

-ABSTRACT

WHAT is *the vernacular*? Are some houses vernacular while others are not? Traditional definitions suggest that only those buildings that are indigenous, static and handmade can be considered vernacular. This thesis uses Harlan County, Kentucky as a case study to argue that *vernacular architecture* includes not only those houses that are handmade, timeless and traditional but also those houses that are industrial and mass-produced. Throughout the 19th century Harlan County was an isolated, mountainous region where settlers built one and two-room houses from logs, a readily available material. At the turn of the century a massive coal boom began, flooding the county with people and company-built coal camp houses which were built in large quantities as cheaply as possible with milled lumber and hired help. Given traditional conceptions of the vernacular, it would have been appropriate to assume the vernacular tradition of house building ended as camp houses, those houses that were not built directly by the residents with manufactured materials, began to replace the traditional log houses. However, the research presented in this thesis concludes that many elements of form, construction and usage that were first manifest in the handmade log cabins continued to be expressed in the county's mass-produced camp houses. These camp houses not only manifest an evolution of local building traditions but also established qualities of outside influence which in turn were embraced by the local culture. Harlan County's houses make the case for a more inclusive conception of vernacular architecture.

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PREFACE

THE research presented in this thesis came together first as a grant proposal submitted to the Hanna Holborn Gray Selection Committee in the winter of 2005. My proposal emphasized a study of the current houses in Harlan County and the possibility of building new low-income housing within the vernacular tradition. My interest in vernacular architecture extended only to present and future houses. I quickly realized, however, that I had no frame of reference by which to define the current houses. What made one house vernacular and not another? What constituted the distinction? It was clear that I needed to craft a definition for the vernacular house in Harlan County.

My thesis is this definition. After receiving the Hanna Holborn Gray grant I spent five weeks during the summer in Harlan County conducting interviews, researching in local libraries and exploring every back road in the county for extant houses from eras past. Studying the vernacular houses of Harlan County's past proved to be more than enough to tackle in one project, although someday I hope to combine this research with a study of the present vernacular houses and what it means to build future housing within the vernacular tradition. The work presented in the following pages is a necessary definition and history of the vernacular house in Harlan County.

The thesis title, *Four Sides to Everything*, is a reference to titles of two Harlan County works. The first, a song by Florence Reece called "Which Side Are You On?" arose from the poignant battles between coal miners and coal operators during the 1930s and was used as a rallying cry for labor struggle across the United States. The second, a book by Shaunna Scott entitled *Two Sides to Everything: The Cultural Construction of Class Consciousness in Harlan County, Kentucky*, rearranges the title from Reece's song to pose a critical examination of class consciousness among miners nearly a decade after Harlan's second major union struggle in the 1970s. Scott's work "elucidates the apparent contradictions between popular images of central Appalachians, as militant labor activists, on one hand, and passive, traditional, fatalistic 'hillbillies,' on the other."¹ Just as Scott's work addresses the dichotomy of culture on Harlan County's social front, my

¹ Shaunna L. Scott, *Two Sides to Everything: The Cultural Construction of Class Consciousness in Harlan County, Kentucky* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), back cover.

work brings this critical examination to the physical landscape and the everyday, ordinary house. This thesis acknowledges the “contradictions” inherent between Harlan County’s pre-industrial and industrial houses yet finds continuity and an overarching vernacular tradition in the four sides of every house, whether they were hand-hewn log cabins or mass-produced coal camp prototypes.

Harlan County is significant to me because I grew up there. From the age of five to fourteen, my family lived in the small city of Evarts where my parents pastored two churches. Our community in these Kentucky mountains was the first place I knew as home and it is still a place of meaning and inspiration for me even as I have moved very far from that region and way of life. It is an honor for me to return home to a source of study, bringing the tools and knowledge from the education Bryn Mawr has given me to look critically at the houses that surrounded me as a child. The five weeks of field work I did this summer were relatively easy because I had familiar faces to point me in the right direction and an encouraging and supportive community in which to work. This being said, I had times of struggle: days when it seemed like there was no way to get answers to my questions; days when it seemed like there were *too many* answers to my questions; and as every student of material culture finds, the subject matter turned out to be more complicated than first thought.

I extend my sincerest thanks to those who took interest in my project and offered their help. The librarians at Harlan County Public Library were always ready to help, digging out all their bits and pieces of relevant information. In my research at the Berea College Archives Steve Gowler was particularly helpful. To the staff at the Southeast Kentucky Community College in the Appalachian Archive, Larry Lafollette and especially Theresa Osborne, I am most grateful for the wealth of resources to which they led me.

On a more practical note, I could not have done any of this field work without a place to live and for that I thank the staff at the Cloverfork Clinic, especially Britt Lewis. Even with a house to live in, I could not have felt like I was back at home without the hospitality and welcome of very special people like J.D. and Becky Miller, Cathy McKnight, Jim Banks and all the loved ones at Evarts Congregational United Methodist Church. There were a number of people who offered to take me around the county in

search of “old houses” or old people who remembered the old houses including Jeff Chapman-Crane, Denver Turner and Duane Coffman.

I could not have put this research together without the academic support and advising of Jeff Cohen, Daniela Sandler and Gary McDonogh who helped me refine my study and develop it into a coherent body of work. I am grateful to the Hanna Holborn Gray Selection Committee who provided me with the funds that made my field work feasible, especially Jennifer Webb and Dean Erika Behrend who continued to offer their support and encouragement long past the summer ended.

Lastly, I thank my family—my brother and my parents—for their care for me and their enthusiasm about this project which I believe carries a piece of each of us and our life together in Appalachia.



Figure 1: Evarts, Kentucky, from the top of Black Mountain. (Photograph by author)

INTRODUCTION

The true basis for any serious study of the art of Architecture still lies in those indigenous, more humble buildings everywhere that are to architecture what folklore is to literature or folk song to music and with which academic architects were seldom concerned... These many folk structures are of the soil, natural. Though often slight, their virtue is intimately related to environment and to the heart-life of the people. Functions are usually truthfully conceived and rendered invariably with natural feeling. Results are often beautiful and always instructive.

