needs to "get out and tell the other side of the story," led him to do it himself. His is a beautiful example of cultural literacy and local community empowerment. Rather than engage in a written debate with the scholars and journalists who have staked claim to the history of the turpentine industry, Greene approached the issue in a way that would allow him to bear greater witness to turpentine's past: he went on the road with his collection of turpentine materials to educate and tell the other side of the story through public demonstrations and displays. Greene frequents local festivals and historical gatherings, and he brings with him trailer loads of turpentine tools and photographs pinned on wooden pegboard displays, which he uses to tell a more complete history of turpentine's storied past.

In the pages that follow, I view this past through the many statements former woodsmen make to commemorate the demise of their industry. Theirs is a nuanced story of hard work, of cherished landscapes, and of coming to terms with local and global change. Their voices are powerful reminders that history is as much about the present and future as it is about times come and gone.



Figure 2.1

Public Domain

## *Two*

### A History of Naval Stores and Turpentine

#### **In Wrath and Transoceanic Progress: An Early History**

*And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. – Gen. 6:13-14*

*Naval stores have slipped from view today, but throughout history nations have depended on them, sought them out, fought wars over them, and treated them like nations today treat petrochemicals. Without them, and without access to the forests from which they came, a nation's military and commercial fleets were useless and its ambitions fruitless. Until the nineteenth century, the greatest navies in the world were kept afloat by the humble products of conifer forests.*

– Lawrence Earley, *Looking for Longleaf* (2004:85-6)

Turpentiners often trace their industry's history to the Bible. In chapters six through nine of the book of Genesis, God appoints Noah to build a large vessel in preparation for a flood that will "destroy all flesh" (Gen. 6:17) and thus cleanse the earth of mankind's wickedness. Among God's instructions for Noah is to protect the vessel from leakage by applying a sealant to the planks in the ship's hull. The sealant God calls for is "pitch" (Gen. 6:14), which refers to the black, concentrated gum left behind after distilling the resin that exudes from the cells and internal canals of a variety of tree species. The command suggests that God himself bestowed upon mankind the gift of arboreal oleoresins and thus serves as a significant source of pride for many former workers in the turpentine industry. It is common in the fervently religious communities along the Georgia-Florida border for a turpentine worker to lift his head in pride and declare, as Bubba Greene did to me, "Poor ol' Noah wouldn't have got very far in a leaky boat now, you know." For many, the Biblical reference renders turpentine "God's work" and bolsters former turpentiners' notion of a Protestant work ethic.

Though it is impossible to pinpoint the first instance in which humans engaged in the exploitation of trees for their resinous properties, the practice is certainly an ancient one. "No doubt," Lawrence Earley writes in his book *Looking for Longleaf*, "it occurred in a maritime country when sailors first dared to set forth on the open seas in a vessel made of wood" (2004:86). Earley points out that the Homeric epics, which date to the eighth century B.C., depict the hulls of Greek ships as "black with pitch" and indicate that ancient Greeks, Macedonians, and Phoenicians created pitch by cooking tree resin in open cauldrons. Moreover, archaeological research shows that by the time the peoples of the ancient Mediterranean world began using pitch, the practice was already, well, ancient. Archaeologist Cheryl Ward has provided evidence that ancient Egyptians assembled planks of wood into ship hulls as early as 3000 B.C. (2001). The oldest ships

discovered to date, a group of fourteen unearthed in Abydos by Egyptologist David O'Connor, show wooden planks sewn together and bear traces of grass and reeds which were stuffed in the seams between planks. The ships also feature the sticky remains of pitch, revealing that humans have exploited trees for their resin for at least five thousand years (Schuster 2000).

For all seafaring peoples since at least these times, pitch was as integral to a ship's construction as was wood itself. Yet, not all countries had equal access to the trees whose resin lent itself to the creation of pitch, and thus the import and export of the product became big business in ancient commerce. With this, the naval stores industry was born. It lasted for millennia. "From ancient days until the end of the wooden ship era," Earley writes, "the smell of tar and pitch was forever mixed with the sea's salt air in the memories of sailors. If Aristophanes associated the fitting out of a ship with pitch in the fifth century B.C., John Muir was still referring to 'the Tar-scented community of the ship' twenty-five centuries later" (86-7). Pitch remained the principal ship sealant for as long as wood remained the principal material for the body of the ship. Shipwrights experimented with wrought iron as an alternative to wood beginning in the first half of the nineteenth century, but their efforts found little success. It was not until the latter half of that century when steel became readily available that it began to replace wood as the preferred material.

Tar and pitch were the two most central products of naval stores for thousands of years. Shipyards around the world were stocked with what seemed like endless rows of barrels that contained the resinous products awaiting application to ship planks. Caulkers stuffed cotton and hemp fibers into the seams between the planks in the ship's frame before applying thick coats of pitch along the hulls in order to make the ships watertight and resistant to wood-boring mollusks. Tar and pitch also protected the ropes

and cords along ships' sails from corrosion at the hands of salt air and saltwater. Not only were the products used in *preparation* for sea travel, but as Lawrence Earley notes, they were also used in routine maintenance and in cases of emergency while at sea. Historical records indicate that among ship inventories at sea were barrels of tar, pitch, and raw pine gum in addition to caulking irons, tar brushes, and pitch mallets. Ship crews every so often tarred down ships while at sea to ensure that ships remained watertight on long voyages. And when the ships did spring a leak, crews rushed to patch the seam before disaster unfolded. "Sometimes," Earley writes, "ships had to be intentionally grounded, especially if it was the 'devil seam' that had sprung the leak. This was a particularly troublesome seam because it lay at the bottom of the ship, between its keel and the first strake or plank on either side" (89-90). Earley goes on to explain the fascinating naval origin of the saying "the devil and the deep blue sea." The expression "is often used when a person is faced with two disagreeable alternatives." He continues:

It arose from a more urgent naval situation when, with no shore nearby, the devil seam had to be patched at sea. Then the ship was heeled on its side and a sailor lowered overboard with his caulking irons and bucket of pitch, facing the twin dangers of being drowned or crushed by the waves against the side of the ship. (Earley 2004:90)

Others of the potentially many expressions that originated from the nautical use of tree resin are even more commonly known today. Earley explains, "It may be no surprise that the punishment of being 'tarred and feathered' originated at sea – it was ordered by Richard I of England [in the twelfth century A.D.] as standard naval punishment for theft, although it also had plenty of applications on land" (89). Even more common in everyday speech, the phrase "pitch-black" likely refers to the jet-black color that resin takes on when processed into pitch. The sayings are a testament to naval stores'

monumental role in early commercial and military maritime activity. They also serve to remind us that, though “naval stores” is by no means a household term today, its legacy lives on in our common vernacular.

In the earliest days of naval stores activity, several species of trees were used to make pitch and early forms of turpentine. While it is likely that pine has always been the most common and best-suited for such purposes, others were indeed exploited for their resinous properties. In fact, the word *turpentine* derives (via French and Latin) from the Greek *terebinthine*, a species of tree now known as terebinth. Terebinth existed throughout the ancient Mediterranean world and is still found from present-day Portugal and Morocco on the west to Turkey and Syria on the east (Barnhart 1995). The terebinth tree may well have been Noah’s source of pitch in preparation for his great adventure; the tree is mentioned throughout the Bible – in Genesis, Isaiah, Judges, and Ecclesiastes. In addition, the earliest form of turpentine was likely that created by shipbuilders who, while distilling terebinth resin into pitch, collected the oily vapors on animal skins. Once the skins were soaked through, turpentine was wrung from them into vats and sold as another product of naval stores (Earley 2004:86).

### **An Ancient Resource in a New World: Naval Stores in North America**

We can only speculate that the first instance of arboreal naval products gracing the North American continent occurred simultaneously to the coming-to-rest of the first Old World ship upon New World shores. When this first happened is of course a matter of considerable debate, though most historians point to Norse explorer Leif Ericson as the first European to land in North America. Around the turn of the eleventh century, Ericson is believed to have established a Norse settlement at Vinland, which lies at the northern tip of the present-day island of Newfoundland, Canada. What is certain is that

Ericson's ship would have been stocked with naval stores and its hulls painted thick with pitch. Likewise, when in 1492 Christopher Columbus mistook the Bahamian Archipelago for the East-Asian mainland, his *Santa Maria* (along with the *Niña* and *Pinta*) was undoubtedly kept afloat by the black gum of European pine. All carracks before and after would have been similarly primed.

While every ship that came aground on North American beaches would have been outfitted with pitch, the first instance of humans *creating* pitch from North American pine trees is less certain. Though at the time of first European contact there were nearly two million Indians residing among the longleaf and slash pine forests of the American South, there is little evidence in the archaeological record that they ever engaged in the production of pitch. They did, however, use the forests extensively. Natives collected and burned fallen branches for heat and cooking, and they mixed the residue of soot with bear oils to create war paint. They also used pine in the construction of dwellings and pine bark in the paving of village roads (Earley 2004:74-5). The vast majority of Indians' efforts in the forests involved the use of fire, as they routinely burned the woods to open them for hunting and for travel, to ward off mosquitoes, chiggers, snakes and other pests, and to release nutrients for the growth of berries and other important natural foods for which they foraged (Outland 2004:16-17).

Lawrence Earley traces the earliest documented use of southern pine trees for the production of naval stores to just thirty-six years after Columbus' great voyage:

In 1528 Spaniard Pánfilo de Narváez led an army of three hundred conquistadors up the Gulf Coast of peninsula Florida to Apalachee, near present-day Tallahassee. The expedition ended disastrously. Miserable, ill, hungry, and beset by hostile Indians, they returned to the coast after a few months, ate the last of their horses, and set sail in makeshift boats,

hoping to return to Havana. They didn't know how to make boats, wrote Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, one of the few survivors of the campaign, nor did they have naval stores – neither 'iron, nor forge, nor [oakum], nor pitch, nor rigging.' They made do. One of their members was a carpenter who used palmetto fibers and husks to make an adequate substitute for oakum, normally a tar-covered hemp that carpenters pounded into the seams of ships to prevent leaks. Another, a Greek named Don Teodoro, made pitch from 'certain pines' to waterproof their hulls. Despite these efforts, only three men survived the return trip. After eight years of wandering, the others were dead of disease and starvation, drowned in rivers, riddled by armor-piercing Indian arrows, or cannibalized by their friends. (Earley 2004:85)

The account of Pánfilo de Narváez suggests that perhaps the Spanish were the first to exploit the vast pine forests of the American South for their resinous offerings, though they did so only in desperation. As Earley notes, Spaniards were "generally indifferent to the forests they passed through" as they explored the new frontier (2004:86). The English, on the other hand, were another story altogether:

[T]hey sensed immediately what we know today – that the pine forests of the Southeast were the greatest naval stores forest in the world. The English saw trees, as Philip Amadas and Arthur Barlow reported to Sir Walter Raleigh in 1584, "trees which could supply the English Navy with enough tar and pitch to make our Queen the ruler of the seas." (Earley 2004:86)

Amadas and Barlow knew that a rich and abundant source of naval stores was as crucial to the success of a country and its military as was its artillery. England, acutely aware of

this as well, pounced. By 1608, one year after the founding of Jamestown, Englishmen eagerly became Virginians in pursuit of a veritable naval stores gold rush.

Prior to the discovery of America's sprawling pine forests, England had received its supply of naval stores from Sweden and, earlier, from Prussia and the pines along the Baltic Sea (Outland 2004:9). Indeed, for the first century of naval stores experimentation in the American colonies, Sweden remained a more sensible and profitable source of tar and pitch for England than were their new colonies. For one, the cost of shipping naval products was much higher across the Atlantic than from the Baltic. In addition, worker shortages in the colonies drove the cost of colonial labor well over that of Sweden. Lastly, colonists were relatively inexperienced in naval stores production and thus produced a smaller quantity and a poorer quality of tar and pitch than their Swedish counterparts. Therefore, while it is commonly understood in historical circles that naval stores was the first industry in Colonial America, its products were by no means the principal export of any colony at any point in the 1600s (Outland 2004:12).

The 1700s, however, brought a surge of naval stores activity in Colonial America. Triggered by Sweden's monopoly on tar and a subsequent hike on the cost of Scandinavian naval stores, the British Parliament in 1704 passed "An Act for Encouraging the Importation of Naval Stores from America." This piece of legislation led quickly to a naval stores boom stemming from the vast pineries of the southern colonies. No colony reacted more quickly or with more enthusiasm to the bounty than did North Carolina. For nearly all of the eighteenth century and most of the nineteenth, North Carolina was the largest producer of naval stores and turpentine in the world. Its impact was such in the state that Edmund Ruffin, writing of his travels in 1840, proclaimed that "the making of turpentine and tar is almost the sole business of the

thinly settled population of the pine lands” (Ruffin quoted in Earley 2004:97). Unlike other southern colonies, North Carolina lacked a dominant cash crop. Tobacco and rice turned a profit, but they grew only in specific sections of the colony. Neither was nearly as profitable for North Carolinians as naval stores (Outland 2004:35). In the nineteenth century, North Carolina monopolized the production of turpentine and rosin in the United States, its ports shipping close to 96 percent of all North American naval stores products. Barrels of naval stores lined the shipyards of Wilmington to a greater degree than they did in Charleston, Savannah, or Jacksonville (Wright 1979:72-3). Likewise, come 1850, there were nearly eight hundred turpentine stills in North Carolina, a figure more than ten times that of the stills in the other states put together (Earley 2004:98).

North Carolina supported its intensive involvement in the production of naval stores and turpentine with an equally intensive involvement in the African slave trade. In a twist of peculiar irony, slaves throughout the southern colonies labored to patch the seams of the ships that would bring more of their brethren through the Middle Passage and onto southern shores as human property. Planters in North Carolina – and in other states on a smaller scale – capitalized on their forests’ great potential with slaves who labored to build tar kilns and to tap pine trees for the production of turpentine. In the final years of slavery in the 1850s and 1860s, North Carolina engaged an average of 3,000-4,000 slaves in naval stores production. South Carolina, the closest rival to North Carolina in terms of production, never exceeded 1,500 naval stores hands during that same period. Meanwhile, the number of hands in Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana *combined* totaled only about 1,000 in the 1850s and 1860s (Outland 2004:41). Some counties in eastern North Carolina produced nearly 140,000 barrels of naval stores products in 1840 alone. By contrast, no county in any other state produced more than 3,157 barrels that same year (Outland 2004:113). Slaves made

North Carolina the leading producer of naval stores in the world and rendered the state's longleaf pine forests the greatest turpentine forests on the planet. Their involvement in naval stores labor also led in large part to the initially derogatory and later prideful designation "Tar Heel," which the state holds as its nickname to this day.

In nineteenth-century North Carolina, the naval stores industry began to shift its concentration from the production of tar and pitch to one heavily centered on the production of turpentine. Naturally, this shift occurred in conjunction with a boom in the use of turpentine as a household product. Prior to the nineteenth century, turpentine had little function in the lives of ordinary citizens, but it is difficult to exaggerate the popularity of turpentine in the lives of Americans throughout the 1800s. "It's hard for us to imagine today," Lawrence Earley notes, "how bewitching the word 'turpentine' once was, how powerful its allure. 'Getting turpentine' became a mania in the nineteenth century, driving thousands into the forests of longleaf pines where they fought off the heat, rattlesnakes, ticks, chiggers, and loneliness while cutting 'boxes' into the living trees, chipping trees, spooning the raw gum into buckets, and carrying heavy barrels of it along woodland pathways to the turpentine stills" (2004:97).

The nineteenth-century "mania" that enticed thousands into the woods to pursue turpentine came as a result of turpentine's lucrative demand as a consumer good. In addition to its use as a treatment for hemorrhages from bullet wounds in conflicts as late as World War I, turpentine became a staple in household products across the United States and around the world. Indeed, the spirits of turpentine were a virtual panacea. A spoonful of turpentine, mixed with camphor oil, was believed to cure tapeworm. A clean rag lightly soaked with turpentine would heal any cut, scrape, or scratch. The fumes of turpentine acted as vapor rub to clear congestion of the sinuses. It cured sore gums, toothaches, rheumatic disorders, and muscle pain. Blisters, insect bites, snake bites,

colds, coughs, fevers, even constipation and sexual dysfunction called for turpentine as a cure, and it was used as such by turpentiners, national militaries, and families alike.



Figure 2.2

Timothy C. Prizer

A sign at the annual Catface Community Turpentine Festival in Portal, Georgia expresses a sentiment that has long been a widely held truth among the communities of the turpentine belt.

Former turpentiner George Music, Jr. of Waycross, Georgia told me in reflecting on turpentine's medicinal powers that he recalls no more than two trips to the doctor before he was ten years old. His father and grandfather were large producers of turpentine and knew the substance as an all-purpose remedy. As a boy, Music mimicked his elders as they hacked at pine trees and collected gum. Using raw turpentine, which he calls "the world's best natural healer," he endured and recovered from cuts and scrapes that "folks in town" felt necessitated stitches and professional medical attention. Music's belief in the healing faculties of turpentine is echoed throughout former turpentining communities, as is seen on a sign welcoming guests to the annual Catface Community Turpentine Festival in Portal, Georgia. "Nature's Best Medicine: Pure Turpentine," the

sign reads. Moreover, in his *Illustrated History of the Naval Stores Industry*, Pete Gerrell includes a humorous recipe for curing a stiff neck that highlights the widespread belief in turpentine's panacean abilities: "For a crick in the neck, wrap Spanish moss around it. The chiggers will soon make you forget the stiff neck. Rub turpentine on the chigger bites for relief" (1997:129).

Turpentine also served many household purposes beyond the medicine cabinet. It was an effective carpet cleaner and paint remover. It eliminated stains from clothing, repelled moths from closets and drawers, and drove mice from their holes. It polished floors and furniture, shined shoes, waterproofed leather, and made candles burn brighter (Earley 2004:101). Indeed, turpentine was the central ingredient in a popular lamp oil, as it provided bright flame with minimal odor. It was found in chewing gums and glues. Pine rosin also became widely popular. It was used as a preservative for fruit, a liquid marinade for cooking potatoes, and an applicant for strings on a variety of musical instruments. Rosin was also an important ingredient in many soaps, waxes, and pharmaceutical products.

The high demand for turpentine as a domestic product coupled with an equally significant industrial demand for the substance. Turpentine producers figured they stood to make a fortune from the burgeoning rubber industry, which counted turpentine among its central ingredients. The railroad industry relied on turpentine and tar for creosote, which was used to preserve wooden rails and railroad ties (Wright 1979:50). Large-scale turpentine farmers likewise hoped to rake in cash from chemical companies who used turpentine as a principal solvent in paints and paint-thinners. These industrial and domestic interests in turpentine made naval stores products the third largest southern export by 1850, behind only cotton and tobacco (Wright 1979:35).

The increased demand is also responsible for the industry's rapid expansion across the southern states in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Outland 2003:6). With the expansion of the railroad as a means to facilitate widespread industrial growth, would-be turpentine producers looked over the North Carolinian horizon and saw goldmines in the form of untouched and untapped pine forests in Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and east Texas. The industry became "nomadic," in the words of Lawrence Earley, and turpentiners "gypsies, seduced by the vision of unmeasured and seemingly inexhaustible virgin forests" (2004:134).

Yet, to be certain, turpentine's migration across the South was not solely an effort to have supply meet demand. Because the pines of the Carolinas had been worked for centuries, the states' virgin forests were becoming extinct. The pines had been overworked, bled dry, and left to die. Turpentiners in the Carolinas had engaged for three centuries in the destructive "box method," by which they gutted the bases of pines to create a box-like cavity where the pine gum would collect after trickling down the face (see Figure 2.3). In the wake of this destruction, North Carolina's scarified turpentine trees had become "rows of gravestones" signifying the end of the Tar Heel State's long run as the world's leading producer of turpentine (Earley 2004:138). Those trees that had not yet ultimately succumbed to years of destruction at the hands of the turpentine's thrashing pullers and hacks yielded a lower grade of resin, which in turn resulted in a lower quality of turpentine. Thus, the industry's migration was also an effort to maintain any supply whatsoever, or at least to maintain a supply of turpentine that, one, met the standards of quality consumers had come to expect and that, two, brought the revenue turpentine producers had become accustomed to from the highest grades of their product. A columnist for Brunswick, Georgia's *Advertiser and Appeal* wrote as early as 1882 that, "While the supply is far from inexhaustible, there's still a



Figure 2.3

Timothy C. Prizer

Prior to the invention of the turpentine cup, the earliest naval stores activity involved cutting a “box” into the base of the trees themselves for the collection of resin. This lightened slab is from former turpentine Milton Hopkins’ collection.

large area of yellow pine forest through the pine belt of Georgia, that is almost untouched by the ax of the timber cutter and will supply the demand of [the timber industries] for years” (quoted in Ray 1999:99-100). It is clear, then, that turpentine’s movement to – and eventual settlement in – south Georgia and north Florida came principally from a situation of looming industrial suicide.

North Carolina’s rapid concession to Georgia in overall turpentine production is evident in statistics compiled by the US Department of Agriculture between 1850 and 1950. Whereas, in 1850 to 1851, North Carolina produced an overwhelming 96 percent of all naval stores in the United States and Georgia just 2 percent, by 1889 Georgia had surpassed the Tar Heel State as the nation’s leading producer. From 1900 to 1901, North Carolina produced just 9 percent and Georgia nearly 40 percent of the national sum. By 1917, North Carolina’s total production had plummeted to less than 1 percent, and the state never again produced even 5 percent of the United States whole. Florida, for its part, produced just 2 percent of the total production in 1889 – the same year Georgia’s production first exceeded that of North Carolina; one decade later, however, the industry had reached Florida to an extent that nearly a third of the turpentine produced in the United States came from the Sunshine State (Wright 1979:70-1). In fact, Florida became the leading producer of turpentine in 1905 and remained so until 1924, when Georgia regained the lead. Georgia maintained an outright dominance in turpentine production for the remainder of the industry’s existence (Thomas, Jr. 1976:F-5). Indeed, for much of the twentieth century, four separate counties in the Peach State each maintained over 500,000 faces while thirteen others kept between 300,000 and 499,999 faces in production. By comparison, no other state – not even Florida – could boast even one county with more than 300,000 faces in production (Thomas, Jr. 1976:F-6). By the late 1940s, North Carolina’s contribution had dwindled to an imperceptible sliver on the pie

chart at .3 percent of the United States total, while Georgia pumped out 70 percent and Florida 22 percent (Thomas, Jr. 1976:F-5).

The increased production in Georgia and Florida would not have been possible had it not been for the rapid expansion of the railroad along their shared border. As Robert Outland explains:

By 1890 Georgia's railroad network reached every county in the piney woods. That same year the state had 228 naval stores operators who employed nearly 10,000 workers, whose labor produced tar and turpentine valued at \$4,000,000. Ten years later, the number of producers had more than doubled to 524, the workforce had nearly doubled to over 19,000... and the products' value had doubled to more than \$8,000,000. Of the 39 counties engaged in this business by 1900, all had railroad service. (2004:131)

The *Savannah Morning News* reported in 1911 on the exponential population growth in the region that came as a result of the expansion of the railroad and turpentine's migration there. The last decade of the nineteenth century saw an influx of over 100,000 new settlers in the wiregrass region, the newspaper reported, and some south Georgia counties witnessed more than a 75 percent increase in population during that time (Ray 1999:101). By 1901, at least thirteen counties in south Georgia each boasted a dozen or more turpentine stills. Coffee County, the largest producer of turpentine in the state that year, reported a whopping thirty-six stills (Thomas, Jr. 1976:E-1). And whereas not a single railroad junction existed in the region twenty-five years earlier, by 1900 "hundreds of miles of railway crisscrossed the state" (Ray 1999:101). Of course, the rails helped transport heavy barrels of pine gum and turpentine from otherwise isolated camp stills to distribution centers and port cities, but they were equally important for their human

cargo. Thousands of turpentine woodsmen hopped trains in their native North Carolina for the journey to their new home along the Georgia-Florida line.

No doubt, relocating to the virgin forests of Georgia and Florida slowed the industry's bleeding significantly. For one, literally millions of lofty pines stood untapped, and turpentine producers with equally lofty financial ambitions saw the trees as a means to make their dreams a reality. Secondly, while turpentine migrated south, a major invention was in the works that would revolutionize the industry by eliminating the box technique that had proven so harmful to the forests of the Carolinas. In September 1902, Dr. Charles Holmes Herty, a chemist at the University of Georgia, presented to an audience of six hundred members of the Turpentine Operators' Association his idea for an "Apparatus for Collecting Crude Turpentine." Herty proposed tacking an earthen cup of specific dimensions to the base of each tree for the pooling of gum rather than slashing deeply into the tree's membrane to create a box. A system of galvanized iron "gutters," positioned slightly above the clay cup on the face of the tree, would channel the dripping resin into the cup (see Figure 2.4). While Herty's invention met significant hesitation and even ridicule on the part of producers and workers alike, cupping eventually proved a more environmentally friendly and financially profitable alternative to boxing. The "cup-and-gutter system," as it is known, thus became an industry standard and defined turpentining in twentieth-century Georgia and Florida (Wright 1979:85; Earley 2004:147-8). In fact, when more durable aluminum cups replaced the earthen ones of Herty's original design, "tacking tin" quickly became synonymous with "working turpentine" in the industry's vernacular. Herty is remembered today as a "visionary and an industrial genius" (Earley 2004:186), his name etched in stone across the campus of Georgia Southern University in Statesboro where he conducted much of his research (see Figures 2.5-2.6). As a result of his innovation,

south Georgia and north Florida remained the industry's epicenter for the next one hundred years, until its demise in the late twentieth century.



Figure 2.4

Image courtesy of Carroll Butler (1998)

Dr. Charles H. Herty's 1902 invention of the turpentine cup and the "cup-and-gutter system" of gum extraction revolutionized the turpentine industry. Original caption: "Longleaf pines worked for gum, early 1900s. Florida State Archives."

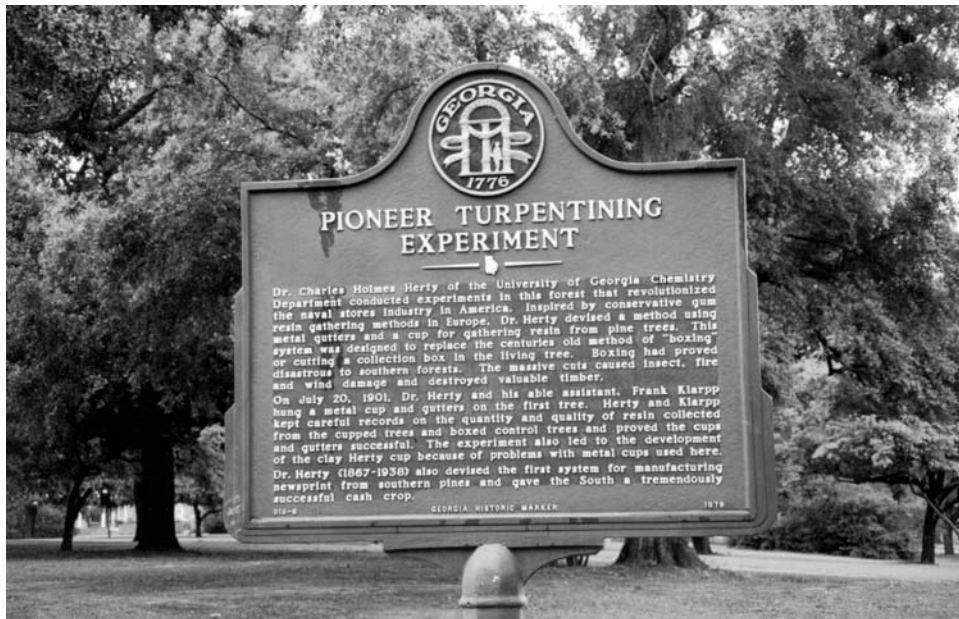


Figure 2.5

Timothy C. Prizer

In 1978, the Georgia Historical Society paid tribute to the site of Dr. Charles Herty's "cup-and-gutter" innovation with an official historic marker. Herty's experiments took place in the town of Statesboro on what is now the campus of Georgia Southern University.



Figure 2.6

Timothy C. Prizer

Georgia Southern University has converted the site of Charles Herty's experimentation into an official nature preserve. The school has also named one of its major streets and one of its classroom buildings in Herty's honor.

## Slavery on Plantations of Pine: The Roots of Racial Divide

African American men, first as slaves and later as indebted peons, performed the vast majority of the daily tasks in the turpentine woods throughout the industry's history.<sup>1</sup> While blue-collar southern whites of the pine belt played a significant role in the production of turpentine, little of their contribution is found in the historical record. It is known that before and after the Civil War, poor white families often supplemented their meager wages by harvesting small quantities of gum on land they acquired through squatting. These families encountered little opposition establishing of a home site and workspace on the infertile and unwanted lands in isolated sections of the pine barrens, lands whose soils were predominantly clay or sand. In these desolate areas, parents and children worked together to collect gum from pine trees, which they sold to larger turpentine operations for food and other goods (Outland 2004:60-61). "Turpentine production," Robert Outland points out, "often provided a family of small means the only staple they could produce from the sandy pineland" (Outland 2004:62).

My fieldwork with white turpentiners begins to tell the story that has been underrepresented in the literature on the industry. Through conversations with turpentiners whose primary income came from farming tobacco and other crops, I highlight the fact that it was not only *poor* whites who worked turpentine. Middle-income families often worked small stands of timber on larger agricultural farms to supplement their earnings. Today, a significant number of families in south Georgia and north Florida remember turpentine as "grocery money" rather than primary income. Earl Carter, Gillis Carter's cousin whose occupational identity is above all a tobacco

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that Native Americans, Mexicans, and people of other diverse ethnic backgrounds also worked turpentine in the American South. Many, like poor white families, tapped pine trees "on the side" for supplemental income, while others worked in the turpentine woods as convict labor (Wright 1979:80). There are also reports, however rare, of African American women working alongside men in the woods, as referenced in my interviews with Ralph Wilkerson, Junior Taylor, and C. J. Taylor, among others. While other groups may have worked in the turpentine woods, the labor force was almost entirely black and male throughout the industry's existence.

farmer, remembers that life would have been especially difficult without the pine trees his family worked for turpentine adjacent to their tobacco farm:

It's just, it was one of the deals that kept a lot of people on the farm. You could only farm so much tobacco, and back then you had to sucker so much... You'd still run the whole farm, and the turpentine was money that would come in almost year round. There were just a couple of months after Christmas that you didn't work turpentine. Then you were usually raising tins or whatever and a lot of time [even] that kept people that worked turpentine with groceries every week for their families. And just a small farm like this one – 100-acre farm – and it had 1500 trees. Well, the 1500 trees would dip from four to five barrels every month, eight months out of the year at least. At \$25 a barrel, back then \$100 a month, even \$25 would *way* overpay for your groceries and all. So it just kept them going.

Earl Carter's middle-income farm was just one of hundreds in the pine belt that turpentine helped keep afloat.

The scarcity of information on poor white southerners' experiences, as former turpentiner Bubba Greene has explained to me, results from the fact that these families were for the most part illiterate and thus left little documentation of their lives and activities. Anthropologist Gay Goodman Wright, in her 1979 master's thesis on turpentining, agrees. "Generally illiterate," Wright points out, "often the only records [poor white families] left were the scarred faces of the exhausted pines they left behind" (1979:33). Of course, slaves and indebted blacks, for whom there is no such lack of information, were also mostly illiterate. It comes as no surprise, however, that the lives and labor of these African American workers are thoroughly represented in the historical

record. They were overseen – literally and figuratively – by white producers and operators, government officials and politicians, media men and academics. Behind them, these groups left a mountainous trail of journal entries, manuscripts, transcriptions, newspaper articles, and significantly, photographs depicting black labor in the turpentine woods. Taken together, these records relate an important chapter in the story of African American labor, struggle, and triumph.

With the settlement of Jamestown in the first decade of the seventeenth century, enslaved Africans began to slash into the resin ducts of Virginia pine trees for the production of tar and pitch. Yet, not until England called for America to become its principal source of naval stores – almost precisely a century later – did the industry have a significant involvement in the acquisition of slaves. With the new challenge of supplying England with enough tar and pitch to cover its growing naval fleet, the pine forests of the southeast became home to large naval stores producers who acted as slave masters on their forested plantations. In the Carolinas throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, slaves in the naval stores industry toiled among the pines and lived lives not unlike forced black laborers on the row-crop plantations of other industries. One might assume that slaves in naval stores and turpentine – laborers who engaged primarily in the task system rather than gang labor – were subjected to less oversight and thus less cruelty than slaves on plantations of cotton, tobacco, indigo, or rice. This, however, does not seem to be the case. In fact, at the onset of the nineteenth century when the production of tar and pitch gave way to the escalating demand for turpentine, many plantations of the southern pine forests took on an especially harsh character. As Outland explains, “the expansion of [turpentine] manufacturing after 1830, the various procedures involved in harvesting turpentine, the size and location of the turpentine forests, and the way that these three factors affected slave-management practices

created... harsher working and living conditions than [for] bondsmen on a typical agricultural plantation” (2004:60). In other words, not only did the growing demand for turpentine bring with it an increasing demand for forced labor, but it also necessitated a grueling work routine in a rigidly controlled work environment.

Seasonal and temperature changes dictated the specific tasks to which turpentine slaves tended throughout the year. Beginning with the first sign of cold air, usually in November, slaves began the process of boxing the bases of tree trunks. The “boxes” were cavities gashed at an angle into the tree’s base where pine gum would gather. This was backbreaking work that required strength and precision, and producers valued slaves with the skill and experience to box quickly. Slaves were held to the task of cutting boxes in seventy-five to eighty trees per day throughout the winter months, and the most skilled of turpentine hands are reported to have exceeded one hundred boxes in a given day. Therefore, in the annual work cycle, wherein boxing lasted from November to March, a single turpentine hand boxed approximately 10,000 pine trees. When that figure is multiplied by the thousands of African American men boxing trees throughout the southern states and by the many years that this activity occurred, it becomes clear just how visible an impact the industry left on the region’s landscape. It is also evident just how taxing this activity was not only on the forests, but also on the slaves working in them.

As the weather warmed in early spring, turpentine hands began the process of chipping the trees. Lasting from mid-March to mid-November, this procedure called for slaves to take a bark hack or wood hack to the trunk of the tree just above the box. They scraped the bark off and then shaved into the living cells of the tree in order to create a “wound” that would “bleed” resin as the weather warmed. The wound, more commonly called a “face,” is the most visible aspect of turpentine labor. Cut at a V-shaped angle to

channel the resin, the faces were said to look like a cat's whiskers, and thus "catfaces" became a defining mark on the landscape of the pine belt (see Figure 2.7). As soon as the tree was "tapped," resin appeared and, like beads of perspiration, ran slowly down the length of the face and into the box. Over a short time, the boxes filled with gum and had to be emptied – or "dipped." It is thus that "chipping and dipping" is often used interchangeably with "working turpentine" in the language of former turpentine workers.



Figure 2.7

Timothy C. Prizer

V-shaped "catfaces" like this one in Waycross, Georgia were the most visible signs of naval stores and turpentine labor. These trees defined the landscape of the pine belt for over three centuries.

Like boxing, the processes of chipping and dipping required slaves to work rapidly in order to meet the demands of their overseers. Producers expected each worker to dip between 1,800 and 3,000 boxes every day. Dippers scooped the gum from the boxes and into "dip buckets" that were then emptied into large barrels. The barrels were quickly hauled by mule-drawn wagons to the turpentine still so that the gum could

be cooked before its quality declined or deteriorated altogether. Chipping was an especially arduous task in that, like boxing, it required not only speed but careful precision. Working quickly while working carefully was difficult and considered a valued skill among slaves. As Outland explains, “Producers sought well-trained workers for the task, since the skill of the chippers determined how many years an orchard could be harvested. If the gashes were too deep, the tree’s life was shortened; if the cut was too broad, the face would soon rise out of reach and the tree could no longer be harvested” (2004:73). On top of the call for meticulousness, most producers demanded that each worker chip between 1,000 and 2,000 trees in a single day’s work.

Of course, hard work was not the only punishment slaves received on pine plantations. In fact, it was work inadequately performed that drove many producers to inflict their own brand of penalties. Since the various tasks involved in the production of turpentine required workers to “fan out” across the sprawling forests, workers were divided into grids known as “crops” that consisted of approximately 10,000 boxes over one hundred acres of forested land. With workers dispersed across the forest in this task system of slavery, producers struggled to find a way to effectively supervise their laborers. To address the problem, the industry relied on “woodsriders” – overseers who rode on horseback to monitor the work of slaves. Abuse at the hands of woodsriders is an issue of some contention. While some, like amateur historian Pete Gerrell, claim “without hesitation” that woodsriders rarely if ever abused workers, others recount experiences – lived or witnessed – that refute the archetype of the benevolent woodsrider. Gerrell goes as far as to characterize turpentine hands as “a happy people” who “sang almost all the time” (Gerrell 1997:26). Meanwhile, Outland describes a very different situation in which turpentine hands were physically punished for “skipping trees,” among other perceived transgressions. “Slaves,” Outland writes, “received

beatings for not working fast enough, for failure to complete tasks, for complaining, and simply because their master arbitrarily decided to punish them” (2004:82). Using the examples of turpentine operators and slave owners G. W. Perry and G. I. Germond, Outland highlights some of the most severe examples of abuse in the turpentine industry. Perry adopted a system to evaluate the worth of his slaves and “thrash[ed] [them] accordingly.” He also believed his turpentine hands “required whipping every time after dipping when chipping was commenced” (Perry quoted in Outland 2004:82-3). For his part, Germond lashed three of his slaves forty times each for neglecting a patch of trees. In addition, he escorted a slave “with hands tied behind him + locked him up in the Smokehouse” after the slave left the plantation without a pass (Germond quoted in Outland 2004:83). Though Perry and Germond may have been atypically cruel among turpentine producers, theirs are certainly not isolated cases.

Turpentine slaves were also subject to latent and non-physical forms of abuse. Like nearly all slaves, they were often granted only enough food, clothing, and shelter to ensure survival. Many were put up in shanties consisting of little more than four dilapidated walls, a slight roof, and a floor of Carolina clay. According to Outland, the industry’s transitory nature created a situation in which the quarters for slaves in turpentine were often far worse than on stationary agricultural plantations. With turpentine’s progression from one virgin forest to another, slave quarters were designed to last only as long as the work itself would last in certain sections of the woods – rarely more than a single decade. Slaves’ homes thus amounted to “crude lean-tos” kept upright by a frame of frail pine poles. Their homes provided little protection from the elements, be it wind, rain, temperature extremes, snakes, or mosquitoes. Situated in rows and isolated deep in the pine forests, the quarters of turpentine slaves ensured long work hours and loneliness. The quarters were positioned close to the worksite and far

from any other diversions, creating a situation in which slaves were often forced to work from sunup to sundown with little relief. The isolation of the quarters, coupled with the industry's penchant for a system of task labor that positioned workers considerable distances from one another in the woods, denied turpentine slaves the camaraderie and social interaction that often broke the monotony of work for slaves in gang labor systems. Many turpentine operations did afford slaves the right to practice religion in shanties designated as houses of worship, and many producers also permitted social gatherings on rare occasions like major holidays. But these outlets were often too few for slaves coping with the loneliness of life in the turpentine quarters. One Georgia slave owner lamented the fact that, without permission, "our turpentine hands will work all day + then walk eight or ten miles to dance all night" (Williams quoted in Outland 2004:82).

The clothing turpentine producers issued to their slaves is yet another area where turpentine hands suffered latent maltreatment. "Even by slavery standards," Outland suggests, slaves on turpentine operations "appear to have been generally poorly clothed" (2004:87). From their bodies hung "Negro Cloth," a cost-efficient material resistant to the damaging effects of acidic turpentine and sharp tools but that rendered garments stiff and uncomfortable. Producers generally issued clothing to their turpentine hands once a year, and these included no more than a few pairs of pants, some shirts, a hat, and a pair of shoes. Though inadequate clothing may be a mild and covert form of abuse, it occasionally led to the most blatant and unashamed cruelty. Revisiting the case of G. W. Perry, Outland tells a shocking story of one slave's unspoken requests for more sufficient clothing:

G. W. Perry complained that his slaves would make it known when it was time for their clothing allowance or when their clothes or shoes had given

out. He reported that he “had them to walk by me, and let the old shoes drop off their feet, so that I should notice it, and at other times to complain that their feet were badly cut up, for want of shoes.” When one slave persisted in demonstrating how his worn-out shoes would easily drop off his feet, Perry “let him repeat it until I felt satisfied that he knew I noticed it: I then had him whipped, without telling him the cause, and whether he understood it or not, he never tried a repetition of the maneuver.” (Outland 2004:88)

While Perry’s treatment of his slaves was, again, perhaps uncharacteristically harsh, no turpentine hand would have escaped the neglect that was his tattered clothing.

Many turpentine hands did, however, find ways to escape the brutality of slavery in the woods. The historical record is rife with the grumblings of turpentine producers whose slaves had fled in the night not to pursue unmitigated freedom but rather better living conditions on agricultural plantations. While slaves were thought to prefer work in the turpentine woods to gang labor on cotton or tobacco plantations, this was often not the case. One particularly telling story involves two enslaved brothers, Ned and Colin, who in the 1850s were sold to James Grist, a wealthy turpentine producer in Brunswick County, North Carolina. Loathing the work and life associated with the turpentine woods, the brothers escaped. Crossing a bridge in Fayetteville, they were shot at and, fleeing in opposite directions, became separated. Colin found work as a slave on the railroad in Greenville, while Ned, malnourished and depleted from days on foot, sought the care of a Sussex County, Virginia planter named William Parham. As Parham helped Ned recover, Ned explained that it was his deep aversion to working turpentine that forced him to flee Grist’s operation. Parham, upholding his end of planters’ unspoken buddy system, wrote to Grist to notify him of Ned’s whereabouts. In his letter,

Parham testified that “the work and the manner of life in making turpentine he cannot stand. It is hard work and would kill him by piecemeal, and he had rather be killed at once” (Outland 2004:94; Earley 2004:100).

The story of Ned and Colin demonstrates that the core characteristics of turpentine’s tenure in slavery – the loneliness and isolation, heavy work demands and dangerous labor conditions, ramshackle housing and threadbare clothing – were frequently too much for slaves to bear. And while some poor southern white families worked turpentine in the antebellum era, it is clear that the roots of the industry’s racial divide stemmed from slaves being overworked and mistreated by big turpentine producers who watched their wealth grow at the expense of their human chattel. Juxtapose, for instance, the image of the shanty in the turpentine quarters with that of the estate of John Avirett, a turpentine tycoon in nineteenth century North Carolina. Avirett’s 125 slaves produced 30,000 barrels of turpentine every year from his 22,000 acres of pine forest in Onslow County. His wealth afforded him a visit from George Washington, a state senate term, and almost two decades as county sheriff. His mansion, as Outland describes it, was truly a sight to behold. “An avenue of elms, 1,200 feet long and 40 feet wide, lead to his impressive home, which rested on five-foot-high brick pillars,” Outland writes. “A piazza extended around his three-story residence, whose large windows opened to the floor.” Avirett’s son James proudly noted the estate’s seclusion from the “egg-sucking cur of the negro quarter” (Outland 2004:64). His words, full of pride and contempt, highlight the stark division between white affluence and black impoverishment that defined the industry’s antebellum years.

## **The Camp, the Commissary, and Debt Peonage**

The “freedom” that ostensibly came to slaves with Lincoln’s passage of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1865 was mostly lost on African Americans in the turpentine industry. Emancipation did little to unshackle turpentine hands from a situation of utter poverty or even forced labor. As the industry’s migration from the Carolinas to Georgia and Florida intensified in the years following the Civil War, black turpentiners often found that their situation changed in location and name only.

“Plantations” in the Carolinas became “camps” in southern Georgia and northern Florida. They were still isolated deep in the forests, far from any attractions or other lines of work that may exist “in town.” Their quarters still consisted of rows of ramshackle shanties, often with no running water. Former woodsman Elliott West of Folkston, Georgia once described to me one of the many shanties he lived in. Through gaps in the ceiling, West remembered, “You could see the stars. Oh boy, it was rough.” West’s friend and longtime coworker Eddie Lee Scipp recalled being able to see the ground through the cracks in the floorboards and even having to wade through water inside his home on the turpentine camp after heavy summer rains. Bernice Wilcox remembered that her mother did her best to weatherproof her family’s quarters by stuffing newspaper and plastic wrap into the cracks in the walls (see Figure 2.8).

Still dependent upon their employers for food, clothing, housing, and medical needs, workers remained mired in a paternalistic system not unlike slavery (Wright 1979:81). They awoke each day at 4:30 in the morning to the woodsriders’ wakeup call and emerged from beds of wire and Spanish moss – beds, as some described them, about as comfortable as a “pile of rocks” (Gerrell 1997:76). They put on clothes made from flour sacks and entered the woods where, from daybreak to dusk, they performed the same tasks under the watchful eye of woodsriders (Butler 1998:131). Pushed to meet backbreaking quotas, they were expected to work every bit as quickly and as efficiently as

they had in slavery. No longer considered human property, they remained bound to a camp and its overseers by a vicious system of debt peonage.



Figure 2.8

Timothy C. Prizer

Workers' quarters, before and after slavery, were often "crude lean-tos" or ramshackle structures. This one in Willacoochee, Georgia stands today as a reminder of the living conditions of African American families in the turpentine industry.

As in slavery, African American men did the majority of work in the woods from the immediate post-War years through to the industry's demise in the late twentieth century. White men, usually, assumed the roles of producer, operator, stiller, and woods rider – known collectively as "boss men" in workers' circles – and lived in much nicer homes on the opposite end of the camp from the turpentine hands. Nearly always, the finer homes of white producers and camp management lined the only path onto or off of the camp, an added deterrent for workers who may have been inclined to flee as a way of escaping debt (Outland 2004:180). Racial segregation was apparent in other

aspects of camp life as well. Rarely, for instance, were white men seen performing the same tasks as black workers in the woods. As Milton Hopkins of Fitzgerald, Georgia told me in conversation, and as he writes in his book *In One Place*, “Turpentine was hot, hard, nasty work, for pine gum ran during the hottest months. I know of only one white man out of perhaps a hundred black workers in the woods, and he couldn’t handle the work” (2001:116-7). Whites commingled with their black laborers in the woods, but usually only as a matter of supervision. White adults and black adults seldom socialized with one another in situations not related to work; nor were the children of workers and camp authorities expected to play with one another.

It is important to remember that race relations on the turpentine camp were a product of Jim Crow laws that defined race more generally in the American South. The 1896 Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* not only served to legalize segregation, prohibiting blacks and whites from sharing public space; it also legally sanctioned the superiority of whites over blacks. While white families of the turpentine camp usually went to church and their children to school in the nearest town, black families used a vacant one-room shanty in the quarters as a house of worship on Sundays and a schoolhouse during the week (Wright 1979:77-8). Church sermons and classroom lessons alike were given in the one-room clapboard shanty by laymen and women – often workers as preachers and their wives as teachers – or by professionals from off the camp who made weekly visits for these purposes. Camp schooling usually went through the sixth grade, though most boys by the age of seven or eight had already begun to favor woods work to schoolwork. Nearly all began dipping gum part-time before they were ten, and by the age of fourteen most had begun working full-time at other tasks in the woods (Butler 1998:132; Wright 1979:114). From childhood, African Americans were ingrained with a palpable sense that their status as turpentiners separated them as

lower-class citizens. Whites in towns near the turpentine camps often distinguished between blacks of other trades and “turpentine niggers,” the latter’s coarse flour-sack clothing and hands stained with pine gum connecting them to the stigma of the turpentine camp.

Despite the racial segregation that survived slavery and remained a defining attribute of postbellum turpentine communities, it is clear that indebted freemen had a significantly more diverse racial experience than their enslaved forebears. First, not all white bosses after the Civil War were large producers or overseers, nor did all black turpentiners live and work in the camp setting. Often, a white family of modest means employed one African American hand to work turpentine as a sharecropper on a small stand of timber. Grady Williams of McRae, Georgia, for instance, recalls that when he was a boy, his father’s turpentine operation amounted to one African American sharecropper in a small patch of trees on his family’s property. The sharecropper lived with his family on the property in a small home adjacent to the Williams residence. Also, common in my conversations with former turpentiners – woodsriders and woodsmen, white and black – are stories of interracial compassion and friendship. Former operators like Gillis Carter recall, in a tone of somber commiseration, forging complicated relationships with their workers – relationships that melded disciplinary supervision with heartfelt empathy, that balanced worker exploitation with well-intentioned paternalism. The father of former turpentiner Bubba Greene, Harvey Greene so closely befriended his worker Sam Williams that most people in their hometown of Madison, Florida knew Mr. Williams only as Sam Greene. African American turpentiners like brothers Junior and C. J. Taylor speak fondly of friendships forged with benevolent “boss men” while, in the next breath, recalling the blatant abuse and cruelty of others.

Though abuse on turpentine camps may have been less pervasive than on the plantation, it was still very real. And nearly every specific occurrence of violence on the part of a woods rider or operator stemmed from an underlying system that made superficially free workers slaves to debt. When a turpentine worker arrived on a new camp, he was issued an advance of funds that would allow him to purchase basic supplies for his family and their new home in the quarters. For this advance, his account was immediately charged, and he found himself in debt before he had even entered the woods. Once he went to work, he was paid by piecework – the amount of labor he was able to complete each day – rather than by the hour. Come payday, his earnings were applied to his account. Rarely were his wages enough to exceed his balance, resulting in “paydays” that saw a slight and temporary reduction in debt but no pay. When earnings did exceed debt, operators on many camps still did not pay workers in American currency; rather, they issued their workers commissary scrip – usually tokens, coupon booklets, or punch cards – sometimes redeemable only at the camp store (Outland 2004:169-73).<sup>2</sup> On top of commissary debt, workers footed the charges for doctor’s bills and hospital visits when they became ill or were injured in the woods. If they wound up in jail, their producers paid the bail and added it to the amount the workers owed (Butler 1998:135-6). The end result was to bind workers to the camp by entrenching them in an inescapable system of debt peonage. “It’s a long story,” C. J. Taylor once explained to me of his life plodding through the muck of indebtedness to the commissary:

They’ll charge you so much for your groceries, and then you borrow so much. From anytime of the month, you wouldn’t have nothing coming in. Then you wanted to borrow four or five dollars and they wouldn’t let you

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<sup>2</sup> Some stores in some towns did accept commissary scrip as payment from camp workers. Yet, on the harshest of camps, operators made certain that this was not an option for their turpentine hands. In the 1930s, Congress outlawed the use of company-minted currency (Butler 1999:135). However, industries like turpentine that often escaped the purview of law enforcement continued the practice into the 1940s and 1950s.

have it... You did a lot of work for nothing... You couldn't get no money nowhere else. There wasn't no loan companies. That boss man, he was just like your daddy.

As Taylor points out, the frustration of insurmountable debt was only a portion of the horrors of the peonage system; so too was the paternalism that accompanied it.

Peonage was the primary and by far the most pervasive form of abuse on turpentine camps. It touched the lives of virtually all workers, irrespective of the real or perceived benevolence of some camp authorities. It was also the inherent underpinning of more blatant and violent disciplinary action. Workers were scolded or beaten for skipping trees or misrepresenting the amount of piecework they completed, both of which were an attempt to increase wages so as to decrease debt. A producer near the Florida-Alabama line, Outland notes, "punished unsatisfactory work by tying laborers to pine trees and beating them with a buggy whip" (2004:176). The harshest abuse the Taylor brothers recall witnessing in the woods resulted from a worker who had missed a patch of trees as he made his rounds chipping. It was an afternoon of sweltering summer heat, and the woodsrider trotted his horse up to the worker responsible for the neglected trees. The woodsrider demanded that the hand return to complete the work. Sluggish from the oppressive temperatures, the hand responded slowly – an act the woodsrider interpreted as an act of defiance. Without hesitation, the woodsrider struck the man across the back with a bush knife. The blow threw the worker to the ground, where he lay struggling for his life. "He was bleeding like a hog," C. J. Taylor remembered, "and that man just rode right on off with that horse." The injured man dragged himself to a nearby highway where he was picked up and transported to a hospital in town. "You

don't tell nobody what you *wouldn't* do," Taylor recalled. "Things was so bad back then, you was just like a slave."

Often the worst forms of punishment came when workers were caught fleeing the camp – a frequent occurrence and, again, usually an effort to escape mounting debt. The Taylor brothers recall as young boys seeing their father – then a turpentine hand on a Mayday, Georgia turpentine camp owned by the prominent Langdale family – slapped to the ground by a white woods rider. The punishment was in response to Taylor gathering his family and their belongings and fleeing the Mayday camp. Taken in by a producer on a camp in Aaron, Florida, Taylor succeeded in gaining a clean slate of credit. But after a short time spent in the new location, a lawyer for the Langdale family cornered Taylor and hauled him back to Mayday. Upon return, he was forced to the ground and beaten. While it was occasionally acceptable for a turpenter to leave one camp for another if the new producer volunteered to pay off the worker's debt, coordinating such a trade was often difficult. Some workers had accumulated more debt than any new producer would pay. Especially possessive producers saw their worker's desire to leave as an expression of disloyalty. A malicious boss may view the tradeoff as an admission of defeat. As for Junior and C. J. Taylor's father, there was often little choice but flight when it came to improving the situation of a worker and his family.

Some of the most famously horrifying cases of abuse occurred on the Aycock and Lindsay turpentine operation in Cross City, Florida, as reported in the writings of Zora Neale Hurston and Stetson Kennedy for the Federal Writers' Project (FWP). Against the backdrop of the Great Depression, the work of Hurston and Kennedy highlights at once the resilient strength of impoverished workers and the appalling racism turpentiners faced on a daily basis. Though the conditions and abuses at Cross City were uniquely harsh, stories from the camp provide a striking example of just how little changed for

many workers following the abolition of slavery. Hurston's involvement in the documentary effort is especially telling; as an African American, she caught a unique glimpse of the racism and discrimination that faced her turpentine informants. It was, of course, extremely rare for any African American to be allowed into a turpentine community unless they wanted to work in the woods. When Hurston traveled to the Aycock and Lindsay operation in May 1939, she was confronted by the gun-toting Catherine Lindsay, who kept her more than three hundred turpentine hands in virtual slavery. Finally convincing "Miss Catherine" that she was there on behalf of the state of Florida, she almost immediately gained the trust of the workers. She collected a vast body of "treasures" from these workers, who not only sang, danced, and gambled for Hurston but supplied her with countless horror stories of life on a turpentine camp in the 1930s. Workers were often beaten and threatened with death. Hurston's fieldnotes include such observations as "a hand tried to run away last week, and the sheriff had all the roads guarded." She also wrote that "there is a grave not far from here of a hand they beat to death." One woman told Hurston that she cooks, cleans, washes, and irons on the camp for just \$2.25 a week. Yet another informed her that "black bodies were often weighted down with cement ... and dumped into the Gulf of Mexico" (Hurston quoted Boyd 2003:323).

Racial attitudes in the turpentine industry are clearly demonstrated in stories Stetson Kennedy continued to tell years after his experiences on these camps with Zora Neale Hurston (Kennedy, "Florida Folklife and the WPA"). One involves the turpentiners themselves:

After recording some songs around an open campfire at night, I picked up on Zora's leads by putting on my cap as director of Social-Ethnic Studies and asking questions about such things as peonage and the commissary

system. When I did, my informants promptly posted sentries. “Don’t you know that in this country nobody can make you work against your will?” I asked. “They do do it,” came the laconic reply. “And if you tries to leave, they will kill you; and you will have to die, because they has folks to bury you out in them woods.” After I had recorded a good deal of such as this, a sentry dashed into the firelight, whispering: “Here come The Man – sing something quick!”

Kennedy was appalled by the racism. He wrote that “the terrorism was real, not fancied, and a constant in the recording of the folk material in those days, at least in the South” (Kennedy, “Florida Folklife and the WPA”).

In his article “Forced Labour in the United States,” Kennedy exposes the cruel system that combined peonage and racism, escape and capture. Employing terms like “the plantation,” “the Big House,” and “slaves,” Kennedy compares the turpentine industry with the system of slavery from which it derived:

To escape from a forced labour camp it is almost always necessary to slip away in the night, leaving behind one’s personal possessions, and oftentimes one’s family. The overseers travel far and wide, and even from State to State, tracking down and bringing back their runaway slaves. Some industries, notably turpentine, maintain a sort of information service whereby camp overseers co-operate with one another in recapturing runaways. Where co-operation with law officers is close, operators do not hesitate to call upon them to “arrest” the runaways. While sitting in the parlor of the “Big House” of a turpentine camp at Shamrock, Florida, we listened while the operator telephoned the sheriff a description of a runaway, ordering that deputies be posted on all roads leading out of the

area. The usual punishment for running away is a severe flogging, but sometimes the penalty is death. As a forced labourer named Robert Graves told us, in describing the Aycock Lindsey plantation, "If you left owing the Bossman even \$5 and he caught you he would kill you, and you would have to die, because they would bury you. He would make other workers dig the graves out in the woods." Symbolic of this form of terrorism is the toe of a lynched Negro which reposes in a jar of alcohol on a commissary counter in North Carolina. Asked whether he would personally lynch a Negro, the proprietor replied, "No, no I wouldn't – not unless he owed me money."

Turpentine hands coauthored several work songs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that explicitly address the themes of strict worker supervision, debt peonage, escape, capture, and disciplinary abuse. One such song strings each of these themes together in a coherent narrative:

When I left old South Ca'lina,  
I left in the winter-time.  
"Where you gwine, nigger?"  
"I'se gwine to Georgy, I'se gwine to Georgy,  
To work in the turpentine."

When I gits to Georgy,  
They gimme a hack and stock  
And put me in a crop; they say  
"If you wants to see that double line,  
You shorely got to chop."

You see that Woodsman comin, ridin through the pine;  
He turns round and 'gins to peep;  
You hear him say to the black man,  
"Old nigger, sink emin deep!"

The nigger pull off his hat,  
And throwed it on the ground;  
You hear him say to the Woodsman,  
"Do you want me to cut 'em down?"

They worked this nigger all year long;

It's time for him to go home.  
You hear the Bossman say to the Bookkeeper,  
"How do this nigger stand?"

The Bookkeeper goes in the office,  
He sit down and 'gin to figger;  
Then he say to the Bossman,  
"That's nigger's just even now!"

When I libbed in Georgy I heard a lion sing,  
And I didn't have long to stay;  
I got in debt, and I had to run away.  
The Woodsman went to the Bossman,  
And begin to fret; he said,  
"I'll bet that nigger has left in debt!"  
The Woodsrider caught me and brought me back;  
He said, "If you don't work, I'll beat your back!" (Outland 2004:169-70)

Considering the challenges of work in the woods and the abuses of life on the camp, it seems turpentine hands would have been wise to seek work in other trades. For several reasons, however, this was rarely an option. First, the pine barrens of southern Georgia and northern Florida were essentially devoid of industry prior to turpentine's migration there after the Civil War. Industrial development in the region came principally with the southward migration of North Carolinian turpentine producers and the workers who accompanied them. The region therefore offered its inhabitants little in terms of employment outside of timber industries, the most prominent of which was turpentine. While this was especially true for uneducated black workers, turpentine provided one of the few practical career paths for the white population of the pine belt as well. As George Music, Jr. remembers:

There wasn't much of a choice. There wasn't much else in this area to make a living in back in them days. You had to either cut crossties or work turpentine... It's the onliest thing that made any money... Whatever it takes to put groceries on the table.

Secondly, the lack of plantation agriculture in the region kept the region's native African American population low in the antebellum period. In wiregrass Georgia, blacks

comprised only about 5 percent of the region's antebellum population. After the war, these numbers multiplied exponentially. By 1900, they accounted for 40 percent of all the region's inhabitants. The laborers who comprised this influx in the late nineteenth century had often been trained only as turpentiners, not as field hands in agriculture. Because the skills and tasks involved in turpentine required specialization and expertise, and since these skills were passed on to children to prepare them for work in the woods, generations of black workers in the pine belt of Georgia and Florida often found themselves essentially confined to work in the turpentine woods and life on the turpentine camp (Outland 2004:162-4).

Interestingly, however, the mid-twentieth-century downfall of the camp community as the industry's principal institution rendered turpentine a *preferred* line of work for many African Americans in the pine belt. While the railroad industry and other timber industries like pulpwooding, logging, and sawmilling had long provided some alternatives, these had never been as prevalent as turpentine. Nor were they as favored in the industry's final years. As a result of Civil Rights legislation that placed strict labor regulations on southern employers, the turpentine industry radically shifted from one structured around the autocracy of the camp commissary to one based on contract labor and state-owned lands in the 1960s and 1970s. The overarching camp complex – an arena in which workers and their families lived in the turpentine woods, shopped in the commissary, worshipped in makeshift churches, and went to school in camp shanties – became a thing of the past. Turpentine woodsmen suddenly realized an unprecedented level of autonomy – for the first time, many had the freedom to work around their own schedules and to name their own hours; they were able to garner earnings consistent with the amount of labor they contributed, to be able to afford their own homes, to experience the dignity of supporting their families through hard work,

and to shed their reliance on the paternalistic aid of the “boss man.” In the last several decades of the twentieth century, workers reported to work on stands of timber they leased from the state or from a private owner, and they worked as little or as much as they wished. On these forested plots, they chipped trees and dipped gum, selling the gum by the barrel to the landowner, the leaseholder, or directly to stills located off-site. It was an occupational arrangement closer to self-employment and entrepreneurship than African American turpentiners could have ever imagined.

In addition to a period of social transformation, the latter half of the twentieth century was also a time of industrial modernization for the turpentine industry. Several of the procedures historically associated with work in the woods gave way to new developments. Whereas barrels of gum had traditionally been transported by mule-drawn wagons to wooden stills on the campsite, they were now loaded onto pickup trucks and hauled into town to industrial distilleries built of aluminum and steel. Also, while at the old stills workers had monitored furnace temperatures by listening closely to the volume of the sizzle of the gum as it cooked, the industrial stills of the late twentieth century were largely mechanized and electronically-monitored. The image of the still worker with soot-stained clothing stoking furnace fires from beneath copper kettles became a symbol of times past. Workers during this time also increasingly engaged in the practice of treating the faces of trees with sulfuric acid to speed resin flow and increase production, by then a time-tested technique further necessitated by burgeoning competition on the international turpentine market.

The period following the decline of the turpentine camp is a chapter of the industry’s history that remains largely untold due to its recency and its incongruity with turpentine’s master narrative of racial cruelty. Yet, any discussion of nostalgia for the turpentine industry must include this period. Black workers’ memories of this time

stand in stark contrast to the painful stories of racial exploitation of decades before. While the majority of the nostalgia found in the memories of black workers combines painful reminiscence of racial inequality with proud recollection of obstacles overcome, it is from this period of the immediate past that we find the most pleasant memories. Common are memories like those from the late Junior Taylor, who recalled a happy ending to work in the turpentine woods:

In about the last 20 years, I was working for myself. You know, leased the trees from the state. I was working on my own. I could come in anytime and go out anytime of day... They can't make you work and they can't make you stop... That's why I worked turpentine so late and so long.

Wasn't no one to answer to, working for yourself, you know.

My conversations with Junior Taylor, and with other African-American men who worked turpentine into the 1970s and beyond, make it clear that woods work became more than a "necessary evil" in the years of the industry's twilight. Whereas turpentine had been one of the only viable trades for rural African Americans throughout the region's history, the industry became a relatively rewarding career that granted workers a significant degree of independence in the years immediately preceding its collapse. Like Junior Taylor, former woodsman Willie White of Hoboken, Georgia paints a glowing picture of turpentine in its waning days:

Turpentine was a sort of job that you could always depend on. You didn't have no worry about this and worry about that because you could be your own boss. You could go when you want to come and come when you want to go. You didn't have nobody to tell you this and tell you that. You knew what your job was. You want to go out there and say, "I'm going to make a half a day," you go make a half a day. You didn't have nobody to tell you

that you got to do this, got to do that on time, you got to be on the clock.

Rainy days, you didn't have to worry about working. The weather got too

bad, you'd be home. Be too cold, you didn't go to work. You'd be home.

Willie White's reflections on the final years of the industry's stint in the pine belt stand in stark contrast with the horrors stories of earlier decades.

It is a peculiar irony that this period of relative profitability and occupational sovereignty – of social transformation and industrial modernization – coincided with the industry's demise. For so many years, though, the industry had relied on a combination of racial and environmental exploitation that was no longer tolerated. Without this exploitative authority, the industry began to fade from the pine belt. To be sure, however, improving labor conditions and the implementation of economic protections were not the only factors that sent the industry into a tailspin. Meanwhile, rising timber prices and domestic labor costs led to rural outsourcing and the use of cheaper foreign labor. New inventions from the world of chemistry put synthetic turpentine substitutes on the shelves of grocery and hardware stores. As a result of these and other factors, the industry sank into rapid decline. In 1999, when Junior Taylor's brother C. J. hauled his last barrel of pine gum to the still only to be turned away, turpentiners were making "good money," C. J. remembers – about \$150 per barrel. "I loved turpentine," C. J. Taylor says. "I still love it. But when things got good, everything moved out from under us." The industry's demise in the late twentieth century was thus perhaps especially devastating for African American families. "People," C. J. Taylor added, "they depended on turpentine. They didn't think that would never go out... Now, ain't no work for the black man in the farming, ain't no work in the turpentine."

## **The Demise of an Industry, The Birth of Remembering**

The insurmountable poverty and Jim Crow racism that bound workers to their bosses and confined them to oppressive turpentine camps was the contextual backdrop for a dynamic occupational culture that flourished in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Though this is an industry with a checkered past – tainted by violence, racism, and an exploitative debt peonage system – it was also an industry shaped by creativity, by ingenuity and resilience, by strength and skill. Turpentiners crafted songs, jokes, sayings, and calls-and-hollers unique to their industry that together demonstrated a creative imagination and formed a vibrant body of expressive culture. The industry grew out of a time when knowledge of hand skills rather than machines was the measure of a person, and it provided thousands with the only line of work they ever knew (Prizer and Sommers 2004). Centuries of families – white and black – owed the food upon their tables and the roofs over their heads to the by-products of pine resin.

Beginning in the 1950s and continuing into the 1970s, however, all this began to change. As I charted above, the latter half of the twentieth century brought a series of progressive “advancements” that quickly rendered the industry old-fashioned and which ultimately led to its obsolescence. Civil Rights legislation that improved labor conditions for African Americans conversely diminished the industry’s profitability. Machinery and other technology that boosted many agricultural trades were impractical for the specialized tasks of the turpentine woods. A general economic trend of rural outsourcing and cheaper foreign labor led to a sharp decline in domestic turpentine production. High timber prices and rising labor costs weakened the industry’s revenue stream. To make matters worse, the introduction of alternative industrial sources of turpentine rendered even the industry’s product obsolete. Petroleum-based distillates like mineral spirits (known as Turpenoid or “turps”) provided less flammable, less toxic, and odorless

substitutes for turpentine. Linseed oil and a variety of water-soluble oils also served as store-bought alternatives.

These hits devastated the industry. Whereas, in 1950, there were 8,863 turpentine producers in the United States, this figure had fallen to just 1,222 by 1960. In the same period of time, the number of barrels of turpentine produced fell from 1,330,000 in 1950 to just 194,635 ten years later. Likewise, while at the midway point of the century there were approximately 21,000 workers employed as turpentine hands, by 1960 there were just 3,300 (Thomas, Jr. 1976:15). And by the mid-1970s, few large-scale turpentine operations existed in the United States. Gay Goodman Wright, writing in 1979, reflected on the decline she was witnessing firsthand:

...times have changed. Today the industry is thought to be dying.

Commissaries, camps, fire stills, and annual conventions have either disappeared, or soon will. In the 1940s, gum naval stores contributed fifty million dollars annually to the economy of the southeast. Today its economic impact is virtually nil. (93-4)

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, turpentining survived on the margins, mostly as contract labor on state and private land before becoming mere side-work for individuals seeking supplemental income. The commercial production of turpentine in the United States officially came to an end in 2001, when Major Phillips dipped the last bucket of gum in the forests of Soperton, Georgia. Today, in the rural forest communities of China, Indonesia, Brazil, and several Mediterranean nations, turpentining remains a minor source of rural employment, but it is not the center of any economy as it was throughout the southern pine belt (Shanley et al 2002:193).

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It is difficult, if not entirely impossible, to represent the full breadth of experience for workers – white and black – in the turpentine industry. In my conversations with black former turpentine woodsmen, there are stories not only of hardship and abuse but also of honor, dignity, pride, and fair treatment. Many African American laborers are passionate about their work and experiences in the turpentine woods. For many of them, the history of the industry is balanced between intense expressions of pride and painful recollections of hard work, economic struggle, and racial inequality. To be sure, many white bosses and supervisors treated their workers with respect and integrity. Echoes of this are evident in the narrated memories of white men like Gillis Carter, George Music, Jr., and Bubba Greene. Situations of humane and benevolent treatment are also clear in the words of black workers like Junior and C. J. Taylor, Wilburt Johnson, Ralph Wilkerson, Elliot West, and Willie White. We must not forget though that this was indeed an occupation founded on the exploitation of black labor. Reflections of fair and humane treatment are checked and balanced by horror stories of abuse and neglect. In any case, the story of turpentine from the worker's perspective is, for the most part, a story seldom heard. My goal, in the pages that follow, is to provide an inclusive representation of the way this complicated racial history has textured expressions of memory for former turpentiners.



Figure 3.1

Timothy C. Prizer

## *Three*

### Work-Sites of Experience: Landscape and Place in the Turpentine Belt

#### **Echoes in the Pines: Turpentine's Sensory Landscape**

*I thank the Lord with all my heart for his goodness in granting me admission to this magnificent realm.*

– John Muir, 1867, in a pine forest somewhere between Thomson and Augusta, Georgia<sup>1</sup>

The demise of the turpentine industry has brought near silence over the pine forests of the American South. Take, for instance, the expansive tract of natural-standing pines that surrounds the home of George Music, Jr. in Waycross, Georgia.

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<sup>1</sup> Muir quoted in Ray 1999:67.

Today, Music's forest stands much as it would have before turpentiners ever ventured into this part of the pine belt. Apart from whispers of wind through the pine needles and the sounds of wildlife along the forest floor, the woods sit silent and empty, devoid of the labor that for so long clattered here. But like all seemingly empty pine forests, George Music's remains a sensory wonderland, just as it would have been before it became an arena for work. Accept, first, that no one needs to be present – nor does even a tree need to fall – for the forest to make a sound. With or without human company, the woods hum a tune of nature's choosing. As wind brushes through the woods, the wiregrass groundcover hisses softly, then more loudly as the wind picks up, then descends to the faintest of whispers, and repeats without ever ceasing entirely.<sup>2</sup> It is much like Lawrence Earley describes it: "a low and constant tone like the surf crash of a distant sea" (1998:7). Overhead, the treetops reverberate as breezes rush through needles like breath through a woodwind instrument. No doubt, it is this combination of wood and wind in a pine forest that accounts not only for its gentle sounds but also its vivid sights and smells. Flashes of sunlight glint off of auburn pine straw and swaying pine needles. Shadows thrown long over the forest bed are offset by hazy beams of sunlight that shoot between widely scattered pines. Meanwhile, the wind carries fresh scents of pine sap and balsam. Just as the force of the wind determines the forest's natural volume, it too controls the potency of the woods' natural aroma.

By the 1880s, less than two decades after John Muir's heavenly experience in a virgin forest of Georgia pines, turpentiners moved into these tranquil worlds and began tapping pine trees for gum resin. For the next century, the serenity of the woods blended with a bustling occupational culture based on the production of turpentine. The industry brought to life the already vibrant woods in a whole new way. Each morning, as the sun

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<sup>2</sup> Wiregrass, as author-environmentalist Janisse Ray accurately defines it, is a "flammable, thin-leaved, yellowish bunchgrass that grows calf-high and so thick it resembles a mop head" (1999:66).

broke darkness to dawn, echoes resounded through the woods, signaling the start of the day. First were the 4:30 am hollers of the “shack rouser,” whose job it was to ride on mule-drawn wagons – and later in pickup trucks – through the workers’ quarters shouting wakeup calls or sounding truck horns. At the sound, workers rose from their beds and emerged from their shanties – lunch buckets in hand – for the ride deep into the woods to begin chipping, dipping, and “tacking tin.” At dawn, with a coat of dew still draping the forest floor, workers arrived at their “hang-up ground,” where they hung their lunch pails from tree branches before locating the “drift” of trees to which they had been assigned (Wright 1979:100). Back at the camp, workers’ wives maintained small garden plots while their children locked hands and sang as they played traditional ring games in yards of dust and sand.

Nearly every task in woods work involved its own rhythm and produced its own distinct sound. The forests rang out from sunup to sundown as turpentine hands labored to meet their quotas. While workers affixed cups to the bases of pine trees, the woods echoed with the drumming of hammers driving nails through aluminum and into pine. A chorus of voices accompanied the percussion as workers shouted personalized calls and hollers to alert tallymen of their progress. The tallymen, usually on horseback, kept a running count of the number of faces each worker tacked throughout the day. When workers finished cupping a face, they hollered their nickname, their favorite number, the name of their female companion, or the name of their hometown, and tallymen scribbled a mark on the tallyboard beside the name of the corresponding worker. Raised within earshot of a turpentine camp, anthropologist Gay Goodman Wright recalls the “rough beauty” of the turpentiners’ “rhythmic chant” (1979:106). As debt often bound workers to the commissary, many of their calls drew on themes of mobility, travel, and life away from work. Wilburt Johnson shouted “Can I Go?” as he

moved from one tree to the next, while others hollered “Automobile!”, “Rail line!”, “Greyhound!”, or “Long gone!” Some chanted their own nicknames. Junior Taylor, for his part, hollered “Poor Boy!” or “Iron Man!” as he met his daily quota. The woods echoed with “Sweet Betty!” as one turpentine hand shouted the pet name of his female companion. Others chanted “Nahunta!”, “Race Pond!”, and “Hahira!” – the respective south Georgia towns in which they had been born on turpentine camps. Other rhythms echoed across the woods from the coopers’ shed, as skilled craftsmen hammered together the staves of wooden barrels. Coopers often hammered in distinct, rapid-fire beats, and many accompanied the work with the singing of spirituals and the blues. Listening to the coopers’ music was a favorite pastime for camp children and adults alike (Butler 1998; Prizer 2004).

Joining the rhythm of work were the slashing sounds of hacks ripping into pine bark as turpentine hands chipped fresh streaks in the trees’ faces to keep the resin running. Once enough resin had trickled down the face to fill the aluminum cups with pine gum, workers emptied the cups by scraping out the gum – its consistency thick and color white, like paste – with metal dip irons or “dip wands.” They transferred the gum from the cups into larger dip buckets, scraping the wands along the bottom of the cups and wiping them clean along the rims of the buckets. With this, the coarse sound of metal-on-metal joined the clatter of work in the woods. When workers had emptied enough cups to fill a bucket, the gum was again transferred, this time from dip buckets to larger barrels, some of which held up to six hundred pounds of gum. When the barrels became full, workers loaded them on mule-drawn wagons in preparation for the trip to the still. Muleskinners shouted directives to the turpentine mules to guide the animals through the rough terrain of the woods to the fire still, their skillful commands joining

the chorus of sounds involved in turpentine labor.<sup>3</sup> The turpentine woods, as C. J. Taylor recalled, “just sounded like a song, all day long” (2002).

At the still, the barrels were unloaded and the gum poured from them into the still’s copper kettle. With log fires heating the kettle from below, thick clouds of smoke billowed through the woods, carrying with them the clean, sweet scent of pine gum and fresh turpentine. People in town knew when the “boys over at the still” had produced a fresh batch of turpentine, for the smell drifted from the depth of the woods to downtown squares. Nighttime on the camp brought thumping beats and boisterous commotion from camp jook joints as workers unwound with alcohol, loud music, and gambling. As the last worker staggered home to bed from a night of jooking, quiet fell over the dark woods and the workers’ quarters, but only for a short time. Soon enough, the shack rouser would rise and harness up the mules, his piercing wakeup calls signaling a new day in the turpentine woods.

For nearly four centuries, naval stores forests in the American South pulsed with the sights, the smells, and the sounds of human labor in the turpentine industry. Today, though, the sounds of turpentiners’ hand tools have been replaced by the racket of mechanized timber industries and destructive industrial deforestation. Industrial pine forests today crack with the force of bulldozers, the buzz of chainsaws, and the clatter of rattling chains. Smells of turpentine and wood smoke no longer drift heavy in the cold air. Very few of the old fire stills are even left standing. Catfaced trees have

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<sup>3</sup> On the subject of mules, George Ellenberg notes in his book *Mule South to Tractor South* (2007) that mules involved in forest labor were often the largest and strongest of all the mules used in southern agriculture. According to Ellenberg, turpentine mules would have belonged to the broader category of “draft mules,” a class of animals more physically stalwart than mining mules, cotton mules, sugar mules, or farm mules. “Draft mules,” Ellenberg writes, “...ranged in height from 16 to 17½ hands and weighed between 1,200 and 1,600 pounds” (2007:7). The timber industries found the larger animals particularly well-suited for forest work in that they were most capable of hauling the several thousands of pounds of pine gum or timber over the dense terrain of the forest. Indeed, essentially every former turpentiner in my research agreed that the turpentine mule was, in the words of Gillis Carter, “the hardest worker in the dip woods, human or otherwise.” Milton Hopkins similarly reflects in his book *In One Place* that “Turpentine mules were real savvy about getting through the woods between close pines. Seems they were able to judge the distance better than a man and could clear two trees by a scant few inches on either side without benefit of a gee or a haw” (2001:118).

been sawed down, turned to paper, crumpled, and tossed into garbage cans. Those that do remain are few and far between. It is important to understand that once, not long ago, it was impossible to travel the roads of south Georgia without seeing at least a few catfaced trees, a roadside turpentine still, or workers' quarters. Imagine what the landscape must have looked like when, at one time, few counties in the southern half of Georgia maintained less than 100,000 faces and several others kept over 500,000 catfaces in production (Thomas, Jr. 1976:F-6). These were everyday features of the landscape, ever-present to the point of invisibility for many local people in the region. In the relative absence of these scenes today, however, their occasional presence has rendered them powerful symbols representing history and change. It is thus that workers' concerted efforts to keep these scenes a part of the cultural landscape are also efforts to have people take notice – notice of the landscapes that they have helped shape and that, in turn, have shaped them; notice of their everyday surroundings; and notice of the histories that have defined their region. They are efforts, in the words of Paul Groth, to resist the tendency of local people to become “like fish who can't see water” (1997:1). They are also attempts to represent past experience and communicate aspirations and anxieties for the future in the face of the change. Above all, they are profound acts of memory intended to compel others to remember in equally meaningful ways.

### **Space and Place, Land and Landscape: A Theoretical Discussion**

Just as work in the turpentine woods was a full-sensory experience, the powerful memories that the landscape evokes for former workers are also situated in all five of the senses. It is important to recognize that landscapes are not only seen; indeed, as the word *sense* in “sense of place” suggests, landscapes are heard, smelled, felt, even tasted. Most of all, they are *remembered*. And memories, like landscapes, also employ all of our faculties. In our subconscious minds, we often remember sounds and smells and tastes

that, when reencountered unexpectedly, alert us to the fact that we have unconsciously attached them to vivid recollections of experience and place. As Dolores Hayden has noted, “it is place’s very assault on all ways of knowing (sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste) that makes it powerful as a source of memory, as a weave where one strand ties in another” (1997:114). It is thus not only the visible characteristics but all perceptible stimuli associated with life and work in the woods that contribute to the powerful relationship turpentiners have forged with the land upon which they labored. It is also the combination of landscapes – the natural, the constructed, the experienced, and the remembered – that together comprise former turpentiners’ sense of place.

Though separating the intimately entwined notions of *space* and *place* is often difficult, I do think a quick conceptual distinction is in order before moving forward. As I use the term, *space* refers to the physical locales in which human beings work, play, worship, celebrate, and so on. As work in turpentine was labor done *on* the land and *with* the land, part of workers’ feelings of nostalgia relate to the tangible, physical spaces in which they worked and lived – the forests, the camps, the fire stills, and so on. But these spaces possess no intrinsic meaning of their own; minus human experience and interpretation, they are nothing more than patches of dirt and slabs of wood. It is where *space* takes on meaning in the lives of human beings that we find *place*. In the words of cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, “What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place when we get to know it better and endow it with value” (1977:6). *Place* thus refers to the complex relationships people develop with physical spaces based on personal experience, memory, and understanding. At its essence, *place* is both experiential and mnemonic. It is the product of the events we undergo in a certain locale and the way we make sense of those experiences in recollection. When former turpentiners look at an old turpentine forest, for instance, they do not only see a plot of physical *space* where they used to work.

They see a *place* infused with meaning, experience, and history. Their experiences there rush to the forefront of their memory and stir emotion within them. Taken together, these memories and emotions – again, firmly situated in the senses – amount to their sense of place.

One must look no further than the titles of two books written by former woodsmen to grasp the high esteem turpentiners bestow upon their land. One of them, by the late Milton Hopkins, is entitled *In One Place* (2001). A collection of stories about Hopkins' life on a farm in the unincorporated railroad town of Osierfield, Georgia, the book documents the rich experiences and memories of a turpentine worker in the locale that shaped him. Likewise, the late "Dub" Tomlinson's memoir, *A Lad in the Piney Woods* (2002), is a collection of anecdotes and personal experience narratives about boyhood in the turpentine woods of south Georgia and north Florida in the 1930s and 1940s. Like Hopkins' collection, Tomlinson's reveals the powerful relationships workers formed with place often very early in life.

Much of the scholarship surrounding issues of *space* and *place* tends to conceptualize the former as physical reality and the latter as cultural "creation." Drawing from Yi-Fu Tuan's pioneering work on the subject (1977), the studies rightly demonstrate that *space* is a relatively static concept in contrast with the ceaselessly negotiated and interpreted notion of *place*, which is principally a product of the mind. However, in doing so, I feel that many studies overstate the constructed nature of *place* to the point of rendering it a contrived artifice that obstructs critical and rational thought. Some studies, for example, attempt to show that groups often express little emotion for – nor even claim rights to – their land until threats from outside groups or forces bring those lands into jeopardy. Under siege or the threat of diaspora, groups become impassioned and territorial, even collectively inventing histories – consciously

or unconsciously – that they grow to believe and are often willing to fight, kill, and die for (Abrahams 1993; Bohmer and Shuman 2007; Rosaldo 1989). Anthropologists have dubbed this phenomenon the “imagineering of the past” while folklorists have applied the term “fakelore” – a word Richard Dorson coined in 1950 to refer to the perceived inauthentic and manufactured nature of some vernacular expressions presented as genuinely traditional (Dorson 1977:4). The studies find that senseless physical conflict often ensues as a result of baseless interpretations of the past. Even if violence does not occur, the studies argue, groups’ shortsighted nostalgia for a time and situation that never existed precludes critical thought (Chase and Shaw 1989; Hewison 1987; Lowenthal 1985, 1996; Nora 1989; Stewart 1993).

Such studies are valuable in highlighting some important distinctions between *space* and *place*. They show, for instance, that groups may engage in political conflict and even warfare over physical *space*, but it is the differential notions of *place* conflicting groups have ascribed to those spaces that provoke the battles in the first place. Also, many conflicts do indeed arise over notions of *place* that are only loosely based in historical truth (Rosaldo 1989). Yet, in rendering *place* an imagined cultural construction and brushing aside nostalgia as something “mere” (and thus which can be ignored), I find that many studies overlook important expressions on the part of groups and individuals coping with other forms of considerable change. For former turpentiners dealing not only with the changes brought on by industrial loss but also with deforestation’s assault on the forests that served as the arena of their work, we find that nostalgia for *place* and for *space* are often indistinguishable parts of the same phenomenon. In other words, memories, though intangible depositories of the mind, need a solid place to stand. When the texture of a place changes to a degree that it becomes unrecognizable, memories of experiences that once happened there threaten to

leave us, to escape their nebulous existence in the mind and vanish into nothingness. To preserve our memories, we reinforce them through nostalgia. In this respect, nostalgia becomes critically important to the perpetuation of memory and, thus rendered, exposes the regrettable oversight in studies that attempt to delegitimize it.

In my work on industrial loss with former turpentiners, it is clear that nostalgia is often productive, insightful, critical – even progressive. As this has become more apparent to me throughout my research, I have begun to think of *place* more as cultural *reality* rather than cultural “creation.” The belief that emotions – for *place* or otherwise – are somehow “created” or devised is not only misleading but altogether false. Emotions surface naturally and universally and may manifest themselves in any number of forms. As Ray Cashman argues, nostalgia is more than languid sentimentalism or a sign of our “modern malaise” (2006:137). Instead, emotions often possess the power to stimulate critical thought and even to incite productive action. In reconceptualizing groups’ and individuals’ expressions of emotion for place as cultural reality, I feel, we rightly remove the dismissiveness inherent in terms like “creation” and “construct.” I also join the recent push (Battaglia 1995; Behlmer 2000; Blunt 2003; Cashman 2006; Smith 2000; Tannock 1995) to move toward an exploration of “critical” or “practical” nostalgia rather than discounting people’s emotions for place as a “veneer of emotion” that defies critical thought (Shuman, n.d.).

The failure to notice nostalgia’s ability to transcend armchair lamentation and become critical action is not the only error in studies that trivialize emotional memory. In mentioning nostalgia only to disregard it, the studies also overlook the fact that nostalgic expressions are often forward-looking statements that draw from the past to illustrate concerns for the future. For some workers in the turpentine industry, the emotions that have arisen since the demise of their trade are such that memory has

turned to expressive action that eyes the future as much as the past. As displays of useful creation rather than idle longing, their nostalgia addresses current environmental, social, and moral concerns that, if not attended to, will increasingly become the burden of future generations. In this respect, turpentiners' nostalgia sometimes uses the past only for its powerful ability to speak to times yet to come.

Importantly, as several former turpentiners have found, there is no more powerful channel than the landscape itself in which to make these expressions. The passing of an industry that made such a visible impact on the landscape has rendered that very landscape one of the most important means for workers to communicate their feelings of loss, their reflections on the consequences of change, and their hopes for the future. Former turpentiners recognize that the landscape is, as David Lowenthal has accurately characterized it, "memory's most serviceable reminder" (1979:104). With this and other concepts discussed here in mind, we can more lucidly understand the commemorative expressions of former turpentiners.