-Frank Lloyd Wright, from The Sovereignty of the Individual¹

Harlan County, Kentucky is an ideal place to define a shifting vernacular conception of the folk dwelling before and after industrialization. As a 19th-century wilderness frontier, Harlan County was populated with a sprinkling of pioneer families living off the land by primitive means. Whether they were spinning wool, making moonshine or building a log cabin, Appalachian mountaineers supported themselves with their own hands, having little or no contact with the outside world. In the first century of



Figure 1: Harlan County is in the far southeastern portion of Kentucky, situated in the heart of the central Appalachians.

white settlement, the motions of progress were subdued by the static cycle bred by unchanging traditions. In 1911, the first serious threat to Harlan's isolation came by way of the entry of the coal industry into the narrow valleys of the Cumberland River. At that point the coal operators

found a few small agglomerated villages, but for the large part they found isolated settlers scattered along the creeks, many of whom had never left the walls of their own "holler;"²

¹ Quoted in Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, *Native Genius in Anonymous Architecture* (New York: Horizon Press, Inc., 1957), 7

generations having never even slept outside of the single-room log cabin their pioneer ancestors built. Yet even such isolation was not immune to the powerful change industry brought. By 1922 at least twenty five major coal operations had descended into and emerged from within Harlan County to excavate the county's coveted and bountiful "black gold."³ The pre-industrial housing in Harlan County could not support the needs of the coal industry, which rapidly attracted a labor force ten times the county's pre-industry population. In order to shelter the tens of thousands of workers flooding into Harlan County, coal companies quickly threw together "camps" across the county, containing rows of mass-produced dwellings flanking the railroad, enveloping the bottom land where the pioneer's log cabin once had domain.⁴

This paper defines the vernacular dwelling in Harlan County as both the pre-industrial folk house of the 19th century *and* the coal camp house of the 20th century. I argue that not only did there exist continuity between the pre-industrial and industrial houses of Harlan County, but that the patterns of external influence introduced into the region by the pioneers and the coal industrialists were not unsimilar and both contributed to the local vernacular. All of this suggests a definition of vernacular architecture that encompasses external influence and internal evolution to create a folk paradigm that adapts to changing social and economic conditions. A regional vernacular is not defined alone by the primitive, static structures of its first settlers, like the log cabin in Harlan County's case, but is inclusive of the subsequent forms that new technology and new

² "Holler" is the local pronunciation of the word *hollow*, a depression or crevice carved out of the side of a mountain by a stream forming a small valley in which one or two families would live.

³ Both newly formed local as well as national corporations set up coal mines in Harlan County in this period. This will be discussed in depth in Chapter Four.

⁴ The term *mass-produced* is introduced here to emphasize the rapid production of houses on a massive scale (relative to pre-coal folk building).

socio-economic structure bring about, such as the camp houses of Harlan County's post-settlement, industrial era. This assertion questions traditional conceptions of the vernacular as static and isolationist. While the case study used in this thesis is one county in a specific geographic region of the United States, the broadened definition of *vernacular* outlined here could apply to any region whose traditional way of life is confronted with changing socio-economic conditions.

The first generations of Harlan's white settlers "lay shrouded in isolation" up to 1911.⁵ The material culture had been sheltered by the mountains, limiting opportunities for new in-migrations.

Hedged in here by high mountain ridges is a basin ninety miles long by fifteen to twenty wide, containing numerous coal beds from five to seven feet thick of high grade and in workable situation. To the west is Pine Mountain, so steep that for miles not even a wagon road crosses it; to the east and north are the Cumberland and the Black Mountains in an unbroken chain, while to the southwest closing in the area is Fork Mountain. For a quarter century after the Civil war these mountains shut off the basin like a Chinese wall.⁶

The folk house tradition established by the first "great" immigration to Kentucky in 1775-1795⁷ remained relatively static throughout the 19th century, changing very little as the population and technology themselves changed very little. When the outside world began for the second time to make inroads into Harlan County, they found a rooted and solid material culture. Unlike the wild and sparsely inhabited landscape the pioneers met, the industrial wave of migration discovered a well-developed civilization with music,

⁵ John Hevener, *Which Side Are You On?* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 1

⁶ Charles Willard Hayes, "The Southern Appalachian Coal Field," *The Cumberland Coal Field and its Creators* (Middlesborough, Ky: Pinnacle Printery, 1905. Kentuckiana Electronic Texts Collection)

⁷ J.C. Tipton, "Historical and Descriptive," *The Cumberland Coal Field and its Creators* (Middlesborough, Ky: Pinnacle Printery, 1905. Kentuckiana Electronic Texts Collection), n.p. J.C. Tipton quotes Thomas Speed from his book *Wilderness Road* in saying that the "great" immigration of 1775-1795 was a movement of the first populations of white settlers to Kentucky and the western frontier beyond.

craft, and agriculture, and a building tradition evolved from European antecedents, but uniquely adapted to the mountainous environment.

When the Old World first arrived in New England and the Tidewater of Virginia, the Appalachian Mountains were an unknown frontier, populated by Native Americans and wild animals. The Appalachians lay forebodingly across any path to the west. Their penetration was unavoidable and necessary for the expanding white population. The small section of far southeastern Kentucky that eventually became Harlan County first came to the attention of those outside the region when a young explorer named Daniel Boone came upon a natural gap in the Cumberland Mountains. Boone “was the first to point out the advantages of the Cumberland Gap doorway, the first to pilot settlers into the state” forging the path for countless pioneer caravans.⁸ By way of Cumberland Gap, pioneers populated the “bluegrass” region of Kentucky and other parts of the mid-west.

Harlan County’s proximity to Cumberland Gap encouraged a handful of pioneers to settle there. The first families had names like Turner, Ledford, Jones, Howard, Middleton and Napier—names that have remained common in the valleys of Harlan County to the present day.⁹ In the 20th century, Harlan County earned a name for itself on a different front. As the site of some of the fiercest labor union struggles in the United States during the 1930s, “Bloody Harlan” became a symbol of battle and triumph for the labor movement nationwide. This struggle inspired folk singers in the labor movement of the 1930s, most notably Florence Reece, who wrote the song “Which Side Are You On?” in 1931. Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie helped to make Harlan’s struggle infamous

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Elmon Middleton, *Harlan County, Kentucky* (Big Laurel, Virginia: James Taylor Adams & James Taylor Adams II, 1934), 15.

when they sang this song all across the nation to workers fighting on every front for rights:

*Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?*

*My daddy was a miner,
And I'm a miner's son,
And I'll stick with the union
'Til every battle's won.*

*They say in Harlan County
There are no neutrals there.
You'll either be a union man
Or a thug for J. H. Blair. ...*



In the 1970s, labor struggles arose again in Harlan County. At this time, nearly a generation later, independent film producer Barbara Kopple was on the scene documenting the unfolding conflict. The resulting film, *Harlan County, U.S.A.*, won the Oscar for best documentary in 1977 and again brought Harlan County's struggle to national attention.