### **Music in the Woods: A Turpentiner's Relationship with Place**

*Because he withdrew often to the woods for safety and comfort and for shelter and food, he knew them like nobody I've ever known. All his life he never loved a human the way he cherished woods; he never gave his heart so fully as to those peaceful wildland refuges that accepted without question any and all of their kind. He was more comfortable in woods than on any street in any town.*

– Janisse Ray, *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood* (1999:40)

For a hundred miles on either side of the border between Georgia and Florida, tracts of longleaf, slash, hill, and loblolly pines flank endless stretches of two-lane asphalt. Sandy white soil peeks through blankets of pine needles, and boarded-up Main Streets lead to more empty stretches of open road. Off of these lonely state highways, long and unpaved driveways carve sandy paths back into the piney woods – the tree-lined trails often bearing the surname of the family who, for generations, has resided

there. One such drive is George Music Road on the outskirts of Waycross, Georgia. Paved only with dirt and sand, it is a one-lane, dead-end chute into what feels like an infinite pine forest. At the end of the road – and at the epicenter of this forest – sits the century-old home to three generations of turpentiners in the Music family. The home is a rustic and ramshackle structure of little more than nails, wooden slats, and a tin roof. Antique appliances and rusted turpentine tools adorn the front porch. Beyond damp laundry on a front-porch clothesline, a screen door leads to rooms rich with history and experience. Out front, in a yard of hardpan dirt and sand, Spanish moss hangs from a cluster of lone oaks in what is otherwise a sea of pines (see Figure 3.2). On the same property today, one will find the mobile home of 48-year-old George Music, Jr., the only living member of the Music family to have worked in the turpentine woods. These catfaced woods and the old home are Music's birthplace. He has spent nearly his entire life right here, listening to the sounds of nature and of work echo from deep within the body of the forest. Like Janisse Ray's grandfather, Music has spent his life falling in love with woods, specifically with *these* woods that have provided for three generations of his family along George Music Road.

The emotional connection Music has with his woods stems from a lifetime of experiences within them, most of which he shared with his late father – the hero of his childhood and the model for his adult life. Deeply personal, his reflections draw from vivid memories of life along the road that bears his father's name. He remembers, for instance, that as a toddler he trampled in these woods alongside his father, proudly toting a toy hack and pretending to tap the trees for gum. "I'd make believe I was just like Daddy out there," he remembers. "I always wanted to be just like Daddy." By the age of four, Music had followed his father into every corner of the woods so many times that he could tell precisely which drift of pines his father was working from nearly a mile



Figure 3.2

Timothy C. Prizer

At the end of a long sandy drive called George Music Road in Waycross, Georgia, there sits the century-old home of three generations of turpentiners in the Music family. Today, George Music, Jr. is the only living member of the family to have worked in the turpentine woods. His attachment to his homestead and the old-growth forest that encases it has only intensified since the demise of the turpentine industry.

away. Indeed, since the time he had taken his first step, he had been in the thick of the woods beside the man who would teach him everything there is to know about work in the turpentine woods. “I learned it just by watching the way Daddy done it,” he remembers.

George Music, Sr. not only taught his son the techniques of working turpentine; he also instilled within him the importance of working *hard*. Music’s father infused within him the values associated with honesty and a rigorous work ethic. He also drove home a reverence for nature, an appreciation for home, and the importance of being *from* somewhere – being firmly rooted in a specific place. Of course, for the Musics, this place was the woods along George Music Road. It is clear in Music’s memories that he was raised not only *in* the woods, but also *by* them. While his father granted him discipline and wisdom, it was these woods that shaped his soul. Often, the lines blurred between the upbringing he received from his father and the one he acquired through his childhood explorations in the woods. I once asked George Music, for instance, about the learning process in the woods and the sorts of mistakes for which his father would scold him. “Messing up a pine tree,” he answered without second thought. “I reckon Daddy could almost feel it when I cut into a pine tree. Didn’t matter where he was. Seems like a pine tree was almost a part of him.” This paranormal connection – one between man and environment, worker and the woods – is one that has befallen George Music, Jr. as well. His uncanny ability as a child to navigate through the thick of the woods has only become sharper as he has become older. Over the years, Music formed such a pattern of work in the woods that he now knows where he is no matter how deep he is in his dense forest just by looking up at the treetops. He says that he could do the same thing in pitch darkness. Gauging the position of the sun and moon and the corresponding lay of his

shadow, he determines the virtual coordinates of his location. He claims to know the precise position of every tree on his land.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 3.3

Timothy C. Prizer

Despite the fact that there are thousands of catfaced pines scattered throughout George Music, Jr.'s forest, Music says he knows the exact position of each tree on his property – knowledge he gained through a lifetime's worth of work in the woods.

While the first six years of Music's life were spent literally in the shadow of his father in the woods, his dream of becoming a real turpentine came true early enough. In 1967, not long after Music's seventh birthday, his father replaced his toy hack with a real one, and by nine, he was engaged in the heavier task of dipping gum. From that point forward, he awoke before dawn six or seven days a week to help his father support their family through the production of turpentine. His contribution as a child was in fact so vital to his family's wellbeing that George Music, Sr. kept his son out of school on a

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<sup>4</sup> This sort of knowledge is by no means unique to George Music. Many former woods workers recall the extraordinary ability to determine their position in the forest, having mentally developed maps of the woods in which they worked.

regular basis to work in the woods. “Daddy believed that school was important up to a certain point,” Music recalls, “but then you should be *on your place, working*.” Music adhered to this belief as well. He has only left his property to live elsewhere once in his life. It happened at the time of his first marriage at age seventeen, and even then he returned to Waycross nearly every weekend to help his father in the woods. When the marriage ended eight years after it began, he moved back home, and he emphatically vows to spend the remainder of his life here on his land. “I never plan to move again,” he declares.

Over the course of Music’s life, the natural sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures of life and work in this forest have infused his spirit and shaped his senses of place and home. In his memory, they now bolster his powerful relationship with the land. Out here, Music can stay in touch with nature. His woods have prevented him from losing sight of the reality that he too is a part of the environment, a mere member of the natural order. In the quiet solitude of the woods, his senses remain in tune with his surroundings. “Turpentine was kind of a lonely life,” he remembers. “You didn’t have many people standing over your shoulder. Only time you had anyone standing over your shoulder, it was usually your daddy,” he laughs. In his memory, he can still taste the bitter sweetness of blackberries and huckleberries – treats he enjoyed straight from the vine as he moved from one tree to the next. He remembers the abundant flavors of his mother’s garden, just as he does the taste of squirrel, rabbit, and quail – game his father hunted from the convenience of the old front porch, all the while joking about how far he had to travel to find food for his family. As lightning bugs float through the forest air at dusk, he remembers the way their glowing bodies illuminated glass jars in his childhood. He recalls, at once, the oppressive heat that soaked his clothing with sweat and the briskness of the Satilla River that cooled his skin after a hot day’s work. Indeed,

even the painful memories – the sting of his father’s disciplinary hand or that of an agitated hornet – occupy a special place in his mind today. Such is the nature of memory when coupled with an emotional attachment to place.

Much of Music’s powerful relationship with his homeplace involves the sense of sound. On my first visit to his property, I was struck by the natural chorus of his woods, and even now, as I listen to my recording of our conversation that day, I am still moved by it. Beyond the hiss of the cassette tape, the pines whisper and the birds chirp in a thousand tongues, my microphone capturing the audible aura of this place from a rocking chair on the old front porch. Sharp listeners will heed the hollow clap of the woodpecker’s labor, sporadic percussion in nature’s constant symphony. At times here, sounds have the power to literally unite those who call these woods home – George Music with his surrounding wildlife. These days, as Music saws on his fiddle or blasts his favorite bluegrass recordings from his garage, the deer that roam his property come close – to within ten or fifteen feet – to listen. Old-style mountain harmony, he swears, will keep a drove of deer nearby for as long as the music plays on. Sounds from the past also continue to resonate from within his memory. He remembers the grunted bray of his beloved mule “Diner” – equal parts beast of burden and cherished pet in Music’s childhood. He still hears his mother’s dinner call echo through the woods from the front porch steps, just as he still hears the whistled melodies of the Carter Family, Hank Snow, and Ernest Tubb flutter from his father’s lips. Music fondly recalls that, “Daddy always was chippin’, dippin’, and whistlin’.” The tunes his father selected to past the time in the woods were usually ones he heard on Saturday nights as the family gathered around the radio to listen to the Grand Ole Opry. With a smile, he remembers boys at school teasing that, because he lived so far out in the country, the Grand Ole Opry his family heard over the airwaves on Saturday nights had actually been broadcast live the weekend before.

Music has long preferred his relative isolation to the lifestyles of those residing “in town.” Life in the turpentine woods has allowed him to remain connected with his natural surroundings and, importantly, his past. Though it has been more than two decades since any turpentine was produced from the resin that pumps through the veins of his pines, his love for his woods grows stronger by the day. And while he no longer works the trees for income, he still considers himself, above all, a turpenter. These days, he still occasionally marches into the thick of his woods, puller in hand, and slashes into the veins “just for the joy of watching the resin run” – and because he knows his father and grandfather would have it no other way. “It’s still amazing to watch,” he insists, “even though I’ve done it all my life.” As the resin seeps to the trees’ surface and beads upon their still-healing faces, Music reflects on what woods like his have meant to his region. He weighs the magnitude of the thought that ancient stands of pine trees have provided for so many thousands of the region’s families, just as they did for his.

Music’s love of place and home is no doubt laced with a strong dose of nostalgia. It is nostalgia that intensifies his memories of life and work in these woods and that sends him trekking into them to cut new faces to this day (see Figures 3.4-3.5). But Music’s brand of nostalgia does not signify a futile, romantic grasping for the past and a coming up empty-handed in the present. Indeed, as I hope to make clear in the following section, his nostalgia is as much about the future as it is about history; it is as concerned with enriching the welfare of generations to come as it is with honoring generations past. Underlying superficially idle reminiscence, I will show, is remarkably progressive action.



Figure 3.4

Timothy C. Prizer

Even though the turpentine industry is gone, George Music, Jr. keeps a bark hack (foreground) and a puller readily available in his front yard. He still enjoys chipping faces, he says, “just for the joy of watching the resin run.”



Figure 3.5

Timothy C. Prizer

George Music, Jr. says he often reflects on how important pine trees have been to his family and to thousands of other families throughout the pine belt. Catfaces like this one are reminders of the central role turpentine played in the region.

## **Standing Tall, Standing Firm: Trees and Efforts to Protect Them**

*Sometimes there is no leaving, no looking westward for another promised land. We have to nail our shoes to the kitchen floor and unload the burden of our heart. We have to set to the task of repairing the damage done by and to us.*

– Janisse Ray, *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood* (1999:103)

*Beauty is not an abstract notion for poets and tree huggers, but an integral principle of forest management.*

– Lawrence Earley, *Looking for Longleaf* (2004:239)

George Music and the thick forest that enshrouds his homestead represent a decidedly unusual set of circumstances for the turpentine industry, and it is foremost important that Music and his land are appropriately contextualized. When naval stores entrepreneurs first arrived in the region along the Georgia-Florida border, they ventured into pine forests much like George Music's – forests that had stood for hundreds of centuries, never planted by human hands. These forests, consisting of what is commonly known as "virgin," "old-growth," or "natural-standing" timber, were the same that would have greeted the first groups of American Indians that settled in the region long before Europeans anchored their ships in the sands of New World beaches. Yet, with the arrival of Europeans who sought to exploit the forests for industry – especially those who brandished the destructive box axes of the naval stores trade – the mighty old-growth forest met its more powerful match and gradually began to collapse. Over time, forest after forest toppled like dominos, and naval stores operations were continuously forced to locate new stands of virgin timber in order to survive, a reality that explains the migratory nature of the industry. It was not until turpentiners had migrated into the pine belt of south Georgia and north Florida that forest researchers and planners discovered the ability to replant pine trees quickly enough to generate renewable stands of timber. Judge Harley Langdale, Sr. (1888–1972), long-time president of the American Turpentine Farmers Association, was instrumental in this breakthrough discovery. Langdale and his associates found that the slash species of pine (*Pinus elliotti*) was

uniquely conducive to rapid regeneration and that replanting it could significantly delay the industry's migration, in turn providing long-term economic stability and growth to the counties of southern Georgia and the Florida Panhandle (Lancaster 2002). Planting and replanting quickly became the norm in the turpentine belt. It is thus that the overwhelming majority of pine belt turpentiners – from the early twentieth century through to the industry's demise – rarely if ever worked in old-growth forests; they worked, rather, in replanted tracts of second- and third-growth timber. This was indeed the case for nearly all private landowners and public contractors alike, including both large-scale camp communities and smaller, family-run operations. It was not the case, however, for George Music, Jr. Music's grandfather, having purchased an expanse of old-growth timber in Waycross in the early 1900s, raised his son and grandson to work turpentine in woods of ancient pine. Here they worked and lived for the remainder of the industry's existence, forging a relationship with their forest that has consequently led George Music, Jr. to passionately defend the dwindling remainder of old-growth pine forests in the region today. His unique position as both an owner of natural-standing timber and also a turpentine worker who has only worked in old-growth forests has made him a particularly sentient witness to issues facing the region's moribund acreage of old-growth pine.

Most estimates suggest that a sprawling 156 million acres of natural-standing pine once blanketed the American South, before humans exploited the forests for industry (Ray 1999:14). In the centuries prior to European settlement in south Georgia and north Florida, Native populations of Oconee, Apalachee, Creek, and Timucua found their expansive forests a source of food and shelter, defining wealth in terms of what the forests willingly bestowed rather than by what they could seize from the pines. Since at least the 1600s, however, the region's old-growth forests have fallen victim to the

monetary value of their resinous properties and, most destructively, of their own lumber. For centuries now, old-growth pines have been sawed, chopped, hacked, and plucked from the earth at an alarming rate. The damage was such by 1952 that just seventy-two million acres of natural standing timber remained on the southern landscape – less than half of the pine cover from pre-settlement times. As the total acreage of old-growth pine has diminished, proportions of replanted timber have increased. These replanted stands – more commonly known as “pine plantations” or “tree farms” – range from mature second-growth pine forests to barren fields still in the grass stage of regeneration. At the close of the twentieth century, pine plantations accounted for nearly half of all pineland acreage in the southern states (Earley 2004:221).

The decimation of the South’s natural standing pine forests is most evident in statistics that chart the decline of one pine species in particular – longleaf (*Pinus palustris*). Of the various species, the cherished longleaf has been the hardest hit. Whereas an approximate ninety million acres of natural standing longleaf pine originally covered the southern states, just five million acres of the remnant old-growth were left by 1935. Another fifteen million acres of longleaf sprouted from southern soil at that time, but these were tracts of replanted, second-growth timber. Twenty years later, the species’ natural stands had been depleted even further, and new- and old-growth longleaf only covered a combined twelve million acres. Fast-forward a decade to 1965 and a total of just seven million acres of longleaf could be found on the southern landscape. The destruction would continue at an astonishing pace, to the point that by 1985 less than four million total acres of longleaf remained in the region (Earley 2004:208). At the end of the twentieth century, not even two million acres of longleaf pine were left, and only a very small fraction of that was of ancient old-growth. Today, nearly a decade into the twenty-first century, the demolition continues. As author and

south Georgian Janisse Ray points out, most of what is left is second- and even third-growth as a result of industrial destruction, fire, and storm damage (Ray 1999:14). As she charts the disappearance of the forests, it becomes clear just how extensive an environmental tragedy this has been. In the American South today, she writes:

Less than 10,000 acres are virgin – not even 0.001 percent of what was.

There's none known in Virginia, none in Louisiana, none in Texas, none in South Carolina. About 200 old-growth acres remain in Mississippi, about 300 in Alabama, and almost 500 in North Carolina, in four separate tracts. The rest survives in Georgia and Florida. An estimated 3,000 acres of old-growth in Georgia lie on private land, precariously, and the largest holding of virgin longleaf, about 5,000 acres, belongs to Eglin Air Force base in Florida.<sup>5</sup>

In a 1995 National Biological Service assessment of biological loss, ecologist Reed Noss classified the longleaf/wiregrass community as “critically endangered.” Ninety-eight percent of the presettlement longleaf pine barrens in the southeastern coastal plains were lost by 1986, he said. Natural stands – meaning not planted – have been reduced by about 99 percent.

Apocalyptic. (Ray 1999:14-15)

Critics of deforestation have voiced their concerns for nearly as long as pine trees have felt the teeth of the lumberman's saw and the blade of the turpentine's hack. A writer for the *New York Lumber Trade Journal* noted as early as 1887 that “The damage done to the forests... by the turpentine business is simply incalculable,” while writer R. D.

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<sup>5</sup> The Eglin Air Force Base in the Florida Panhandle is the largest military base in the United States and the site of the former Choctawhatchee National Forest. Once upon a time, the forest covered as much ground as the base does today – a total of almost 464,000 acres and 724 square miles. Some reports claim that there are actually 10,000 or more acres of old-growth longleaf pine forest on the base today (Early 1999:251).

Forbes reflected in 1923 that “The plain truth of the matter is that in county after county, in state after state of the south, the piney woods are not passing, but have passed” (each quoted in Earley 2004:131, 175). Turpentine, for its part, devastated the forests relatively slowly, as a single tree could be worked for decades before it succumbed to the damages wrought. It is again to this that we owe turpentine’s gradual migration from forest to forest, from state to state. More devastating have been practices associated with “cut-and-run” logging, by which – in a single blow – timber industries casually wipe out vast expanses of pine forest for the profits reaped from their lumber. To this end, the pulp and paper industries have clear-cut southern pine forests to near oblivion while sawmills have turned the piney woods to shavings and sawdust. Timber companies are not, however, the only ones cutting and running; construction firms often regard the forests as mere impediments to a new shopping center or residential community, and they too have left their footprint in the forest – one of catastrophic proportions. Despite modern legal liabilities and environmental obligations put in place to protect the forests, clear-cutting and cut-and-run logging are methods widely practiced to this day.

As industrial deforestation becomes more rampant, old-growth pine forests like George Music’s are nearing extinction. When it happens, the disappearance of natural-standing timber will be the result of many years of an outmoded philosophy – one that finds pine forests inexhaustible and pine trees crops “to be grown, harvested, and regenerated like any other useful and necessary food crop” (Earley 2004:175). Today, as timber industries eliminate pine forests for the production of paper and other products, the trees are strategically restored to ensure a steady flow of revenue. Therefore, as a result of the cyclical regeneration methods associated with clear-cutting and replanting, many of the region’s “forests” today are but tree farms on which tufts of young, skinny saplings are freshly planted on the same plots of land where ancient natural timber once

stood. While old-growth forests consist of trees of varying ages scattered across the forest by chance rather than by strategy, pine plantations are even-aged tracts managed on a meticulous schedule. By contrast, as Lawrence Earley explains, the management of old-growth forests involves “no rotations. The forest is the entity, not the stand or compartment... Regeneration takes place naturally... the canopy is never eliminated. The forest is more diverse in species, more diverse in tree ages and tree sizes” (2004:234). Today’s manmade tracts of even-aged pines represent the industrial model of forest management and have rendered the South one of the largest producers of timber in the world. They are comprised of juvenile seedlings arranged in cleared, open stands so as to avoid competition with the imposing old-growth pines for sunlight, moisture, nutrients, and root space. Like fields of corn, tobacco, or any other agricultural crop, regenerated pines are sowed in shipshape rows that stand in stark contrast to old-growth forests like George Music’s.

Thus, while pine trees remain the prevailing feature of the region’s landscape, forests of natural-standing timber are increasingly rare. Escalating industrial deforestation has made the disappearance of old-growth pines all-too-apparent. It has also, in turn, prompted an array of efforts to protect and defend the tracts that do remain. Much of the effort has been on the part of environmental groups who wish to seize old-growth forests from private interests and turn them into protected, public lands in the form of national forests, state parks, or wildlife refuges. These groups fear what Janisse Ray terms the “precarious” status of old-growth forests that exist at the mercy of private owners. As one private landowner explained to Lawrence Earley, “This is the problem. Many landowners don’t even think about their forests until they need funds, and then they cut” (2004:213). Indeed, there is mounting temptation to harvest one’s forest as timber prices rise due to the United States’ and much of the world’s increasing

dependence on the South for its wood supply. Environmental groups tremble with the news that, at the onset of the twenty-first century, private ownership still accounts for far more acreage of old-growth pine than what can be found on public lands (Earley 2004:214-5). Despite their efforts to secure private forests, there is much work left to be done.

There is no question that the private ownership of old-growth pine forests poses a serious threat to their well-being and continued existence. In the early years of the twenty-first century, as the United States sinks deeper into its worst economic recession since the 1930s, the futures of many natural-standing forests are uncertain at best. Many private owners feel that they are left with no choice but to sell their timber. In desperate times, replenishing one's bank account often takes precedence over all else. For private owners of old-growth forests, this often means depleting their timber stands. Yet, while taking this risk into consideration, we should be careful to avoid painting private owners with too broad a brush. As my conversations with George Music, Jr. powerfully reveal, the notion that all private owners will one day surrender their forests to outside interests is an unwarranted fear and a severe overstatement. The truth of the matter is that, for many owners of old-growth pine forests, the woods are infused with memories, histories, and experiences for which there will never be an adequate price tag. Indeed, in the protection of old-growth forests by private owners, we find powerful evidence that nostalgia is no simple longing for an irrecoverable past. The attitudes of George Music, Jr. and other private-owners toward their natural-standing forests clearly reveal nostalgia's tendency to speak to the future as well as to the past, to elicit progressive action in addition to inspiring the preservation of history. Longleaf and naval stores enthusiast Pete Gerrell of Wakulla County, Florida notes on the back cover of his book that he too "strives to preserve the history and beauty of the pine forest"

through the protection and careful management of his longleaf and slash timber stands (1997). Gerrell and Music may be rare among private timber owners, but theirs are certainly not isolated cases. As Lawrence Earley remarked after a conversation with yet another individual who stands as an exception to the rule of the apathetic private owner, “if there is plenty reason for pessimism about the future of longleaf on private lands, anecdotally, at least, there is also some room for hope” (2004:269).

The precarious private ownership of old-growth timber would no doubt include the forest of George Music, Jr. were Music not the passionate guardian that he is of his woods. Music’s case, however, stands as a testament to the fact that some privately-owned forests are the safest of the remaining acres. Outside of his job as a locomotive mechanic and his role as fiddler and harmony vocalist in a local bluegrass band, Music expends the majority of his energy these days ensuring that his timber remains healthy and standing. “There’s not a whole lot to do,” Music says, “other than watch out for the timber and make sure it’s taken care of.” Like his proud trees, he stands tall and firm in the face of the all-pervading commercial and residential development of current times. There has never been a mortgage on his property in the nearly ninety years that it has belonged to the Music family, and according to its current owner and protector, there never will be:

We’ve kept the property in the family since 1922, and it’s not been a mortgage on the property. And as long as I live, as far as I’m concerned, there won’t be another mortgage on it. We like to walk through and look at the timber, look at the different animals and stuff that’s on it. We’re not planning on cutting the timber – *ever* – that I know about, and I’m the owner of it... It’s gonna be here... I just don’t need the money bad enough to see the timber cut off of it. Daddy always wanted it to where

his grandkids could walk through and say, “Well, this is grandpa’s natural standing timber.”

The concern Music’s father had for future generations being able to experience the majesty and history of his forest is a torch his son carries today – a torch passionately aflame with the conviction that his woods will not realize the destructive fate met by so many others. Music understands that, to generations who have only experienced the artifice and imitation of even-aged pine plantations, his forest is a powerful symbol – one of a region’s history and of overwhelming change, of unprecedented environmental ruin and a future in jeopardy. His efforts at preservation come out of a strong sense of moral obligation and are efforts equal parts environmental, historical, and experiential.

Dramatic evidence of the devastation that has occurred – and an equally dramatic indication of efforts to preserve the natural stands that do remain – lies in a photograph I took along the border of George Music’s property and an adjacent property whose owner surrendered his forest to the demands of outside interests (see Figure 3.6). The right half of the photograph – dark with a thick forest of towering pines from its bottom edge to its top border – depicts the ancient stands of timber along the westernmost margin of George Music’s property. A dirt path runs vertically through the photo, dramatically dividing the image almost precisely into two halves. In the left half of the picture, a bright sky hovers above wiregrass brush and an empty field dotted with the stubble of a few young saplings. On this neighboring property, all of the old-growth stands have been cleared out. Timber companies, with the blessing of the landowner, have robbed the land of its ancient forest and left only a grassy field thinly studded with early pine seedlings.

To those like Music, writer Janisse Ray, and other south Georgians working to protect and defend their forests, new tracts of pines like the one adjacent to Music’s



Figure 3.6

Timothy C. Prizer

George Music, Jr.'s natural-standing forest (right) towers over brush and young seedlings on a neighboring property. The site provides a stark representation both of deforestation and efforts to fight it.



Figure 3.7

Timothy C. Prizer

These gaunt saplings sprout from soil on land adjacent to George Music, Jr.'s forest of lofty catfaced pines, which can be seen in the background.

property are insincere and unsatisfactory attempts at forest renewal. For Lawrence Earley, they are at once “an artificial system hatched in the organizational brain of humans” and “an imitation of nature” (2004:235). Regardless of how one characterizes second-growth tree farms, it is clear that timber industries like pulpwooding, sawmilling, and logging cannot see the forests for the trees – or, more accurately, for the money the trees fetch for their lumber. In the feverish pursuit of profit, the industries set their sights on the trees themselves, and the forests suffer the consequences. Yet, as former turpentine Grady Williams explained to me one morning on a stroll together through the woods of Helena, Georgia, it is the forests – not just the trees – that are the heart of the region’s history and the bedrock of its economy. Williams, who for many years oversaw the unofficial “turpentine division” of the Georgia Forestry Commission until retiring in 1995, explained to me that the forests have nourished, sheltered, and provided for thousands of the region’s families in a way that trees alone cannot do. No single tree has ever sheltered a family from the wrath of a hard rain, he explained. Only forests, he added, can sustain the wealth of natural vegetation and wildlife that has provided nourishment and recreation for generations of the region’s people. Nor has any tree ever produced enough paper or furniture to give a family more than a short-lived paycheck. In contrast, Williams explained, a family with a small patch of pines could work the trees for turpentine and maintain a flow of supplemental income that was enough to keep groceries on the table for a quarter century or more. In the case of his own family, Williams laughed, pine resin has paid for much more than groceries:

On our family farm, we still have some of the trees there that I collected gum from when I was a boy. And I know the income from those trees supported in part my attending college. And the income from those same trees supported my two sons attending college. And heck, one son, he

really stayed in school a long time. He's got two doctorate degrees in medicine! So hey, it took a lot of trees and a lot of pine gum to keep him going.

Williams proudly reflected that it is the chemical properties afforded by pine trees that have been their greatest contribution to humankind throughout history, not material products like furniture or paper – products that rely on the outright destruction of the forest.

Williams' rumination on the consequences of industrial change was also one of environmental concern. As we high-stepped over fallen timber, he explained to me that while turpentine was no doubt fatally damaging to forests over time, the industry relied on mature, natural standing timber for the extraction of crude gum and engaged in extensive forest-preservation efforts – many of which Williams administered in his position with the Georgia Forestry Commission. By contrast, timber industries active today rely on the rapid destruction of the forests. Too often, he explained, the only “preservation” initiatives that these industries promote are the insufficient replanting of new-growth timber stands. They consider trees a cash crop and harvest them like agricultural produce. While this may guarantee a relatively stable economic situation in the pine belt, Williams said, it is disastrous for the environment.

Our conversation about the harmful environmental impacts of deforestation reminded me of a discussion I had with George Music in July 2002, as we trudged over fallen timber in his ancient woods. Looking out across the scattered debris along the forest floor, Music explained to me that, growing up, storms never seemed to pack the destructive punch that they deliver on a regular basis today. “You can point your finger at big timber companies for that,” he said. His belief is that deforestation has interacted with the environment in such a way that storms today are stronger and more violent



Figure 3.8

Timothy C. Prizer

While Music's forest is home to thousands of tall pines, it is also the site of significant destruction in the scattered debris of fallen timber – a result of storms that have increased in force, Music says, with the rise of deforestation. The enormous stump pictured above, which bears several of the early box cuts, is one of many trees that have been uprooted by wind and lightning in recent years.

than they were in his youth. In other words, he has felt the environmental consequences of global warming in remarkably local ways. He explained to me that since the fateful night of September 21, 1989, when Hurricane Hugo ripped through southern pine forests with winds up to 145 miles per hour, he has had to battle storms as aggressively as he has the pleas from timber companies for him to surrender his trees. Compared to his industrial opponents, however, lightning and wind are less predictable and therefore more formidable foes. Since Hugo ravaged the east coast two decades ago, Music's woods have been increasingly vulnerable to the storms that define summer evenings in

the South. Lightning has splintered much of the timber on his land, and he says that it seems every storm now takes out a few more of his pines.

Stronger winds and more violent lightning are not the only evidence of environmental change Music has witnessed in his woods. As we roamed through his forest that day in 2002, I remember him suddenly stopping in mid-sentence and abruptly kneeling to the ground. He rose to his feet holding the large gray shell of an animal I could not place; it was too large to be that of the common turtle. Palming the shell like one would a basketball, he asked, “You know what this is?” He knew that I, a young man with no firsthand knowledge of forest wildlife, would have no idea, and before I could respond he said, “It’s the shell of an old gopher tortoise.” “A what?” I asked. I had of course heard of a gopher, and I knew well what a tortoise was. But a gopher tortoise? “It’s native to these parts,” he said. “Can’t find them anywhere but the pine woods of Georgia and Florida, and maybe some in Alabama. Actually, you can’t hardly even find them here anymore.” He went on to explain that the gopher tortoise is a species of turtle (*Gopherus polyphemus*) known for its ability to burrow into the earth, where it spends the majority of its time underground. As a result of deforestation, though, the gopher tortoise is now officially a threatened species, its numbers having dwindled to a shameful low. When the roots of old-growth pines are ripped from the earth, Music explained to me, many of the tortoises living underground are killed instantly. Those that survive the uprooting become vulnerable to the bulldozer, many having been crushed as developers turn old-growth forests to state highways, urban strip malls, or tree farms. Most estimates suggest that the gopher tortoise’s annual reproduction numbers are currently well below the levels that die each year as a result of adverse forest management practices.

The gopher tortoise is just one of several species whose outlook grows increasingly grim with the destruction of old-growth forests. While the gopher tortoise burrows into the earth beneath the pines, the region's native red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*) makes its home by boring directly into the pines themselves. In fact, the red-cockaded is the only woodpecker species that excavates cavities in *living* pine trees, and it has long relied on mature, old-growth longleaf for its habitat. The disappearance of natural forests has thus had an especially devastating impact on them. By 1970, the federal government had already officially listed the red-cockaded woodpecker as an endangered species, and since that time its numbers have diminished in direct proportion to the disappearance of old-growth forests. George Music regrets the decline of the gopher tortoises and the red-cockaded woodpeckers that were once common in his forest. He understands that timber harvesting and the protection of endangered species are diametrically opposed, and he is proud that his forest remains one of the few places where one can still find these species in any number. Today, he vows to keep his woods safe for all species native to his region.

Environmental degradation has meant more than the loss of the forests and the species that inhabit them. It has also meant experiential loss. In turn, it has intensified feelings of nostalgia. Janisse Ray, reflecting on what she calls the "pain of the lost forest," charts the destruction of old-growth pine in terms less statistical and more experiential this time:

What thrills me most about longleaf forests is how the pine trees sing.

The horizontal limbs of flattened crowns hold the wind as if they are vessels, singing bowls, and air stirs in them like a whistling kettle. I lie in thick grasses covered with sun and listen to the music made there. This music cannot be heard anywhere else on earth.

...In the choirs of the original groves, the music must have resounded for hundreds of miles in a single note of rise and fall, lift and wane, and stirred the red-cockaded woodpeckers nesting in the hearts of these pines... Now we strain to hear the music; anachronous, it has an edge. It falters, a great tongue chopped in pieces. (Ray 1997:67-8)

For George Music, too, ecological and environmental loss has meant strengthened feelings of nostalgia. The impacts of deforestation have compromised his ability to engage in cherished pastimes that have long made him feel one with nature. Though he has done everything in his power to protect his woods, nurturing them as they have him, his forests are not immune to the impacts of logging and timber harvesting on surrounding properties:

Used to, every weekend, you'd probably find me on this Satilla River down here, fishing somewhere under some gum tree sitting on the bank... But the river don't hold as much water as it used to. The big timber companies and landowners and stuff has drained so much of these pond woods, they don't hold water like they used to. So, therefore, the river's water levels also went down. And it drains right on off to the coast now within just hours of the rain.

In addition to sacrificing his love for fishing, the harmful methods associated with timber harvesting have forced him to abstain from enjoying the natural vegetation and other indulgences of his forest. The blackberries and huckleberries that Music remembers enjoying straight from the vine while chipping faces, he explains, are no longer safe for consumption. Today, timber companies crop-dust their tree farms with liquid fertilizer that acts as poison to berry bushes and people alike. Like the red-cockaded woodpecker

and the gopher tortoise, some forms of natural vegetation are virtually endangered species:

We don't have as much anymore because the timber companies and stuff went and sprayed all around and about took them out. We got a few bushes on this place now, but it's not like it used to be. Because you got these big timber companies just aerial-spraying fertilizer from the helicopter. It's about cleared them out.

Just as Music once enjoyed berries in the woods when hunger struck, he remembers that he and his father sipped standing water from cupped hands when the heat parched their tongues. Not anymore, though. Today, fertilizer mists soak the forest floor, polluting puddles of rain and many more of the forest's natural treasures.

The loss of old-growth pine forests, then, has also meant the loss of powerful sensory experiences that happened within them. In the wake of this sort of absence, the emotions attached to memories are intensified, their meanings deepened. Changes in the texture and character of places to which we feel an emotional attachment magnify and sharpen those emotions, resulting in a deepened attachment to place. In other words, when landscapes change, memories of place become emotionally charged. This is nostalgia for place – the heightened emotions and keen memories inspired by altered landscapes. We must recognize, however, that these emotions surface not only in the forms of sadness and longing. Nostalgia, too often associated only with dejection and grief, can take shape in a variety of forms. Indeed, for many former turpentiners, the demolition of old-growth forests has elicited an array of responses.

At times, the prevailing emotion is anger. There is no doubt a hint of it in George Music's determination to protect his forest. His words at times sting with bitter animosity aimed at timber companies and negligent landowners. I once asked him, for

instance, what his grandfather would say if he were to come back today and see his life's work and this way-of-life gone. "It would be pretty tough for him to deal with, I'm sure," Music said. "It's hard to say how he would react, but it sure wouldn't be pretty to be standing around, I don't imagine." The fit of anger Music fears his grandfather would unleash if he could see the damage done is one that Janisse Ray guesses has already enraged the creator of natural standing pine forests – God. Speculating on God's aversion to deforestation, Ray exhibits her own anger in delivering a fiery warning to those who would consider selling off their old-growth forests:

You'd better be pretty sure that the cut is absolutely necessary and be at peace with it, so you can explain it to God, for it's fairly certain he's going to question your motives, want to know if your children are hungry and your oldest boy needs asthma medicine – whether you deserve forgiveness or if you're being greedy and heartless. You'd better pay good attention to the saw blade and the runners and the falling trees; when a forest is falling it's easy for God to determine to spank. Quid pro quo. Don't ever look away or daydream and don't, no matter what, plan how you will spend your tree money while you are in among toppling trees.

(Ray 1999:123-4)

Ray, the product of a God-fearing family in small-town south Georgia, hopes this approach will resonate with landowners in a way her purely environmental writings may not.

Other times, nostalgia kindles not so much any one emotion as it does a sense of urgency. Periods of rapid change inspire urgent efforts to preserve pieces of the past. We see this frequently in the preservation of historic buildings, photographs, and material artifacts. And we see it perhaps most powerfully in the preservation of

landscapes. For former turpentiners like George Music, as for environmentalists like Janisse Ray, the landscape must be preserved for reasons both ecological and experiential. They are home to precious species and to cherished experiences alike, all of which are endangered in the face of change. Thus, for those who have *experienced* a pine forest, preservation is as much about history and memory as it is about eco-friendliness. This is why, for George Music, the catfaced trees among the thousands of untapped ones are most central to his efforts at preservation. While he acknowledges the awesome grandeur of his virgin timber, the pines bearing evidence of life and work in the woods most powerfully bolster his determination to protect and defend his forest. On his property, there are several thousands of trees once used in the production of turpentine. The oldest of the faces bear the scars of the box axe, as Music's grandfather practiced the early method of boxing while the cup-and-gutter system was still in development. Just as the rings inside the pines tell us how many years they have been standing, the healed wounds on their faces indicate just how long turpentiners have stood beside them. In this respect, the catfaced pines in Music's woods stand today as important reminders not only of an obsolete industry, but also of a rich family history.

It should be clear, then, that even when nostalgia does surface in the form of sorrow, it is rarely the petty longing for an imaginary past that many studies believe it to be. More often, it is a response to the loss of deeply personal experiences. Our goal as folklorists must be to refuse the separation of the emotional and the intellectual – the poetic and the cognitive – arbitrary divisions so ubiquitous in the discourse of other disciplines (Rival 1998:25). Likewise, our objective should rarely be to determine the accuracy of the past for which our consultants are nostalgic. This is usually a non-issue, for we are students of the people we study and are thus concerned with belief, emotion,

and sensory experience – sensations so real that they are *felt*.<sup>6</sup> As folklorist Dorothy Noyes correctly insists, “A felt reality is quite real enough” (2003:27).<sup>7</sup> There is nothing trivial or contrived about the sense of loss former woodsmen feel with the decline of their forests and the demise of their industry. In George Music’s words, watching the industry pass is “kind of like being, I guess being married or something for all them years. It’s kind of hard to turn loose something you’ve done for all your life. A lot of fond memories, you know, and that’s what put groceries on the table for all them years.”

In other ways, the disappearance of turpentine has been much like a death. For George Music, Jr. and his family, it has been almost literally so. Music vividly remembers the day his father hauled their last batch of gum to the still. It was a summer’s day in the year 2000. He returned to the old house from the still in Waycross and told his son, “Well, I reckon I just hauled the last load. They won’t be buying any more after the next couple of weeks.” It was one of the most difficult days of his life. It also represented a crossroads in his father’s life and health. It marked the beginning of his decline and the onset of a sadness that sits heavy in his son’s stomach to this day. Citing a weak heart and lungs, doctors had been telling Music’s father that his days were numbered for years. But he knew that as long as work in the turpentine woods was around, he would continue to prove them wrong. The work kept him healthy both mentally and physically. When the industry passed, the man whose lungs were once so enlarged from hard work that a radiologist could not fit them into one x-ray screen suddenly had little initiative to fight on. As his son explains:

Truth be known, he looked forward to chipping them trees every year.

Probably the thing he wanted to put most of his time in was the woods.

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<sup>6</sup> Inquiries into the experiential aspects of culture and history represent a break with modernist social scientific theory and its preoccupation with empirical validity.

<sup>7</sup> Noyes points out that the notions of *community*, *group*, and even *nationality* and *ethnicity* – are “felt realities.” Indeed, they are realities so intensely felt that they are often deemed “worth dying for” and “worth killing for” (2003:27).

When he had to quit chipping, he'd take the tractor and ride around in the woods all the time... He went looking for other things to do to fill his time. He wasn't going to sit down because that was quitting. He done some mechanical work, some sawmilling, building some steps for mobile homes and stuff... fixing equipment, doing repairs and stuff.

It was never quite enough. George Music, Sr. suffered a heart attack and passed away at the age of sixty-seven on September 12, 2001.

I first met George Music, Jr. on July 12, 2002 – ten months to the day from his father's death and just two years after the last traces of turpentine were drawn from Music's timber. Still fresh at the time were the wounds on catfaced pines and the heartache left by his father's passing. It was immediately apparent that his woods are a setting in which the natural world is unusually visible, a stage on which the forces of nature – of life and death – play out and leave little to be unveiled. The forest at once flourished with life and felt eerily motionless, like it was not yet empty of his father's presence. Birds and small animals were still astir in the woods, but their habitat had been reduced as a result of storm damage on Music's property and clear-cutting on neighboring lands. Yet, even among the scattered debris, Mother Nature showed signs of her instinctive restoration. As Music guided me through the natural history museum that is his forest, he stopped at one point to show me that a new shoot is now forming on the stump of the first tree that he ever worked as a seven-year-old in 1967. The symbolism was transparent for me, as it had been for Music. South Georgia may be called the pine barrens, but for turpentiners there is nothing at all barren about a pine forest. "[These trees] don't got to be planted by a man's hands," Music explained as he ran his hand over the new shoot. "The pines are put here by God – 'The Old Master.' The good Lord and old Mother Nature are the onliest thing that's going to control them."



Figure 3.9

Timothy C. Prizer

George Music, Jr. kneels beside the stump of the first tree he ever worked. Much has changed in the years since he chipped a face into the tree as a seven-year-old in 1967. The turpentine industry is gone, the barrels behind him are corroding with rust, and lightning has claimed this tree among many others. Yet, Music points out that a new shoot is forming on the old stump, and he finds great symbolism in the forest's ability to naturally regenerate itself – to carry on in the face of change.

As we walked through his woods that day, I noticed about him a demeanor both proud and mournful, dignified and forlorn. His stride was tall as he trudged over the brush and fallen timber among his ancient pines, but there was also something distinctly solemn about his gait. A sense seemed to pervade him that these woods – with their catfaces covered in hardened scrape and rusted gutters; their cups filled with congealed resin, bugs, leaves, and dirt; and their once-towering pines made into insignificant pieces of windfall – are the real “spirits” of turpentine: ghosts of his father’s past, of his own past, and of the industry’s past.

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George Music's dual efforts to preserve his forest and his past should be taken no less seriously than those of individuals in coalmining communities working to combat the destructive consequences of mountaintop removal (Burns 2007; Fisher 1993; Loeb 2007; Montrie 2002). Like theirs, his efforts are at once environmental, moral, and deeply personal. They also powerfully reveal nostalgia's ability to manifest itself as a profoundly forward-looking phenomenon. As Music's case highlights, critical nostalgia deliberately conflates past and future to underscore the ways that the past directly shapes and determines our predicaments now and later. What is often thought to be a desperate longing for the past, then, is actually a critical awareness of the reciprocal relationship between time and change, between sequence and consequence. The catfaces of Music's woods stand as monuments to the past and beacons to the future. What sort of message are we sending young people, Music asks, when we strip our land of its natural beauty, its environmental treasures, and its historical significance? What sort of world will we leave for posterity? How will they repair our damage and address the consequences of our reckless negligence? Janisse Ray wonders these things as well. In the afterword to her *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*, she reflects:

When we consider what is happening to our forests – and to the birds, reptiles, and insects that live there – we must think also of ourselves.

Culture springs from the actions of people in a landscape... Our culture is tied to the longleaf pine forest that produced us, that has sheltered us, that we occupy... We recognize that the loss of our forests – which is to say of health, of culture, of heritage, of beauty, of the infinite hopefulness

of a virgin forest where time stalls – is a loss we all share. When we log and destroy and cut and pave and replace and kill, we steal from each other and ourselves. We swipe from our past and degrade our future... We [must be] willing to fight for the birthright of our children's children and their children's children, to be of a place, in all ways, for all time.

What is left is not enough. (Ray 1999:271-2)

Ray's use of the word *we* in addressing her reader indicates that her appeal is for more than individual action. The demand for old-growth timber owners to surrender their forests is currently such, she feels, that nothing short of *collective* action will suffice.

In my work, I have seen powerful signs that pleas like Janisse Ray's are not going entirely unheeded. When a public initiative was announced to build a regional airport in former turpentine Bubba Greene's hometown of Madison, Florida, an informal commission of concerned local citizens arose to protect a strip of old-growth pine forest that the airport would destroy. The airport's only supporters, Greene says, were recent "transplants" to the region, people from outside of the pine belt who remained oblivious to the environmental, experiential, and symbolic significance of local forests. When a community meeting was called to discuss and debate the proposal, Greene remembers a woman who stood up to voice her support for the airport in the face of the outcry from longtime Madison residents. Her words, he says, echoed the collective sentiments of those who endorsed plans for construction:

She got up in favor of the airport, bringing in all the big jets and all this stuff, you know. And she says, "All that is out there is old pine trees and what in the devil are they good for?" And immediately, you know, there was a lot of old timber people there and there was a lot of people in the industry and everything else, and you realize real quick that you're in a

different area. You got people coming in from other areas, you know, south Florida and the North [northeastern U.S.]. Most of them around here come from south Florida most recently. We call them “halfbacks” – they came from the North, they moved south, and they’re getting halfway back, you know [he laughs]. So we got a lot of halfbacks who come in and they got no clue about those trees and how many jobs that those trees have kept people working all these years. And with her, she just sees those pine trees as in the way of that airport being bigger and longer, you know. “Get rid of those old trees!” she says.