Figure 2: “A miner, Lejunior, Harlan County, Kentucky” in 1946. Fierce labor union battles gave Harlan County the name “Bloody Harlan” and brought the county to national attention on the social front. (Courtesy the Russell Lee Photographic Collection, 1979, University of Kentucky Digital Library)

Harlan County's labor strikes in the 1930s and 1960s brought national attention to the struggle of unionization in the coal camp community but this spotlight did little to draw scholarly attention to the intricacies of coal camp material culture. Popular stereotypes about living conditions in Appalachia's company towns were negative, initiated primarily by governmental reports published in 1925 and 1946.¹⁰ Rhonda

¹⁰ The United States Coal Commission conducted a survey of company towns across the nation and issued a report in 1925 citing numerous substandard living conditions as compared with the national middle class standards at that time. The Boone Report, published in 1946, “enlarged the negative images of company

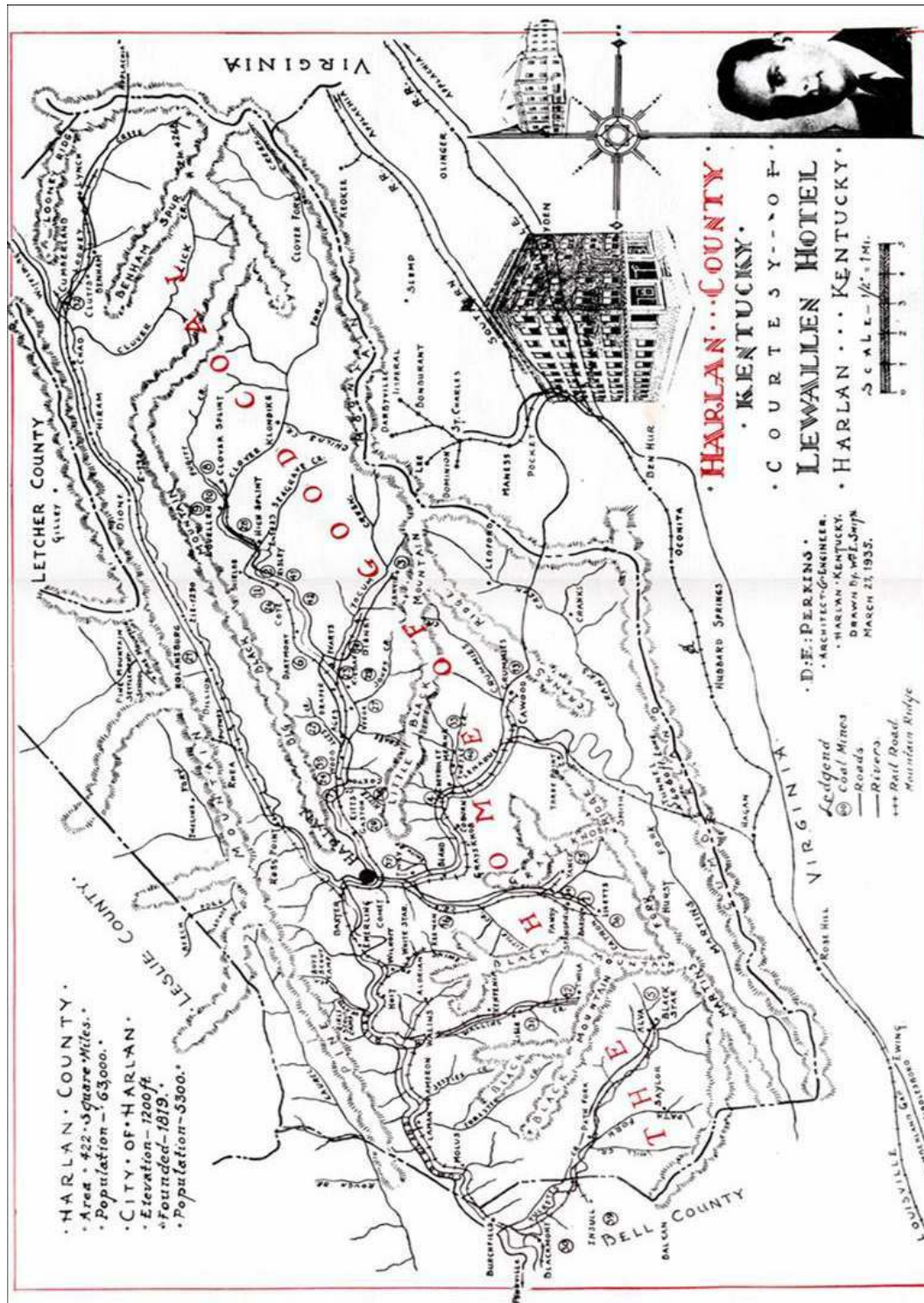


Figure 3: Map of Harlan County at the height of the coal industry circa 1930. At this time the population was 63,000 and over one hundred coal camps dotted the county. (Courtesy Theresa Osborne)

towns with photographs of sanitary conditions in the best and worst camps." In Crandall Shifflett, *Coal Towns* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 146-147.

Coleman summarized these negative stereotypes (with which she disagreed), writing that “they are dirty, squalid, poverty-stricken, collections of hovels with the atmosphere of concentration camps.”¹¹ The living conditions in coal camps were indeed substandard compared to middle-class America, but the poor conditions were often blown out of proportion by those outside the region.

Regional folk, writing about their own experiences, have been more positive (perhaps influenced by nostalgia) about life in the coal camp.¹² The majority of informants in the oral history collection at Southeast Community College in Harlan County recounted fair to positive experiences of growing up in coal camps. Mellie Brown moved to a camp house in Three Point from a nearby farm and recalled fondly the “nice clean little house” in the coal camp.¹³ Similarly Chester Cooper said the coal camp at Coxton where he started in the mines at age 17 had “any convenience that you wanted... good neighbors and good social times.”¹⁴ Yet very few of the more positive accounts bring attention to the architecture of the camp houses. If anything, informants might mention the number of rooms their camp house had or that there was a privy “out back.”¹⁵

Harlan County may have risen to national attention on the social front because of its union struggles, but its architecture never made it stand out in popular interest or scholarly research. However, the rich pioneer traditions contrasted by the scale of

¹¹ Rhonda Janney Coleman. “Coal Miners and their Communities in Southern Appalachia, 1925-1941,” *West Virginia Historical Society Quarterly* 15 no.2 (April 2001). Accessed online <http://www.wvculture.org/HiStory/wvhs1502.html> in October 2005.

¹² See Rebecca Caudill, *My Appalachia* (Canada: Rinehart and Winston, Ltd, 1966); W. C. Stump, *Memories of a Coal Camp Kid* (Kentucky: W.C. Stump, 1989)

¹³ Mellie Brown, interview by Sara Wilder, tape recording, 24 March 1983, Southeast Kentucky Community College Appalachian Archive (hereafter SECC).

¹⁴ Chester Cooper, interview by Opal Blevins, tape recording, 8 April 1982, SECC.

¹⁵ Bill Forrester, interview by author, 16 August 2005, Harlan, Kentucky.

industrialization that followed make the houses of Harlan County an excellent case study of continuous and evolving vernacular traditions in changing socio-economic conditions.



Figure 4: Children look out of the window of a camp house in neighboring Bell County in 1946. The caption accompanying this picture reports the windows have “no panes, the door frames have no doors; old quilts and boxes are used during the winter for protection.” Houses played a prominent role in changing socio-economic conditions in Harlan and neighboring counties. (Courtesy the Russell Lee Photographic Collection, 1979 at University of Kentucky, digitized in Kentuckiana Digital Library)

Coal mining began in earnest in 1911. Harlan County’s coal mining was executed by two distinct forces: local and absentee. In the camps that local companies developed, there was neither an abrupt change in landscape nor were the camp houses discontinuous with previous vernacular patterns due primarily to the fact that local builders were hired to build these houses.¹⁶ However, the shift from folk dwellings to coal camp dwellings was abrupt and discontinuous in coal camps developed by large absentee corporations like International Harvester at Benham and U.S. Steel at Lynch where larger, architect-

¹⁶ Local companies formed by local business built camps like Three Point in Lenarue pictured in Figure 5.

designed houses were constructed (see fig. 6).¹⁷ With this dichotomy of camp house types the delineation between pre-coal folk houses and coal camp houses becomes more complicated. The later chapters of this thesis address this dichotomy and posit that both locally and absentee-built camp houses have a place in Harlan's vernacular.



Figure 5: The Three Point Coal Camp in Lenarue, Kentucky originally constructed in 1923, pictured here in the 1930s. (Photograph courtesy John Cody)



Figure 6: Camp houses in Lynch, KY, c. 1918 along side one remaining log cabin. Many of the houses built in Lynch looked very different from the preceding folk houses.

¹⁷ *Absentee corporate interest* is used throughout this paper meaning speculative interest developed by corporations based outside of the Appalachian Mountains. In all cases discussed, absentee corporations were large, nationally recognized companies based in northern cities.

This thesis is two-fold: it is a written history of the house in Harlan County, recounting the forms, construction methods and usages of the everyday dwellings from settlement and coal camp eras; and it seeks to develop an understanding of vernacular architecture as inclusive of housing for ordinary folk in both static and temporal environments. I combine a synthesis of published materials, oral testimony and field observation. Using Harlan County, Kentucky as the case study, the thesis is organized into three sections: Vernacular Theory, Pre-Industrial Folk Houses, and Coal Camp Houses. The first section seeks to bring clarity to the concept of vernacular architecture, which can often be ambiguous, by offering an overview of the discipline's evolution and purpose. In this section I will also present my own understanding of vernacular architecture, as confirmed by the evidence found in Harlan County. The second section will describe the journey of European architectural elements to this country and how they result in the uniquely American log cabin with a focus on Harlan County. This section will describe the architectural variations and intricacies of the log cabin and its folk successors, framed and boxed houses. The third section addresses the industrial movement that brought a culture of industrialization and mass-produced folk dwellings. This collective presentation of both the pre-industrial and industrial folk house in Harlan County defines the handmade house and the mass-produced house as viable and interrelated pieces of vernacular architecture.

I. VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE: SYNTHESIS AND ADAPTATION

Interest in vernacular architecture began in the United States in earnest in the 1960s, when scholars like Fred Kniffen and Henry Glassie shaped an interdisciplinary study of ordinary, everyday buildings by combining elements of architecture, architectural history, geography, folklore, anthropology and material culture. The modifier *vernacular*, borrowed from its more common linguistic usage, is derived from a Latin root meaning domestic, native and indigenous.¹ Because the study of vernacular architecture combines so many different disciplines, the word *vernacular* has maintained a certain degree of ambiguity within the discipline and even more so to those outside it.

At this point it would be appropriate to offer a definition of *vernacular architecture*. However since this thesis posits a new understanding for an old, increasingly out-of-date definition I will begin by laying out its limitations. The initial understanding of vernacular housing owes much of its meaning to the word *vernacular* itself — indigenous, native dwelling built of natural, local materials by the inhabitants themselves in a fashion that responded to their everyday needs, values and physical environment in buildings that appeared to be “timeless and unchanging.”² John Brinckerhoff Jackson provides an apt summary of current thought and associations sparked by the word *vernacular*:

As generally used, [vernacular] suggests something countrified, homemade, traditional. As used in connection with architecture, it

¹ f.L. *Vernacul-us* domestic, native, indigenous (*Oxford English Dictionary*. Online: <http://dictionary.oed.com>).

² Paul Groth, “Making New Connections in Vernacular Architecture,” in *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 58, n.3 (Sept., 1999), 444.

indicates the traditional rural or small-town dwelling, the dwelling of the farmer or craftsman or wage earner. Current definitions of the word usually suggest that the vernacular dwelling is designed by a craftsman, not an architect, that it is built with local techniques, local materials, and with the local environment in mind: its climate, its traditions, its economy –predominantly agricultural. Such a dwelling does not pretend to stylistic sophistication. It is loyal to local forms and rarely accepts innovations from outside the region. It is not subject to fashion and is little influenced by history in its wider sense. That is why the word timeless is much used in descriptions of vernacular building.³

This understanding of the *vernacular* sparked numerous studies in rural landscapes of quickly disappearing folk forms including works by Kniffen, Glassie, Dell Upton, Terry Jordan and Michael Ann Williams. These studies focused long overdue architectural attention on the handmade, primitive buildings of American material culture.⁴

Early in the discussion on vernacular architecture, Glassie articulated a distinction between folk material culture and popular material culture. He posited that folk material culture, that which was handmade and traditional, was defined by geographic regions while popular material culture, that which was assimilated across a broad region for mass-consumption, was defined by time periods. This suggested that folk patterns were rooted in a locality and were less likely to change over long periods of time, being region-specific and static. Popular patterns, on the other hand, were more widespread and temporal in nature, hence national styles that came and went relatively quickly.⁵

The delineation between folk and popular, and whether only the former can be called vernacular, has become increasingly vague. Students and scholars of vernacular architecture have begun to study buildings that were not necessarily handmade or region-

³ John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1975), 85.