Since that night’s assembly, the community uproar in opposition to the airport has only grown louder, and the protests appear, for now, to have been effective. As of July 2009, there is no airport in Madison County, Florida. But jets loom, and the fight continues.

The efforts of Madison County residents – like George Music’s tenacity and Janisse Ray’s prose – exhibit nostalgia’s forward glance, its critical fusion of past and future, its concern for *place*, and its ability to act as a statement of earnest concern. Indeed, as these cases collectively demonstrate, nostalgia may even incite an urgent call-to-action.

### **Marking Place, Leaving an Impression: Catfaces and Conflicts of Memory <sup>8</sup>**

*I reckon, next to my love for the Lord Jesus, I just love turpentineing.* – Gillis Carter

Discerning readers will note a curious irony in dual efforts to preserve the forests and the industry’s past: catfaces like the ones in George Music’s woods do not purely signify a rich industrial history; they are also evidence of that industry’s assault on the

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<sup>8</sup> Portions of this section appear in a previously published article: Prizer, Timothy C. “Branches of Interpretation on Turpentine Trees of Memory: Race, Landscape, and Memory in South Georgia’s Turpentine Industry.” *North Carolina Folklore Journal* 53(2) (2006):18-35.

very pines former turpentiners now wish to save. Like all industries that have sought to exploit the riches of the pine forest, turpentine left a significant trail of environmental destruction. A catface is, after all, the result of life-threatening, hack-induced blows into the inner membrane of a living pine. Yet, rather than delegitimizing the commemorative value of the catfaced pine, the irony highlights an important distinction between the concerns of turpentiners and those whose interests are purely environmental. For former turpentiners, environmental responsibility is important to the extent that it results in the preservation of places infused with memory, experience, and the symbolic significance of work. Nothing represents these qualities as powerfully as a pine tree wounded with the unmistakable marks of a turpentiner. Today, however, catfaces are yet another of the forest's endangered species. With work in the woods gone, their numbers do not fluctuate – just steadily decline. Timber companies claim more of them every day. Once unremarkable, the sight of one today is striking, their scarcity and sudden anachronisticness having rendered them an increasingly meaningful commemorative symbol. For many former turpentiners, then, forests need preserving if for no other reason than for the fact that they contain one of the last visible signs of turpentine's existence. Indeed, rather than obstinately squatting upon lands on which catfaces remain, some have taken a more aggressive approach to guaranteeing their preservation: creating new ones. Though they stand to make no money from tapping trees today, a handful of former woodsmen continue to chip faces simply for the powerful message the trees send to those who see them. In this – the manipulation of the landscape and the perpetuation of work – we see perhaps the most profound of former turpentiners' commemorative activities. We also find that, for those who have infused memory and experience into the symbol of the catfaced pine, there is little

contradiction in preaching preservation and taking a bark hack to the side of a tree; for again, these are efforts to preserve *history* as much as the natural environment.

Unlike George Music, Gillis Carter does not live under the canopy of an ancient pine forest. His home in Willacoochee, Georgia sits just two-hundred feet from the side of a well-trafficked two-lane highway lined with cotton fields and neatly manicured pine plantations. Carter's front lawn is, however, home to approximately fifteen or twenty towering pine trees, and for a moment here and there, his property whispers with the same quiet serenity of George Music's land. Inevitably, though, the distant drone of a lumber truck swells to a roar as the rig whips past Carter's home with a load of fresh-cut timber dangling from its back end. The sight and the sound serve to remind Gillis Carter of the endemic deforestation of modern industry and the consequent loss of catfaced pines. It has also pushed him to take action, to sweep the dust from his old cups, gutters, and hacks and go back to work. In a move both proactive and defiant, he continues to chip faces on four of the pines that stand in his front yard. Rather than idly allowing all traces of the industry to gradually fade from our view, he has taken it upon himself to keep turpentine alive on the landscape. His response to the end of work has been to keep working – and to the loss of catfaced pines, to continue creating them anew. He is one of the last people in the United States still working trees for the extraction of crude gum (see Figures 3.10-3.11).

Born May 1, 1941 in Coffee County, Georgia, Gillis Carter lived in the towns of Wilsonville and Douglas in his earliest years. His father Era had become involved in the turpentine industry by the mid-1930s, leasing land from timber owners and selling the gum he harvested to the stills in town. For supplemental income, Era Carter also at this time operated a small service station, he and his wife pumping gas and selling grocery items to people in the local community. By the time of Gillis' birth, his father had soaked



Figure 3.10

Timothy C. Prizer

Gillis Carter's response to the loss of catfaced pines has been to create more, which he does on trees in his front yard in Willacoochee, Georgia.



Figure 3.11

Timothy C. Prizer

Carter hammers a gutter low on a pine tree in preparation for chipping a new face. This process is known as "tacking tin."

away enough money to consider buying his own timber and starting his own turpentine operation. In 1946, he found a patch of land for sale in the town of Willacoochee in neighboring Atkinson County. It had a couple of old barns on it, an old farmhouse, and all the timber he could dream of. He jumped at the opportunity, relocating his family to the farm in Willacoochee that same year. For the next three decades, he and his sons labored in these woods – and others that they continued to lease in three separate counties – alongside the mostly African American turpentine hands they hired and housed in quarters adjacent to their property. Though their operation ran aground with the industry's decline in the late-1970s, Gillis Carter continues to live on this same piece of land today. It has been his home for more than sixty years now, and it holds for him profound experiential and historical significance.

As was the case for George Music and for so many former turpentiners, Gillis Carter grew up thinking that turpentine was all there was when it came to work. When he was a small boy, his father sat down to dinner every evening with his hands sticky and his overalls caked with pine gum. The fathers of nearly all the other boys his age, too, returned home in a similar state after a long day's work. Back then, it seemed everybody's daddy was a turpentiner. And as was the cycle of turpentining, the work was passed to the next generation at a very early age. By the age of eight, just three years after Era Carter bought the land in Willacoochee, Gills was in the woods beside his father, learning how to harness the mules, how to tack tin, how to wield a bark hack, and how to dip gum. Proof of his early involvement and the vital role he and his brothers played in the woods lies in a letter their mother wrote to her sister in the 1950s. Carter explains that he preserves the letter today as a keepsake:

I've got some written letters that my mother wrote back in the '50s. She was writing some relatives out in Arizona, and speaking of the same farm

we're sitting on right now, she wrote my aunt and says, "Era's bought him a farm and paid X number of dollars for it." And she says, "He's dependent on these boys helping him work it out" – helping him pay the debt.

Reminders like these – ones that highlight his early contribution to his family's wellbeing – intensify the sense of pride he has for his life's work and strengthen the attachment he has for the place he calls home. They also serve to remind him that his life has literally been a lifetime spent in the turpentine woods. Indeed, his earliest recollections are of the forest, of his father and other men raking bark from tree trunks and driving nails into the soft center of pine. As for George Music, memories flash through Carter's mind of times when the woods were still a place for play – a place for watching with wonder as grownups tapped trees for resin. He remembers mimicking his elders in the woods until finally the woods became, for him too, an arena for work. Officially a turpenter by the age of eight, he has worked in no other trade. In fact, he has only left the farm in Willacoochee to live elsewhere once, when he traveled to Athens and earned his Bachelor's degree in Chemistry at the University of Georgia. His home and his land along this stretch of Willacoochee highway are the site of powerful sensory experiences that have shaped his identity and his sense of place. A conversation with him today is a fascinating history lesson – one based in lived experience rather than reported occurrences. He is an eloquent observer of his past and his region's history, and it has become clear to me that all the tape in the world could not begin to capture the wealth of stories he has to tell about the characters he has encountered along the way. Like life, his stories at once erupt with humor and overflow with sorrow, rejoice in the kindness of others and celebrate hardships overcome.

Gillis Carter's stories are important reminders of an industry and way of life that has disappeared from the pine belt. Yet, while he hopes for them to continue circulating beyond his lifetime, he understands that his stories are likely not enough to keep the industry at the fore of the region's consciousness. Like nearly all people striving to maintain and transmit memory, Carter has found that verbal expression is an all-too-fleeting phenomenon, temporary in its impact and limited in its scope. As mentioned earlier, memory, as an intangible of the mind, often aims to manifest itself in more durable forms of expression. For a former turpentine worker who wishes to see the industry maintain its centrality to the history of his region, there must be a more permanent, visible, and enduring way of guaranteeing that the past is transmitted into the future. Carter has found that there is no more effective method of doing so than through the manipulation of the landscape and the marking of physical space. In continuing to tap pines for their resin, Carter literally *carves* out meaning and uses the landscape as a canvas for the depiction of memory. His efforts address at once the preservation of catfaced pines and the perpetuation of the work required to create them. He explains his commemorative activity in these terms:

I reckon, next to my love for the Lord Jesus, I just love turpentineing... And I just grown a fondness for it, and I just wanted to cut those trees out there and chip them for people that passes this highway out here, that they might stop and show it to their kids... It's something that I'd like to see kept alive fifty years down the road... We've got a generation of children that's 22- or 24-years-old that's never seen a face.

In Carter's words, we again see the temporal complexity of nostalgia; that is, we find further evidence that nostalgia is not exclusively preoccupied with the past. Of course, the past is at the heart of his efforts. As a self-proclaimed "advocate of the turpentine



Figure 3.12

Timothy C. Prizer

Turpentine, Gillis Carter feels, is a “gone art,” and he enjoys it when people are interested in his life’s work. Above, he chips a fresh streak and scrapes gum from a dip bucket.

industry,” Carter says he understands that tapping trees is something very few people know how to do today. He enjoys when people see his trees and approach him with comments such as, “They tell me you used to dip tar, or you know how to pull, or you know how to chip, or you know how to tack up a tin.” Turpentine, he recognizes, is a “gone art.” But when he marks a pine tree today, he does not desperately latch onto the past. He knows that the industry is not due for a dramatic return. Rather, he understands the importance of the past and hopes to see the industry’s *history* occupy a place in the present – and beyond. In his hope that parents “might stop and show it to

their kids,” we find again that his nostalgic gaze is as much to the future as to times come and gone.

The alteration of landscapes for the purpose of representing memory is by no means a novel phenomenon. Indeed, the erection of any monument should be understood as an effort to manipulate the landscape in a way that draws attention to the historical significance of some person or event. Landscapes have long proven themselves a powerful tool for commemorative expression. A number of studies, many from the field of cultural geography, have demonstrated landscape’s unique ability to preserve and transmit memory. As cultural geographer Kenneth Foote has argued, landscape is most accurately understood as “a sort of communicative resource, a system of signs and symbols, capable of extending the temporal and spatial range of communication. In effect,” Foote continues, “the physical durability of landscape permits it to carry meaning into the future so as to help sustain memory and cultural traditions” (1997:33).

Anthropologist Julia Hendon similarly notes that “by creating and modifying a landscape of natural and built forms, groups construct a setting that gives concrete, permanent expression to relationships and identities” (2000:50). Gillis Carter’s trees are a prime example of both Foote’s and Hendon’s points. With them, Carter is able to communicate the type of sentiments commonly represented in ephemeral oral expression, but he creates what is ultimately a more “durable, visual representation” in his use of the physical landscape (Foote 1997:33).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> I should add here, if only as a point of acknowledgement, that there is also of course the sense in which oral expression has the ability to outlast these ostensibly more “durable” forms of expression. Several scholars have correctly observed that oral accounts about historical events can continue to circulate – and are sometimes even strengthened – in the event of the destruction of the physical monuments erected in remembrance of said historical events. Natural disasters, wars, and deliberate efforts to vandalize or deface have ruined many monuments while the stories surrounding the events represented by those monuments persist in oral tradition. The physical reminder and the oral account, then, exist complementarily (Basso 1996; Brundage 2000; Connerton 1989; Foote 1997; Gillis 1996; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Lowenthal 1996; McKittrick and Woods 2007; Meinig 1979; Rosaldo 1989; Santino 2004; Schama 1996; Schein 2006; Shackel 2001, 2003).

While the use of the landscape for the expression and preservation of memory is common, there are a number of factors central to Gillis Carter's commemorative activities that make them unusually profound. First of all, we must keep in mind that the turpentine industry's existence was clearly manifested on the landscape. Catfaced pine trees dominated the terrain of south Georgia and north Florida while the industry was active. Their presence was nothing short of panoramic. Thus, as the rise of deforestation and pine plantations has nearly wiped catfaces from the countryside, the landscape has undergone a drastic and absolute transformation in the years since the industry's demise. All evidence of work in turpentine has nearly been eliminated. For those who have witnessed the changes unfold before their eyes, the destruction has been especially shocking and unthinkable sudden. Gillis Carter has become so disturbed by the loss of catfaced trees that he has sought reprisal in the symbol of the towering pine, slashed into the veins to convey the intersection of work and history. The trees strike back at timber companies' efforts to confine turpentine to the history books and confront the forces that have erased turpentine from the landscape. Carter's form of "memory work," then, is not only an effort at preservation, but also at *restoration*; he strives both to preserve and restore the industry's place on the landscape. His catfaces attempt to reestablish turpentine's position on the ground, in history, and in the consciousness of the region's people.

In addition to creating new catfaces, Carter today also strives to preserve the few turpentine trees that linger on the land he and his father once owned. Having sold much of their land with the industry's collapse, they have had to watch timber harvesters destroy their old catfaces and, painfully, erase evidence of their life's work. Carter explains that a few of the trees survive today in small and isolated numbers. These have

been spared due to their position in especially damp, thick, or otherwise impassible patches of the forest:

There's some little places about, remote areas that you'll find some that's still standing, you know. There's two on the side of the road over here about two miles away that we worked back in the '60s. And when they came in here to log it, it was between the graded road and a fishpond dam and they left those two trees. Matter of fact, I got pictures of them in yonder. I'm always looking at things like that. That just happens to be my nature. It happens to be my love.

Carter is acutely aware that when landscapes change, memories are strengthened through nostalgia. He has felt his own memories intensify with the destructive changes wrought by deforestation, and he similarly hopes that his marks on the landscape will strengthen the memories of those who recognize them. Carter thus engages in the maintenance of catfaced pine trees for reasons far more complex than any mere personal attachment to the work. The trees represent a concerted effort to broadcast his feelings of loss in the wake of turpentine's disappearance and to instigate a productive response from those who pass his home. As symbolic representations of memory, his trees are intended to engage an audience in visual narrative, even if that audience is racing by at sixty miles an hour. That he is mindful of his elusive and transient audience is apparent in his selection of specifically which trees to work. The four trees bearing catfaces in front of his home are, importantly, the most visible from the highway and thus have the greatest potential of reaching passersby. As is the case for all physical memorials and monuments, the placement of Carter's trees is essential to their intent and overall meaning. Rather than allowing the remaining traces of turpentine's existence to be thrust to the margins – relegated to the deep and impervious parts of the region's forests



Figure 3.13

Timothy C. Prizer

Gillis Carter chips new faces today for reasons beyond a personal attachment to working turpentine. His goal is for the trees to send a message to the people who pass by on the highway in front of his home. The photograph above depicts the view of two of his catfaced pines from the road.

– Carter spotlights them, returning catfaced trees to their position front-and-center at least on his patch of the region’s landscape.

Conspicuously positioned, Carter’s trees exemplify the rhetorical qualities of folk expression. He has taken advantage of his trees’ proximity to the highway, realizing the trees’ potential to act as a communicative tool to influence in both subtle and not-so-subtle ways. He marks the trees as a persuasive technique to jog the memories of those who pass his home and, he hopes, to create a sense of a common past. His comments above concerning his intention for his trees illustrate that they are principally didactic expressions for the young or unacquainted, and they also serve to remind people who may forget that the industry once occupied such a central role in the region. In this



Figure 3.14

Timothy C. Prizer

These two trees on Gillis Carter's land are large enough to accommodate faces on two sides of their trunks, which enables Carter to ensure that his message reaches drivers regardless of the direction they might be traveling when they pass his home.

respect, his primary purpose for maintaining the trees is for their educative and persuasive power. They function as rhetoric intended to educate and influence through the symbolic representation of memory.

Drawing from Kenneth Burke, Roger Abrahams reflected upon folklore's rhetorical nature in 1968, noting that folklore often functions as "an implement of argument, a tool of persuasion" that is "enacted by a performer who tries to use it to affect an audience in some way" (146). Abrahams added that vernacular expression many times "asks for some kind of sympathetic reaction" from an audience (1968:146). His thesis lends itself well to Gillis Carter's trees. Though one of Carter's goals, as he explains, is to have others know that he worked in the woods as a turpentine, his core

objective is to engage people in the collective action of memory, thus reaffirming community and joining individuals in collective concern. His trees aim to influence others to use memory as a means of recognizing and considering the consequences of the vast amounts of change the region has witnessed over the last several decades.

Carter's use of catfaced pines reveals that rhetorical expressions involved in the symbolic representation of memory are powerful and effective markers of both individual and group identity. The trees in his front lawn exhibit at once the personal connection Carter has with the industry and the central role turpentine has played in the lives of so many people throughout the region's history. Abrahams' argument is thus valuable for its demonstration of the ways individuals use vernacular expression to persuade and to create a sense of a collective identity based upon a common past. Yet, writing in the 1960s, Abrahams' goal was to show how rhetoric functions to maintain structure and solidarity within groups. He aimed to view "values and attitudes" of "specific groups" and analyze the techniques members of bounded folk groups employ to "attack" outside forces that "threaten the existence of the group" (1968:157, 146). As is fundamental to the concept of rhetoric, however, there is never unanimous agreement on the meaning contained within any symbol – be it a word, a painting, a photograph, or a catfaced pine tree. Symbolic representations of memory often evoke profoundly different interpretations of the past as a result of the varying perspectives and remembered experiences of those who observe the symbols and decode their implications. Issues of perspective, power, and positionality are forever embedded within cultural markers and are central to the meanings catalogued therein.

This is indeed true of all vernacular expression. Folklore is not always the collective activity of a group nor do its expressions serve as umbrella statements conveying the mutual concerns of all members. In fact, it often serves to disrupt the very

harmony it is held to maintain. Richard Bauman notes that folklore is rarely “a collective representation of the participants, pertaining and belonging equally to all of them.” Rather, it is often “differentially distributed, differentially performed, differentially perceived, and differentially understood.” “Vernacular expression,” Bauman continues, “may be as much an instrument of conflict as a mechanism contributing to social solidarity” (1972:38). Abrahams’ early argument thus erroneously assumes, as Edmund Leach has shown to be the case for myth as well, “that whatever may be the total tensions and oppositions within a social system, the overall structure is somehow in equilibrium” (Leach 1968[1954]:198). Stuart Hall reminds us, however, that “the meaning of a cultural form and its place or position in the cultural field is not inscribed inside its form” (1981:235). Any sign, Carter’s arboreal one serving the present case, “may delimit a range of meanings but it carries no guarantee of a single meaning within itself” (Hall 1981:237). Likewise, any representation of memory, as an indexed symbol, carries the potential to produce “a language of argument, not a chorus of harmony” (Hall 1981:197-8).

The points that Bauman, Leach, and Hall make above may be especially true for Carter’s trees. The turpentine experience cannot, and never could, be conceptualized as a categorical experience undifferentiated by social constructions and hierarchical divisions. Given the industry’s long history of racial division, one should expect to find a significant degree of discord in the ways the industry is remembered. Indeed, turpentine’s racial legacy remains apparent in the divergent memories of workers whose recollections vary based on their unique experiences in the industry. It is clear in the reflections of many African Americans that their memory of the work differs substantially from that of many whites in the industry. There is no room for Carter’s or Music’s brand of nostalgia, for instance, in the memories of former woodsman J. F.

Wilcox, a retired African American worker from Ludowici, Georgia. Both J. F. and his wife Bernice were born on turpentine camps in the 1920s, and indeed they married on the front porch of Bernice's parents' quarters in 1940 (see Figure 3.15). Both vividly recall memories of woodsriders who were regularly "nasty" in their treatment of black turpentine hands. If the industry were to return to the United States, J. F. Wilcox says, he would not return to it:

No, I don't miss it, huh uh. I wouldn't want to go back through that anyway if I had the chance. It's nasty. That old gum get all in your hands, your clothes be gummy... See, now, you can't get people to work turpentine now. It was just a lot of hard work for no money. To make a long story short, that's what it was... It was something I had to do. It wasn't enjoyment. See, you do what you have to do. What you got to do for a living, you do it. Make yourself content at it. Not to say you *enjoy* it. Nobody ever enjoyed going out there and working in grass knee-deep and water and mud and things... I was glad to get out of turpentine. I didn't miss it. I didn't miss it at all. I got out of it as quick as possible.

When Carter's type of expression is thus contextualized and placed within the social and racial framework of its history, it could suggest a multiplicity of potential narratives and produce conflicts of memory (Basso 1996). For those like J. F. Wilcox, the symbols in Carter's Willacoochee lawn would not necessarily elicit memories of a peaceful agrarian lifestyle and a noble trade. Nor would they inevitably signify the pride that comes with a life of hard labor and the sense of loss that results from the demise of an industry that shaped a region. Rather, they could rekindle recollections of sweat, poverty, and even racist violence in an oppressive Jim Crow occupation.



Figure 3.15

Timothy C. Prizer

J. F. and Bernice Wilcox spent practically their entire lives on turpentine camps. They were both born on a camp, and in 1940, they were married on the front porch of Bernice's parents' turpentine quarters in Ludowici, Georgia. Both recall horror stories of "nasty" turpentine producers and woodsriders.

The trees are thus symbols of collective memory only in that they stimulate recollection among all involved in the industry; they by no means produce consensus on the composition of that memory. As we see, symbolic representations of memory like catfaced pine trees do not only work to create a common identity and combat exoteric forces; they also reveal in-group factionalism with concern to memory. Rhetoric always has the ability to disorder from within in addition to uniting against forces from without. Therefore, rather than one overarching "collective memory," we are confronted with various communities of memory in which symbolic representations are, for some witnesses, deeply ambiguous and suggest multiple – and at times competing – narratives.

In the absence of a truly “collective” memory, then, we are left with the expressions of individuals who could be said to belong to a group but whose vernacular activity does not necessarily speak for all members. As Eber and Neal argue in their book *Memory and Representation: Constructed Truths and Competing Realities* (2001), “collective” memory ultimately comes down to the individual. They write that, “although the cumulative experiences of a given group of people shape their basic design for living, it is the individual’s definition of the situation that shapes the immediate course of action he or she is likely to follow” (3). Likewise, historian Alessandro Portelli has reflected that “the act and art of remembering is always deeply personal”:

Like language, memory is social, but it only materializes through the minds and mouths of individuals... Though we are working to construct memories that can be shared and used collectively, we should be wary of locating memory outside the individual... It becomes *collective* memory only when it is abstracted and detached from the individual (Portelli quoted in Walker 2006:8)

The symbolic representation of memory, then, also occurs primarily on an individualized basis. It entails an individual’s construction of a symbol system intended to describe and interpret the events that have comprised his or her life (Eber and Neal 2001).

It would be a mistake to suggest, however, that this individualism and lack of collectivity somehow simplifies the messages contained within symbolic representations of memory. In fact, rather than blanket statements of an entire community, they are intricate and nuanced personal expressions that attempt to articulate the grainy subtleties of lived experience and the complexities of an identity under constant negotiation. The catfaces Gillis Carter etches into his trees embody seven decades of work and experiences in the turpentine woods. These have been years characterized by

both good times and struggle, by both pride and regret. His trees, as examples of *critical* nostalgia, are intended neither to idealize his own past in the turpentine woods nor to dismiss the industry's racial legacy. Inscribed within the seemingly straightforward symbol of a catface are memories of work in an industry that forged complicated and meaningful relationships between black and white, turpentine hand and boss man, the impoverished and the relatively prosperous. Historian John Gillis, in his book *Commemorations* (1996), reminds us of the important fact that “‘memory work’ is, like any other kind of physical or mental labor, embedded in complex class, gender, and power relations that determine what is remembered (or forgotten), by whom, and for what end” (3). Thus, in order to fully understand and appreciate Carter's commemorative work, we must look to the particular ways that he has personally positioned his symbols in the complex power relations of the industry's history. This can only be accomplished by looking more closely at the details of his personal involvement with African American labor and his own attitudes toward race.

Gillis Carter's earliest memories of the turpentine woods include the swinging hacks, pounding hammers, and boisterous calls of black workers. His father began hiring turpentine hands in the mid-1940s, when Gillis was still just a “knee baby.” At the time, Era Carter was leasing land from other timber owners, and his work crew usually consisted of both black and white workers. As a lessee, Era employed eight to ten men in the woods during the warm months of “chipping season” and just three during the colder months of “dipping season.” Over time, his workforce became almost exclusively African American, especially following his purchase of the land and timber in Willacoochee in 1946. Likewise, when Gillis took over the business later in life, he too kept approximately eight to ten workers – mostly black – under his supervision at any given time. Though neither Era nor Gillis Carter ever operated a turpentine camp or managed

a commissary store, their business had several of the trappings of larger, more organized operations. Black workers in Era Carter's turpentine operation were, for instance, housed in shanty-like quarters a short distance from the dip woods. The quarters were constructed at various points in the industry's history, and most of the homes – built in the 1920s and 1930s – already stood on the property when Era Carter acquired it in 1946. Feeling the homes a bit outdated and too small for workers and their families, Era and his sons often built additions onto the quarters to make them more livable. Yet, as in most camp communities, few of the homes had indoor plumbing before or after the Carters began maintaining them. Workers and their families relied on outhouses for restrooms and well water for bathing and the laundering of clothing.

Like the shack rouser or woods rider on a turpentine camp, Era and Gillis Carter carried their workers into the woods each morning at sunup. Workers were transported upon mule-drawn wagons in the earliest years of the Carters' operation, and later in the beds of pickup trucks. Once in the woods, Gillis and his father supervised their workers and kept a running tally of the day's progress as the workers chanted their personalized calls and hollers. Instead of supervising from horseback like most woodsriders in the camp setting, Era and Gillis preferred to walk the woods. Their operation was smaller than most camps, and thus the acreage worked at any given time was rarely expansive enough to necessitate travel upon horseback. Era not only found that he could sufficiently monitor the work on foot; he also preferred not to appear the malevolent disciplinarian that some woodsriders assumed upon horseback. Today, Gillis Carter is quick to stress that, from his post on the ground, his father could look his workers in the eye and address them as equals. He emphasizes that the dignity of his turpentine hands, both as men and as workers, was first and foremost for him and his father throughout their years in the woods. Carter remembers that when a worker skipped a tree or

neglected an entire patch of pines, his father calmly addressed them and told them to return to the work they had overlooked. Unlike many other producers, Carter recalls, his father rarely raised his voice with his workers and never physically harmed them in any way.

Though Era and Gillis Carter's treatment of their workers may have been more humane than that of many producers, the pay structure and cycle-of-debt common for workers on turpentine camps characterized the Carters' operation as well. The Carters paid their workers on a percentage basis, dividing 25 percent of their profits from leased land among their workers and giving another 25 percent to the landowner. The Carter family managed the remaining 50 percent, using it to cover business costs and basic living expenses. While turpentine hands could earn as much as \$50 a week on the Carters' operation – a figure Gillis Carter stresses was “good money” in the 1940s and 1950s – the pay was rarely enough to escape considerable debt. “During most of the years,” Carter explains, “a turpentine operator had to be partly a banker because most of the employees never could make out with what you were paying them. They'd want to borrow a few dollars. And then a few dollars over a period of years amounted to a right smart of dollars.” Carter and his father carefully monitored and tracked these transactions, keeping exact figures as to the amount of debt each worker had accrued. The balances accumulated such for some of their workers that they could see no way out but to physically escape the debt. “A lot of times, one would just move off in the middle of a night,” Carter says, “and he might go a hundred miles and you'd never hear from him. Sometimes, you'd try to hunt him up, might find him. But as the old saying is, ‘You can't get blood out of a turnip.’ And if a person don't got it, you're not getting it unless the landowner was willing to pay it for him.” On occasion, a turpentine hand fleeing his debt to another producer would show up on the Carters' operation with hopes of starting

with a clean balance. Gillis remembers that his father rarely took issue with the sudden arrival of a new worker. However, if the unpaid producer successfully traced the worker to their Willacoochee farm, his father acted just as he would expect another producer to act in return were the situation reversed: he paid the worker's debt. Carter explains:

That was one thing about my daddy. If he ever got anybody, a hired hand... I say "got" them – that's not like *buying* them, but if he ever hired a person to move to our place from a neighboring farmer, Daddy would always say, "How much does this man owe you?"

"Well, he owes me \$450."

"Well, I'll just write you a check for that \$450. I'll assume his indebtedness, and then I'll run the chance of him working it out."

Some workers amassed so much debt that both producer and worker knew there was no hope of reimbursement. And, in fact, sometimes a producer so valued the labor of an unusually productive worker that the debt mattered little. For instance, Ralph Wesley, now a friend of Gillis Carter's, once owed the family more than any worker in the history of their operation. Wesley came to work for Carter in 1968, at which time he and his wife had one child. By 1978 – the last year the Carters worked turpentine – Wesley's wife had given birth to eight children. With the birth of each child, the Carters had paid the hospital bills, so that by the time that they stopped turpentine, Ralph Wesley owed the family between \$3,000-4,000. "But Ralph was – and still is – dear to my heart, you know," Carter explains. "And he could work turpentine like few men I've ever known. I would have done most anything to keep him from running from the money he owed to me and Daddy." As Carter emphasizes today, no debt would have been so steep as to risk losing Wesley's labor – or his friendship. He thus made an exception for Wesley,

effectively modifying the economic workings of his operation and tacitly acknowledging the circumstantial inadequacies of its pay structure.

The dynamics of Gillis Carter's relationship with Ralph Wesley was by no means unique in the relations between producer and turpentine hand, but it was most certainly atypical. While we might expect, for instance, that African American former workers would vividly remember the horrors that occurred as a result of debt peonage and the tense racial friction of the industry's past, Carter demonstrates that he too recalls much of the same. Indeed, he has even lost close friends to the violence that ensued between white and black. Carter remembers that his father's best friend, a turpentine producer in Wilsonville, Georgia, lost his life to the shotgun of a fleeing turpentine hand:

My father's had good friends that's got killed. Just happened upon a fellow moving and the fellow would shoot him. That happened back in the early '30s down in Wilsonville. And my father's favorite friend, a guy shot him and killed him one night with a shotgun. And the guy shot his brother-in-law down, shot him down too but he survived. In fact, they caught the guy and actually, back then, I don't know whether they lynched him or just what happened, but they killed him, a group of men killed him.

"But times is different," Carter would go on to say, "and I'm glad things ain't like they used to be, Tim. It was just a way of life that's kind of gone, but I think it's got a lot of history."

Gillis Carter's candid acknowledgment of the painful aspects of the industry's past, combined with his appreciation for its "history," is crucial to the layered meaning contained within his commemorative catfaces. His claim to be "glad things ain't like they used to be" underscores the fact that his trees represent far more than a yearning for a

romanticized past. Were Carter's trees simply examples of "mere nostalgia," they would signify his desire to return to times come and gone. Rather, they are much more complicated statements, symbols that attempt to encapsulate the often conflicting intricacies of memory and lived experience. Instead of seeking to craft an arcadian rendering of the industry's history, Carter's nostalgia strives to critically evaluate turpentine's past and, in doing so, to find a method of remembering that neither idealizes nor dismisses the complex and controversial history of the industry. As Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo have shown to be the case for former steel workers in Youngstown, Ohio, Carter wishes to "remember the past as at once meaningful and painful, a source of pride and a tool for understanding community problems" (2002:245).

In conversation with Gillis Carter today, it is clear that he indeed remembers the past as at once meaningful and painful. In many of his stories of life in the turpentine woods, his voice cracks as he recounts emotionally difficult memories of experiences with his African American workers. He is careful to point out that the turpentine industry was not an arena of wholly separate experiences divided along lines of white and black. Rather, his stories demonstrate that turpentine producers and turpentine hands endured common struggles and now share a common past. It is indeed this common past and Carter's notion of shared experience with his African American workers that make his trees exceptionally powerful commemorative expressions. Exemplary of his accounts today is the story of Junior May, a mentally disabled and harelippped turpentine hand who lived alone with his mother on Carter's property well into adulthood. Carter remembers May as a lonely man who found no greater joy or company than his six-string guitar and the droning sounds of his own vocal cords. Often, at dusk following a day's work in the dip woods, Carter joined Junior May on the

front porch his quarters. The two sat on rocking chairs and sang together while the sun sank behind the pine trees on the horizon, May softly picking the strings of his guitar. Today, tears form in Carter's eyes as he tells the story of May's death from cancer in the mid-1980s. In May's memory, Carter hums the tune to "Wildwood Flower" and recalls that May could lay the guitar upside down behind his neck and play the old Carter Family number without missing a note. "He could pick that thing as pretty as you ever seen," Carter smiles. "It'd just make tears come to your eyes. Junior was precious to my soul."

In Carter's reflections on race today, he consistently reiterates his belief that the differences separating white and black are superficial – only skin deep. "I just ain't got nothing to say but something good about blacks," he says in quiet introspection. "The only thing different in a black and a white is the color of their skin." His memories flourish with powerful reflections on the common humanity that unites black and white, turpentine hand and turpentine producer. One such memory is from Carter's childhood and involves a hand named Bill Williams. Mr. Williams had a home in neighboring Douglas, Georgia, but he spent the work week in Era Carter's Willacoochee turpentine woods and weeknights in the workers' quarters. "We'd haul him back and to out here," Carter remembers. "We'd pick him up on Monday morning and he'd stay out here until Friday night and then we'd carry him home." One Friday evening, when Gillis and his brothers were still children, they piled in the car with their mother and father for the ride to Douglas to drop Bill Williams off to spend the weekend with his family. "I remember we started to Douglas one evening, and we had Bill in the car with us, and us four boys and Daddy and Mother taking Bill home," Carter says. "And I remember, we had a harmonica, a mouth harp, and we were blowing tunes on it." As they crunched along the gravel roads between Willacoochee and Douglas that night, Gillis and his little brother

Mackey took turns wailing on the instrument before passing it to Bill. When Bill finished howling out a tune, he handed it back to Gillis. “When he gave it back,” Carter remembers, “it looked like there’d be slobber on it. But it didn’t matter, Tim. And you know, it’s good that children are innocent, you know. Because you know, there ain’t no difference in Bill Williams’ slobber and mine.” Carter has tried to retain the wisdom of childhood innocence as he has grown older. He does so by holding on to powerful memories like ones of Junior May and Bill Williams.

Indeed, much of Gillis Carter’s racial compassion and his recognition of a common humanity took root in his childhood. He remembers the day that he was painfully struck with the realization that the men who labored in his father’s woods had families that they loved just as he did his and that they endured pain he hoped never to experience. “They have feelings just like we do,” Carter says. “And I’ve seen some sad times with some of them, you know.” The saddest of these times involved the family of one of Era Carter’s hired hands, and Gillis’ voice trembles as he tells the story today. The family had two young children and had recently given birth to a new baby. Not long after birth, the infant became ill, and the family rushed the child to the doctor in nearby Pearson, Georgia. But minutes before they reached the doctor, the baby stopped breathing. “Back then, a lot of times,” Carter explained to me, his voice fluttering:

they didn’t carry it to a funeral home. They’d just bring it home and, the next day, bury it. And they pulled up to a service station in Willacoochee and we were across the street. And my daddy and mother maybe had already heard that the child was dead. But they had the child in the backseat of that car covered up. And they stopped over there, and their other little kids was eating ice cream right in that backseat with that little baby, you know, it covered up. And us children was across the road over

there eating a snowball. And when Mother told us that that little baby was in that car dead, we couldn't taste of our snowball again. Lost all thoughts of wanting anything to eat. Our hearts, we could see the little kids in the backseat of that car over there. It's just touching, heartrending, but this is the truth. Those little kids were licking those ice creams and that little dead baby covered up there in the backseat. That's one of the sad things that happened out here.

The story is especially moving for Gillis Carter, as he too has lost his share of loved ones. In 1991, his "baby brother" Morris died from melanoma while just in his early forties. Since Morris' death, Carter has lost all three of his brothers, along with both of his parents. He knows too well the pain that comes with the death of family, and he therefore is able to deeply empathize with the worker who lost his newborn child. It is also clear today that there is nothing more important to Carter than his own family. His daughter and son-in-law live today with his "grandbabies" in a home immediately adjacent to the one Carter shares with his wife Helen. And having lived within equal proximity of his workers and their families in the quarters for so many years, he has seen how important the institution of the family has been for them as well – how his hands have "worked like the mischief" to provide for their families and how they have pulled together to make ends meet in the face of hardship. It has been further testament to their common humanity.

"We've had a lot of real good black people," Carter says, staring out across the cotton fields beyond his catfaces. "They're just like white people. You'll have some that's mean, some that's in trouble, and some that don't want to cooperate. But most of the time, we had mighty good men, *mighty* good men. And we worked a good many through the years." That he wishes for his catfaces to stand as memorials to the many "mighty

good men” that have come and gone from his property is clear in what he said to me next. “You know, I could have written down a list,” he said regretfully. “I thought about it one time, just writing down a list of all the men I remembered.” Though he bemoans the fact that he never did this, he knows that any such list would have been an inadequate tribute – that he would have regrettably passed over a turpentine hand or two who deserve to be remembered. He hopes his trees serve as fitting monuments to their lives and labor, and he takes comfort in his faith that their names are inscribed on the rolls of a higher power:

There’s been a lot of hard work, a lot of sweat dropped in these old piney woods around this area. A lot of people that’s labored and worked so hard that’s done forgotten. But the good Lord knows each and every one of them, and they’re all counted.

Gillis Carter has done his part since the industry’s demise to keep up with the select group of workers who, over the years, have come to occupy a special place in his memory. He still makes the short drive over to Ralph’s Garage, the Willacoochee auto shop owned and operated by his formerly indebted and unusually talented worker Ralph Wesley. Wesley occasionally makes repairs on Carter’s truck, but more often the two men visit today simply to catch up and reminisce, just as Carter did for many years with Willacoochee native and ex-turpentine-hand Wilburt Johnson before Johnson’s recent death. While it is easiest for Carter to remain in touch with workers who have stayed in the immediate area, he has shown that he is willing to travel considerable distances to demonstrate what his workers have meant to him. Twice in 2003, Carter drove over four hundred miles from Willacoochee to sit at the bedside of his former worker William Jones in a Pinehurst, North Carolina nursing home. Jones’ family had relocated him to Pinehurst after he suffered a stroke that robbed him of the ability to speak. Though

Carter was aware that Jones would be unable to respond to his words of support, he knew that the warmth of his hand would bring Jones comfort in a time he needed it most. Of the many turpentine hands Carter has employed throughout the years, he was perhaps closest to William Jones. Jones lived in quarters on Carter's property for many years, and throughout, Carter's relationship with him tiptoed the delicate boundary between friend and foreman. Today, Carter grins as he remembers the special bond he shared with Jones and, in the next breath, grimaces with the thought that he may have mishandled him in his roles as employer and supervisor. "I hope I didn't mistreat him," Carter said to me as he gazed at an old photograph of Jones on my most recent visit to Willacoochee. "I know I did though, Tim. I'm sure I did. I love him with everything I have though, you know. He meant so much to me."

The kind respects Carter paid to William Jones are not mere apologist actions inspired by racial guilt. Rather, the years following the industry's decline have been a period of profound racial reconciliation, mutual understanding, and reciprocated reverence. Indeed, actions and attitudes like Carter's have not strictly been bestowed unilaterally upon turpentine hands by turpentine producers. When Era Carter passed, for instance, several of his former workers were among the faces at his funeral. They locked hands and joined the congregation in song to honor the life of the man whose woods they long called home. Likewise, though George Music, Jr. and his father never regularly employed African American labor, they too forged meaningful relationships with black turpentiners. While Music usually worked in solitude with only his father as company, he remembers in particular two African American hands whom they contracted to help them dip gum every several weeks. They were twin brothers, Junior and Leroy, and while they were traveling laborers who worked in the woods of many producers, they felt especially close to the Music family. "They were good workers,"

Music recalls. “*Very* good workers. In fact, one of them come to my dad’s funeral on September the 12th last year [2001] when dad died.” The brother who missed the funeral was only absent, Music went on to explain, because he had become bedridden due to complications with diabetes. Today, both Junior and Leroy still make the trip out to Music’s property just to say hello. “Still, whenever they get the chance,” Music says, “they’ll come by and check on us.”

Such was the nature of work and of life in a region dominated by a single industry. Whites and blacks were often separated by the industry’s divisive power relations, but they remained united in a common trade and a common place. Thus, over time, the paths of even the most solitary white workers crossed the paths of even the most independent black turpentine hands. More often than not, meaningful though complicated relationships took shape as a result of the industry’s reliance on close and long-term interactions between white and black labor. In the wake of the industry’s demise, these relationships remain complicated by conflicts of memory, but they also exhibit a significant degree of confluence and mutual understanding that was rarely possible while the industry was active. Indeed, the industry’s disappearance has granted workers, white and black, the gift of a fresh perspective – that is, the ability to contemplate, interpret, and come to terms with their individual pasts and the industry’s collective past. Evidence of this newfound understanding is found throughout the pine belt, and it surfaces in a myriad of forms.

One of the most interesting examples involves the late Dub Tomlinson, a former woods rider from Echols County, Georgia known for his talents as a storyteller, songwriter, and musician. In 2003, just a few years before his death, Tomlinson presented Laurie Sommers of the South Georgia Folklife Project with an original song entitled “Turpentine Blues,” performed and recorded by Tomlinson’s son. The song, one

composed by a man who once occupied the intimidating position of woods rider, is sung in a decidedly downhome blues style and from the perspective of an African American turpentine hand. “Woe is me, woe is me / Going from tree to tree,” Tomlinson’s worker cries. “A troubled mind in the hot sunshine / Working that turpentine.” In some of the songs most memorable lines, Tomlinson acknowledges the industry’s history of racial exploitation and mistreatment. “Boss man, boss man,” the worker pleads, “have a good heart / Don’t shorten my pay ‘cause my skin is dark.” “Ain’t got no house, just this little old shack / But that’s how it is when your face is black.” How did this troubled black soul with “holes in my pockets, holes in my shoes” and who has “got them working this turpentine blues” come to find a place in the creative imagination of a white former woods rider? The song is an important act of memory, commemoration, and understanding in the years following the decline of a racially divided southern industry. In drawing candid observations on the crucial role disadvantaged African Americans have played in the history of the turpentine industry, the song refuses to dismiss or revise any aspects of the past, regardless of how painful.

Like Tomlinson’s “Turpentine Blues,” Gillis Carter’s commemorative catfaces are at least in part intended to honor the lives, labor, and struggles overcome by black workers in the turpentine industry. I have asked Gillis Carter what his symbols might represent to a black worker who endured a profoundly different experience in the turpentine woods. In reply, he becomes emotional as he reflects upon his deep admiration for workers and families who have suffered and surmounted unthinkable odds:

I think a lot of times people look down on the black people and call them “tar heels” and “turpentine niggers” and you want to about think of them as being the very lowest employed people. But when you *really* learn

their history, when you *really* learn what all they went through, when you take into consideration that they didn't even have an outhouse, they just used a pile of gallberries or dog fennels or palmettos, your heart has to bleed... I hope of the lot of the black educated people will look back on their great-grandparents and they won't look back with a ugly thought. I hope they would look back with a thought of admiration for people that went through the toughest of times – and *survived* it. And my heart, I hate to get emotional, but my heart just kind of bleeds when I think about how tough it's been for some of them... Because I've seen the hardships that they've endured. I've seen the manual work that they've done. I've seen them when there wouldn't be a dry thread on their body from working.