⁴ These studies were published between 1965 and 1990.

⁵ Henry Glassie, *Pattern in Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), 33-34

specific, but still housed everyday, ordinary people in their local environment—buildings like the professionally designed yet broadly assimilated suburban tract houses, company-built houses, and others that are manufactured like mobile homes.



Figure 7: A coal miner's children on the back porch of their camp house at the PV & K coal camp in Kenvir, Kentucky. While coal camp houses were built in large numbers throughout Harlan County with machine-made materials, they are also apart of the vernacular landscape. (Russell Lee Photographic Collection, 1979, Kentuckiana Digital Library)

The creation of the Vernacular Architecture Forum did a lot to expand and promote a broadened view of vernacular architecture. Members of this organization embarked on a wide spectrum of architectural studies ranging in subject from rural to urban, handmade to mass-produced, regional to national. No longer was vernacular

architecture a rural and indigenous-centric discipline focused on static buildings of timeless places:⁶

Over the last thirty years, scholars have begun to shift the definition of vernacular architecture away from its earlier, essentially folkloristic emphasis on preindustrial construction and ethnicity, and also away from the geographer's fascination with regional patterns.⁷

This thesis contributes to the ongoing effort on the part of folklorists, geographers and architectural historians to assert a broader definition of the vernacular. In the particular case study of Harlan County, the vernacular includes a duality of traditional and mass-produced houses which makes it an ideal field to continue this widening conception.

This thesis will expand on conventional notions of the vernacular as static, handmade and timeless where aspects of this conventional definition remain relevant and apparent in Harlan County's houses. Vernacular architecture describes those buildings which are anonymous cultural expressions on a human scale. Vernacular houses express a community's identity and take shape out of the "smallness of their own experience."⁸ The community could have been as small as a caravan settlement on a fork of the Cumberland River living in single pen log cabins, or it could have been as large as the coal miners throughout the whole of Appalachia living in industrial camp houses. The "smallness of their own experience" was the way the community's lifestyle, environment and values were reflected in the architecture of their everyday use. These lifestyles, environments and values changed slowly from generation to generation. The houses

⁶ See Paul Groth, "Making New Connections in Vernacular Architecture;" Henry Glassie, *Vernacular Architecture*; Camille Wells, introduction to *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, v. 1 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987); Annmarie Adams and Sally McMurry, introduction to *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, v. 7 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

⁷ Groth, 444-451.

⁸ Glassie, *Vernacular Architecture*, 17

responded to these changing conditions and evolved to meet the needs of their residents. The log cabin and the coal camp house can both be called vernacular because each in their own time reflected the “smallness” in everyday living of the inhabitants.

Ninety-eight-year-old Betty Spicer grew up in a log cabin. When she married, she moved around from camp to camp as her husband worked various coal mining jobs.



Figure 8: Betty Spicer at her home.
(Photograph by author)

Finally they built their own house in 1947 just down the hill from where Mrs. Spicer’s childhood log home had stood. She remarked to me in a wistful tone that her father built their log house with help from neighbors in just two days out of “crooked” logs. Proudly she added: “You can build a house out of anything. But a home—now *that* was a home.”⁹

The study of vernacular houses can often be overwhelmed by the intricacies of building types and construction methods. But the underlying

essence of the discipline involves the recounting of how a house becomes a home and what that means for all the generations to follow.

⁹ Betty Spicer, interview by author, Closesplint, Kentucky, 16 August 2005.

II. THE PRE-INDUSTRIAL FOLK HOUSE IN HARLAN COUNTY

“Unlike fashionable styles, folk building traditions, handed down from generation to generation, show relatively little change with time; they are however, more strongly influenced by geography than are architectural styles. The local availability of building materials, as well as the building traditions imported by the earliest settlers of an area, can lead to strong contrasts in the structure and form of folk houses from region to region.”

Lee and Virginia McAlester, *Fieldguide to American Houses*¹

Integral to understanding Harlan County’s vernacular houses were the basic forms and methods employed by the region’s first European-descent settlers.² As the passage above articulates, “folk” building methods were formed through generations of trial and error, cultural priorities, resources at hand and the environmental conditions of the locality. People do not always stay in the same place, though. Europeans who moved to North America inevitably brought with them the building sense and tradition of their homeland. Harlan County, like the whole of Appalachia and the New World, lay as a canvas for these Old World traditions, which in turn blended to make houses that were unique to the emerging cultural and physical environment of the American colonies. New combinations of European building traditions, notably the log cabin, became embedded within the American vernacular landscape.³ These houses would in time become a precedent and building block for future incarnations of the vernacular, long past the ending of the initial settlement period.

¹ Lee and Virginia McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 63.

² For the purposes of defining a vernacular tradition that was first established by European settlers, the minimal presence and influence of native peoples in Harlan County will not be included.

³ The word *cabin* comes from Ireland meaning a small, temporary house. John Alexander Williams *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 105; Henry Glassie, “Appalachian Log” (*Mountain Life and Work* XXXIX: 4 [“Appalachian Log”]), 8.

This second chapter narrates a history of the pre-industrial house in Harlan County, as compiled from oral history, photographic and literary evidence. The first section of this chapter gives a background on the arrival of European building traditions to Appalachia and Harlan County. The second section fleshes out the construction methods, materials and spatial usage of Harlan County's log cabin. The second chapter moves into the age of the sawmill, investigating the ways lighter, more uniform building materials were applied to traditional forms, and how traditional forms evolved with new materials, focusing on the two story farmhouse and the box house.