Carter's poignant response to my suggestion that his trees may produce conflicts of memory reveals that the catfaced pine is an exceptionally complex commemorative symbol. It nostalgically marks the passing of an industry and way of life, but it does not do so as a form of revisionist history. Rather, turpentiners exploit the landscape as a communicative resource to preserve, persuade, educate, commemorate, and reconcile. Though catfaces may evoke memories of painful experiences in an industry divided along lines of race and power, they contain as well the potential to bridge these divisions under the banner of shared experience and a common past. They unequivocally confirm the fact that nostalgia is more often a tool of critical thought and action than it is a symptom of idle longing.

## **Race, Nostalgia, and Black Experiential Memory**

*Some that miss it, that say they miss it, is because it grewed into their lives. That's like my daddy, that's all he ever did. It grewed into his life.* – Ralph Wilkerson

When I first began to explore issues of memory and nostalgia in terms of the turpentine industry's demise, I assumed that interpretations of the past would be firmly defined and divided along racial lines. I noted in my earliest observations on the subject that white former workers often remembered their industry's past in romantic terms while African Americans conveyed competing emotions of loss and relief (Prizer 2006:21). My own romantic preconceptions led me to believe that, for white men once involved in turpentine, the heyday of the industry was a time when the tight-knit rural community prevailed and work in the woods brought with it an "appreciation for the simple pleasures of yesteryear" (Cashman 2006:141). White turpentiners, I figured, would have realized a satisfaction only possible in agricultural trades, where individuals worked on and with the land, and under the open sky. Subsequently, I expected to find the opposite in the memories of black former turpentine hands. As a demographic that had long worked under the often oppressive supervision of white producers and woodsriders, and who had long lived in the rundown homes of the turpentine quarters, my African American consultants would certainly, I presumed, provide a stark contrast to the rose-tinted picture painted in the memories of the men who once exploited their labor. What I found, however, was a far more complex and nuanced spectrum of experiences for white and black turpentiners. White woodsriders, producers, and small turpentine farmers alike rarely romanticized the industry's past, offering instead textured accounts of individual experience that sought to accurately portray life and work in the turpentine woods. Likewise, my conversations with African American workers seldom slanted disproportionately toward stories of hardship and mistreatment. Rather, they balanced trial and tribulation with fond memories of compassionate

producers and times of autonomy working as independent contractors. As evidenced in the words and memory of Gillis Carter, turpentine's history of race relations is much more complicated than a white-black dichotomy will allow. Through conversations like the ones I have had with Gillis Carter and, more revealingly, in discussions with men like Wilburt Johnson who worked many years *for* Gillis and Era Carter, I came to better understand the complexities that have long defined racial interactions in the pine belt.

When I sat with Wilburt Johnson in the carport of his home in Willacoochee for a conversation in February 2004, Johnson was a wise and weathered 82-year-old man with a head full of snow-white hair. His long life had been filled with work in the forests

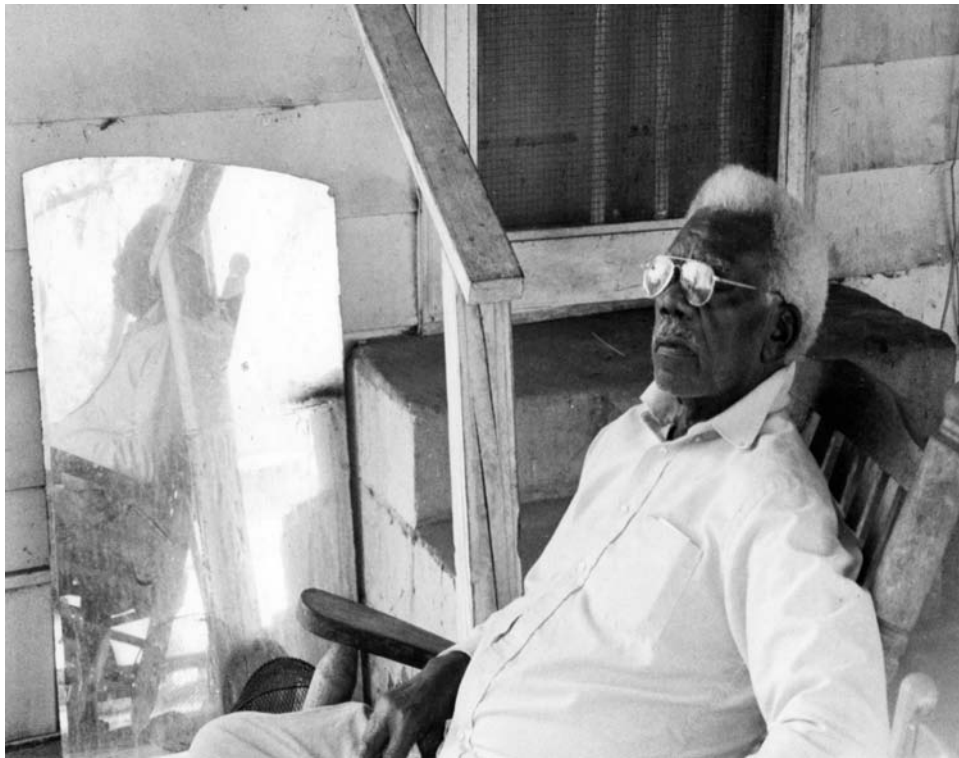


Figure 3.16

Timothy C. Prizer

The late Wilburt Johnson, once a turpentine hand on Era and Gillis Carter's turpentine operation, sits on a rocking chair in his carport in Willacoochee, Georgia. Johnson vividly recalls stories both of hardship and fair treatment throughout his tenure as a turpentine.

of south Georgia, and he remembered times of pain and of pleasure with equal acuity. I noted, as I had of nearly all of the oral histories with African American turpentiners that I conducted prior, that Johnson's earliest memories of the turpentine woods were virtually identical to those of white workers. "When my daddy brought us up," Johnson remembered, "all I wanted to do was go to the woods with him, but he always figured I was too small to be out there." Johnson was determined, however, to be just like his father and to become a turpentine. Before he was hardly even able to lift one, he found a hack in a pile of his father's old equipment. Its blade was dull from years of use, but young Wilburt failed to notice. He snuck the hack from the pile and took it to a patch of secluded trees where he could practice his stroke and emulate his father without anyone knowing. Before long, he mustered the courage to track down his father in the woods and demanded to work:

So one day, my daddy was chipping some boxes around here about two miles from home, where we were staying at. Well, I got through my chores hoeing cane and everything, and I said, "I'm going to the woods where Papa at." And I got my hack, and I went out there. He was down there in a little old round pond chipping. And he was *bad* to talk to hisself, you know. But he was down there talking to hisself. And I said, "Well, I wonder who he's talking with." So, I was standing up out there on an old log, you know. And I got to where he could see me. He said, "Boy, what you doing over here?" I said, "I come to help you chip some." "Well, chip one out there and let me see how it is." I chipped one and waited 'til he got there. He looked at it, "Let me see your hack." Got my hack and cut it out you know and sharpened it up. And I chipped on with it all that evening. And, the old hack wasn't very much. So, he told me, he said,

“Well, son, bring your old hack in and I’ll get a good one and fix it up and let you come back and help me.” So he did, and I started chipping then.

And from then on, on up to right now – chipping, dipping, pulling...

Johnson’s idolization of his father – and his prodding to become a turpentine – is virtually a universal motif in the earliest memories of turpentiners, regardless of race or circumstance. Willie White, an African-American former turpentine woodsman from Hoboken, Georgia recounts a story strikingly similar to Wilburt Johnson’s and almost identical to George Music, Jr.’s:

When I got started in it, I used to ride out there with my daddy. And I used to go, really, I was just going out there with him to pick blueberries. And I’d get out there with him and I’d see my daddy just going out there just whistling and chipping them boxes, whistling and chipping. So I got into it and I said, “I want to do that. Boy, I sure want to do that.” And so I kept on at my daddy, and my daddy said, “I’m going to show you. I’m going to teach you how to do it.” And he kept on, he went to showing me how to do it. And I got to where I got to loving it. And I used to come home and my mamma used to say at my daddy, “What’s wrong with his clothes?” Have holes all in it where I’d be standing too close to the tree, spraying the acid on it. You spray acid on the tree and you hold it too close, it’ll bounce back on your clothes and eat them up. Daddy would say, “He’s been chipping.” And mamma would say, “Your boy’s out there supposed to be picking berries and you got him out there chipping!” So I told mamma, I said, “No, it wasn’t nothing about daddy.” I told my daddy to teach me how to do it. And, you know, I fell in love with chipping. And

then I came on from chipping and went to dipping. And so I just loved it all.”

For young boys, then, the turpentine woods were often the stage for the rite of passage into adulthood. When they had convinced their fathers of their ability and desire to work, they were officially turpentiners, and thus they imagined, grownups as well.



Figure 3.17

Timothy C. Prizer

Willie White of Hoboken, Georgia, like nearly every worker regardless of race or circumstance, remembers his initial involvement in the turpentine industry in terms of his boyhood idolization of his turpentining father.

Of course, African American turpentiners’ early glorification of their fathers’ activities gave way rather quickly to the realities of work in an industry that relied on the exploitation of their labor and the indebtedness of their credit accounts. Wilburt Johnson, for instance, worked, like his father before him, under the supervision of white producers on several different turpentine operations. His longest stint and most recent

experiences had been as a hand in Era and Gillis Carter's woods. Indeed, Gillis Carter had arranged my meeting with Wilburt Johnson that day, and he had prepared me for the conversation by describing his former employee as a man who was once a "leader of the clannish black people" and who had thus, for a time, required considerable supervision and discipline. Carter also, however, characterized Johnson as one of the hardest and most productive workers he had ever employed. In the woods, as in the jook joints, Carter explained to me, Wilburt Johnson had been "the ringleader of the blacks." As Johnson grew older, he had become "a man of the Lord," Carter said, and since the end of Carter's turpentine operation in 1978, the two men had continued to pay each other visits in a mutual effort remain in touch. Carter's balancing act between his past roles of stern supervisor and proud boss, combined with his present wish to maintain a respectful friendship with Johnson, is a common characteristic of post-turpentine interracial interaction. It is also emblematic of the conflicted experiences of so many African American turpentine hands. It accounts, at least in part, for the coexisting and seemingly conflicting emotions of black workers in the wake of their industry's collapse.

For most African American workers, there are naturally memories of hardship, struggle, and the feeling that turpentine was "just a lot of hard work for no money," as J. F. Wilcox remembered. There are also memories of outright abuse and racial violence, like brothers Junior and C. J. Taylor and others recounted in the previous chapter. On the flipside of these very memories, however, are proud recollections of perseverance, resilience, and adversities overcome. Just as labor historian Michael Honey notes of African American industrial laborers in his *Black Workers Remember: An Oral History of Segregation, Unionism, and the Freedom Struggle* (1999), the story of black turpentiners is "a bitter history, but one they are proud of" (13). It is a history of disadvantaged workers creating, against all odds, a degree of dignity and self-respect.

Throughout the narratives of former turpentine hands, there is a pervasive and strong appreciation for the industry and the life lessons taught by hard work and survival in the face of misfortune. “We’ve come a long way,” C. J. Taylor recalls proudly. “We got to thank God we’ve come as far as we is. You’d be surprised what my brothers and all of us went through with to get where we’re at. We ain’t never stolen nothing from nobody. We always worked for what we got.”

C. J. Taylor’s simultaneous reflection on the hardships of the past and the honest labor that pulled him through those struggles is another recurring theme throughout the memories of black workers. In their narratives, the past is no doubt a time of painful struggle and hard labor, but it is also a period characterized by a strict moral order and honorable work ethic that is much less common today. In consciously drawing a distinction between the past and the present, black workers call attention to a more humane racial climate today but a past in which hard work and self-reliance made for a more meaningful, disciplined, and principled existence. Their comments reflect upon the changes they have witnessed in their communities since the turpentine industry’s decline and highlight a profound generational gap in their observations on the troubles facing African American youth today. Wilburt Johnson, for instance, reflected on the moral corrosion he was witnessing around him:

You see, when I come up, all we had was work. But now, you take these young boys now, they don’t want to do nothing but smoke that old crack and stuff. They don’t enjoy getting out there and working in the woods, working like we used to... You take most of them now, take the young folks, they don’t want to do nothing but smoke that dope and mess with that junk like that... It’s done got to where ain’t nothing in here but them

young bucks, and they don't want to do nothing but steal. You know, they don't want to do no kind of work.

Over in Ludowici, J. F. Wilcox agreed:

It wasn't like it is now. It's just a different world now... Anybody who come up back in them days, they learned you had to work for a living, wasn't no way out. Wasn't no scheme to pull like they do now... See, back then, you didn't have no government helping you. Then, you had to do the best you could. Work, there wasn't nothing else.

C. J. Taylor has noticed the same of his community in Blackshear. "You got to work if you're going to make it," he says. "If you don't work, you're going to steal. Everybody's supposed to work."

If older black workers' emphasis on past order and present-day disorder idealizes parts of the past, it does so only to stress to younger generations that certain aspects of the past are worth preserving. Indeed, according to Willie White, the solution to current societal ills is a return to the fundamentals of work that once provided both structure and sustenance in people's lives. Reflecting on the gap that separates former turpentiners and younger generations, White says, "A lot of young people tell me sometimes, 'Man, I wouldn't do that. I wouldn't work in no turpentine.'" To this, he retorts, "No, I wouldn't say that if I were you. If you was coming up then, you wouldn't have no choice. You'd have been glad to work in turpentine... You wouldn't go around hungry or nothing like that, like I see some of them now." White maintains that if work in turpentine were to return in its most recent form – a time in which independent workers named their own hours, stood to earn compensation consistent with the amount of labor they contributed, and were not required to pass drug screenings or provide proof of sufficient education – the communities of the pine belt would be a better place today:

If turpentine was here right now, you would see a lot of homeless peoples right now that is hungry, ain't got no shelter or nothing right now, if turpentine was still here, them people would have them a job and have them a decent meal on their table... It's a lot of people around here right now that are wishing turpentine were here... Some of them right now is on the streets. Ain't got no work or nothing. They're homeless. They ain't got no home. Ain't got no work they got to do. But if turpentine was here, I guarantee you them peoples would have a job and they would have food to eat.

White went on to explain his feeling that, even in the age of the turpentine camp and commissary indebtedness, uneducated men at least had the *opportunity* to provide for themselves and their families. They had the chance to realize the sense of dignity that comes with holding down a steady job. Even if a man had never set foot in the woods, White said, he simply needed to express to the producer his desire to work, and the “boss man” would put an experienced hand in charge of teaching the new hire. “You just go out there and tell that man you want to work, and he’ll put you to work,” White remembers.

But times have changed. Securing employment today entails much more than marching into the woods and asking for a job. Few workers today have the opportunities that turpentine afforded uneducated black men in the southern pine belt. Indeed, former turpentiners’ observations on rising joblessness, spiking crime rates, and increasing instances of homelessness are based in statistical fact. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the counties that comprise south Georgia and north Florida are currently experiencing unemployment rates that surpass any since the mid-1970s, when the turpentine industry began its rapid skid. The unemployment rate as of

January 2009 in most counties was between a staggering 8 and 9 percent, and these numbers have been steadily increasing over the last several years.<sup>10</sup> Even jobs in logging, sawmilling, pulpwooding, and other timber industries have been cut, in some estimates, by more than half since 1990.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, the state of Georgia has established the South Georgia Coalition to End Homelessness, a non-profit organization based in Valdosta designed to confront the issues that have led to a recent upsurge in the numbers of homeless individuals in the southern half of the state.<sup>12</sup> Also, in the years following turpentine's decline, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement have each noted significant increases in rates of property theft and drug offenses in the counties along the states' common border.<sup>13</sup>

Having witnessed these trends firsthand, and recalling turpentine's profitability for blue-collar workers in the pine belt in the industry's waning years, many black workers like Willie White express sincere appreciation for the role the industry played in their lives and their communities. White reflects that:

Turpentine has brought me from a long ways, and I know it's brought many of my friends from a long ways... Because there was a time that peoples couldn't hardly get a job but just turpentine. I have seen a lot of mens that are out there pulpwooding and logging and stuff. They would leave that alone to go back to turpentine.

The appreciation White expressed for the industry is a sentiment heard repeatedly in conversations with African American workers. But White also expressed a sincere desire

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<sup>10</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Georgia Economy at a Glance," <http://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.ga.htm>; "Florida Economy at a Glance," <http://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.fl.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Mining and Logging – Georgia," [http://data.bls.gov/PDQ/servlet/SurveyOutputServlet?series\\_id=SMU13000001000000001&data\\_tool=XGtable](http://data.bls.gov/PDQ/servlet/SurveyOutputServlet?series_id=SMU13000001000000001&data_tool=XGtable).

<sup>12</sup> South Georgia Coalition to End Homelessness, "SGCEH Narrative," <http://www.sgceh.org/>.

<sup>13</sup> Georgia Bureau of Investigation, "GBI Crime Statistics Database," [http://gbi.georgia.gov/oo/channel\\_modifieddate/0,2096,67862954\\_87981396,00.html](http://gbi.georgia.gov/oo/channel_modifieddate/0,2096,67862954_87981396,00.html).

for the industry's renaissance: "Man, I hope and pray that one day I might see it again," he said. "I don't know if we will or not, but I hope and pray we is." The unabashed nostalgia underlying his call for the industry's return was by no means an indication that he had dismissed or romanticized certain aspects of the past. He was not engaging in a sort of selective "historical amnesia" through which he managed to forget about the objectionable elements of the industry's history (Anderson 1983[2006]). Rather, Willie White has recognized that the past contains lessons that are useful in the present and that these lessons may indeed be critical not only for understanding community problems but also for solving them. Here again is irrefutable evidence of nostalgia's critical, practical, and forward-looking tendencies, this time uniquely situated in the perspective of an African American turpentine hand.

Despite "common sense" to the contrary, nostalgia for the industry is found throughout the memories of African American turpentiners. Turpentine had been, for African American woodsmen as for white workers, a *life* as much as it was an industry. The turpentine woods had not simply been a site for work, but an arena in which the drama and cycle of life unfolded. Children were born in quarters in the turpentine woods, they played on the dusty streets of turpentine camps, they marveled at the work of their fathers, and they went to school in vacant turpentine shanties. As teenagers, they fell in love against a backdrop of catfaced pine trees, and they eventually wed in camp churches or on the front porch of the bride's parents' quarters, many times simply locking hands and jumping a broomstick to symbolize their passage together into the next stage of life. Men and women alike sang and danced and celebrated in jooks located just a few hundred yards from their homes. They mourned the deaths of their loved ones and laid them to rest in the sandy soils of the pine forests. As such, the turpentine woods were not mere worksites, but rather sites of experience. In black turpentiners'

memories, as for white workers, the woods are places of great historical significance, rich with profound experiential meaning. Naturally, as Ralph Wilkerson remembers, turpentine “grew into their lives.”

There are also numerous instances of African American workers’ desire to preserve pieces of the past. Junior Taylor, for one, expressed regret that he had no pictures of himself working turpentine. Reminiscing about times he waded in chest-level swamp water to chip nearly unworkable trees, he said he would have used the images to “make a movie” about the hard work he had performed in the turpentine woods (see Figure 3.18). His desire was to show the documentary to younger generations so that they would better understand the grueling labor that fell upon the shoulders of their ancestors. Yet, with the industry gone, he plainly accepted that his wish would never be realized. “It’s just like anything else, like everything else that goes out,” he said. “You have to forget about it because it ain’t never coming back.” There were also the comments of Junior Taylor’s brother C. J., who reflected upon the generation gap that separates protectors of old-growth pine forests from those who would strip the forests of their timber and rob them of their history (see Figure 3.19). “Ain’t no old guy going to sell no timber off his land,” C. J. declared. “You know who sells it? When they die, them young boys build a big, big house and everything, and after a while, they’ll be going bankrupt or killing themselves or something.” His words spoke at once to the value of forests like George Music’s, to the disintegration of core social values, and to the importance of preserving portions of the past.

There were also the remarks of Wilburt Johnson, which served to extinguish the notion that black workers would wish to forget their labor. “Yeah, I tell you,” Johnson said, “sometime you know, if you’re down this way, we’ll go out there to Gillis Carter’s, and I’ll chip one or two of them for you. Show you how it do.” Johnson’s invitation



Figure 3.18

Timothy C. Prizer

The late Junior Taylor of Blackshear, Georgia wished he had photographs of himself working in the woods so that he could “make a movie” about the hard work he performed as a turpentine woodsman.

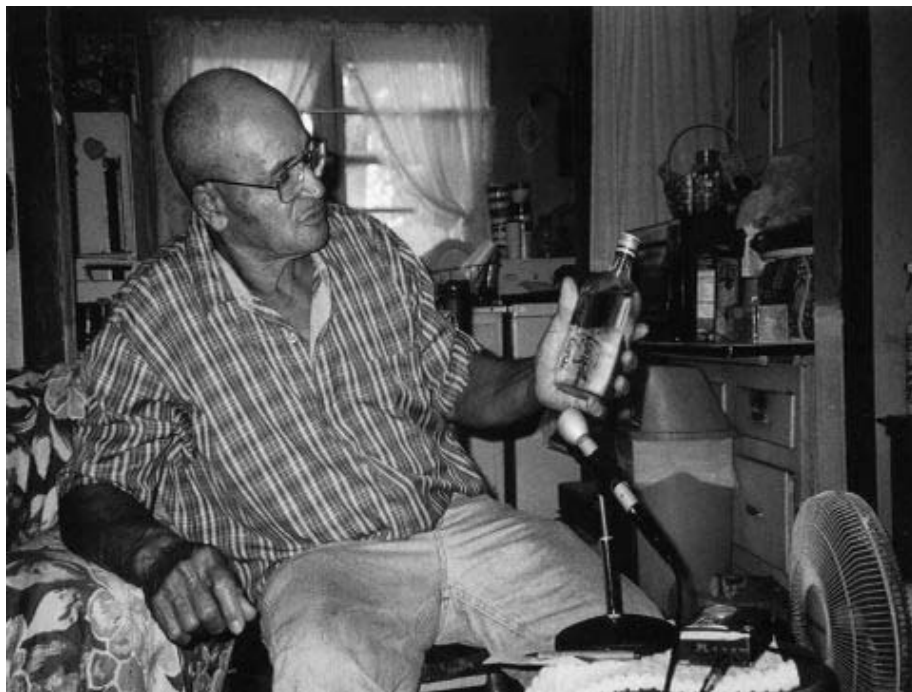


Figure 3.19

Timothy C. Prizer

C. J. Taylor displays a bottle of turpentine and expresses nostalgia for the loss of his industry despite the hard times he experienced on some camps.

suggested that he had at least a tinge of Carter's same nostalgia for the work. He added that he "wouldn't mind trying to chip a few now," warning however that he was "too old to do too much, you know." His warning is revealing. The relative absence of concerted commemorative activity on the part of African American turpentiners can be partially attributed to the notion that such "memory work" would only conjure memories of a painful and impoverished past. But it also has much to do with the fact that many African Americans who once labored in the industry are, as Wilburt Johnson put it, "too old to do too much" now – their bodies having long withstood work under the oppressive sun that so often suffocates the flatlands of the pine belt. Those workers who are still relatively young – workers like Ralph Wilkerson and Willie White – rarely have the benefits of time, leisure, or, importantly, *land* with which to engage in commemorative activity. Today, most of them live in subdivisions with limited yard space and few trees while continuing to work long hours in the woods or in sawmills for logging and pulpwood companies.

I should also be careful not to overstate the lack of conscious commemorative activity carried out by black former turpentiners. In fact, as I note in the next chapter, many African American workers preserve and even continue to collect much of the industry's material culture for commemorative purposes. But the existence of commemorative vernacular activity by former turpentine hands became perhaps most compellingly clear upon my visit to the home of Arthur Riley in Milan, Georgia in the summer of 2004. Like Gillis Carter, Riley continued to tap pine trees in forests just a short drive from his home. On my visit, he guided me through his woods and pointed out what must have been close to a hundred catfaced trees that he had worked since the industry's collapse. He explained to me that he continued to chip trees for reasons that one would expect – because over time, as Ralph Wilkerson suggests of many old-timers,

work among the pines had become an important part of his identity. Also, as late as 2004, Riley provided barrels of raw pine gum for the annual commemorative still-firing at the Agrirama Living History Center in Tifton, Georgia. Regrettably, Riley passed away before I had the opportunity to engage him in conversation about his life. However, Riley's commemorative expressions provide an interesting counterpart to Gillis Carter's, in that Riley, an African American who made his living in the turpentine woods, may have recalled a remarkably different set of experiences in the industry – experiences that nevertheless also led to the creation of commemorative catfaces.

Conversations with former turpentiners, white and black, reveal the complexities of the industry's race relations and the intricacies of workers' historical memory in the wake of the industry's collapse. Throughout this study, one of my primary goals and most pressing challenges has been to avoid paying disproportionate attention to stories of hardship and abuse and to resist dodging accounts that are at odds with turpentine's master narrative of white privilege and black misfortune. To fail to do so is to oversimplify an exceptionally complex southern industry and to do all turpentiners, regardless of race, a severe disservice. The industry's master narrative paints white producers, woodsriders, and small turpentine farmers too broadly, inaccurately and collectively rendering them all callous disciplinarians. Equally problematic, it similarly generalizes the experiences of African American turpentiners and further silences the voices of black workers – workers who have, for centuries, been forced to respect laws and customs that have done more than enough to stifle them. Though we must acknowledge that theirs has been a past of hardship and hard work, it is also a past worth honoring and remembering. It has been a time of pride in struggles overcome and, importantly, powerful experiences in the places that have shaped them.



Figure 4.1

Timothy C. Prizer

## ***Four***

### **Displays of Nostalgia: Material Culture and Memory in the Turpentine Belt**

#### **Outside-In: Blurring Boundaries between Landscape and Artifact**

*One thing I have learned about [a pine forest] is not to underestimate its power to stir people's imaginations.*

– Lawrence Earley, *Looking for Longleaf* (2004:272)

To segregate landscape and material culture into discrete conceptual categories, as my division of chapters appears to attempt here, can prove an impractical endeavor. In many respects, the landscape and the material trace are two sides of one coin, overlapping parts of the same phenomenon, and I suggest that they be viewed as such.

For starters, the concepts' resistance to separation becomes immediately apparent when we consider the cultural significance of items that constitute vernacular architecture – those manmade structures that extend from the earth to shelter us and other animals, to store our tools, our equipment, our most prized possessions. Like the natural landscape, these structures act as sites of experience and serve as one of the landscape's most salient and centrally defining characteristics, texturing the ways in which we visually encounter, digest, and experience our physical surroundings. As with all forms of art, these buildings – homes, barns, sheds, houses of worship – follow broad cultural patterns while allowing for variations that result from matters of individual taste or localized preference. Henry Glassie, implicit dean of material culture studies, calls attention to the conceptual inseparability of landscape and material culture when he notes that:

The very earth is the common resource upon which life is built... [In Bangladesh,] Farmers plow the fertile soil and plant it to rice so that people might eat. The clay beneath the surface is dug out, borne in headloads, and heaped into the foundations that lift the villages above the flood. And clay is mined and mixed, shaped and baked into the tools people use to get through another hard day. (1999:145)

The landscape of the pine belt in southern Georgia and northern Florida is characterized as much by the material trace as it is the natural order. Presently and historically, the material culture of a region shaped by work in the pine forest is one of the landscape's most conspicuous attributes. Remnants of turpentine hands' rundown quarters, now boarded up and overrun with kudzu and weeds, still texture one's visual experience of this part of the world (see Figure 4.2). Corroded metal turpentine barrels, their rust flaking like dry skin, lay strewn among other discarded tools and pieces of equipment along the roadside (see Figure 4.3). In places like Portal and Willacoochee, Georgia –



Figure 4.2

Timothy C. Prizer

Amidst kudzu and weeds, traces of turpentiners' quarters like this one near Fitzgerald, Georgia remain prominent pieces of the landscape in the pine belt.



Figure 4.3

Timothy C. Prizer

Corroded turpentine barrels like these in Hoboken, Georgia are strewn in plain view along roadsides throughout the pine belt today.

towns that sprouted with the turpentine industry as their seed – we are able to see remarkably well-preserved traces of turpentine’s wooden fire stills, their copper kettles, even commissary stores, coopers’ sheds, and the former homes of turpentine producers (see Figure 4.4). Other abandoned buildings stand as well. For example, there remain the morally opposed structures of the camp church and the workers’ jook joint, where pounding beats would have shaken each of the buildings’ foundations with equal force, one in praise of God and the other in pursuit of “sin”. When the industry was active, these now-neglected buildings and tools were central to workers’ experience of the landscapes in which they lived and worked.

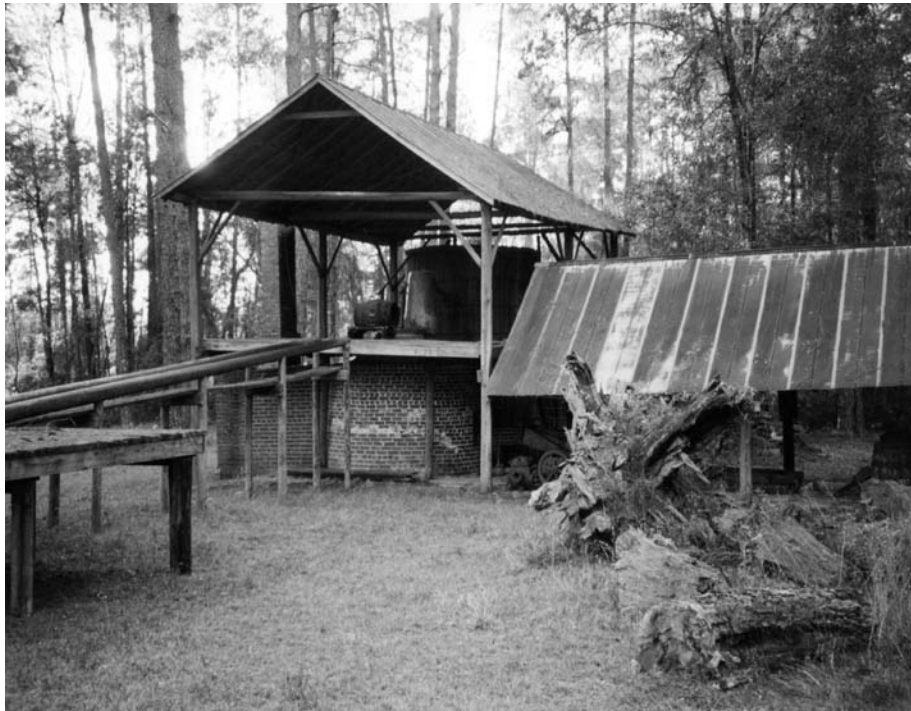


Figure 4.4

Timothy C. Prizer

Nearly all of the turpentine stills that once dotted the pinelands of the American South have been destroyed, but a few have been preserved. This one, the McCranie Still in Willacoochee, Georgia, provides visitors with a clear picture of these unique and elaborate structures. Other examples of well-preserved stills include the Carter Turpentine Still in Portal, Georgia and the still at the Georgia Agrirama Living History Museum in Tifton.

Any effort to fully distinguish between the landscape and material culture is further confounded by the fact that, in the turpentine belt as in most places, the natural environment was often adorned with pieces of the material world. Turpentine cups, gutters, and aprons – made first of clay and later of aluminum – decorated the faces of pine trees, and due their ubiquity, were nearly indistinguishable from the trees themselves. Pullers and hacks were left propped upon tree trunks, just as workers' lunch pails dangled from branches in their hang-up ground. Dip wands protruded from dip buckets, and 600-gallon turpentine barrels rested heavily upon beds of pine straw. Wagons, waiting to be tethered to the mule, dug into the sandy soils beneath them. On the landscape, these items seemed to bud from the earth like the wild and unruly wiregrass brush that flourished in their midst. Though born of human hands, material objects were important pieces of the landscape and were nearly as prevalent in the forests as were the pines themselves.



Figure 4.5

Timothy C. Prizer

Material objects like turpentine cups and gutters were as much a part of the landscape in the pine belt as the pine trees that shouldered them.

To divorce landscape from material culture is also impracticable in terms of former turpentiners' commemorative activities. Indeed, their application of the industry's material culture for purposes of commemoration is many times indistinguishable from, and parallel to, their use of its landscape to meet similar ends. Throughout the pine belt today, turpentine tools and equipment – items that once adorned the outdoors and contributed to one's sensory experience of the region's landscape – have been moved inside the home to ornament the hearth, the mantelpiece, the bookshelf, the countertop. The Herty cup – which to the untrained eye appears little more than an empty, unadorned, and untreated pot of red Georgia clay – rests today as a decorative item in the homes of many former turpentiners. Rusted canisters of Hercules-brand spirits of turpentine have become ornamental antiques, often used as bookends in families' personal libraries. Bark hacks and pullers are mounted on living room walls, propped upon nails like works of art. Dip buckets likewise stand at front and back entrances to hold umbrellas, walking canes, broomsticks, and various assortments of tools. The industry's material culture, then, no longer useful in terms of facilitating work in the woods, has been granted newfound utility, meaning, and aesthetic value in former turpentiners' commemorative displays. These displays further underscore the parallel existence and function of the landscape and the material trace, for objects also evoke powerful memories of place.

Any inclination I may have had, initially, to classify the manipulation of the landscape and the interior display of material culture as independent spheres of vernacular activity was forcefully abolished when I met Earl Carter. Gillis Carter's younger cousin, Earl Carter resides today along a dirt road that bears his name in Snipesville, Georgia, an unincorporated sister community to the town of Denton in Jeff Davis County. Just four years after his birth in Wilsonville in 1949, Earl moved with his

family to the same piece of land where he lives today. Outside of two years in the Army, when he lived for a time on the bases at Fort Benning, Georgia and Fort Polk, Louisiana, he has spent the last fifty-six years of his life in the tobacco fields that blanket his homestead. “I’ve been in a tobacco patch ever since I was born,” Carter recalls, noting that his father, Era Carter’s oldest brother and Gillis’ uncle Denzil, chose to become a tobacco farmer rather than a turpentine. “Daddy, he liked tobacco better,” Carter says, “whereas Uncle Era, he *stayed* in the woods turpentine. Daddy never was much for turpentine, really. Just a matter of personal preference I guess.” Denzil Carter had, in fact, worked turpentine marginally on the old-growth timber that stood on the property when he bought it in 1953, but he cut it soon after to expand his tobacco farm. Around the same time that he cut the old timber, however, Denzil also scattered a few handfuls of pine seed on another portion of his property, for he understood, like so many other small farmers had realized before him, that working a few trees for turpentine alongside the farm could ease financial strain and cover at least the cost of groceries. By the time Denzil Carter’s young seedlings had matured enough to withstand the hacks that would rip faces into their internal canals, it was the early 1960s. Earl Carter and his brother Claude had started high school, and part of the weekly chores assigned to them by their father was to tend the turpentine patch. Earl and Claude worked between 1500 and 1600 faces, chipping half of the faces one evening and the other half another evening each week. Every third week, the brothers dipped the gum that had congealed in the aluminum cups at the base of their incisions, and they hauled the gum into town to sell at the still. Their labor was enough to provide the family with “grocery money” – an additional source of income vital to the family’s financial stability.

Earl Carter’s fulfillment of his high school chores was the extent of his experience in the turpentine woods. Tobacco always had been the most important task on Denzil

Carter's land. He made it clear to his boys that turpentine, while beneficial, was secondary to their many acres of tobacco. Plus, when Earl and his brother finished high school in the late 1960s, the turpentine industry's demise seemed to loom ominously over the entire pine belt. "When I got out of high school," Carter recalls, "turpentine was just fading out everywhere. Prices was dropping fast, you know." Thus, just a few short years after he first experienced the sticky residue of pine gum upon his hands and clothing, his stint in the woods was done. Compared to most of my consultants, then, Earl Carter has minimal experience in the turpentine industry. His pride has long rested in farming, his occupational identity firmly that of a tobacco farmer. In recent years, when he has been forced to stop growing tobacco due to its declining value in the market and recurrent problems of plant disease<sup>1</sup>, tobacco has become even more important for its place in his occupational memory. Having worked in the tobacco fields his entire life, and having resorted to harvesting peanuts and raising cattle today, his time in the turpentine woods seems to him a mere flash, a fleeting moment that flickered and faded nearly a half-century ago. And yet Earl Carter, this tobacco- and peanut-farming semi-turpentine, has created arguably the single most profound commemoration of the turpentine industry in the entire pine belt.

It is a fascinating story. It begins in 2001 with Earl Carter and his wife Angie's ambitious desire to construct a new, two-story home of pine, oak, and cypress. Loyal to the farm on which Earl has lived his entire life and that he and Angie have shared for nearly four decades of marriage, the couple decided that the home would sit on the same property along Earl Carter Road and, symbolic of their powerful sense of place, would consist primarily of timber cut from their own land. As they imagined it, there would be

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<sup>1</sup> Tobacco's decline in market value is a result of the Fair and Equitable Tobacco Reform Act of 2004 – known in short as the "Tobacco Buyout" – which ended the industry's Depression-era quota and price-support program. The most persistent of the plant diseases that have afflicted tobacco is the Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus, found in a number of crops grown primarily in temperate and subtropical regions.

a large, open kitchen, high ceilings with a loft overlooking the living room, and floors of hardwood and concrete tile throughout. A broad front porch would span the length of the home, and rocking chairs would look out across the fields. In 2001, they set out to make the dream a reality. Earl began laying the foundation, while Angie coached him on the particulars she hoped her new home would contain. A neighbor contributed to the effort, donating a stack of “‘buggy trees’ – dead timber that had started to get bugs,” Carter explains. Earl towed the dead timber to his farm, cauterized its aphidian pests, and sanded its exterior to a smooth surface. “I used a lot of her old dead trees,” Carter says, “but 75 percent of the lumber in this house come off the farm here.” Indeed, it was when he went to cutting timber from his own land that the unforeseen would become the home’s most notable addition, its signature earmark, and would render it one of the most extraordinary homes in the region.

Earl and his wife decided that their cypress groves would be most suitable for the home’s exterior siding, noting that cypress is uniquely resistant to insects and decay and that its “grown-in-the-wood” preservative oil, cypressene, renders it naturally impervious to splitting and warping. The Carters also liked the fact that, in addition to its dimensional stability, cypress happens to have a rich grain, texture, and color that would give their new home the traditional farmhouse ambiance they hoped to achieve. So Earl went to work in the woods, cutting the cypress trees that were to become the exterior of his new home. Interspersed among the cypresses on his farm are several old-growth pines and, deeply aware of the dwindling number of natural-standing pine trees in the region, Carter was careful to leave them standing. He figures he will let God take what is left of them with the winds and lightning He sends with such regularity – and such force – to the region on summer evenings. Yet, on this day, as Earl Carter waded in a creek on his farm to reach an unusually plump cypress, he stumbled upon one pine that

he felt intensely compelled to protect. An enormous old-growth conifer bearing the earliest traces of turpentine labor in the region, the box cut, it deserved proper preservation. The boxed cavities on the tree predate Dr. Charles Herty's 1902 invention of the cup-and-gutter system and would have been made at some point in the 1800s. Lost in the deafening roar of his chainsaw, a tool he brandished like an instrument of combat – longtime weapon to pine – he was struck, in seemingly contradictory fashion, that the pine he had just happened upon would be safest if he removed it from its natural habitat. Carter recalls it all quite vividly:

I was cutting a big cypress in the creek down here, and I just happened to glance around and seen this pine tree with an old box cut. And I had seen box cuts, you know, in trees all my life – in *stumps* – but never in a whole tree.<sup>2</sup> And I kept looking at it while the saw was running, and I kept pushing the saw into that cypress. And when I got to step on the other side to make the other cut on the cypress, I looked over at the other side of the pine tree, and there was a box cut there too! And I said, “Dang! That one’s got *two* box cuts,” and at that point I just shut the saw off! I walked over to the tree and seen it had two more regular catfaces with tins and all. But the two box cuts is what fascinated me because they wasn’t but about four foot high before they quit. No tins, no nothing on them. And they were in perfect shape. They wasn’t rotted. They was just solid lightered. And I looked at that tree, and it was a whole standing tree. And I looked at it and I said, “That tree’s going in my house somewhere.” And

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<sup>2</sup> The distinction Carter draws here is indeed significant. Several former turpentiners maintain and display centuries-old stumps that bear evidence of the box axe. I personally have seen them in the collections of Milton Hopkins, Gillis Carter, and Barry Nobles, among others. But the existence of a fully intact tree with these marks seems to defy the laws of nature, for few trees were able to withstand the lethal damage of the boxing technique. Earl Carter’s find is, to my knowledge, the only such tree known to exist in the pine belt today.

now *where* exactly, me and my wife, we may have to fuss about it, but it's going in there *somewhere*.

Carter cut the tree from his farm the same day he found it, dragging it from the woods to his front lawn where he would pressure wash it to remove the dirt, loose wood, and sawdust that had accumulated on its surface over the centuries. It required no chemical preservative or treatment, for as solid lightered wood, it had naturally developed the properties of creosote and pitch that would protect it from rot. For approximately two years following that day, Carter preserved and protected the tree under a shelter on his property while the construction of his new home progressed. When the frame of the house was finally mounted upon its foundation, Carter explained, “we brought the tree in and put it in the house.”

Carter's simple explanation – that they “brought the tree in and put it in the house” – belies the labor and logistics that must have gone into lodging the tree in place, for the sight of the tree today is nothing short of spectacular (see Figures 4.6-4.7). The tree extends, dramatically, from the floor of the home's first level, beyond the wraparound wooden staircase, to the rafters on the ceiling over the second-story loft some twenty feet above. To the unacquainted onlooker, it appears to have been standing in its current place for an eternity, and the home to have been constructed around it. Indeed, it is difficult to determine where the tree starts and where it stops, for it appears to sprout from the soil beneath the tile flooring, to exit through the ceiling, and to extend indefinitely into the sky beyond the roof. An enormous and clearly defined catface, carved long ago with a long-handled puller, stretches two-thirds up the length of the tree. The face stops just three feet shy of a small perch, where dangles a single strand of Spanish moss and a taxidermic turkey keeps watch from the rafters. “It's one of those believe-it-or-nots,” Earl's cousin Gillis says of the rigging.



Figure 4.6

Timothy C. Prizer

Earl Carter's catfaced pine stretches from the tile flooring of his living room into the ceiling above the rafters of his second-story loft. Here, his cousin Gillis looks up at the tree with wide-eyed wonder.



Figure 4.7

Timothy C. Prizer

Halfway between the top of the catface and the point at which Earl Carter's tree meets his ceiling, a taxidermic turkey and a piece of Spanish moss hang upon a lone branch.

Looking at it for the first time, I was reminded of folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's reflections on the problems inherent in the display of items that, for any number of reasons, cannot easily or even possibly be "physically detached, carried away, and installed for viewing." "What happens," she writes, "to the intangible, the ephemeral, the immovable, and the animate?" "The immovable," she answers, "whether a mesa, pyramid, cliff dwelling, or landform, can be recorded in photographs, but presents formidable logistical obstacles to those who would detach and carry it away" (1991:394). With this in mind, Earl Carter's initial explanation of the tree's installation left me dissatisfied. It was cursory and prosaic, suggesting simplicity and profoundly understating the grandeur of the tree. "Certainly," I said to him, "you encountered a number of obstacles in removing the tree from the woods and lodging it within the confines between your floor and ceiling here, right?" "Well," he laughed:

I had a tractor with a big boom that we used to load tobacco on the trailer – it was about a twenty-foot boom on it. And we took it and stuck it in the front door with the tree and pushed it as far as we could. But we got it in far enough that we could put the top of the tree up on the second floor, up on the loft in there. So that give us the start right there. Then we could – it was about seven of us, men that was helping build the house – it took all of us and the people that worked [in the fields] with me too, all them picking up on the tree and sliding it on in, and then standing it up, and then we just rolled and walked it over to the corner. And when we got it to where we wanted it, we put some big lag bolts through it to hold it in place. And it goes through the ceiling – it looks like it goes all the way through the top of the house – but it actually goes through the ceiling about four inches.

Carter grinned as he explained how he knew exactly when the house was ready for the tree:

We had the tree here – I had the tree laying in the yard here a week or two weeks waiting on the time to get right to where we could put it up, get the stairs built because it's in there at the corner of the stairwell. So when it got right on building the house, when we get all that built and everything in the top of the house, we could finally fasten it in to the thing. It supports the house, for sure. It's in there good. You couldn't take it out easy at all. The tree will never move. There's bolts halfway up the tree between the floor and the loft, and also at the very top. And it's just sitting right there on the concrete floor, grout around the base to stabilize it, but it looks like it's coming right out the floor... Lots of people ask me, "Y'all built this house around that tree?" No. But just to walk up to it and look at it, it's that way.

In uprooting the tree and replanting it inside his home with such realism that, if anything, the house – not the tree – appears out of place, Earl Carter has underscored the fact that, conceptually, landscape and material culture have the potential to act as interchangeable parts of the same phenomenon. Also, in taking the landscape and literally transporting it indoors, he has exhibited that one's sense of place may manifest itself as powerfully inside as it does out, especially in a region where the landscape has, for centuries, occupied a central position in the individual and collective identities of its inhabitants. As Carter observes, "The best part about it? It was on this farm is where it come from. It wasn't, you know, on somebody's farm twenty miles away or nothing. It was on *this* farm here. And I reckon it'll stay here until it burns or whatever – it's *in* the house."

The tree in Earl Carter's home is a piece of history, a piece of the landscape, and a piece of material culture. But it is also, in itself, an index of the history of the turpentine industry's material culture, a museum exhibit that charts the industry's past through its material remains. Earl Carter has made it so. Beginning with the box cuts, the catfaces, and the tins that were on the tree when he found it, Carter has since actively sought after and collected turpentine's material culture so as to use his tree to document the progression of the industry's history through its material transformations. To this day, he keeps his eyes peeled for discarded tools and equipment as he travels the rural routes of the pine belt. He drops in and inspects the inventory at local antique stores, where turpentine tools have become popular items for individuals wishing to afford their homes a rustic flair with relics from "the olden days." And like many, he networks with others who maintain collections of turpentine's material past to track down rarer and harder-to-find artifacts. Each time he finds a new piece, he tacks it to the tree inside his home, and turpentine's historical puzzle inches ever closer to completion.



Figure 4.8



Timothy C. Prizer

Earl Carter actively collects the many styles of turpentine cups that forest researchers developed over the course of the industry's history. As he acquires new pieces, he tacks each of them to his tree to tell turpentine's story through its material culture.

As I stood with him beside the tree in his home, Carter ran his fingers through the grooves of the face and guided me along a verbal tour of turpentine's history through its material culture:

The tins on it is the original tins on the tree. But I've just got all kinds of cups from different eras, different stages of turpentine where they started off with the box cuts – that's the first two in the bottom. Then they went to the clay pot. And I got one clay pot on it. And I've also got this rare glass cup, but I ain't put it on the tree yet because it cost us so dern much, I don't want to bust it. But then I got the butterfly cup, what they call the butterfly, which is the triangle. And then I got the regular aluminum and the rare metal cups, they started with the quart cups. Mostly all of them was galvanized, but they come out with the aluminum... And then I got the regular half-gallon cup too. I just wanted one of every kind on the tree. And I got one clay cup that come from North Carolina. And I've never seen none of them down here. But if you look at it, you'd think it was cut to be put on this tree. My brother got it for me at a yard sale, I believe it was, or an antique store or something. Anyway, he got two of them to give to me. And I was just looking at one of them. And the way the tree's cut in the bottom, there are notches cut on one of the faces, and that cup fits perfectly in, just like it was made for it. Now, whether we had some of those cups down here and people just throwed them away, I don't know. But this tree has got a notch cut for that dang cup. And it fits perfectly.

Earl Carter's collection of equipment and tools-of-the-trade span the entirety of turpentine's long history. The boxed cavities cut in the base of the tree remind us of the

earliest stage of naval stores activity, while a plastic spray bottle, hung by its trigger over the lip of an aluminum cup, recalls turpentine's recent decline and efforts to save the industry by treating catfaces with sulfuric acid to increase resin yields. Together, then, the tree and the material traces pinned upon it constitute a tangible history lesson and serve as yet another powerful example of commemorative action in the pine belt.

As we encountered in the commemorative activities of George Music, Jr. and Gillis Carter, it may again appear a contradiction to suggest that Earl Carter took his chainsaw to the old pine that day in the interest of preservation. But indeed he did, for his is once again an act of preservation concerned more with *history* than the environment. Earl Carter knew that neither the tree, nor the industry's history, would be safe were he to leave the tree to fend for itself in the woods. His efforts here speak to his awareness of material culture's unique ability to carry the past into the future. In removing the tree from the context in which one would expect to find it and creating the bizarre anomaly of a fully intact, catfaced pine within the walls of his home, he has inspired curiosity on the part of those who see it and has thus done his part to ensure that the history of the turpentine industry does not die with the last living turpentine. But why, one could logically ask, would a tobacco farmer with seemingly no real personal investment in the history of the turpentine industry wish – and go to such trouble – to create this profound commemorative statement on turpentine's behalf? Even his cousin Gillis marvels at once over the beauty and perfection of the tree and at the fact that his cousin-the-tobacco-farmer loves turpentine enough to put the tree in his home. When I posed this question this way to Earl Carter, however, his tone turned introspective, philosophical. It is really quite simple, he explained:

Because there are *none* of them left. You can't find one. And I've had some old-timers, you know, old people that have said, "*Man*, I'd have

never thought about putting a catface in my house, but say, I'm glad you've got it in there because you can't see one nowhere else in this world." One old-timer, a man over in Willacoochee, he's been meaning to come see the tree here for a couple years now. He's got one like it, a stump with five box cuts in it, in his front yard. But he says he just *has* to come see the tree *inside* a man's home. He couldn't believe it. Other old turpentine men have asked me, "Say, how in the world, Earl, did it keep from burning?" I said, "Because it was right in the middle of the creek. And it was right where another little creek come in. So it was always a wet spot right there, and it was right on the run of the creek, and fire never would burn in there where it was wet." And they say, "Well, I understand that. But it stood unharmed over a hundred years because none of the faces had never burnt nowhere." I know it. It's just one of those things that's just amazing, you know.

As in his cousin's desire to have catfaced trees leave an impression on a younger generation, Earl Carter explains that it is not only old-timers who are fascinated by his tree. His tone is especially proud in speaking to the ways young people have responded to the oddity of a tree implanted inside his home:

You wouldn't think any kids, I mean like high school kids and all, would have any interest in it. But they'll sit here and ask me questions for a half hour about turpentine, about this tree. You know, why I got it here, and what were these, how did it do this? And like the streaks on it, they don't understand nothing about what you put a streak on with – a hack or a puller. None of them has an idea about it, and when I got them in there, I can show it to them. And then they'll sit back, "Well, I see now. I like



Figure 4.9

Timothy C. Prizer

One of the greatest satisfactions Earl Carter (left) receives from the catfaced tree in his home is the fact that it so effectively serves as a conversation piece for young and old alike. Here, he and his cousin Gillis discuss the streaks in the tree.

that. You know, I didn't ever know that's what you done. I didn't know nothing about turpentineing." They don't know a thing about it because I reckon the last turpentine that was around here was about twenty years ago. So there are kids now that's done out of high school that ain't never seen a tree that was being worked. And they don't know that's an old catface unless somebody tells them. There are a lot more that are more interested in it than you would really think. For, when they see it, they

wonder what it is. And you start telling them and they want to know more and more and more about it. And it's a good conversation piece. You can talk for a while on that tree. And I like to sit there and talk with them. And Angie says, "You'd sit there and talk with them all day, Earl!" And I say, "Yeah, I would! Because I like talking about it."

Preserving the tree, telling the story of turpentine's history, and educating young people on the lives and labor of their forebears is important to Earl Carter's sense of regional identity. He understands the vital role turpentine has played in his region, in his community, and in the lives both of families who made turpentine the centerpiece of their economic efforts – like his Uncle Era and cousin Gillis – and those families, like his own, who relied on turpentine for supplemental financial support. "If you worked turpentine at all," Carter reflects, "you just can't help but remember it. It used to be a *big* deal, a *real* big deal in these parts, and people don't know it or plumb forgot... For many of us, it was the same way that hogs have done for years and years and years," he adds:

It was just something added on the farm that kept a small farm operation going. It was extra income, and with turpentine, there wasn't no expense to it. For years, all you had was a hack. That was the only expense to it. It was just an added income that really helped, and since it's gone, there are a lot of people that would be working in the woods with the money [it brought]. Because turpentine was good money when it left. It was *dang* good money. But you couldn't get nobody much to do it now.

Reflecting upon the importance of turpentine to the part of the world that has been his home since birth, Carter reveals that the industry occupies a place not only in his regional identification but also his individual identity. While his working life has been spent primarily in a tobacco patch rather than the dip woods, he too misses turpentine:

I miss seeing the turpentine. Because these old men that worked it around here, I knew all of them. And I'd stop with them in the woods over there, and I'd tell them, "Let me chip two or three." And they'd say, "Nah, you'll mess the face up." Which, they didn't know I knew how. I had chipped boxes for several years. And I'd get the hack from them, and I'd talk them out of it. "Nah, I ain't going to mess it up." And once I got the hack in my hand, I'd put on a streak about as good as they could. And they'd say, "Well, where'd you learn to chip boxes like that?" Well, it just tickled me, and you know, I'd tell them me and my brother worked up here for about five years and we learned how to chip and pull and everything. And then every time I'd get back by and I'd stop with them, they'd say, "Come on and chip a few while I cool or something," and I'd chip eight or ten for them. And it was just something, you know, an art or trade you learned. And you always liked doing it... But, you know, it was fun to pull eight or ten or chip a few trees for them, and talk with them. Because they were always good old people, them old men were. And you enjoyed being around them. And it's just something you miss. There ain't none of them here anymore, very few of them that's even *living* anymore. And these young ones, there will be very few who know how to put on a streak – *very* few of them.

Though Earl Carter recognizes the gradual and inevitable dissipation of turpentine's visibility on the landscape, he is proud to have done his part to preserve the industry's place in his region's memory by moving a piece of that landscape to safety inside his home. In weaving the concepts of landscape and material culture together as one, he has stimulated curiosity and thus promised to move the past into the future through the

durability of the material trace. “It’s just an industry that’s gone,” he says. “And if somebody don’t tell it, pretty soon nobody will. And my tree in there, as long as it’s around, you can say, ‘Well, that’s the way it was over a hundred years ago.’ It was a rough start back then. You had to chip that box in that tree. That took some work doing that. You was swinging an axe, man.”

Earl and Angie Carter put the finishing touches on their new home in 2004, and they have delighted in it since. It contains all of the features and charm they envisioned early on. But it is that one powerful, unanticipated addition to the home that has effectively rendered it part of the nexus of commemorative action in the pine belt. The catfaced pine tree that towers over visitors to the Carters’ home reminds us of a number of key points concerning material culture and memory. First, that bold and imaginative commemorative statements, especially ones that exploit the physical durability of material culture and elicit notions of provenance and “lived” experience, have a unique ability to stimulate the sort of curiosity, conversation, and dialogue that leads to the preservation of history and the mutual understanding of its import. Earl Carter’s explicit hope is that his tree serves as a sort of “elephant in the room” that no one can resist discussing, for he knows this is how history perseveres in the face of change.

The second point, in essence an extension of the first, is that nostalgia is critical and productive, an effective means of coping with and commenting upon change. Indeed, as a tobacco farmer first and a turpentineer secondarily, Earl Carter provides an especially lucid testament to the fact that nostalgia does not merely grasp for an imaginary, idealized, and irrecoverable past. Were it so, Carter’s commemorative expression would inexplicably lament a past that is hardly his own. Carter’s nostalgia shows a genuine appreciation for the role turpentine played in helping to support his family. But he most resoundingly puts to rest any notion that his may be an act of purely

romanticized nostalgia in emphasizing that one of his principal goals is to educate young people about where they come from. He recognizes that people must adequately understand their pasts in order to effectively deal with their futures.

Third, Earl Carter's commemoration of the turpentine industry prompts us once again to consider the semantic nuances indexed within the concept of *preservation* – those tricky connotations that tempt us to find contradiction in efforts to preserve history by manipulating the landscape and exploiting the environment. Commemorations of the turpentine industry, however, draw *consistently* – in the sense both of regularity of occurrence and coherence of thought – upon its unique landscape to facilitate the preservation of history and the perpetuation of memory.

The fourth and final point Carter's tree highlights is that *sense of place* may manifest itself in infinite forms – on the landscape, through the display of the material artifact, indoors as well as outdoors. As his transformation of the landscape to interior decoration and commemorative display attests, there are endless possibilities for the manifestations that notions of place may assume – especially when left to the creative imaginations of individuals like Earl Carter. Indeed, the catfaced pine tree that soars to the rafters of Earl Carter's home offers a powerful and uniquely literal example of Henry Glassie's observation that "Material culture records human intrusion in the environment. It is the way we imagine a distinction between nature and culture, and then rebuild nature to our desire, shaping, reshaping, and arranging things during life. We live in material culture, depend upon it, take it for granted, and realize through it our grandest aspirations" (1999:1).

## **Material Articulations:**

### Theories of Materiality, Metaphor, and Memory

*Remembrance is not a process internal to the human mind; rather, it is a process that occurs in the bodily encounter between people and things.*

– Andrew Jones, *Memory and Material Culture* (2007:26)

*All life stories are not told in words.*

– Barbara Babcock (1986:320)

Of all the subfields underlying the broader disciplines of the humanities and social sciences – disciplines like folklore, anthropology, and history – the study of material culture invites perhaps the most vehement theoretical arguments over the perceived significance or triviality of its subject. While a number of scholars increasingly locate profound statements of identity and memory in articulations of the material world, many others apparently continue to devote the majority of their professional careers to the study of material culture only to undercut the significance of the items that constitute their focus; that is, some scholars seem to engage material traces of the past only to depreciate the value of those very traces.

It is rather simple to understand why this is so. Material culture, in its critics' defense, does in fact readily lend itself to the charges of romanticism and wistfulness so often leveled at it. In attics, closets, sheds, and storage spaces, we increasingly maintain enormous collections of items that represent our pasts – tools, toys, photographs, and letters – not because these remnants necessarily mean so much to us, but because the act involved in throwing them away would constitute a sort of ritual symbolizing the disposal of our pasts, and as such, is too difficult to carry out. As Walter Benjamin speculates in his essay "Unpacking My Library," the act of collecting might be no more than "merely a dam against the spring tide of memories which surges towards any collector as he contemplates his possessions" (Benjamin quoted in Healy 1994:33). Historian John Gillis, drafting a similar metaphor, has argued that because individuals

find themselves endlessly “swimming in the... flood of change..., every attic is an archive, every living room a museum. Never before,” he continues, “has so much been recorded, collected; and never before has remembering been so compulsive... What we can no longer keep in our heads is now kept in storage” (1996:14). In cluttered closets, cobwebbed storage sheds, and dark attics, our items serve to remind us unexpectedly, to overwhelm us with memories of the times they represent, and, so the argument goes, to kindle mournful emotions that cause us to reach longingly for a past that has forever escaped us – and that may have never existed as viewed through the rose-tinted glass of memory. Were we not the compulsive packrats and indiscriminate magpies that we are, these studies insist, we would be better off, effectively permitting ourselves to see through our idle lamentation to become critical thinkers about our pasts. Were we able to take the leap involved in moving our unused items from the attic to the landfill, those items would almost immediately lose their power to affect us in this way – forever out of sight, forever out of mind. The past would not be forgotten utterly, but those items that remind us too rawly or deceptively would be ultimately divested of their capacity to do so.

It is one thing to suggest that miscellaneous items locked away in storage represent an inability to dispose of, or move beyond, an idealized past. But what of when these items are removed from the shed, the closet, the barn, or the heap in the backyard and placed on display? What of when they are placed in clear view upon the mantle, on the wall, by the door, or on the lawn, not as impending reminders that unexpectedly jolt us back to times stowed away in our subconscious minds but as *constant* reminders that, by our own design, force us to systematically and recurrently remember, interpret, and confront the past? Herein, I believe, is where the real power of material culture lies. When we take physical traces of the past, no longer useful to us for their intended

functions, and grant them newfound utility as items that Edward S. Casey calls *commemorabilia* – pieces of material culture that come to commemorate and index past event, action, person, or place – we infuse inanimate objects with powerful statements of identity, memory, and autobiography (Casey 1987:247). Folklorist Barbara Babcock concisely charted the multifaceted significance of material culture in 1986:

When we... examine how and in what forms people reflect on their own experience, construct a sense of self, and interpret life events, we tend to focus on verbal and performative genres. I would argue, however, that cultures and the individuals within them not only constitute, reflect on, and reconstitute themselves through what they say and what they do but through articulations of the material world as well... for objects are used not only to represent experience but also to apprehend it and interpret it, to give it meaningful shape. All textualization is not verbal. Objects do speak and should be heard as significant statements of personal and cultural reflexivity, as shapes that “materialize a way of experiencing,” and “bring a particular cast of mind out into the world of objects, where men can look at it.”<sup>3</sup> (1986:318)

Henry Glassie, too, has called attention to the fact that folklorists have historically favored the ephemeral aspects of culture – performative genres like folksong, dance, jokes, and oral history – over material culture, which Glassie defines as “the tangible yield of human conduct” (1999:41). Like Babcock, Glassie reflects on the differences as well as the similarities between oral and material realms of human action, and he impels others to carefully consider the profound implications of groups’ and individuals’ material expressions:

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<sup>3</sup> Babcock quotes from Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (1976:1478).

It is an odd term, material culture, for culture is immaterial. Culture is pattern in mind, inward, invisible, and shifting. Material things – red wheelbarrows, for instance – stand solidly out there in the world. But I have become accustomed to the term over time, and I even find virtue in its ungainly conjunction of the abstract and the concrete, for it cautions us to recall that we can know about culture only as it cycles in flashes and scraps through the sensate. We have things to study, and we must record them dutifully and examine them lovingly if the abstraction called culture is to be compassed, if the striving of the human actor is to be met with fellow feeling... Beginning necessarily with things, but not ending with them, the study of material culture uses objects to approach human thought and action. (1999:41)

Glassie, Babcock, and others correctly note that, like words, material forms may contain individuals' autobiographies, articulate a group's or a region's history, and effectively facilitate remembrance, thought, and feeling (Babcock 1986:320-1). Accurately rendered, material culture is virtually a narrative genre.

Unlike most narrative genres, however, the physicality of material culture works to confront the ephemerality of both memory and the oral representation thereof. Memories forever threaten to escape us, to abandon their tenuous, vaporous position in our minds, and to drift into oblivion. We attempt to preserve them in song and story, but we understandably fear that, in their evanescence, they will fade as quickly as their audible vibrations come to rest. Even if they are safe within our own minds, in what form do we express them to ensure a lasting impact upon those with whom we wish to share our memories? It is in fact these apprehensions that lead to our use of film and tape to document and preserve our lives, our pasts, our creative flourishes, those

impulses to compose and give birth to new forms. And it is precisely these same concerns that drive former turpentiners and others to enlist the landscape and the material trace to serve in the interest of memory. As we saw with the landscape, the durability and perceived permanence of material culture permits it to preserve memory in concrete, corporeal form, transcending limits of time to carry the past into the future. “The past is vast, and it is gone,” Henry Glassie reflects. “Almost all of it is gone utterly, leaving no trace in the mind or archive. We know the past only through things that chance to exist in the present: old books, broken pots, disturbed memories. Yet, even the tattered scraps that remain are too many, overwhelming in their multiplicity, their intransigence, their unfitness to narrative orders” (1999:6). It is thus, Glassie writes elsewhere, that “History is not the past; it is an artful assembly of materials from the past, designed for usefulness in the future” (2003:176). Memory’s “unfitness to narrative orders” inspires us, as archaeologist Andrew Jones observes, to find ways of “storing memory in extrabodily form” as a means of overcoming our awareness of the fact that “the retrieval of memories, through the act of remembrance, is inexact and faulty” (Jones 2007:1). “The durability of objects,” Jones notes, “is then taken to indicate the preservation and endurance of memory” (2007:39).

Though the points Babcock, Glassie, and Jones help me make above may seem relatively innocuous – acceptable ruminations on the profundity of culture manifested in material form – several scholars remain convinced that artifactual display represents little more than the most bathetic sentimentality of all commemorative expressions. Many entertain what I feel is the obvious contradiction of acknowledging the symbolic power of objects and then suggesting that the emotions evoked by objects are, at best, fallacious, and, at worst, mawkish and artificial. Not uncommon are arguments like those of Susan Stewart, whose book *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the*

*Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (1993), while a brilliant philosophical accomplishment, is determined to render nostalgia, as expressed through the material world, a “social disease” that precludes historical discernment and authentic emotion (ix). Throughout, Stewart remains preoccupied with notions of “utopian nostalgia” and posits strict dichotomies that counterpose authenticity versus fabrication, natural purity versus artificial contamination, and the realness of lived experience versus the artifice of material collection and display. She views material traces and their commemorative functions as temporally unilateral – desperate attempts to recapture purely romanticized pasts that never were. “The souvenir,” Stewart writes, “involves the displacement of attention into the past. The souvenir is not simply an object appearing out of context, an object from the past incongruously surviving in the present; rather, its function is to envelop the present within the past. Souvenirs are magical objects because of this transformation. Yet the magic of the souvenir is a kind of failed magic” (1993:151). Paradoxically, Stewart argues elsewhere in the book that material displays manage to secrete and suppress the past. Though the material display “speaks to the cultural organization of the material world, it does so,” she insists, “by concealing history and temporality; it engages in an illusion of timelessness. The message... is that nothing changes” (1993:29). Roger Abrahams suggests the same in his observation that “in so collecting and organizing [material culture], all of culture is objectified, and the study of traditions becomes a part of natural history, subject to the same kinds of organization and classification as geological and biological entities” (1993:16). By these assessments, then, the material display is a sort of “homemade universe” that ascribes mostly fictional meaning and symbolism upon inanimate objects in an act of “failed magic” and fetishism (Stewart 1993:162-3).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> I should clarify what is meant by Stewart’s and others’ use of the terms *fetish* and *fetishism* to describe material assemblages. The term *fetish* was coined as a result of colonial European interaction with West Africans along the Gold Coast in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Dutch and Portuguese slave traders and merchant-

Studies like Stewart's discount and even deride the notion that material collections play a vital role in the formation of identity and the expression of experiential memory. In *On Longing*, for example, Stewart consistently places quotation marks around terms like *personal*, *self*, and *identity* when speaking of the so-called profundity of material articulations. It is an effort on her part to indicate that, while she is aware of others' defense of artifactual displays, she remains committed to her intellectual opinion that the material assemblage is a contrived expression (Stewart 1993:162). Stewart is far from alone in this estimation. David Lowenthal makes his agreement immediately evident in his choice of the sardonic title *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* for his 1996 volume. Indeed, as Ray Cashman notes, one need only refer to the general body of scholarship on nostalgia to learn that material expressions represent a "fevered, uncritical" rush to indiscriminately preserve pieces of a purer past (Cashman 2006:137), or to find that nostalgia is an illness inflicted by the onset of modernity (Chase and Shaw 1989; Hewison 1987; Lowenthal 1985, 1996; Nora 1989).

The errors inherent in these studies are made evident by ethnography, be it in my work in south Georgia, Ray Cashman's in Ireland, or Henry Glassie's in virtually every corner of the globe. Perhaps most notable among the errors is the conflicting notion that material collections somehow manage to, one, romantically preoccupy the past while, two, imparting the illusion of changelessness. I must address the latter point first. In displaying *in the present* objects *from the past*, people neither wish to nor succeed in

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adventurers found West Africans' spiritual relationships with inanimate objects "primitive" and devised the term *feitico* to describe what they felt to be a "confusion of the religious and the economic, a denial of the proper boundaries between things, between animate subjects and inanimate objects" (Jones 2007:32-3). Marx much later adopted the term to refer to the fetishism of commodities and the ways that commodities managed "to make a fetish of the invisible and *immaterial*" (Jones 2007:33, emphasis in original). As archaeologist Andrew Jones points out, "[I]n European eyes, fetishes are denounced as irrational entities that crop up when non-Westerners confuse things with people," but today, the term *fetish* refers to the fact that material items often serve to "concentrate or localise human experience and belief in the power of objects" (2007:34). Chris Healy elaborates, noting that "in order for an object to be associated with social memory it must be fetishised, that is, it must be transformed into a representation of something other than itself to become the subject of desires" (1994:36).

concealing change. In fact, the collection and display of obsolete objects deliberately spotlights that very obsolescence and, in doing so, *calls attention* to change. Put another way, an item stripped of its workaday functionality and foregrounded on display serves as artifactual documentation of the very changes that have transformed it from a tool to a relic, from an item of utility to an item of the aesthetic. The message intrinsic to the collections of former turpentiners is that things in fact *do* change and that these changes should be appropriately documented, interpreted, understood, and addressed. Ray Cashman, through fieldwork in a Northern Irish community, has similarly shown that “Nostalgic practices do not offer people the power to literally arrest change, but they do offer them the temporal perspective necessary to become critics of change, and more or less willing participants” (2006:146). Moreover, Cashman observes, individuals’ “voluntary museumification” allows them to “interrupt modernization temporarily for the sake of meditation and appreciation, to take stock in the face of rapid and irrevocable change” (2006:146-7). Material traces of the past – collected, preserved, and displayed – grant individuals the opportunity to “register and critically evaluate” the “massive economic, social, and cultural changes associated with modernity” (Cashman 2006:137,144). Henry Glassie agrees, pointing out that the stark juxtaposition of the material past against the mass-produced plasticity of current commoditization and consumerism *highlights*, rather than hides, change. “The collection,” Glassie writes, “represents a victory over disorder in industrial times, when the flood of goods threatens to sweep us to madness in a rising tide of irrelevant trash” (1999:86). Thus, in the pine belt, where tools of the turpentine trade have lost their practicality as a means to facilitate work in the woods, they have consequently regained usefulness as effective *markers*, not masks, of change.

Equally flawed, by extension, is the notion that the collection and display of material objects invariably reveals a sense of desperation for, or obsession with, the romantic past. As representations of change, material collections are temporally complex, enlisting the past to evaluate the current state of affairs and to outline potential paths for the future. It bears reiterating that the assemblage of material traces from the past is an expression concerned as much with the present and future as it is with the supposed glory days of a bygone era. Collections are efforts, as Cashman observes, “not only to remember, but also to reconsider – to leave a conceptual space between now and then” (2006:147). The distinction Cashman draws here between remembrance and reconsideration is an important one. Remembrance, while an action performed in the present, does not necessarily entail the act of reconsideration – the act of critical thought aimed at using the remembered past as a means by which to understand the present and to affect the future. The concept of *nostalgia*, as I use it, encompasses both actions. It is nostalgia’s capacity to facilitate both recollection and reassessment that makes it powerful not only as a source of emotional and sensory remembrance but also as a tool for analytic thought and interpretation. Rather than an indication of “reactionary romanticism,” Cashman explains, nostalgia “provides critical equipment for living in an unfamiliar present and... for shaping a more desirable future” (2006:148). He similarly points out that “nostalgia is not a disease that wrests agency or afflicts [people] with a compulsive, counterproductive sentiment of loss” – nor, I should add to Cashman’s point, is commemorative activity a symptom of this purported “disease.” Individuals instead, Cashman concludes, “give themselves over to nostalgia because in practice... nostalgia serves as a vehicle for knowledge that offers sought-after perspectives. Nostalgic practices, in other words, are put to critical uses” (2006:154). It is thus that, from turpentine’s material remains, former workers are able to extract profound

experiential meaning, evaluate the current state of their communities, and determine which aspects of the past are worth transmitting into the future, which virtues of history should be upheld for posterity.

Recognizing the temporal complexity of material culture is also critical to an understanding of the ways in which artifacts provide groups and individuals with what Andrew Jones calls “ontological security” (2007:50). Jones refers to the notion that material culture allows people and societies to situate and orient themselves in time, to perceive of their position in the overall sequence of history. All forms of materiality, whether traces from the past or items manufactured for use and consumption in the present, provide us with a sense of our place in historical schemes larger than ourselves. Indeed, the *juxtaposition* of the old with the new provides a visible, sometimes stark, representation of groups’ chronological position in terms of their collective pasts and presents, while also charting trends that allude perhaps to probable directions for times forthcoming. Yet, of all forms of materiality, Jones correctly notes, artifactual traces of the past are particularly powerful indicators of a group’s temporal orientation, for artifacts at once symbolically represent our past experiences, tell of our life’s history, and importantly, remain a part of the physical world once death has removed us from it. Material culture, in essence, “outlives” us, its longevity and durability enabling it to carry the past into the future and permitting us, in Jones’ words, “to transcend [our] own temporal limits” (2007:50). As I have shown, items that constitute material culture perform these feats, in part, by stimulating curiosity among younger generations and inspiring stories of the items’ historical function and value. Moreover, Jones adds, artifacts also manage to preserve fragments of the past “alongside the ever-changing character of things” (2007:50).

The only caveat I would offer here is that it would be misleading to suggest that artifacts “freeze” time or crystallize the past. Rather, the semiotics of the material trace are, like history itself, forever subject to renegotiation, their textured meanings and levels of perceived significance varying based on differences in individual experience, generational association, and notions of racial, ethnic, religious, and gender identity. In any case, however, the material trace does in fact have a unique ability to physically “presence” the past, and it is thus that Jones, among others, proposes that we think of material culture as indexed symbols – rather than explicit representations – of past action. “Objects do not simply represent past events directly,” Jones writes:

rather, past activities of production, construction, and wear are transformed in physical form – they simply refer to the past. But how are these past events recalled? Not through a process of information retrieval but through a process of sensory experience, by inferring the presence of the past through the senses... [D]ue to the physicality or *perdurance* (physical persistence) of material culture, things act as a means of presencing past events to the senses. If we treat objects as indices of past action, then we come to realize that objects do not so much preserve distinct memories in fidelity; rather they *evoke* remembrance. Material culture therefore actively precipitates remembrance. (2007:24-5, emphasizes in original)

The term *presence*, here used as a verb, as in Jones’ idea that “things act as a means of presencing past events,” raises yet another crucial component of the perceived symbolic value of material objects: the notion of *contagion* or *provenance*. Though objects do not innately “*experience, contain, or store* memory” (Jones 2007:22, emphasis in original), they are symbolically granted the capacity to do so through people’s ideas of provenance

– the notion that material things carry with them traces of their past and thus, in a sense, have their own “lived” experiences. This is to say that material traces of the past are thought to “presence” or play witness to past action based upon the knowledge of or assumptions about how, when, or by whom a particular item was once used. This information in turn serves to endow the item with symbolic value. Thus, the act of conferring symbolic significance upon an object is achieved through the accompaniment of a narrative that tells of the object’s past and what that past is felt to represent. Just as *space* contains no intrinsic meaning of its own and only becomes *place* once human beings bestow it with value, material culture must be infused with meaning for it to stand as a symbol of past events remembered; a bark hack is but a bark hack until a turpentine imbues it with symbolic commemorative value.

Henry Glassie and Andrew Jones each help to flesh out these ideas, both using the example, aptly enough, of an axe. Glassie, for his part, reflects that:

Seeing a composition of steel and wood, we pull it into our idea of the axe. We make it imaginatively into a thing for the chopping of timber and cease pondering it. A tool, we say. But for the man who forged and helved it, the axe was more – the realization of his tradition and skill, a device to honor his master and serve his neighbor. And for the man who used it, the axe might have been a token of status, not to be lowered into wood and mere utility. (1999:59)

While Glassie speaks directly here to the power of provenance to bestow symbolic value upon ostensibly valueless objects, Jones suggests as much in less direct fashion:

It is not the axe by itself that chops down trees but rather the axe in its wooden haft acting in concert with a person to achieve the end of woodland clearance. Taking a materialist stance we might say that axes

chop down trees, but taking a sociological stance we might equally counter that axes don't chop down trees, people chop down trees. Both views have their problems; obviously axes alone don't chop down trees, but to say that people chop down trees ignores the role of the axe. Doesn't the axe play any part in the chopping? (2007:35)

Jones' rhetorical question here need not be rhetorical. The answer, simply put, is yes. In fact, the question explains much about the nature of material culture. It helps to explain first, in part, how the material trace, due to its having acted "in concert with a person," is endowed with experiential and commemorative meaning. It explains also how items on the antique and cultural arts markets are granted alleged authenticity – and in turn monetary value – through narratives of their provenance and the history of their ownership and use (Abrahams 1993; Cohen 1988; Malchow 2000). It also helps to explain how, through the notion of *contagion*, a baseball that cost approximately one dollar to manufacture can sell for over \$750,000 after leaving the bat of a professional ballplayer and sailing into the seats for a record-breaking homerun. As Andrew Jones points out, "The history of an object is read in its wear" (2007:21). Indeed, so is its value – whether symbolic, monetary, or, as is often the case, a composite of the two.

While it is essential that we recognize the capacity of objects to "presence" the past – to carry the past onward – we should not overstate this transference of tradition nor should we assume that all displays of the material past are explicitly intended to represent past action or event. Sometimes, the material display is as much about the concept of *presence* in its connotation as a noun as it is in its sense as a verb. This is to say that recognizing material culture's *temporal* complexity – its capacity to speak across linear segments of time – should not preclude us from equally recognizing its *spatial* significance, its ability to comment topically across the spatial spectrum of the here-and-

now and to signify the ways we as humans make sense of the worlds we currently inhabit. Barbara Babcock notes, for instance, that “the objectification of personal experience is not limited to the past” and that it is often “not a matter of recollection but of presence.” “Its subject,” she continues, “is explicitly relationship – between generations, between past and future, and between words and things” (1986:328-9). Henry Glassie likewise points out that material culture “describes habitat, heritage, and the talented self, and it tells of our times,” noting elsewhere that, “Coming into being, the artifact inevitably creates relations – relations between nature and culture, between individual and society, between utility and beauty” (1999:172,143). Andrew Jones acknowledges these facts as well, suggesting that “materiality should be treated as a quality of *relationships* rather than a quality of things” (2007:36, emphasis in original). The emphasis Babcock, Glassie, and Jones place here on notions of *presence*, *topicality*, and *relationship* calls further attention to the fact that nostalgia, as expressed in the material world, is rarely a simple act of desperate longing; rather, it is more often a statement of contemporary relevance exhibiting critical thought on the part of individuals and communities about the realities of their current situation.

I should clarify that every point I have made in this discussion of material culture’s theoretical implications is predicated upon notions of context and contingency. The material past acquires the capacity to act simultaneously as a mnemonic device, a contemporary statement, an expression of future concern, and a gauge of temporal and spatial orientation in large part through its display in unconventional and unexpected contexts – contexts that ultimately serve to render the item a spectacle, an instrument of decoration, and in turn no less than a piece of art. The catfaced pine reaching to the rafters of Earl Carter’s home provides only one example of the ways an adventitious contextual placement can call attention to an item not only as artifact but also as art. We

see it commonly in less extraordinary forms as well: in the use of turpentine tools and equipment as home furnishings, yard ornamentations, wall hangings, mantelpiece décor, and, most explicitly, in efforts at grassroots museumification. All call attention to traces of the material past as art. “Indeed,” Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues, “the litmus test of art seems to be whether or not an object can be stripped of contingency and still hold up... By suppressing contingency and presenting objects on their own, such installations lay claim to the universality of the exhibited objects as works of art” (1991:391-2). It is thus that material traces of turpentine’s past, taken from the woods and propped upon the mantel, undergo a process of “artification” – a term I employ to refer to the means by which ethnographic objects come to be culturally classified as pieces of art.

“Artification” is a process that has understandably come under considerable fire from folklorists and anthropologists, for often their examinations of the phenomenon are directed at formal, federally funded museums and explore the problematic cultural politics and power relations involved in displaying ethnographic objects as works of artistic exoticism (Appadurai 1986; Brett 1996; Cantwell 1993; Cohen 1988; Healy 1994; Jarman 1997; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991, 1995, 1998a, 1998b; Malchow 2000; Stewart 1993[1984]; Whisnant 1995). In cases like the one I present here, however, ones that involve not the bureaucratic will of institutions acting in the interest of heritage tourism but rather the grassroots and voluntary work of individuals and communities, recognizing that the material past has been rendered a form of art helps us to better understand how material culture serves to grant agency to people and their communities. It also helps to explain how artifacts are used to express personal identity and to convey both individual and collective memory. Indeed, employing the word *art* in speaking of vernacular articulations of the material world serves to remind us that

material culture should be taken seriously and treated with great esteem for its deep significance and serviceability to those who seek out, locate, and store profound meaning in their material surroundings. Henry Glassie, who above cautions us to remember that “We have things to study, and we must record them dutifully and examine them lovingly,” likewise suggests that perhaps, in place of the term *material culture*, “Art is a better word” (1999:41). His suggestion here is in large part a response to his observation that the overwhelming majority of the Western world arbitrarily dichotomizes the utilitarian and the aesthetic, demeaning the former and lifting certain pieces of the latter into an “idle elite.” The dichotomy is a cultural construction that crumbles under cross-cultural examination. “For the world’s working majority,” Glassie notes, “utility is a high value, the merely decorative seems trivial, and their greatest creations blend the aesthetic and the useful, just as the good meal blends flavor and nutrition. The potters of Bangladesh make useful pots and beautiful statues, and they call them both *shilpa*: art” (1999:154).

The point is that the infinite forms that comprise the material world – and the equally infinite manifestations that result from human interaction with those forms – all similarly provide people with a critical outlet for expression and therefore merit evenhanded consideration from those of us who wish to explore the theoretical implications of materiality. Whether classified under headings of function and fashion or viewed as a collective whole, material culture deserves our careful study, as the vast array of former turpentiners’ material articulations reminds us.

In the pine belt, we are confronted at once with turpentine trees indoors, turpentine tools upon the mantel, turpentine equipment strewn disorderly yet decoratively across the lawn, and turpentine memorabilia neatly situated in informal gallery exhibits. We find, too, the skilled craftsmanship of the woodworker’s art, as in



Figure 4.10

Timothy C. Prizer

In the wake of the turpentine industry's demise, its material culture includes not only rusted tools and equipment once used in the woods but also the artistic creations of the region's many craftspeople. Buddy Kirkland's ceramic mules pulling pocket-sized wooden barrels on a miniature wooden wagon is just one example of commemorative craftsmanship in the pine belt.

Wade Peebles' handcrafted miniature woods scenes made from fallen pine branches. Peebles' work, displayed each year at Georgia's Catface Community Turpentine Festival in Portal, features action-figure-sized turpentine hands tending to the daily tasks of the dip woods and achieves a level of detailed realism that calls to mind the miniature models on the sets of cinematic blockbusters. Meanwhile, in Nicholls, Georgia, Buddy Kirkland tethers miniature ceramic mules to handmade wooden wagons with strips of leather shoelace, affixing a freight of pocket-sized turpentine barrels to the wagons' platforms. Kirkland's pieces are found in several south Georgia homes, including the old Osierfield train depot that Milton Hopkins called home until his death in 2007. There are also scenes from the turpentine woods oil-painted upon canvas by artists like Ken

Brauner and Robert Butler. Elsewhere in the pine belt, you may find the traditional woodwork of Elmer Tanner or Ronnie Dale Lee, former woodsmen, and the pine sculptures of Taylor Davis, a young artist classically trained in the fine arts who grew up at the knee of his turpentine grandfather. Collected or displayed, passed through tradition or formally learned, each form of material expression bespeaks the universal significance of our physical surroundings and material expressions. As objects of shared experience, they provide the grounds for us to partake in the act of memory, to formulate and negotiate identity, and to expose, exhibit, and express our common humanity.

### **Assemblages of Assessment:**

#### **The Industrious Collection of an Industrial Past**

*I don't know what intrigues me so much about shovels and hoes and axes, but I can't go by one without buying it at a antique market or either picking one up in a junk pile and cleaning it up and putting me a handle in it. I know I'm not going to be able to swing that axe right on, but I like to have several of them anyhow.*

– Gillis Carter

The active collection of turpentine's past is not confined merely to a handful of particularly nostalgic ex-turpentiners. Rather, the great majority of individuals I have encountered in my research preserve, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, traces of their industry's past, for in the industry's absence these are meaningful pieces of one's own past as well. Former turpentiners' collections range from the untidy pile in the shed or carport, on one end of the spectrum, to the deliberately displayed and meticulously labeled exhibition on the other. Between these extremes we find tools as home décor – galvanized cups resting over the fireplace, rust-eaten dip irons hanging from the living room wall, and splintered axe handles propped high upon the bookshelf. Each application of the industry's physical past, from the seemingly passive storage of old equipment to the outwardly avid collection and display of it, establishes the fact that many former turpentiners wish to remember their industry and have found its material

culture to be an effective means of doing so. It is an obvious deduction to note that the industry's physical past serves to emotionally remind former workers of bygone days. What is less obvious, and what I hope to demonstrate here, is how those most passionately engaged in the collection of turpentine's material past deploy physical reminders to speak as much to the present and future as to the past. For the material collection as for the manipulation of the landscape, I prefer to focus upon and underscore the *emergent* qualities of former turpentiners' commemorative behavior – the *action* involved in the expressive manifestation of memory – rather than entertaining blind notions of inert languor and idle longing.

One of the most intriguing testaments to the kinetic and emergent nature of turpentiners' interactions with their physical pasts is the existence of complex networks of individuals who assist each other in expanding their respective collections of the industry's material culture. Through the sale, trade, and gift of turpentine tools and equipment, collectors remain intertwined with one another in an ongoing effort to augment their collections and gradually inch them ever closer to "completion." I cannot count the number of times in my fieldwork that a former turpentiner has proudly shown me a recent addition to his enormous inventory of oxidized tools, cracked handles, and refurbished equipment, following the demonstration with a narrative not only of the item's more distant historical provenance but also of its recent discovery and path to incorporation in the collection. Common are utterances such as, "This one here's extremely rare. I bought it off of a fellow over in Jesup who happened to have a couple lying around in his barn," or "I traded a man who lives down in Folkston for this one. I had an old hack he needed and I'd been looking for one like this for several years now." Above, Earl Carter hints at the network while simultaneously offering a narrative of provenance for one of the pieces in his collection, stating that his brother purchased a

rare form of turpentine cup for him at a yard sale or antique store and that the style of the cup dates it to the era of North Carolina's dominance in naval stores production. Meanwhile, Earl's cousin Gillis highlights the *dynamics* of turpentiners' efforts to collect traces of their industry's past. His description of how he has come by many of the items in his commemorative displays further emphasizes the system of networks that result from the natural drift and flow of daily life in the pine belt:

A man over in Pearson told me last Saturday he knew of a guy who had a couple of the old glass cups he might not mind parting with, you know. Well, I gave him my number and sure enough, he called the other day to let me know he had one ready for me to come by and pick up whenever I could make it back over that way.