Figure 9: The “Old Cabin Home” became a symbol of the American pioneer. This photograph was taken in Southeastern Kentucky in the late 19th century. (Berea College Archive, Mountain Collection)

Shaping the Appalachian Log Cabin

European Roots

As Europeans settled on the East Coast of North America, they brought with them the well-developed material cultures from their homeland.⁴ In most cases these traditions had to be adjusted to the new environment and the availability of natural resources. The English brought a half-timbered house in which vertical and angled thick hewn logs provided the structural support, and a limestone mixture filled the gaps between the timbers and provided the insulation.⁵ Once the English arrived in New England, they discovered that limestone was not as common there as it had been in England. They were forced to either choose different materials or adapt the construction style.⁶ In a similar way, the emerging cultural environment affected the proliferation of forms and techniques. Both Scandinavian and German emigrants are credited with bringing log construction to the colonies.⁷ However, the traditional Scandinavian and German house plans did not fare as well in the New World. The German house plan contained three rooms as shown in Figure 10.

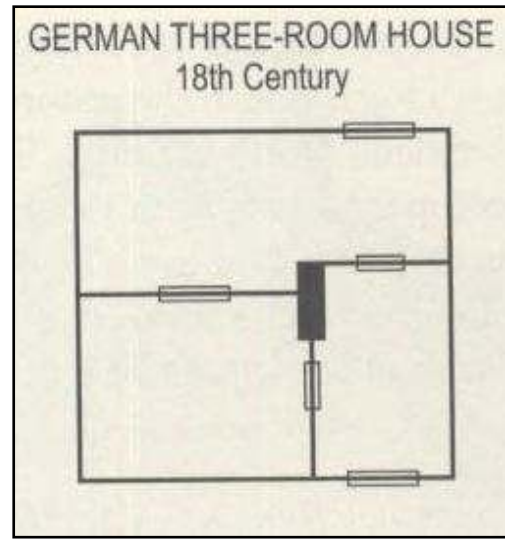
⁴ Material culture is a term used by folklorists and defined here by Henry Glassie in *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States* as denoting those “segments of human learning which provide a person with plans, methods, and reasons for producing things which can be seen and touched” (2).

⁵ Glassie, “Appalachian Log Cabin,” 5; John Milnes Baker, *American House Styles: A Concise Guide* (New York: The Sarabande Press, 1994), 20-22. Baker specifically links the half-timber construction to England’s Tudor and Jacobean eras.

⁶ The English embraced sawn lumber, or clap board, as a way to cover the heavy timber frame instead of in-filling it with limestone. Terry G. Jordan and Matti Kaups, *The American Backwoods Frontier: An Ethnic and Ecological Interpretation* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 135.

⁷ A. C. Weslager, *The Log Cabin in America: From Pioneer Days to the Present* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1969), 202, 213. Weslager makes the important point that even though the Swedes and Finns were the first to bring log construction to America in the early to mid-1600s, the Germans, arriving nearly a century later, far outnumbered the Scandinavians and dispersed over a larger region, proliferating log construction as we know it across Pennsylvania and the Shenandoah valley of Virginia. See Fred Kniffen and Henry Glassie, “Building in Wood in the Eastern United States,” *The Geographical Review* LVI: I 1966), 56 n. 34, 58-64. Henry Glassie and Fred Kniffen also hold that German log construction diffused across Pennsylvania, down the Great Valley and into the Upland South. See Fred Kniffen and Henry Glassie, “Building in Wood in the Eastern United States,” (56 footnote 34, 58-64.

Figure 10: The log houses the Germans built as they first arrived in the colonies were three rooms with a center chimney. Their log construction, however, proliferated to a greater extent than their house plan, as the English pen tradition had a greater influence on colonial building. (Plan taken from Rehder, *Appalachian Folkways*, 111)



English culture carried the largest influence on the Eastern seaboard during the 17th and 18th centuries, dominating the New World from settlements in Tidewater, Virginia and New England. As a result, at least one aspect of their building tradition, the pen plan, became incorporated into the building vocabulary of the other cultural groups, including the Germans and Scandinavians.⁸ The English *pen* meant a room in a house. A single pen house consisted of just one square or rectangular room while the double pen was two rooms.⁹ The single pen house was more common in the New England settlements where the house had an end-facing gable and one door to the outside on the wall that is at the gable side with a chimney on the gable end.¹⁰ (See *Image Glossary*) The double pen, or *hall-and-parlor* house, was more common in the Tidewater settlements.¹¹ By the time

⁸ Weslager, 155; Michael Ann Williams, *Homeplace: The Social Use and Meaning of the Folk Dwelling in Southwestern North Carolina* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1991), 26; Glassie, "Appalachian Log," 8.

⁹ Glassie, "Appalachian Log," 5.

¹⁰ Williams, *Homeplace*, 26-27. Glassie "Appalachian Log," 9: Glassie cites the influence of the medieval English bay house in the single pen log cabin. The traditional English bay houses were a square sixteen feet while pens often took on a more rectangular shape.

¹¹ McAlester, 94; Gerald Foster, *American Houses: A Field Guide to the Architecture of the Home* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 90-92. Of the two rooms of a *hall-and-parlor* house, one was larger and acted as an enlarged path from the front of the house to the back (the "hall") and as a multi-purpose room where the kitchen would have been if not outside, as well as stairs to the loft. The smaller room called the "parlor" acted as a space for sitting, sleeping or entertaining. Within the hall-and-parlor

German and English settlers had moved into western Pennsylvania, down through the Shenandoah Valley and into the foothills of the Appalachians, both the single and double pen houses were the predominant house type. These were built not out of a half-timbered frame with clapboard, but out of horizontally stacked logs, a resource more readily available to those on the frontier than milled board.¹²

The log cabin in the pen tradition was a strategic combination of horizontal log construction, a method that utilized “the most abundant raw material of the woodlands ...and could be accomplished quickly with only an ax and a saw, required no hardware, and allowed the pioneer to be free of dependence upon sawmills, brick kilns, and nail manufacture.”¹³ Even though the log cabin has been branded an American icon, a house that “strongly symbolizes Appalachia to the rest of the nation,”¹⁴ the log cabin itself was a product of the cultural fusion, evolution and adaptation of pre-American influences. It became a building block to later Appalachian houses, but it was first a transplantation and combination of European vernacular houses.

plan the chimney was, as mentioned above, either splitting the middle two rooms or on one or both ends of the side gables. The front door entered the house on the side of the gable into the “hall,” slightly off center on the house façade.

¹² Jordan and Kaups, *American Backwoods* 135.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ J. A. Williams, 105.

Harlan County's First Houses

“Out of this combination of Old World and New World factors came a vernacular style characterized by short-lived or temporary dwellings focused on the family and distinct from the place of work, dwellings largely independent of the traditional community constraints and institutions, dwellings using new construction techniques, and with a new relationship to the environment.”