Similarly, two of the rusted box axes in Carter's collection are ones he received from a friend he met, as he puts it, "in my Christian movements." I stress here Carter's use of the word *movements*, for it draws further attention to the dynamics of former turpentiners' use of their industry's material past for commemorative purposes. Again, as Carter's language suggests, it is the fortuitous encounter of individuals in motion, the interaction that occurs in the carrying out of unrelated daily activities, that often enables former turpentiners to expand upon their collections.

For former workers who participate in the assemblage of turpentine's past, it is generally accepted that no collection will ever fully represent the great inventory of tools and equipment the industry amassed over its lifetime in the region. Centuries of forest researchers – in constant pursuit of ways to paradoxically increase resin yields while inflicting less harm on the environment – devised, tested, and issued to turpentine producers an enormous array of products and tools designed to enhance both production and ecological responsibility. Innovations that proved useful over time found their way

into the basic stock of the industry's proverbial toolbox and are the most common items in the collections of former turpentiners today; those that proved ineffective or gimmicky have come to comprise the rarest and most sought-after traces of the industry's past. Interestingly, there is also a rich history of innovation among turpentiners themselves. Several unique forms of tools and contraptions arose from the creative imaginations of producers and woodsmen, rather than from the controlled experiments of forest researchers. In any case, the industry's history of perpetual experimentation has resulted today in a material culture too vast and too diversified for the collection of any one ex-turpentiner to fully represent. By the same token, the very breadth of turpentine's material culture serves to perpetuate the act of collecting, to fuel former workers' efforts to render their collections as exhaustive as possible; simply put, the challenge makes collecting more fun. This also explains the sheer number of individuals who participate in the informal network of collectors.

Of the many players in the turpentine belt's dynamic commemorative network, there are those who have been most powerfully lured by the exhilarating search-and-discovery of the industry's artifactual history. In their enthusiasm, these certain few have amassed near-encyclopedic collections of turpentine's material culture and, as a result, have achieved a level of local notoriety in turpentining circles. In addition to Gillis Carter, names like Carroll Butler, Pete Gerrell, Milton Hopkins, Barry Nobles, Jim Morris, and Doug Chassereau are heard commonly in the pine belt for their substantial collections and the important roles they have played in the network. Carroll Butler's reputation as an avid collector coincided with the publication of his book *Treasures of the Longleaf Pines: Naval Stores* (1998). In it, Butler outlines in text and photograph items from the industry's rich history of tools and equipment, many of which come from his personal inventory. *Treasures* is perhaps the only scholastic manuscript ever written

about turpentine *by* an ex-turpentine rather than an outside researcher or reporter.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the book is a source of pride found commonly today on the bookshelves of former turpentiners throughout the region. Pete Gerrell, a retired electrical engineer, also maintains a thorough repository of the turpentine industry's material culture, and he too has compiled an artifactual compendium of the industry. His book, *The Illustrated History of the Naval Stores (Turpentine) Industry* (1997), itemizes his catalogue of home remedies, recipes, and jokes in addition to his collection of tools and equipment. Milton Hopkins, right up to his death in March 2007, excitedly stockpiled not only cups, hacks, pullers, and catfaced stumps but also postcards, photographs, newspaper clippings, magazine articles, letters of correspondence, and all varieties of memorabilia from the industry's storied history. Hopkins painstakingly organized and labeled his items in an informal museum under the arched roof of a greenhouse on his sprawling Osierfield farm (see Figure 4.11). In nearby Alma, Georgia, Barry Nobles maintains shoeboxes of evidence of turpentine's long stint in the pine belt. Among other items, he holds a sizeable cache of now-rare medicinal and household products containing the spirits of turpentine and pine rosin. Thus, in addition to the expected hack or puller, Nobles' collection features antique jars, glass vials, tin canisters, plastic bottles, and paper bags once regularly stocked upon the shelves of drugstores and grocers' markets. Likewise, Jim Morris, a Bainbridge, Georgia law enforcement officer, preserves an endless inventory of the industry's artifactual past with a special interest in turpentine's historical use as an ingredient in medicinal and remedial products. Morris' aspirations of one day authoring a book on turpentine's application as a curative

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<sup>5</sup> Several former turpentiners have written personal memoirs about life and work in the woods (including Milton Hopkins [2001] and Dub Tomlinson [2002]), but few outside of Butler have undertaken an academic approach to the industry. Gay Goodman Wright's master's thesis, "Turpentine: An Ethnohistorical Study of a Southern Industry and Way of Life" (1979) is a near exception to this, for Wright is the daughter of a turpentine. Pete Gerrell's *The Illustrated History of the Naval Stores (Turpentine) Industry* (1997) is educational but hardly academic, and it is likewise written by a man with close ties to the industry but who has never personally worked turpentine.



Figure 4.11

Timothy C. Prizer

Under a label simply marked “Turpentina,” the late Milton Hopkins strapped a dip iron, a caliper, aprons, and nearly every form of turpentine cup ever invented upon this piece of particle board in his extensive collection.

substance is common knowledge among those most active in the region’s network of collectors. Meanwhile, Doug Chassereau is one of the most familiar names in the pine belt not only for his position as Chief Ranger of the Georgia Forestry Commission’s Emanuel County Unit but also for his commemorative actions in response to the demise of the turpentine industry. Chassereau is both a major collector of the industry’s material culture and a volunteer turpentine still worker at commemorative still-firing events and festivals.

In exploring commemorative collections through the complex networks that sustain them, we are therefore able to draw a number of important observations. First, we find that the assemblage of turpentine’s material past is by no means an activity pertaining only to a small minority of exceedingly wistful former turpentiners. Rather,

the collection of the industry's past for purposes of commemoration is a dynamic process and is indeed the norm rather than the exception among ex-turpentiners today. We also find through the efforts of individuals like Pete Gerrell, Jim Morris, and Doug Chassereau that the collection and display of turpentine's material culture is not an avocation belonging exclusively to those with firsthand experience in the turpentine woods. Because the entire pine belt relied for so long on the turpentine economy, and because the industry shaped and structured so much of daily life in the region, commemorations of the turpentine industry understandably occur broadly among a variety of the region's inhabitants. Pine belt residents of all backgrounds recognize the central role the industry played in their region and have thus included its material culture among the most integral pieces of their regional, if not autobiographical, heritage; the rusted cups, gutters, and hacks turpentine left in its wake are now treasured badges of both personal and regional identity.

Further, exploring the inner workings of the region's commemorative networks has revealed that the active collection of turpentine's material culture may not even be confined to the pine belt. Perhaps no one is more aware of the possibility of happening upon an old bark hack or long-handled puller in an unexpected part of the world than is Ken Bass of Baxley, Georgia. An online auctioneer of antiques and historical collectibles, Bass makes his living through the sale of turpentine tools and other agricultural relics on websites like eBay and the antique-specific auction site OldAndSold.com. Bass' bidders are by no means all local to the pine belt; in fact, he ships traces of turpentine's past to antique collectors around the world. Of all the people avidly engaged in the collection of turpentine's material culture, Bass is known to maintain one of the largest of the pine belt's many inventories of turpentine tools and equipment. Accordingly, his name is often referenced as an instrumental link in the informal network of turpentine collectors

in the region. It is of course only natural that Bass would be considered a crucial strand in the network of collectors, for perhaps he more than anyone depends on the network as a means of maintaining a steady supply of items for sale. Indeed, without the active enlistment of network resources, his business would be impossible and his livelihood depleted.

I should acknowledge, as a note of appreciation, that just as the network effectively facilitates former turpentiners' efforts at commemorative collection, it has proven equally invaluable to me in the facilitation of my research. Recalling the many conversations I have had with former turpentiners over the course of my fieldwork, I cannot remember a single one that did not include an emphatic recommendation for me to speak to yet another former turpentine engaged in commemorative activities. Time and again, I received encouragement like that offered to me by Grady Williams. "Sometime when you're back down this way," Williams urged, "you should go have a chat with Doug Chassereau over in Swainsboro. He still works some trees out in Pembroke, and he donates the gum to the folks who run the festivals at Portal and the Agrirama. I'll get you his phone number before you leave." The existence of commemorative networks thus made my own networking nearly effortless; I needed only to follow my consultants' open-ended recommendations and connect the dots across the pine belt.

One of the most important 'corridors,' so to speak, that I followed through the commemorative complex of ex-turpentiners was a literal one, a state highway called Corridor Z. Also known as the South Georgia Parkway and State Route 520, Corridor Z spans the entire southern half of the state and links many of the communities that emerged on the shoulders with the turpentine industry. From the Alabama line to the Atlantic Coast, green "CORR Z" signs swing from power lines and guide travelers through towns like Alapaha, Willacoochee, Waycross, Hoboken, and Nahunta, all of

which once depended almost entirely on the turpentine economy. My consultants' suggestions for further research often sent me whirling through their commemorative networks via this yawning two-lane highway, bound for yet another profound lesson in the meaning of industrial loss and commemoration.

The first time I turned off of the Corridor onto Bridgetown Road in Willacoochee to meet Gillis Carter, I was unaware that the collection of turpentine's material culture was widespread enough to support a commemorative network of like-minded individuals. I arrived just before dusk on a night in late fall, and while the sun fell and the air grew brisk, Carter puffed hot air into his hands and chipped a few fresh streaks in the faces of his pines. Despite the growing darkness, he kindly welcomed my inchoate inquiries into what the trees meant to him and what he hoped for them to represent to those who pass his home. I was immediately engrossed. Listening to his reflections on the industry's absence and his reasons for commemoration, I resented the cold and the shadows that were upon us, and I wished I had been able to arrive earlier in the day. Not wanting to wear out my welcome on the first visit, though, I thanked him, packed up my equipment, and told him I planned to come back as often as he would have me. "Well, Tim," he said, "Helen and I would love to have you anytime you can make it. You're welcome anytime. I just wish you didn't have to take off now. I was gonna run you over to the barn and show you my little collection." In what must have been less than a heartbeat, my equipment was again unpacked and I found myself riding shotgun in Carter's pickup, his headlights pushing the impending darkness in front of us like snow on a plow. The barn was a mere half-mile from his home, and when we pulled up to it, he explained that this, in fact, was the piece of land his father Era had purchased in 1946. His old home, the one he lived in from the age of five, stood just beyond the reach of his headlights. He pointed out the barn that housed his old tools and equipment, explaining

that it was constructed circa 1900. It was a lofted structure with a high, arched roof and large doors on either side that opened to endless expanses of cotton in all directions. We walked to the barn door where Carter released the rusted latch and moved inside, reaching for the elastic string below a light bulb. When the light flickered on, Carter's "little collection" was revealed to be no less than a naval stores museum, the inventory of which was as seemingly endless as the cotton fields that cocooned its surrounding landscape. In an instant, I was exposed to yet another important dimension of turpentiners' commemorative activities (see Figures 4.12-4.13).

That night, Carter and I made several laps around the perimeter of his barn's second-story loft, and he charted the history of the industry through the hundreds of tools propped against the walls. He explained the function of many of the items and placed them in the historical context of their use. Some of them – felling axes, box axes, broad axes, hatchets, mauls, and wooden barrelheads – date to the earliest years of naval stores production, a time before the industry's expansion to south Georgia and north Florida. Other items – tools like wood hacks, cupping axes, clay cups, double-headed nails, and metal barrels known as "Blue Whistlers" – coincide with the early twentieth century and turpentine's first few decades in the Wiregrass region. Still others recall the immediate past and signify the industry's demise. Plastic spray bottles for treating faces with sulfuric acid and pullers with holsters for the spray bottles cut into their handles represent the industry's abortive efforts to hang on in a period of decline. Some pieces, meanwhile, provide few clues to the time of their use. Dip buckets made of wood rather than metal or the many variations of streak hacks, for instance, could coincide with nearly any era of turpentine's past. In any case, it was clear that Carter's museum of occupational artifacts served to thoroughly document the industry through its centuries of buckets, barrelheads, and bark hacks. It was in Carter's barn that I learned how the

industry's history of incessant experimentation had resulted in the vast body of material culture that his collection seeks to embody.



Figure 4.12

Timothy C. Prizer

Traces of turpentine's past span the entire perimeter of Gillis Carter's barn.



Figure 4.13

Timothy C. Prizer

A hanging box and two scrape buckets rest near one of the barn doors overlooking a field of cotton.

I had hardly left the town limits of Willacoochee that night when I began making plans for another visit. Since then, I have returned a dozen or so times, and each time Carter teaches me more about his commemorative use of material culture. In due course, I learned that Carter's relationship with the material past is more than an effort to document the rise and fall of the turpentine industry. It is rather an attempt to coach youngsters on the lessons of the past more generally, knowledge he often imparts upon his "grandbabies" who live next door to him with his daughter and son-in-law. His collection's inclusion of implements with no direct relation to the turpentine industry – a mop with a head of corn shucks or his own grandmother's old hand-powered corn cracker – indicates that the collection is geared perhaps as much to preserving a regional and personal past as an occupational one. "I've just enjoyed my little collection," he says. "I got a lot of my grandmother's and grandfather's stuff in there. It's just a bygone era, and if you don't have somebody to tell you, 'What did they do with these old shucks and this old mop looking thing?' you'll never know. 'Well,' you say, 'they couldn't go to Wal-Mart and buy a mop. They took that and they used it. Kept the old floors plumb slick with that thing.'" Likewise, he explains that the old corn cracker or "biddy mill" was "where us children, fifty or fifty-five years ago, used to pull corn in that little booger and turn it with our hands and it'd crack corn for the little biddies to feed. You didn't have to go to town to buy cracked corn. You could make it right there on the farm." Carter's concern for the region's youth to discover, comprehend, and appreciate the history of the pine belt is such that he hopes someday to advertise his collection as an educational resource, a cultural attraction, to which parents and school groups can bring children for a lesson in the value of their cultural heritage. It is a goal that points once again to the *dynamics* of the collection as a form of commemoration. Like his cousin Earl, Gillis Carter has witnessed the power of material culture to excite the curiosity of young

people, and it is partially to that end that he labors to assemble traces of both turpentine and the region's history at large.

Of course, the majority of artifacts in Gillis Carter's museum of pine belt history *are* remnants of the turpentine industry, and these especially represent deeply personal experiences. "I was raised up in turpentine, and it was my dad's livelihood all of his life," he says as he contemplates the significance of the artifacts:

It just so happens that I've got a love for old tools. I catch myself at the barn sharpening axes all the time. Bush axes. Regular axes. Hatches. I got a little of all of it... And if I find an old axe and it's rusty, I'll clean it up and go to town and buy me a handle. Put it in the vice and I'll take my daddy's old drawing knife, and I'll cut it down to where it'll fit. And I'll fit that booger in and take me some wood and put in the little slot. If not wood, you can put you three or four nails in there, and nail it in there good and tight so that the next fellow who uses it, he's got a good instrument to use. He won't have to be worried about it coming out of the handle and cutting him or hurting somebody else. But it's just always been my love, Tim, and I take pride in it, you know.

While Carter is proud of the oldest and rarest of his items – ones he acquires and restores through the active engagement of commemorative networks – he holds especially dear those that he has simply transferred from the woods to the barn. It is through the physical preservation of these tools in particular – items inscribed with narratives of personal use – that he is also able to preserve, through vivid recollection, memories of the turpentine woods. The sight of scrape boxes evokes wintertime and the image of workers with the heavy containers hoisted upon their shoulders. Collars and harnesses draped over his barn's support beams bring stories of Doc and Blue, mules

that Carter regarded as both loyal friends and trusted employees (see Figure 4.14). Tracing the brim of a dip bucket with his fingertip, he recounts powerful stories of his earliest years in the woods, like the one about his self-sacrificing effort to save a precious bucket of gum as he himself took a spill:

A lot of turpentine farmers would take their children and carry them to the woods... These turpentine farmers would go into the woods and they'd carry little ten-pound lard buckets for their boys – six, eight, ten years old – and improvise with a little wooden paddle. And they couldn't dip much but they'd help their daddy all they could, and that was all part of making a living in the woods. I remember one time, me and my brother was dipping in a little cypress pond down the road here many years ago, and I had a small bucket... And I had my little bucket full of gum and started out of this cypress pond, and I tripped on a cypress knee. And as I fell forward – it was in July or August when the gum was just as soft as water – and I didn't want to lose my gum. Therefore, I dropped it straight down and when I did, I fell over it, and it sloshed that soft tar all over my shirt, arms, face. And I probably cried, but there was a neighbor living nearby, Bertie Mae Spivey lived in a little log house there, and I walked up to her house, and a farmer always kept kerosene at home. And she took that kerosene and got that little shirt off of me and cleaned me up. And that's been over fifty years ago, and I still remember her and love her for that act of goodness she sent my way.

Any attempt to convey the scores of equally moving stories Carter has at his disposal would invite charges of hyperbole, so I will refrain from trying. It should suffice to say that without the material reminders that Carter has assembled into his collection, stories

like the one above might have long escaped him. The effort to thoroughly archive his material past, however, has resulted in an even more infinite archive of experience, the latter of which “materializes” in Carter’s skillful narration of memory.

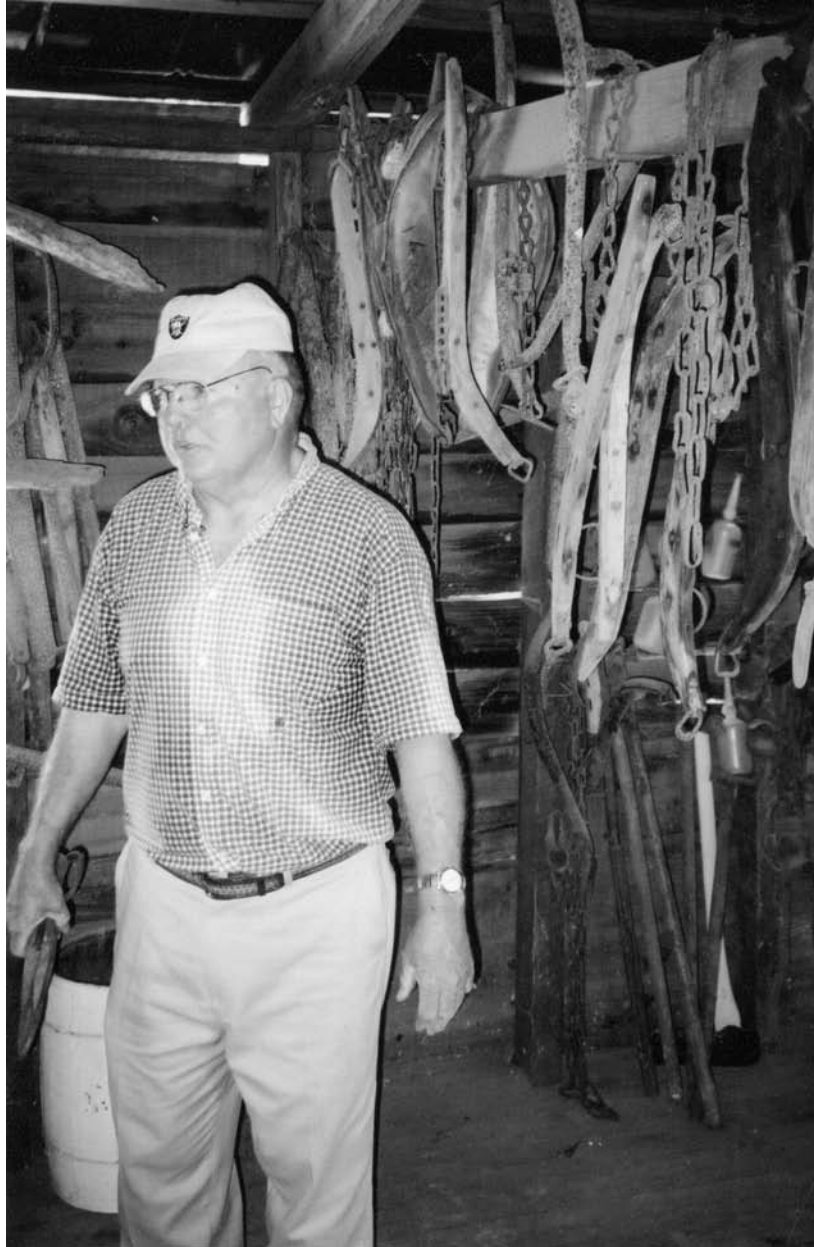


Figure 4.14

Timothy C. Prizer

Gillis Carter’s material artifacts elicit powerful stories about his life in the turpentine woods. Here, collars and harnesses hung over one of the beams in his barn bring stories of Doc and Blue, mules that were once valued employees on Carter’s turpentine operation.

It is usually taken for granted that material objects have the capacity to symbolically represent past action or event. Indeed, the use of material culture for mnemonic and commemorative purposes is found universally across the spectrum of human culture (Glassie 1998). Much less understood is the fact that the material past serves a purpose beyond its effectiveness as a means of recollection. Especially in the structured context of the collection, where the chaos of memories is brought to order in the juxtaposition of items constituting the past, we find verifiable evidence that material culture may also provide the grounds for *assessment*; that is, the collection serves to encapsulate the confusing sequence of changes that have resulted in the circumstances and predicaments to which vulnerable groups must respond and adapt. Gillis Carter's collection, for example, presents the past and the present in stark microcosm, apposing the two in such a way that permits him to evaluate both periods with equal clarity. Just as his accounts above show material culture acting to preserve and perpetuate memory through the stories they evoke, he also employs the material past to come to terms with the significant transformations he has witnessed since the collapse of the turpentine industry. In facilitating the appraisal of the present, then, the past remains critically important but is no longer the means to its own end. Rather, it becomes a catalyst for critical thought and forethought, a lens to bring the present into clearer focus.

I first witnessed this phenomenon in terms of Gillis Carter's collection very early in my relationship with him. In one of my earliest visits to Willacoochee, I asked Carter if he would mind showing me some of the oldest pieces in his collection, those which might recall the earliest years of naval stores activity in America. Without hesitation, he wheeled the head of a wooden barrel toward him on its axis and lifted it for me to inspect. I fingered the parallel planks and considered the careful precision of the cooper's craft. Carter explained the rarity of the old oak-stave barrels today and the

reverse profusion of the more recent metal barrels that have come to litter roadsides and lumberyards throughout the pine belt. As he spoke generically of the old barrels and their role in the broader historical context of the turpentine industry, he suddenly interrupted himself, as he often does, to relate a story of personal experience. “Speaking of these old barrels,” he said:

I remember us boys, my brothers and me, taking Daddy’s old barrels, ones with oak staves in them, down to the natural water hole on this property here to keep the wood moist and keep it from cracking, you know. You had to keep that wood good and moist or it would dry up and rot and the gum would leak out when you hauled it on in to the still to sell. So us boys, my brother Mackey and my baby brother Morris and me, we took the barrels down there quite regularly, Tim. And sometimes we’d even have us a swim at knocking-off time if it was a hot day.

A few seconds of silence followed, and his demeanor turned suddenly introspective. “Times has changed,” he continued. “People has ditched this property, you know Tim, until everything’s dry now. That old water hole’s long gone. Now, water goes to moving and it don’t stop until it gets to the Atlantic or the Gulf, you know.” To be sure, his reflection here was in part a nostalgic reaction to the loss of a meaningful site of experience that had come to inhabit a special place in his memory. Equally certain, memories of times spent with his late brothers engender an emotional response as well. More to the point, however, is the fact that through the engagement of the material past, Carter has been able to take stock of the irrevocable changes that have unfolded since the turpentine industry’s demise. He is able to do so not only in the broad context of his regional past but indeed in the intensely localized context of his own property. Evoking the concerns of George Music, Gillis Carter reveals that he too has felt the detrimental

impact of deforestation and environmental recklessness. In this case, it was the work of an old wooden barrelhead, lifted from its display for close examination, that granted Carter the perspective to notice and react to the changes occurring both on his land and across the many square miles that formerly comprised the turpentine belt.

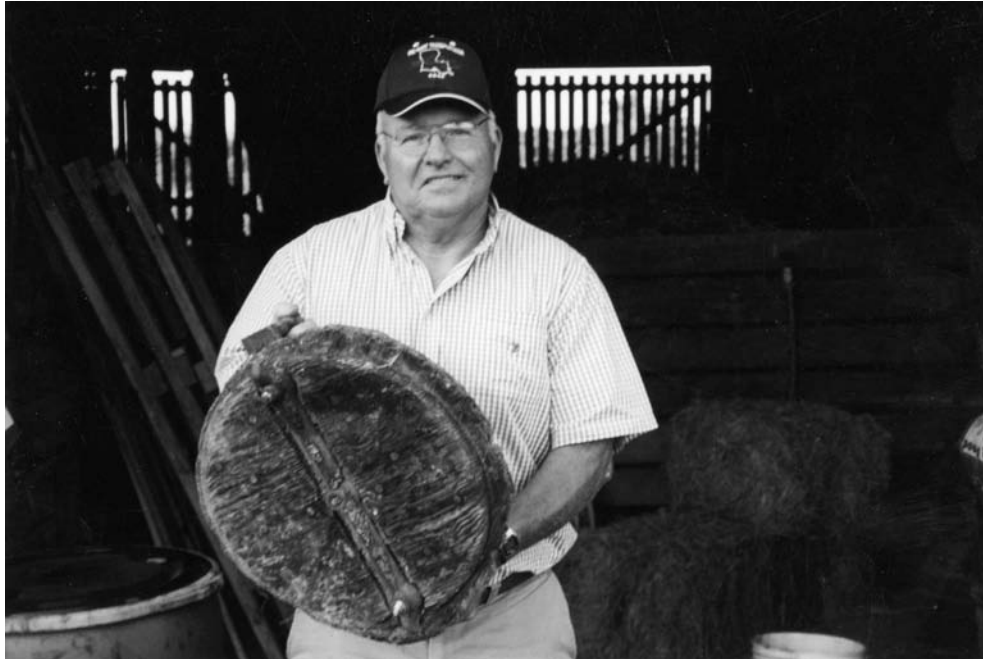


Figure 4.15

Timothy C. Prizer

Pieces of the turpentine industry's material past, like the wooden barrelhead that Carter holds here, allow him to evaluate and come to terms with the significant changes he and others have witnessed in the region since the industry's decline.

Since that day, Carter has reflected many times on the consequences of industrial decline and regional change. In nearly every case, his assessment is facilitated by the reminder of an artifact – an old tool he used in the woods, a ledger scribbled upon by his grandfather, or one of his mother's handmade kitchen utensils. In one particularly moving instance, after having thumbed through photographs of some of the workers he and his father once employed, Carter reflected simultaneously on his love for the material past and the turpentine industry's master narrative of racial exploitation:

I think a lot of the times, the people that *really* talked ugly about the blacks was the people in towns that never knew anything about them. Maybe when they come to town on Saturday evenings, maybe their clothes wasn't as clean or as pretty as a lot of town people. Maybe their smell wasn't just right because maybe they had used a little potash soap instead of Palmolive or Lava. Maybe that used some old potash soap that the old granny normally made. Which I have used it myself and I still love to smell it, and if I see somebody with it, I'll buy me a bar of it, just to have it, you know.

Rarely one to sidestep issues of race in the industry's history, Carter explicitly acknowledges that his 'memory work' seeks to address the tensions of the past and to critically evaluate the state of race relations in the pine belt today. Between the commemorative efforts of his collection and those represented on the landscape, Gillis Carter has provided both a powerful reminder of, and a fitting monument to, the shared experiences of white and black in the turpentine industry.

The collection and display of the material past further highlights the critical complexion of nostalgic activity. It illustrates the ways in which the value of the past lies in its ability to speak beyond itself to more immediate concerns. When a turpentine worker places a bark hack upon his mantle or positions it within the context of an informal museum, he transforms it from a mere tool to a meaningful piece of his identity; from an item of simple utility to a symbol of individual and collective experience; and from an instrument designed to facilitate work in the woods to one for the preservation of memory and the assessment of change. The commemorative engagement of material culture is thus no doubt a dynamic process, both in the transfer of symbolic power upon objects and in the transfer of objects between individuals in the commemorative

network. The dynamics of the latter become evident in the realization that neither the collection nor the act of collecting is ever done. Even Gillis Carter, whose collection seems to nearly exhaust the entire range of turpentine's artifactual past, remains actively engaged in the reciprocal give-and-take of the region's commemorative network. There are in fact pieces of naval stores equipment that have not found their way into Carter's collection, and he pursues them with the youthful excitement of a child on an Easter egg hunt. But for Carter, participation in the network is also enjoyable for the satisfaction he feels on the giving end of a transaction and the social cohesion that he has found the act of giving to foster. Revisiting the short stack of wooden barrelheads in his collection, he supposes he has no real need for more than one or two of them, and he hopes sometime to encounter "a fellow who may find joy in owning one." Like most of his reflections in the wake of turpentine's absence, Carter's thoughts on the gifting of the industry's material culture extend beyond the realm of industrial decline to address larger questions of life and moral reciprocity. As such, his words are a testament to the fact that the commemorative collection of material culture constitutes *critical* nostalgia and a dynamic process:

The only thing that you ever accomplish is the things that you give away in life. And I think that ought to be our motto. I've never lost anything from giving or helping anyone, and that came through my father and mother. They were givers in life, and I think God wants us to be givers.

## **Setting History Straight: A Turpentine Tourer Tours a Mobile Collection**

There is nothing particularly extraordinary about Bubba Greene's involvement in the turpentine industry. In fact, the work he did alongside his father Harvey and the small fleet of African American workers they hired to chip faces and dip gum on their farm in Madison, Florida typifies the lives and labor of thousands of pine belt families. Their small operation featured no commissary to trap workers in a cycle of debt, nor any quarters to house hired labor. Daylight brought no calls or hollers from the woods, just as nightfall emitted no sounds of rough revelry from any jook joint. No armed horseman surveyed the woods for the wayward turpentine hand, for no turpentine hand had cause for sabotage or escape. Bubba Greene and his father did not merely supervise their laborers; rather, they chipped faces, tacked tin, and dipped gum alongside them. For Harvey Greene, as for legions of small farmers in the pine belt, turpentine was never meant to be his family's sole livelihood. He worked turpentine, rather, as a source of supplementary income to the many other allowances afforded by a pine forest. Rather than a "turpentine" per se, he fancied himself more of a "timberman." He and his turpentine crew bled a small drift of trees for gum, hauling the gum into town to sell at the still. Once the drift had yielded the best of its resin, they cut the timber and sold it as well. The crew then scattered pine seed over the clearing and moved on to the next drift. Over time, new trees sprouted on the cleared land, and the workers thus cycled through the woods in an unending process of planting, extracting, cutting, and replanting. It was a system that nourished a century of small farm families in the pine belt.

Yet, despite its centrality to the region's history, the story of this dual-income system, and the many families who sustained themselves through it, is seldom told. Those responsible for its absence – the scholars, journalists, civil rights activists and other social advocates who composed the body of literature that has posthumously become turpentine's master narrative – either failed to notice this fundamental piece of

the industry or altogether ignored it. Today, Bubba Greene insists upon the latter, that northern writers and intellectuals found little use for the story of the small gum farmer and freely neglected to tell it. Scholars, he presumes, elected to focus on the dynamics of camp life – the ‘exotic’ customs and unique patterns of an ostensibly isolated pocket of rural society. The small farmer meanwhile offered journalists none of the dramatic elements they needed to appease their editors and secure their position above the fold of the features section. And of course, the agendas of activists and other intellectuals diverted them from paying the small turpentine farmer any mind, for nothing served them better than cleverly contextualized photographs of white woodsriders and black labor amid artfully crafted narratives of camp racism. Whatever the case, families like Bubba Greene’s rarely warrant even a footnote in the historical record.

Born in 1940, Bubba Greene was practically raised in the turpentine woods of Madison County, Florida. Before he was old enough to hoist a bark hack, he often sat in his mother’s lap on the passenger side of his father’s pickup as it bucked over the rough terrain of the pine forest. These frequent excursions into the woods are some of Greene’s earliest and fondest memories. “Saturday afternoons was sort of like a family outing,” he remembers. “We’d load up in the truck and go to the woods, and Daddy would check on the turpentine crew.” When they pulled up to the appropriate drift of timber, Greene looked on with wide-eyed wonder as his father helped the workers chip streaks in the faces or transfer gum from cup to bucket to barrel. Many times, he rode with his father across the state line and up to Valdosta, where they sold their gum to the Langdales, the foremost family of the turpentine belt. From an early age, then, Bubba Greene observed the technical and transactional details of the turpentine business, and like nearly every other son of a turpentine, he aspired to follow in his father’s footsteps. Not long after he entered elementary school in the mid-1940s, he found woods work preferable to

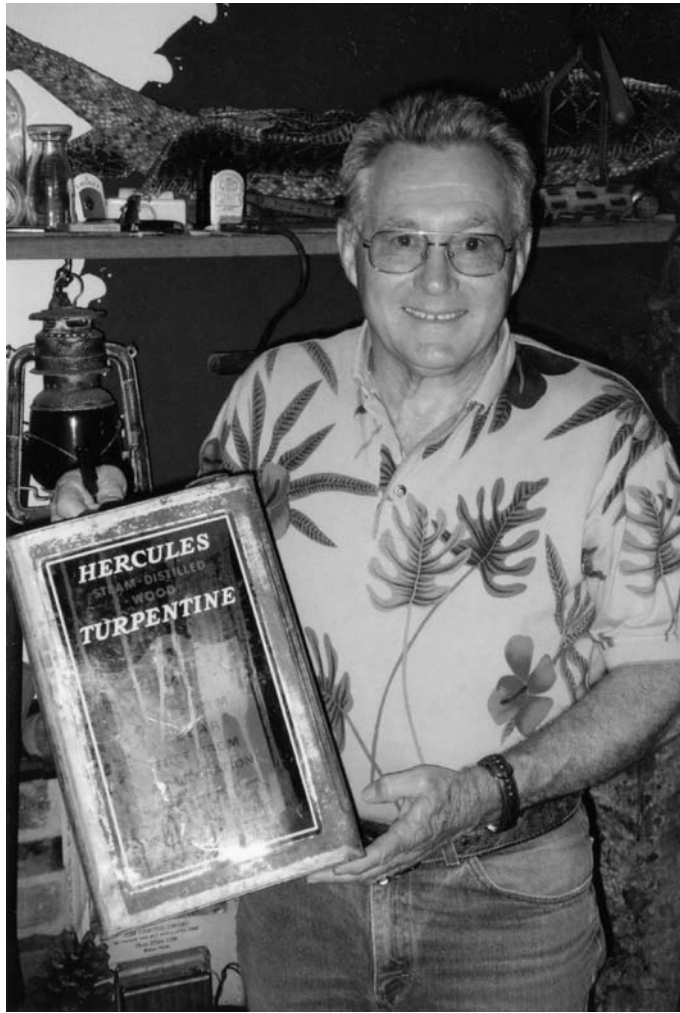


Figure 4.16

Timothy C. Prizer

Though Bubba Greene's involvement in the turpentine industry exemplifies the experiences of thousands throughout the region's history, his story is largely absent from the historical record. Here, Greene displays a can of Hercules-brand turpentine.

homework and would spend most of every afternoon and evening in the woods, imagining himself an official member of his father's crew. Before long, Harvey Greene would accept him as such, and as Bubba matured through late adolescence, the two men came to jointly manage the operation. In stark contrast to the larger camp structure, Bubba Greene's life was not spent in the supervision of nameless turpentine hands; it was spent, rather, working alongside men whom he considered friends, men like Sam

Williams and Buddy Hudson. His life as a small farmer in this close-knit environment led to deep friendships and meaningful experiences that in the wake of the industry's absence have become powerful memories and markers of personal and regional identity.

In the late 1960s, when Bubba Greene's turpentine operation folded as a result of the same forces that would ultimately drive the industry from the rest of the region, he and his crew of workers were the only people in Madison County still working turpentine. Declining gum prices had already forced the other small farmers in the area to abandon the turpentine portion of their operations and focus solely on the sale of timber. The dual-income, timber-and-turpentine model was no longer practicable, and small turpentine farms in the county became pine plantations structured around a simple process of cutting, selling, replanting, and cutting again. Though Bubba Greene was able to hang on longest of them all, he too surrendered in 1967 and then watched as turpentiners across the pine belt met the same ineluctable fate. He did, for a short time, hold out hope for turpentine's return, for another unforeseen shift to rehabilitate the gasping industry, but it only became clearer that this was indeed the end.

Today, Madison County knows Bubba Greene as its last resident ever to work a stand of pine trees for the production of turpentine, and it is a designation Greene wears like a badge of honor. The distinction has granted him a level of local notoriety as a sort of hometown historian, an authority on all things turpentine and Madison County. Yet, while he was freely recognized for his late involvement in turpentine, it would be misleading to suggest that he came by the reputation of local historian naturally. In fact, it was his community's recognition of his life's labor that resulted some time ago in a growing passion for the history of the turpentine industry and the region of his birth. As the epithet of "Madison County's last turpentiner" became central to the concept of his own identity, he proudly set out to chronicle the history of his community's specific

involvement in turpentine and other timber industries. He began his documentary efforts simply by assembling and organizing items related to his own past – the tools and equipment that had come to clutter his garage and his barns, or that he had left strewn across the woods like wreckage from turpentine’s sudden collapse. He also enlisted in the local network of collectors in Madison County and surrounding areas, which led him not only to tools sold with narratives of local provenance but also photographs, articles, commissary scrip, and other items specific to Madison County’s role in naval stores history. Antique stores furnished more artifacts from the industry’s local past and ties to more contacts within the network of collectors.

Greene’s collection grew rapidly, and he spotlighted his artifacts in neat displays atop shelves in front of the row of bay windows that look out over the lush meadow of his backyard (see Figure 4.17). Throughout his collection’s formative stages, his focus remained on the artifactual history of Madison County. This local story, he felt, deserved to be woven into the larger narrative of naval stores history. His goal early on was therefore to discover and highlight Madison County’s particular station in the historical record. What he was yet to discover, however, was that much more than the story of Madison County was missing from the annals of turpentine history.

Bubba Greene remained unaware of turpentine’s master narrative for several years after he began actively collecting traces of the industry’s past. He did not seek out any literature that charted the full scope of naval stores activity in the United States, for he knew the industry’s history well, from its early transatlantic journey to the American colonies to its recent transatlantic journey to the pine forests of China, Indonesia, and the Mediterranean Basin. Ironically, it was in a book on the local history of Madison County, found on the shelves of a Madison County antique shop, that he first sensed an oversight in the industry’s broader historical narrative. As he and his wife Maria



Figure 4.17

Timothy C. Prizer

Bubba Greene displays turpentine's material culture upon shelves in front of large windows in his sunroom.

thumbed through the book's dusty pages that day, they each noted the glaring omission of their own experiences, those that they could personally attest were the experiences of hundreds of other farm families as well:

I picked up the book. It was written in the mid '20s, 1920-something. And it had a little section in there about the orange grove, had a section in there about people growing different fruits and vegetables of different kinds, and the farming, the cattle, the hay, and you know, right on down. And it was a pretty thick book, you know, small but pretty thick. It came down to the section on turpentine. And I read it. And all it was written about was basic about the turpentine. It said mostly black, poor black people that was being – really rough life – being put up in substandard

houses, and right on down. It was just so much stuff, it was more like slapping than writing a history of the turpentine industry. The author had the opportunity to tell something about the turpentine business, and he didn't. He missed it.

The book made him curious. If Madison County failed to mention the small gum farmer, he wondered, how many other historical accounts of the industry ignored those who worked as he had, who either harvested small drifts of pines and sold gum and timber simultaneously or who worked a little patch of trees for financial cushion alongside rows of tobacco or cotton? How many, he was equally determined to find out, not only neglected to mention the small turpentine operation but focused exclusively on the objectionable aspects of the industry's history?

The answers were troublesome. In fact, after considerable research, Greene was unable to locate the small farmer anywhere in the pages of any book, and every account he read seemed to pit white against black in relationships of outright abuse or servile paternalism. Even *reviews* of books written about naval stores history seemed hell-bent on painting all white men in turpentine's history as "pistol-packing woodsriders."<sup>6</sup> Not until his friend Carroll Butler published *Treasures of the Longleaf Pines* in 1998 did Greene come upon an account that treated the industry's history with appropriate integrity. But even Butler, Greene felt, failed to eschew sensationalism altogether. "Heck," Greene explains, "you can't even look at the book on the shelf without getting a little misled." His reference is to the image Butler chose for the front cover of his book (see Figure 4.18). In the photograph, an African American turpentine hand, his tattered flour-sack overalls and three-quarter-sleeved long johns daubed with pine tar and sweat,

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<sup>6</sup> Greene added that "a lot and maybe all of the woodsriders *did* have a pistol or something, but they would usually use that to kill snakes or kill a possum or a coon or a rabbit, either for themselves to eat or to give to some of the men. That was quite often that they would shoot some kind of animal and you'd give it to one of your men for them to carry back home and cook, and that made a happy worker, you know. He wouldn't have dared shot one of those men because if he was the woodsrider, he usually had a boss too – the producer, you know."

# TREASURES

## OF THE LONGLEAF PINES NAVAL STORES



Figure 4.18

Image courtesy of Carroll Butler (1998)

The front cover of former turpentineer Carroll Butler's book *Treasures of the Longleaf Pines: Naval Stores* (1998) has stirred some controversy with concern for historical accuracy. Original caption: "Chipper applying weekly streak near Thomasville, GA, 1885."

bends at the waist to perform an undetermined task low on the face of a pine tree.

Greene's issue with the photograph is not the suggestion that downtrodden black men bore the brunt of the industry's long history of hard labor, nor that an image of such a man should come to stand for the industry in the wake of its demise. He would argue

neither point.<sup>7</sup> Nor is his issue with the photograph the man's clothing, for he knows this was indeed the bedraggled uniform of many a turpentine hand. His contention, rather, is that the photograph, like the thousands of others indistinguishable from it in the historical record, is decidedly concocted and contrived, that the man behind the camera knew nothing about the industry and had an agenda that his staged image would powerfully serve. As such, Bubba Greene feels, it does not so much represent an inaccuracy or error in the industry's history as it does epitomize the severe oversight that has rendered the small farmer and his modest operation absent in turpentine's master narrative.

But how was it staged? Even I, who had the advantage of seeing former turpentiners repeatedly demonstrate the methods of chipping streaks in a tree, did not notice anything suspect about the photograph. When I admitted my ignorance and told Bubba Greene that I found nothing shady about the image, he explained that it would no doubt take an experienced turpentine to discern its dubious character. The problem, Greene said, is that the worker in the photograph would have no reason to chip a streak (or do anything else, for that matter) that low on the tree's face. The face, which extends well over six feet from the box cut at base of the tree, would only need to grow taller in order for the tree to produce more resin. There is consequently no need ever to revisit any earlier, i.e. lower, position on the face when the freshest, most recent cut is always the highest cut. Though Greene read his friend's book and enjoyed it, he was left with no choice but to confront the author about the photograph on its cover:

He admitted, you know, that a lot of these photos was staged. And what we both figured was just that our northern friends with the cameras would come down. And they probably saw this fellow chipping the boxes

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<sup>7</sup> In fact, Greene has made it clear throughout my conversations with him that his intention is in no way to engage in a sort of revisionist history. "I don't mean to be running down anything on the race issue here," he repeatedly stresses. "It's just that there's another side, you know, a story that's not being told."

and probably went to this black man and asked him about would he matter taking some pictures. And probably it was the only time in that man's life he ever had his picture taken. Because down here there just wasn't a whole lot of picture-taking. And it was probably that the boss man would ask him to do it, and he would say, "Yessir, boss, whatever." And whatever that man with the camera wanted him to do, he probably did it. And he had a chipping axe way down there at the bottom of the tree and the face was way up higher. And you know he didn't have no business down there with that.