-John Brinkerhoff Jackson¹⁵

The log cabin characterized the majority of houses built in the early to mid-19th century in Harlan County, being both region-specific and static as traditional definitions of vernacular might suggest.¹⁶ But the timelessness of Appalachian isolation was interrupted following the Civil War. Sawmill technology made its way into the region at that time, although plank and sawn board construction did not reach its height as a building material until the late 19th century. Pre-industrial folk housing in Harlan County can be categorized into three groups by sequence of appearance and popularity: log houses, framed houses and boxed houses. These three manifestations primarily represent a shift in materials and secondarily adjustments in spatial arrangement. The analysis of folk housing in the following sections recounts these pre-industrial folk house forms in Harlan County using evidence collected in the field, oral testimony gathered from people who had at one point lived in a pre-industrial folk house as well as scholarship from a variety of publications.

¹⁵ John Brinkerhoff Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1975), 86

¹⁶ The log cabin became region-specific to central Appalachia during the 19th century as the rest of the Eastern United States adopted new building methods. Local builders in Harlan County and neighboring counties continued to employ log construction for lack of any new architectural influences because of the region's physical isolation. For this reason the single-pen log cabin and its additive variations were a static architectural form for nearly a century.

Log Construction

As European-descent people became more settled on the eastern seaboard of America, a small trickle of colonists pioneered west into the more densely forested inland parts of Virginia, Pennsylvania and New England. From western Pennsylvania, settlers traveled down the Great Valley and into the Carolina Piedmont, there meeting those who were coming west from the Tidewater region. In a map created by Kniffen and Glassie, arrows show these routes of European diffusion through the eastern half of the United



Figure 11: A map displaying Fred Kniffen and Henry Glassie's conclusions on the diffusion of building methods across the Eastern United States. ("Building in Wood in the Eastern United States," *Geographical Review*, 1966, pg 60)

States (fig. 11). In this map, one arrow travels from the Delaware Valley through Maryland, down the Shenandoah Valley and into the Appalachian Mountains crossing over the intersection of Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky, approximately where Harlan

County lies. The county's proximity to Cumberland Gap, a natural entry point into the Allegheny and Cumberland Plateaus (and the likely path of Glassie and Kniffen's arrow), made it a natural resting place and often a permanent settlement for travelers too tired or discouraged to go on. Sometimes, as in the case of Aley Ledford (one of Harlan's first settlers), southeastern Kentucky accidentally ended up being the destination itself.

Aley was thirteen in 1802 when he traveled through the "back door" into what would become Harlan County.¹⁷ His family and a group of four other families together traveled from North Carolina, through Tennessee, and eventually into the wilderness of Kentucky. Aley had set out with his mother and father who were bound for the Bluegrass beyond the mountains. After crossing through Cumberland Gap a strong storm blew a large tree onto the wagon where Aley's parents slept and killed them both. From that point Aley decided to go with the other families who were bound for the valleys just past Cumberland Gap in what was then Knox County. These valleys in Knox County were river bottoms in isolated hollows off the beaten trail, a trail that was increasingly becoming crowded with settlers bound for the Bluegrass.¹⁸

The paths leading from Cumberland Gap into the back valleys of Knox County were rough. The party had to abandon their wagons and carry all their possessions on cattle. Before Aley had left North Carolina he had heard "it was dangerous over beyond the mountains, but even with the hardships, men that came back for supplies and such talked about Kentucky like it was the Bible's Eden..."¹⁹ Eden it must have seemed when

¹⁷ John Egerton, *Generations: An American Family* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 48. The "front door" meaning to have followed the Cumberland River to Mount Pleasant (later named Harlan) and from there to follow one of the three feeding branches of the Cumberland River.

¹⁸ Egerton, 45. Cumberland Gap served as a crossing point for pioneers who were traveling through the Appalachian Mountains in order to get to the other side.

¹⁹ Egerton, 42.

the travelers came out of the thick forest into the bottom land of Martin's Fork where they found a "wide valley that opened to the north, blue sky above it and sunlight shining on the creek waters."²⁰

Aley's story was one of hundreds: pioneers intentionally or accidentally arrived at the beautiful, isolated valleys of southeastern Kentucky. After arriving on the land, the groups of families split up to claim their own acreage. To ensure the land against the claim of future settlers they first cleared off the trees and brush. The cleared trees were saved and used as building material. Using the cleared trees, families (with the help of neighbors) would often build a cabin first, eventually building a more permanent house when resources and time afforded. The house that Aley's family built in the Martin's Fork valley was a two-room, or double pen log cabin with a "loft, hewed logs chinked with mud, dirt floor [and] fireplace."²¹

In Aley's double pen, like all double and single pens, the roof was gabled and covered in "shakes," or shingles, which were made by splitting small lengths of lumber. The dimensions of the rectangular single pen were consistently twenty and twenty-two by sixteen to eighteen feet,²² while double pens, as the name suggests, were twice as big. The chimney(s) was (were) located on the gable end of the house while the door(s) were on the side of the gable (see *Image Glossary*).

Windows were uncommon in the early days of settlement partly because glass was not available and partly because gaps between the logs supplied enough light and fresh air during the day. When windows were included in the log walls, they were small

²⁰ Egerton, 47

²¹ Egerton, 49

²² Rehder, 99. These measurements are based on collective inventories of single pen log cabins in northeast Tennessee and western North Carolina collected by Rehder and colleagues.

and square and covered with a piece of hide, cloth or wood. This method of covering windows continued in Appalachia long past the availability of glass, which was an extra expense. Emma Bell Miles, one of the rare early (1901) writers about Appalachian culture, explains the mountaineer's take on light and air in the log cabin: "Pure air is prized as highly as pure water, and a cabin door is always open, save at night or during the worst weather. This, with the cracks and "cat-holes" where the chinking falls out, naturally renders windows superfluous, and they are rarely found in the older houses."²³

The first families to settle in an area, if they had traveled alone, had the task of building their cabin by themselves. The difficulty of cutting and assembling the logs with just one or two able-bodied men mandated that the logs be lighter and easier to handle. As a result, the earliest log cabins were made from much thinner logs and could



Figure 12: A 20th century "pole" shack in Harlan County. Small round logs, or poles, were used to build houses during the depression when a family could not afford a house made of sawn lumber. (Goodman-Paxton Photographic Collection, 1934-1942, Kentuckiana Digital Library)

²³ Emma Bell Miles, *The Spirit of the Mountains* (New York: James Pott, 1905), 20.

be assembled in a day's time.²⁴ Mud, clay and smaller branches could be filled in later to seal the cracks and make the dwelling more insulated. This house of "poles" was designed as a temporary dwelling until enough manpower could be gathered to cut, hew, notch and assemble larger trees into a durable log house. "Pole shacks"²⁵ as they were labeled in the 1930s appeared again on the Appalachian landscape during the Depression long after log cabins became the primary type of construction (see fig. 12).