Greene confesses that all of his punctilious whistle-blowing over the photograph may appear nothing more than an attempt to show off how much he knows about the industry. But there is much more at stake here. He is reminded of a conversation he had with his "archaeologist friend," a man named Calvin Jones, sometime before the publication of Butler's *Treasures*. Jones "started to go on a rant one day about this little brochure he found for the St. Augustine [Florida] historical festival and parade":

That little brochure had a little picture on it. An artist had drawn some Spanish folks, you know, getting off the ship at St. Augustine way back when. And now Calvin had a fit over it because something wasn't just right with their clothes. Wasn't accurate for the time period or something, you know. He said they wouldn't have worn clothes like the ones in the brochure for another hundred years or more after they stepped foot on the sand here in Florida. And that bothered him. And now, to me, you know, I know nothing about Spanish clothes. So here I am dumb enough to say, "Yeah, that's fine with me." But for a person who knows, that bothered him, and I feel sure a lot of other people that knew

and knew the history, that would bother them. And I realized at that time what Calvin Jones was talking about when I saw that picture of the man doing the turpentine wrong.

The issue, Greene went on, has little to do with the fact that there is a discrepancy in the photograph. The concern, rather, is that the crime of historical imprecision often signals the less excusable offense of historical deception.

The more diligently Bubba Greene searched for himself in turpentine's "official" history, the more frustrated he became. He tried to reason how it was possible that the lives of so many families like his own could have been lost from the pages and pictures of the past. All he could imagine is that the great majority of these families had neither pen nor literacy, neither camera nor the money to afford one – neither the means nor the agency to document their own lives. In the eyes of lettered men with the cameras and phonographs, Greene supposed, the small turpentine farmer was no match for the fabled sharecropper with his romantic work songs and stories of racial strife, nor for the mystic mountaineer with his tall tales, bloody ballads, and frolicsome fiddles. Perhaps it was even for the best, Greene told himself, that the turpentine farmer had not become a caricature of rural life. But that line of thought failed to comfort him long. He was left with but one choice – to turn his frustration into action:

I got to thinking at that time, you know, that if we're not getting out and telling the other side of the story, the story about the small farmers, what are we doing? A lot of it really was little white farmers out there that had land in the back forty that had pine trees on it but it really wasn't suitable for planting crops. But they would go and buy cups and tins or whatever they could get from their neighbor who had already worked their trees out. And they would take their family, their children, and sometimes even

the neighbor's children, because there was a lot of labor swapping back then. And they would work this turpentine as another little cash crop on the side. And they would work their trees out until they couldn't work them anymore. And they would take their tins and turpentine stuff that was left over and sell it to maybe another neighbor, and the cycle would start all over. All these families was connected in the turpentine at some point... And you know, I was thinking as I looked back on it all that this is like the history of, if you was to go ask the little child, "Who picked cotton?" they would say "Slaves picked cotton." And of course slaves did pick cotton, but what of all the little families who could not afford slaves? You better believe they picked their share too. But so many of these poor white people did not have cameras, they did not take pictures, so it's not documented like the rest of it. Well, I figured that same kind of story needed to be told with the turpenter, and I figured I better tell it.

Greene's eyes had been opened to issues of fairness and accuracy in historical representation, and he felt compelled to embark upon a mission to set the record straight. It is an example that provides perhaps the most irrefutable evidence that nostalgia, especially as rendered in the collection, does not sit idly by. Rather than writing a letter to the editor or engaging in any other form of modern-day armchair activism, Bubba Greene strapped his expansive collection of tools on slabs of pegboard and glued labels beside each item (see Figure 4.19). He taped photographs and other documents on triptychs, and in hand-woven baskets he neatly placed plastic jars and glass vials of salves, soaps, and cold medications with turpentine as a central ingredient (see Figure 4.20). Then he packed the displays in his truck, and he hit the road:



Figure 4.19

Timothy C. Prizer

Bubba Greene straps hacks and dip irons onto pegboard displays to tell the story of the small gum farmer.



Figure 4.20

Timothy C. Prizer

Part of Greene's traveling collection is a basket of products like salves, soaps, and cold medicines that included turpentine as a central ingredient.

I got out and I just started you know. I had a lot of our stuff that we had in old barns and that I had picked up here and there, and I just started getting all of this stuff together to where I could easily carry it around with me. And people in the area knew I knew a lot about the turpentine.

When they heard I wanted to tell the story of it all, some of the churches that would have Families' Day or Old-Fashion Day, they was asking us to bring our stuff over and talk to everybody. And the more we did it, we realized that the turpentine industry had touched so many lives that just about everybody would tell you that some point in time they had been in the dip woods. Lots of them said the first money that they ever made was doing something in the turpentine woods. If they was small boys at the time, it might not have been no more than just carrying water to the men to drink or picking up cups or doing something, you know, right up until they got big enough to do a little bit more work, a little bit more work, and right on up to chipping the faces and dipping the gum.

In addition to frequenting church gatherings and festivals in his immediate area, Greene began to tour regionally across the pine belt. His largest venue has been the Florida State Fair, where he annually highlights his pegboard displays for thousands of people from both inside and outside of "turpentine country." His traveling lessons on the history of the small turpentine farmer, told alongside the display of turpentine's material past, have become so popular, he says, that the more he contributes, the more he is asked to attend yet more events, and the busier his schedule becomes. For Bubba Greene, festival vending spaces are a regular pulpit.

The intergenerational response to his displays, Greene says, has been the most rewarding outcome of his activities. In the captive attention of children, he is able to

explain the history of the industry through the history of the turpentine's "toys," and he teaches the youngsters about their local wildlife through the empty shell of a gopher tortoise and the shed skin of a rattlesnake. Further obscuring the boundary between landscape and material culture, a catfaced stump treated with creosote and handcrafted into the body of a podium allows him to show young people the turpentine's distinctive marks, while eliciting excited inquiries from "old-timers" as to how they could come to add a catfaced podium to their own collections. Likewise, lightered catface slabs, also fastened to his pegboard displays, allow Greene to chart the progression of the industry through the variety of cuts workers made at different stages of turpentine's history (see Figure 4.21). Rare items like calipers and commissary scrip jog former workers' memories and trigger the impromptu, animated performance of narratives about life and work in the woods.<sup>8</sup> "It's just like a magnet," Greene smiles. "People start coming over because it brings back their childhood days, you know, things they can remember." In their stories, he says, he too learns more about the small turpentine farmer.



Figure 4.21

Timothy C. Prizer

A lightered catfaced stump used for display speaks to the inseparability of material culture and the landscape.

<sup>8</sup> For a theoretical discussion of this and similar "breakthroughs into performance," see Hymes 2004[1981]:79-141.

Little debate or explanation is required to substantiate the claim that Bubba Greene's use of material culture suggests critical action over idle melancholy. Indeed, to even attempt to elaborate on the self-evident profundity of his efforts is to risk understatement. Greene, after all, has taken allegedly the most hopeless and mawkish of all nostalgic expressions, the collection, and redefined it, rendering it not only *symbolically* critical or *implicitly* topical, but rather, *concretely* so. His goal is not for his collection merely to represent or to signify; nor is it simply to document or preserve. More dynamically, it is an effort to explicitly communicate a story that remains largely untold, to set the historical record straight, and to demand that a sense of integrity and accountability come to discussions of naval stores history. Though his efforts necessitate little contextualization or emphasis, it is worth the risk of stating the obvious, just in case the point is somehow lost: Bubba Greene's activities most effectively expose and forcefully thwart the claims of nostalgia's most antagonistic critics, those who view nostalgia, especially in the form of the collection, as an impediment to historical integrity. It is indeed in the explicit interest of historical integrity that Bubba Greene has enlisted his traveling caravan of turpentine's artifactual past.

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When a man rips a pine tree from the soil and thrusts it through the front door of his home, the critical implications are endless. When that man's cousin converts a two-story barn into a museum in honor of his obsolete industry, the dynamics are equally clear. And when a former turpentineer crams an assortment of items from his industry's past into a truck and takes to the streets to sing an unsung song, we need append to it hardly a word of insight or contextual wisdom. These grand acts nearly speak for

themselves, their profundity almost axiomatic. Yet, I should acknowledge that my focus on these extraordinary examples of critical nostalgia, these elaborate applications of the material past, is not to belie the parallel significance of the vast majority of material articulations, expressions of much subtler tone but of equal magnitude and import.

Explicitness is not the norm for material culture. Most often, its messages lie in items' infinite undisclosed scripts, meaning not intrinsic to the body of objects themselves but located deep within the bodies and minds of those who *perceive* those objects. Indeed, if things could be said to have any inherent capacities, it would be their ability, by virtue of their very presence, to elicit powerful emotional responses from those who encounter and arbitrarily interpret them. All of this is to say that whether painstakingly displayed upon slabs of pegboard, dramatically preserved in one's home or barn, or simply left to corrode in a backyard heap, all material culture has the potential to serve the same profound wealth of functions. They all may function to preserve memory; to recall lessons of the past; to act as barometers for the assessment of change; to reaffirm community; to construct and express individual and regional identity; and to impart the significance of history upon future generations. In the case of former turpentiners' commemorative use of material culture, for example, younger generations are consistently inspired to learn about their histories and heritages, even in situations where that result might not be among the stated intentions of the collector. In effect, we are able to witness the collection's role in the active formation of the personal and regional identities of the youngest pine belt residents, and we find promise for turpentine's prolonged memory.

Junior and C. J. Taylor never imagined that the mound of turpentine tools in their backyard, a mountain that seemed to grow on its own after the industry's demise, would ever be of any interest to anyone. "It's just an old pile of junk," C. J. Taylor

warned when I first asked to see the tools he had chosen to keep when his industry was pulled out from under him. His air of dismissal passed rather quickly, though, as he began to intimate that he was equally proud of his tools as he was of his life's labor, much as his brother Junior had expressed his wish that his years of hard work had been captured on film and yet resolved that, "It's just like anything else, like everything else that goes out. You have to forget about it because it ain't never coming back." It is a reluctant acceptance of the end. Ironically, however, the apparent "junk pile" in their backyard has helped to ease this reluctance, and it has done so through the unprovoked pestering of a child with an insatiable curiosity. The Taylor brothers' great-nephew, a boy of just ten or eleven years old, often sifts through the clutter of old tools in the yard, blitzing his uncles with unending questions. "Uncle C. J.," he asks, "What's this thing? What y'all do with this? What y'all do with that?" In his uncles' responses, the boy discovers his family history, his region's history, and indirectly, his own history. No doubt, his interpretation of these histories will come to define the early stages of his own identity.

For now, though, the boy's naïve excitement has only compelled him to aspire to be just like his uncles. "I want to go out there and dip some gum," the child exclaims. "I want to work the turpentine." He does not yet understand why his Uncle C. J. keeps telling him the same thing again and again. "Ain't no more gum, son. No more turpentine. Now, there ain't no turpentine."

Taylor is right. As an occupation, turpentine is no more. But the response of his young nephew to his pile of tools indicates that the industry remains very much alive in memory, manifested in memorial and memento.



Figure 5.1

Timothy C. Prizer

## ***Five***

### The Fruits of Change: An Epilogue

*Our industry predates the Christian era, and its product – pine rosin – is going to be around as long as we have a pine tree. It's a renewable resource that deserves our interest, our study, our research, and our development to come up with even more uses. It can be used to benefit a worldwide population, and it has a potential for uses beyond our dreams or imaginations.*

– Grady Williams

For the better part of a century, the turpentine industry was the centerpiece of a region, a patchwork that united generations through time and individuals through space. This was a time when boys drew occupational inspiration from their fathers and grandfathers, rarely imagining or aspiring to become anything other than a turpentine worker. Young men left the farm to go to college or enlist in the armed forces, but they nearly

always returned, as George Music, Jr. did, to “take over Daddy and Granddaddy’s operation.” The industry was handed down like a family heirloom. Meanwhile, generations of families clustered in and around pine forests to form self-sufficient communities based on a common trade and unspoken systems of mutual reciprocity. For both white and black, though often socially and economically unequal, the turpentine industry was a touchstone of experience that united them under the canopies of the region’s forests. Turpentine managed to give rise to a distinctive regional culture by bringing together young and old, rich and poor, producer and woodsman. Indeed, had the turpentine industry not settled where it did, we might not consider the pine belt a region at all. As a sign for one of the industry’s major commemorative festivals proclaims as visitors grow near, “Welcome to Catface Country.”

Turpentine is not unique in becoming synonymous with a region. In fact, the United States might be accurately characterized as a collection of industrial pockets, a grouping of railroad centers, coalmining communities, steel towns, and mill villages. Today, however, these distinctions are almost entirely historical. We might still refer to Altoona, Pennsylvania as a “railroad town,” but we know other industries have come to dominate there. We might call Carrboro, North Carolina a “mill town,” though we understand that few, if any, of the town’s residents currently work in a textile mill. Youngstown, Ohio is “Steel Country” in our imaginations, though former steelworkers might greet you at one of the six Wal-Mart shopping centers found within a fifteen-mile radius of that town. Likewise, signs at the town limits of Portal, Georgia welcome travelers to “The Turpentine City,” but Portal’s turpentine still has been dormant for decades. The point here is that neither turpentine’s rise nor its fall occurred in isolation from larger historical and economic developments. Rather, its decline and ultimate demise transpired alongside a series of overarching trends, shifts, and processes that

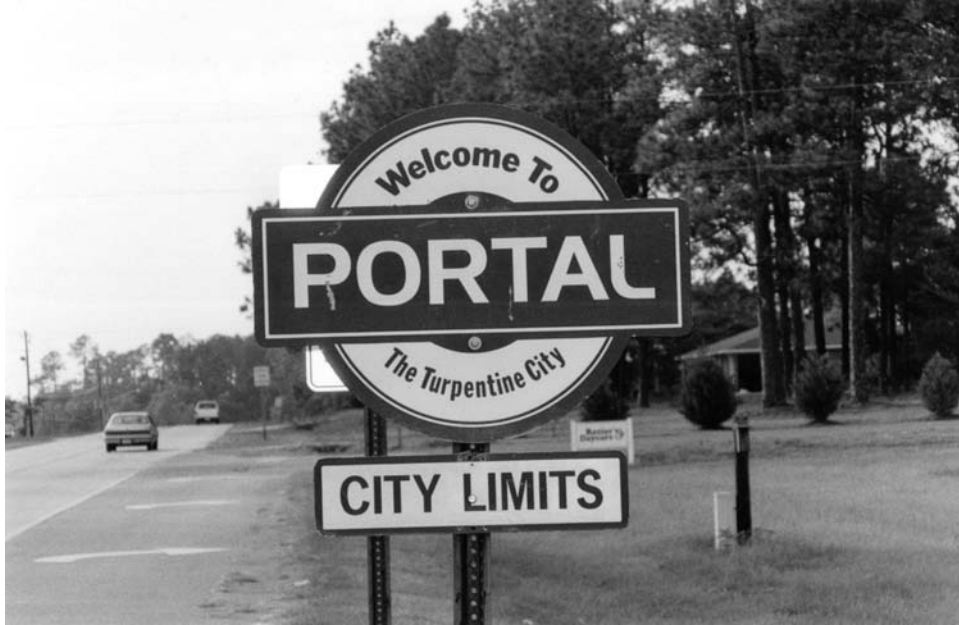


Figure 5.2

Timothy C. Prizer

A city limit sign at Portal, Georgia welcomes travelers to “The Turpentine City.”



Figure 5.3

Timothy C. Prizer

The Carter Turpentine Still in Portal, Georgia sits on Turpentine Drive.

have revamped the American occupational landscape and thrust local economies into an increasingly global marketplace. Like workers in the thousands of waning or fully defunct industries across the country, turpentiners have witnessed more than the disappearance of their industry; they have intensely experienced the dissipation and restructuring of the boundaries that once provided them basic perceptions of order, of harmony, and of reality. Globalization is now felt locally; forces of global proportions literally reverberate along the forest floor in the form of the rumbling tractors and roaring chainsaws of mechanized forest industries and deforestation. Former turpentiners' find their lives increasingly defined by economic forces that appear not only out of their control but beyond anyone's control (Bamberger and Davidson 1998:19).

The state of Georgia provides a particularly telling example of the trends that have restructured the industrial and demographic situation of both the American South and the United States at large. Peach State residents often quip that there is a landlocked nation within their state, a "beast" whose tentacles grow continually longer and threaten to annex the rest of Georgia and the South. The "beast" is a place called Atlanta, a sprawling slab of sun-sizzled asphalt with a metropolitan diameter of sixty miles or more. Before long, the joke goes, there will be Atlanta, and to its direct south, there will be Florida; the rest of Georgia will have been consumed. These observations are only partly in jest. Statistics in fact show exponential growth in Atlanta and other urban centers across the country, while rural populations are shown to be steadily declining. Historian George Ellenberg notes of Georgia that, "In 1930 the state had a population of 2.9 million persons, of whom 1.4 million lived on farms. In 1990, out of a state population of 6.4 million, just over 80,000 fell into the farm population classification. The state's farm population," he continues, "decreased from 48 percent to

1.2 percent in sixty years” (2007:156). The trend continues. As of 2009, a mere 60,000 people of Georgia’s nearly 10 million total can be classified as part of the state’s rural citizenry. Perhaps most remarkable, Atlanta’s metropolitan populace currently accounts for more than 60 percent of Georgia’s total inhabitants (U.S. Census “Annual Estimates” 2009).

In the face of all this modern turbulence – the restless movement of bodies, the relentless decline of industries, and the evaporation of conceptual boundaries – most former turpentiners continue to live in the same small towns of their birth in the Wiregrass region of south Georgia and north Florida. One might say that they remain as firmly rooted in the pine belt as the region’s oldest trees. They are *not*, however, blind or bewildered bystanders to the forces and processes that have effectively dismantled their industry and propelled their lives into a permanent state of flux. To the contrary, they have so rawly experienced these developments as to have become the most lucid and eloquent observers of the causes and consequences that have shaped their current circumstances. Cathy Davidson’s commentary on displaced workers at a Mebane, North Carolina furniture factory could equally apply to former turpentiners. “Workers,” she writes, “are articulate not only about what happened to them but about the ways their story is a national story – a tale of where we have been, where we are now, and where we are going as a nation” (Bamberger and Davidson 1998:18-9). For former turpentiners, it is the engagement in commemorative expression that facilitates this meaningful articulation and the critical assessment of past, present, and future.

When we lend serious consideration to turpentiners’ commemorative expressions, there is no question as to just how well they understand the forces that have driven their industry out and how those forces have redefined the basic structures of life and work in their communities. In conversation with workers about their

commemorations, we discover that these are more than manifestations of memory. Rather, they often speak to profoundly current affairs and act as topical reflections on the state of their communities, their region, their nation, and the world. We find that former turpentiners understand that they join now in an international discussion about the meaning of work and place in a postindustrial society. We learn that commemorative activity in the pine belt serves as a gauge that orients individuals and communities in the larger spectra of time and space. In bringing the past into plain view, the collection of their own artifactual histories and the manipulation of their surrounding landscapes allow them to assess their present position and forecast their future direction. Commemorative expression is thus at once a barometer and a compass, a mechanism that employs the past to measure change so as to offer guidance for future courses of action. Importantly, former turpentiners' commemorations also strive to reinforce notions of community and traditional values that many feel to have dissolved alongside their industry. Their memory work keeps them rooted both in place and perception in the wake of recent change while granting them an outlet through which to highlight important lessons of the past.

Too often, we think of globalization only in terms of what it destroys, of what it serves to stifle and extinguish. It is a process, we find, that acts to muzzle localized expression and mask local character. It is a weapon to tradition, we say, an enemy to regional cultures and local landscapes. Modernity, many would argue, is an age of mass-produced goods, a time when artisans and skilled craftsmen are forced to hammer boards over their storefront windows on Main Street because their towns now amount to little more than the strip of gas stations, chain restaurants, and sprawling shopping centers on either side of the interstate. Networks of computers have replaced networks of people, just as industrial machinery has replaced human labor. The word *community*

refers less now to local, physical spaces than it does to virtual, impersonal spaces on the Web. The global forces that have uprooted longstanding American industries, those which defined local and regional character, have in turn ushered in what many find to be an age of monotony and artificiality. A quick internet search finds people across the country struggling to describe their feelings of malaise that have come as a result of the uniformity of their surroundings; newly coined words like “vanillafication,” “humdrumification,” and “blahification” strive to define life in modern America, while one contemporary American folksinger laments “the blandification of our whole situation.”<sup>1</sup>

These processes have had significant implications for folklorists, longtime champions of the “organic,” the expressive, and the local – the poetics of everyday life in face-to-face interaction. Indeed, the field of folklore has, since its inception, wrestled with its relationship to modernity, historically considering modernity a nemesis to the discipline and a dagger to the heart of its subject. Though in more recent times leading voices in the field have reconceptualized these processes and admonished others for their antagonistic romanticism and rearguard strategies to “save folklore,” globalization and modernity are still often perceived as cancerous and toxic to the contexts conducive to vernacular expression (Abrahams 1993; Appadurai 1996; Bauman 1983; Brenneis 1993; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998b; Noyes 2003; Peacock 2007).

It is, of course, understandable why folklorists and other devotees of tradition would be reluctant to embrace forces that seem only to thwart originality, to obliterate local industries and economies, to conceal regional character, and to erode conventional notions of community. This thesis, in fact, has charted these very issues: the demise of an industry, the displacement of skilled workers, the destruction of a landscape, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Greg Brown. “Eugene.” *The Evening Call* (2006). Sound recording. Red House Records, ASIN B000GCG600.

redefinition of community, all of which have occurred in the pine belt as a result of economic, social, and political currents of global proportions. In light of these changes, it would be very easy to cast turpentiners and their vernacular expressions as fading vestiges of a bygone industry and way of life. To the casual observer, the opportunity would appear limited for the dynamic and continuous production of cultural expression among these former workers in an agricultural industry now entirely defunct. Since we can no longer enter the woods to witness workers' calls and hollers, their jokes and competitions, and the natural rhythms of the workday – items of conventional folkloristic interest – the temptation might be to imagine that the folklore of former turpentiners can only be conceptualized retrospectively. To do so, however, would be a profound oversight.

What I hope to have clearly shown throughout this study is that vernacular activity in the pine belt has not been compromised as a result of globalization; rather, it has been *bolstered*. Globalization has instigated change that, in turn, has intensified memory and driven former turpentiners to action in the interest of commemoration and assessment. Scholars in several disciplines have begun to look at localized responses to global pressures and outline the processes by which globalization may act as a vernacularly constructive, rather than destructive, force. Ultimately, however, many of these scholars prove hesitant to wholeheartedly welcome global transformations into the field of vernacular activity. Historian John Gillis, for instance, notes of modernity and memory that:

In the past two decades, memory has simultaneously become more global and more local... As global markets work around the clock and the speed of communications shrinks our sense of distance, there is both more memory work to do and less time and space to do it in. As the world

implodes upon us, we feel an even greater pressure as individuals to record, preserve, and collect. (1996:14)

Gillis calls on fellow historian Pierre Nora to help him expand his argument, quoting Nora's observation that "When memory is no longer everywhere, it will not be anywhere unless one takes the responsibility to recapture it through individual means" (Nora quoted in Gillis 1996:14). Though Gillis and Nora begin to tap into the ways that globalization and forces of modernity can inspire rather than suppress vernacular expression, they too fall short of escaping the suggestion that modern attempts to commemorate represent a frantic and futile rush in the face of globalization's inevitable path of destruction. In fact, their mutual insistence on the necessitation of *individual* preservation presupposes that the "community" is already a thing of the past. By their estimation, it would seem that vernacular expression is essentially extinct in the modern world save the hopelessly nostalgic attempts of a few desperate souls responding to the "implosive" forces of globalization.

My conversations with former turpentiners indicate that local responses to global pressures are grossly misunderstood and underestimated if seen merely as frenzied efforts to shield artifacts and memories from global fire. Commemorative expression in the pine belt does not occur in vain; its aim is neither to stem the torrential tides of globalization nor to restore the order of a "simpler" time. Nostalgia is again, in Ray Cashman's words, "*a critique of modernity*" – not an attempt to defeat it, nor to hang on for dear life in the face of it (2006:138, emphasis mine). The commemorative work of former turpentiners is not designed to engage in an ill-fated shouting match with the cacophony of chainsaws, timber trucks, and lumber chains that have come to monopolize the soundscape of their forests. Their commemorations are clearly *inspired* by these forces, and they no doubt act as *responses* to the changes these forces signify, but they

are in no way destined to be silenced by them. In fact, rather than threatening to eliminate or stifle localized expressions, global pressures serve as often to *reinforce* vernacular activity and to give rise to *new* expressions that form in response to otherwise destructive or transformative trends. It has been my intention throughout this thesis to highlight the irony that, in the pine belt, emergent expressions are being born of the very forces that have rendered the turpentine industry obsolete.

In exploring local reactions to globalization and industrial decline, we learn much about the role of folklore and vernacular expression in an increasingly chaotic world. Most importantly, however, we are compelled to recall many of the fundamental lessons of our field. We discover that folklore is not, and never has been, threatened by change, but rather that it is perpetually strengthened and sustained by it. We remember that modernity is not a new concept, but a phenomenon that every generation in all of history has experienced in its own way. We understand that while the term *globalization* seeks to describe a new order of change in the world, global influences are themselves nothing new. In the example presented here, we recognize that global forces have dictated the course of the naval stores industry all along, from Noah's call for pitch in preparation for the Flood to the flood of change that swept turpentine from the pine belt. We sense that it may have been an extension of the same forces that brought turpentine to the New World via Jamestown and then, in turn, sent it back via Baxley some four centuries later. But above all, we are reminded of the very essence of what folklore is: a vital piece of what it means to be human, the most powerful medium we have in comprehending, responding to, and coping with change. We are reminded that as long as there is life, there will always be change, and as long as there is change, we will always have the creative human response to it – the body of expression we know as folklore.

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Every few months, word comes down that another turpentineer has passed away. On the front porch of the Music family's century-old home in 2002, George Music, Jr. told me of the recent death of his father. In his words, I could feel his father's presence still there in that forest, and I knew he could too. Not long after I sat in Junior Taylor's living room on a sticky summer day in Blackshear, Georgia – our conversation nearly overwhelmed by the buzz of an oscillating fan – I learned that he too had passed on. It saddened me to know that Junior's brother C. J. had lost his closest friend and fishing buddy. In writing this thesis, I had hoped to visit once more with Arthur Riley in Milan, Georgia. I had spent an afternoon with him before, and my plans were to return for a more extensive conversation over a tape recorder. Like many of the workers I have had the privilege of interviewing, Riley was excited by the idea of having his words and memories immortalized on tape. But my promise to return was one I was unable to keep. Riley died before I ever made it back to Milan.

Often, one learns of a death from another former turpentineer. In November 2008, Gillis Carter broke the unfortunate news to me of Wilburt Johnson's death. Carter's voice cracked, as it so often does, as he remembered the strapping young worker who became his wise, white-haired friend in old age. That same month, former turpentineer Grady Williams told me in passing that another one of my consultants – writer, naturalist, birdwatcher, turpentineer, and farmer Milton Hopkins – had passed away a short time prior at the age of 80. I had trouble believing that Hopkins, a man who less than two years earlier had radiated life and energy and wisdom and humor, had gone to a better place. Yet, when I returned home to Atlanta, I received confirmation of the news in Hopkins' online obituary (Paulk Funeral Home 2007). Hopkins' friend,

author Janisse Ray, wrote of his death that, during his funeral procession, “a long ‘V’ of sandhill cranes passed overhead, sounding their ancient music, their rattling trumpets.” It occurs to me that they may have been returning the love Hopkins had throughout his life for birds and the wonders of his natural surroundings. Ray thinks that “Maybe Milton heard the cranes... and decided to fly off with them” (Ray 2008). I like that idea.

As ethnographers, we strive to maintain relationships with the people who teach us about their lives. We remember that life is more complicated than can be represented on the pages of a book or an academic journal. We are aware that, at the printing press, our texts become static while the lives within those texts are continually renegotiated and reinterpreted. Our aim is dialogue rather than extraction, shared understanding over private interpretation. We attempt to do more than merely “keep in touch” with our consultants; ideally, we would remain engaged in meaningful, unending conversation. Yet, under any circumstances, these can be difficult goals. We and our consultants alike have personal and professional demands that must be met. Our busy schedules too often preclude the sort of continuous dialogue we would hope to maintain. But we do our best. For me, in the death of those who have taught me about their lives, I have learned in solemn ways that the relationships we forge with our consultants must end. And I often wish that I would have been able to better maintain the dialogue. I must admit, however, that I take comfort in the fact that the people whose voices I have represented in these pages have taken the steps to ensure that their legacy – and the legacy of their industry – is remembered for years to come.

Roger Abrahams reflected in 1993 on the manner in which death has shaped and influenced the ways ethnographers conceive of their work. He sensed that folklorists too often exalt themselves for their role in preserving culture through the documentation and recording of traditions that they believe to be nearing extinction as the “bearers” of

these traditions grow old. From this perspective, he wrote, “an alternative version of the eleventh hour tale was developed”:

When texts are recorded from a traditional singer, mortality itself becomes the enemy of tradition; songs and stories in performance only live in their performance, and are therefore always subject to near-death as the informants themselves die, but for the efforts of the folklorist, recording their dying breath. (1993:12)

Abrahams’ criticism of the way folklorists have imagined themselves as saviors of tradition is more than fair, and we should recognize the problematic implications of such a perspective. However, in closing I would like to draw an important distinction between Abrahams’ argument and what I have presented here in the commemorative efforts of former workers in a defunct industry. If I, the folklorist, have contributed in any way to the memory of the turpentine industry or to the preservation of the commemorations that stand in its honor, it will prove a very small and insignificant offering in juxtaposition with former turpentiners’ *own* accomplishments in securing their industry’s place in the memory of generations to come. It is they who have taken the steps to ensure that the past will not die with them. It is former turpentiners themselves who have turned to the past to envision tomorrow and to determine the legacies they hope to leave behind. On the flipside of Abrahams’ warning, then, we should never fail to recognize and call attention to instances in which our consultants wield their own agency as means of documenting their lives and labor. In the case of former turpentiners, it is they who have seized their day.

## Appendix: Glossary of Terms <sup>1</sup>

**Apron:** a strip of galvanized sheet metal or aluminum nailed to pine trees above certain styles of cups; serves to guide the gum down the ‘face’ of the tree and into the cup.

**Bark hack:** a tool with a sharp, curved blade attached to the end of a short handle, bearing on its opposite (bottom) end an iron weight; used in the process of ‘chipping’ and designed to shave the bark from the tree in order to create a ‘face’ without cutting deeply into the tree itself.

**Barrel:** a large cylindrical container made of metal or wood and designed to store up to fifty-five gallons or six hundred pounds of pine gum in transport to the still; often has bulging sides and a flat top and bottom.

**‘Blue Whistler’:** a nickname referring to the largest of the metal barrels used to transport pine gum to the still.

**Box:** a reservoir or cavity cut into the base of a pine tree in which crude pine gum collects; found only in trees that were worked prior to the early-twentieth-century invention of the turpentine cup.

**Box axe:** a tool with a sharp blade at the end of a wooden handle used to cut a ‘box’ into the base of a pine tree.

**Boxing** (or ‘box method’): the practice of cutting a ‘box’ into the base of a pine tree for the collection of crude gum; practiced prior to the early-twentieth-century invention of the turpentine cup.

**Caliper:** a wooden U-shaped instrument of various sizes used to measure the thickness or diameter of pine trees before tapping the trees for gum; ensured that the trees met size standards set by the U.S. Forest Service.

**Camp:** a cluster of buildings on a turpentine operation that served to form a community in which workers and their families lived; may have consisted of all or some of the following: workers’ quarters, the homes of turpentine producers, a commissary, a still, a schoolhouse, a church, and a jook joint.

**Catface:** the vertical V-shaped wound, said to look like cats’ whiskers, that spans the length of a pine tree and exudes resin, the streaks of which are created by the forceful blows of bark hacks and wood hacks; often referred to simply as a ‘face’. Especially large trees often contained more than one face.

**Chipping:** the process of cutting a ‘catface’ into a pine tree by removing the bark and slicing into the tree’s internal resin canals; begins with V-shaped streaks at the base of the tree and progresses in similar fashion up the length of the tree.

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<sup>1</sup> Several of the terms defined here are modified forms of definitions found on the “Traditions of Turpentine” website of the South Georgia Folklife Project (<http://www.valdosta.edu/turpentine/glossary.htm>), where they are reprinted with permission from Carroll Butler (1998).

**Commissary:** a general store found on turpentine camps in which food, clothing, tools, and household supplies were sold; workers often used commissary scrip or tokens in lieu of cash to purchase items at the commissary.

**Commissary scrip:** a means of payment for goods at the camp commissary usually in the form of tokens, coupons, checks, or vouchers which were issued and redeemed by the owners of a camp.

**Cooper:** a worker who assembles and repairs wooden turpentine barrels.

**Creosote:** an oily, viscous liquid obtained as a by-product of the distillation of coal and wood tar; used chiefly as a preservative for wood and applied commonly to telephone/utility poles and railroad crossties.

**Crop:** a unit of measurement referring to a segment of the turpentine woods that consists of 10,500 catfaces; three 'crops,' for instance, would indicate 31,500 faces.

**Crude gum:** see 'Gum'.

**Cup:** a one- or two-quart receptacle attached to the tree at the bottom of the 'face' for the collection of pine gum; materials include galvanized sheet metal, aluminum, clay, and glass.

**Cupping:** the process of hanging cups, aprons, gutters, and tins onto pine trees for the purpose of collecting crude gum from the trees' catfaces; also referred to as 'tacking tin.'

**Debt peonage:** a system of forced labor or servitude in which workers are forced to work in payment of a debt.

**Dip barrel:** see 'Barrel'.

**Dip bucket:** a five- or six-gallon metal container into which cups of pine gum were emptied; when the buckets became full, the gum was then poured into barrels and the barrels hauled to the still.

**Dip iron:** a long metal instrument used much like a spatula to scrape pine gum from the bottoms of boxes, cups, and dip buckets as they were emptied.

**Dip wand:** see 'Dip iron'.

**Dipping:** the process of collecting and transporting crude gum from a box, cup, or dip bucket.

**Dip woods:** the portion of the forest used in the production of turpentine; also referred to as 'the turpentine woods' or simply 'the woods.'

**Drift:** an area of the turpentine woods marked either by natural boundaries or by slashes on trees to divide one worker's jurisdiction or area of responsibility from those of other workers.

**Face:** see ‘Catface’.

**Fire still:** see ‘Still’.

**Firing the still:** the process of feeding wood into the firebox of a turpentine still to maintain proper temperatures for distilling the charge of gum; after the turpentine has been distilled off a charge, the fire is pulled or removed from the firebox to prevent rosin from scorching.

**Galvanized cup:** a turpentine cup coated with rust-resistant zinc.

**Gopher tortoise** (*Gopherus polyphemus*): an endangered species of land tortoise that inhabits old-growth pine forests in the American South; the species is known for its ability to dig large, deep burrows under the forest floor and has become endangered due to land development, deforestation, and tree farming.

**Gum:** the resinous substance that exudes from the wounds of pine trees and from which turpentine and rosin are secured by distillation; also called dip, crude, crude turpentine, crude gum, gum, resin, and oleoresin.

**Gum farmer:** a turpentiner who owns his own timber and works typically between five hundred and five thousand faces on a small turpentine operation; all of the duties related to gum extraction may be accomplished by the farmer himself or he may negotiate a sharecropping agreement with his farm laborers. The gum farmer may work turpentine as a primary source of income or he may work a small number of trees for supplemental income alongside a larger farm of cotton or tobacco.

**Gutter:** a flat strip of sheet metal crimped into a V-shape lengthwise along the center and attached to the face to direct gum flow onto the apron and into the cup.

**Hack:** see ‘Bark hack’ and/or ‘Wood hack’

**Hanging box:** a small, homemade, wooden box carried from tree-to-tree that contains various lengths of tins and nails for the process of cupping or ‘tacking tin’.

**Herty cup:** the earliest form of turpentine cup; invented by chemist Charles Holmes Herty in 1902, the cup was made of earthen clay and resembles a small flower pot.

**Jook:** pronounced with a soft U-sound as in the word *took*, it was a shanty in the turpentine camp among the workers’ quarters that served as a recreation center for live music, gambling, and drinking; also used as a verb to indicate the participation in these activities at such an establishment.

**Kettle:** a large copper container in which crude gum is placed and processed during the distillation process.

**Loblolly Pine** (*Pinus taeda*): the tallest species of pine tree native to the southeastern United States; used occasionally for the production of turpentine but not as

commonly as longleaf or slash pine due to loblolly's slender trunks, which can prove too frail to withstand prolonged chipping.

**Longleaf Pine** (*Pinus palustris*): a species of pine tree native to the southeastern United States known especially for the natural wildlife that inhabits its forests and for the whispering sound of the wind through its tufts of long needles; the longest living species of southeastern pine, a single longleaf pine tree can live up to five hundred years. The species is severely endangered today as a result of deforestation.

**Natural-standing:** See 'Old-growth'.

**Naval stores:** 1) the industry associated with the tapping of pine trees for the production of tar, pitch, and rosin – all products used in building, maintaining, and sealing wooden ships; 2) the products made by this industry (tar, pitch, rosin, turpentine, etc. are collectively referred to as 'naval stores'); 3) the term 'the naval stores industry' is occasionally used interchangeably with 'the turpentine industry.'

**Old-growth:** an ancient pine forest, timber stand, or pine tree existing as a result of natural causes rather than having been planted by human beings; often used interchangeably with 'natural-standing.' Old-growth pine forests are severely endangered in the U.S. South today as a result of deforestation, commercial and residential construction, and tree farming. Old-growth forests are home to a number of endangered species as well, including the red-cockaded woodpecker and the gopher tortoise.

**Peonage:** see 'Debt peonage'.

**Pine belt:** the region of the U.S. South historically and presently associated with large expanses of pine forest; includes the eastern portions of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina in addition to south Georgia, north Florida, and parts of Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and east Texas. Historically, all of these areas have been involved in the naval stores and turpentine industries. This thesis often uses the term 'pine belt' to refer specifically to the areas of south Georgia and north Florida, where the turpentine industry was most recently active.

**Pine gum:** see 'Gum'.

**Pine plantation:** an acreage of pineland that is cyclically harvested, cut, sold, and harvested again; often referred to as a 'tree farm.' The term is often used in contrast with an old-growth or natural-standing forest in that a pine plantation features even-aged timber and is the product of continual, planned replanting rather than natural regeneration.

**Pitch:** the black, concentrated gum left as residue after the distillation of pine resin; a dark, viscous substance used for sealing, caulking, and preserving wood.

**Producer:** the person, firm, or partnership responsible for general management and overseeing of a turpentine operation; this thesis uses the term 'producer' to refer specifically to the individual(s) in charge of a turpentine operation.

**Puller:** a bill-shaped tool with an oval-shaped blade and unweighted handle of varying length used in the chipping process to apply a fresh streak to a catface. Long-handled pullers were used to apply fresh streaks high on the face as the face extended up the tree beyond the reach of a short-handled puller.

**Quarters:** workers' homes on a turpentine camp or operation; often small, ramshackle shanties with scant amenities.

**Raising tins:** the process of periodically elevating cups, aprons, and gutters higher on the tree as the face grows taller.

**Red-cockaded woodpecker** (*Picoides borealis*): an endangered species of woodpecker that inhabits old-growth longleaf pine forests in the American South; while other woodpeckers bore out cavities in dead trees where the wood is rotten and soft, the red-cockaded is the only woodpecker species that excavates cavities exclusively in living pine trees. The decline of old-growth pine forests as a result of deforestation has made the species nearly extinct.

**Resin:** a soft, gummy liquid produced naturally in the internal cells of pine trees that acts to protect the trees from insect invasion once the trees become wounded; resin exudes from the internal canals of pine trees and surfaces at the site of the wound. In turpentine production, the resin trickles down the catface into cups where it congeals into gum. The gum is then distilled and broken down into the spirits of turpentine and rosin. 'Resin' and 'rosin' are not synonymous, nor are either the same as 'sap'.

**Rosin:** the yellowish to amber, translucent, hard, brittle, fragmented oleoresin left after distilling the spirits of turpentine from the crude resin of the pine; used in soaps, waxes, and polishes in addition to varnishes, paints, and printing inks. Also used as a preservative and for lubricating the bows of such stringed instruments as the violin. 'Rosin' and 'resin' are not synonymous, nor are either the same as 'sap'.

**Sap:** the vital mixture of nutrients and water that circulates from the roots of a pine tree to its branches and needles; 'sap' is not synonymous 'resin' or 'rosin'.

**Scrape:** resin that sticks to the wound or 'face' of a pine tree and congeals into gum before ever making its way down the face to collect in the cup. Scrape was "punched" off of a face in flakes or chips and sold to turpentine stills as a lower grade of resin.

**Scrape box:** a container used for the collection of 'scrape'.

**Slash Pine** (*Pinus elliottii*): a species of pine tree native to the southeastern United States and often used for the collection of crude gum and the production of turpentine; it is the fastest growing of all pine species though relatively short-lived with a lifespan of approximately two hundred years.

**Spirits of turpentine:** see 'Turpentine'.

**Still:** a two-story wooden structure designed for the distillation of pine gum into turpentine and rosin; often consisted of a ramp or loading dock for gum barrels, a copper kettle, a brick furnace and chimney, a firebox, a still cap, and a coiled pipe called a ‘worm’. The producer of a turpentine operation that featured no still of its own sold the gum collected from his forest to an independent still, and the still, in turn, sold turpentine and rosin to markets around the world.

**Streak:** the wound made when a tree is chipped; a narrow, horizontal, and oblique wound cut at the top of a catface.

**Tacking tin:** the process of affixing metal cups, gutters, and aprons to pine trees by hammering nails through them and into the tree.

**Tallyman:** the person on a turpentine operation responsible for recording the amount of work completed by turpentine hands working on a piecework basis; workers alerted the tallyman of their progress with personalized calls or hollers.

**Tar:** the dark, oily, viscous substance produced by the destructive distillation of pine wood; used principally as a sealant for the hulls of wooden boats or as a wood preservative.

**Tins:** a term referring collectively to cups, aprons, and gutters.

**Tree farm:** see ‘Pine plantation’.

**Tree farming:** the harvesting of timber through a cyclical process of planting, cutting, selling, and planting again.

**Turpentine:** a fluid obtained through the distillation of pine gum and commonly found as an ingredient in paint thinners, varnishes, lamp oils, and cold medications; historically, it has also been used as an all-purpose folk remedy.

**Turpentine belt:** the region of the United States historically associated with the production of turpentine; refers collectively to the communities that long depended on the turpentine economy. See ‘Pine belt’.

**Virgin:** 1) virgin forest – an old-growth forest standing naturally rather than as a result of human planting; a forest not yet used for the production of turpentine. 2) virgin pine tree – a tree that has yet to be tapped for resin.

**Wiregrass:** a fast-growing species of wiry-textured grass native to the southeastern United States that dominates understory vegetation in pine forests.

**Wiregrass Region:** the area of the American South known for its wiregrass groundcover; encompasses south Georgia, southeastern Alabama, and the Florida Panhandle.

**Wood hack:** a tool with a sharp, curved blade attached to the end of a short handle, bearing on its bottom end an iron weight; used in the process of ‘chipping’ and designed to cut deeply enough into the tree to remove both the bark and the first few layers of wood from the tree in order to create a ‘face’.

**Woodsrider:** a supervisor and disciplinarian of workers in the turpentine woods, usually on horseback; the woodsrider ensured that woods work was performed quickly and efficiently.

**Woods work:** a term referring collectively to all tasks carried out in the turpentine woods.

**Wound:** see 'Catface'.

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