Similar to the "pole shack" in principle, some of the early chimneys were constructed with wattle-and-daub,²⁶ rather than from brick, which was non-existent in early Appalachia, or stone, which may have been too time-intensive to gather.

As families were able, they built more durable log houses out of logs that had been squared, or hewn. Hewing logs was a process of cutting four sides of the log length-wise with an ax. Hewn logs, when stacked one on top of another, created a tighter fit, reducing the amount of chinking needed. Corner notching varies greatly among hewn log houses. In figure 13, the notching on this single pen cabin is half-dovetail.²⁷ This cabin, photographed at an unknown location and time in southeastern Kentucky, exemplifies a one-and-half-story single pen. The floor joists for the loft can be seen extending flush with the outer logs just above the door and window.

A front or back porch was a common appendage to the single pen cabin, although by no means prescribed. The front porch maximized living space outside during the hot summer weather. Just as the fireplace was the center of life in the evenings and cooler

²⁴ Glassie, "Appalachian Log," 8

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Rehder, 323. *Wattle-and-daub* construction is a construction technique from the Old World which uses small branches and sticks to form the wattle, and mud and straw to daub the holes and cracks. (Rehder, 323)

²⁷ The varieties of corner notching have been the subject of extensive study by leading scholars in the field, but in this paper I will neither describe them nor draw on them as substantial evidence.

months, the front porch was the stage for most domestic activity in the summer. In cases where families owned a loom and spinning wheel, they were used on the porch.²⁸



Figure 13: A small window flanks the doorway into this one-and-a-half story single pen, hewn log cabin. The roof is covered with “shakes” or slices axed off a short log. (Berea College Archive, Mountain Collection)

Another significant variation on the single pen plan that occurred frequently was the addition of a rear ell or shed for the kitchen (see *Image Glossary*).²⁹ The rear addition included a chimney and fireplace on the gable end where the cooking occurred. While log cabins with these additions were technically two-rooms, they are still classified as single pen houses.

²⁸ Elfair Frazier, interview by Cathy Page, tape recording, January 1983, SECC.

²⁹ The “ell” and shed are two separate forms. The “ell” has a gabled roof that runs perpendicular to the gable of the original house. If looked at from above, the gable of the “ell” makes an “L” shape in conjunction with the gable of the house. The shed is a lean-to structure whose roof continues from the roof line of the main house’s gable. In either case, the added back room stretched no more than half the length of the original house (see *Image Glossary*)

Michael Ann Williams extensively studied folk dwelling in southwestern North Carolina where the single pen tradition was strong. Williams gathered oral histories of local residents who had lived in a log house. She found that the common folk term for the single pen was “big house.”³⁰ This word refers to the one large room (in relative terms) of a single pen cabin, a house that could have had a back kitchen and a loft above. The “big house” described only the main room of the cabin where the sleeping and living took place.³¹



Figure 14: The Creech family cabin was built in 1847 further up the mountain from its current location on the campus of the Pine Mountain Settlement School, where it was reconstructed in 1921. (Photograph by author)

In some cases the “big house” was quite small as in the Creech cabin (see fig. 14). This single pen cabin from 1870 originally stood on Pine Mountain but was moved down into the valley in 1926 where it has since been preserved as a museum. The Creech cabin

³⁰ Williams, *Homeplace*, 38

³¹ Ibid.

is an example of a single pen cabin where sleeping, eating, living and cooking all happened in one room.

The double pen cabin was an adaptation and enlargement of the basic single pen unit. The two rooms were combined in three predominant ways across Harlan County, each using a different way of extending the single pen house.



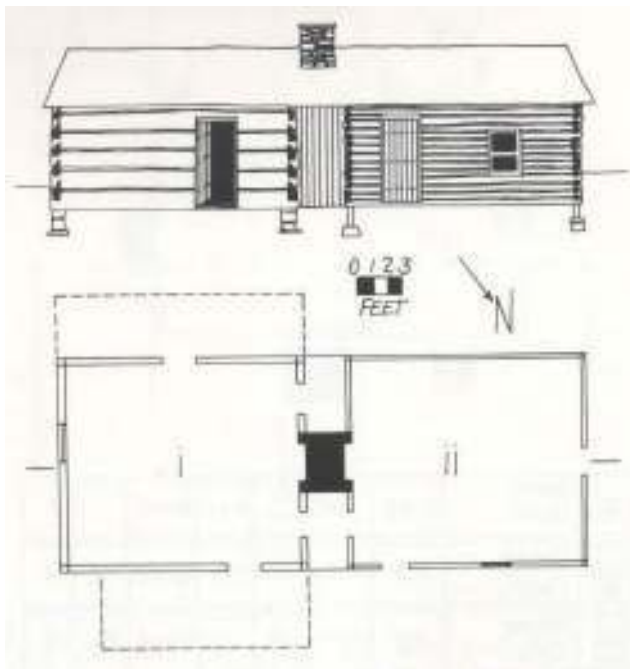
Figure 15: The “Cumberland” house is the standard end to end combination of two single pen cabins. There are two chimneys, one at each gable end. (Tennessee Historical Commission. Taken from Rehder, 101)

The first type, the standard combination of two single pens, was first called the “Cumberland” house by Bert Riedl in the 1970s after he and other anthropologists found this particular double pen form to be dominant in the Cumberland Plateau of Tennessee (see fig. 15).³² The Cumberland house is two rooms wide, one room deep and one-and-a-

³² Rehder, 101. Riedl, Ball and Cavender found this particular “ordinary” double pen the most common double pen type in the Tennessee Valley Authority’s Normandy Reservoir Project in Coffee County, Tennessee. The house was located in part of the Cumberland Plateau and subsequently became known as the “Cumberland” house (Rehder, 101). Although this may not be a universally recognized term for this type of double pen, I will use it in this paper because of its prominence in Harlan County, also a part of the Cumberland Plateau.

half stories high.³³ It is distinguished by one chimney on each gable end, two front doors and a shared wall between the two pens. A typical appendage is a front porch running the length of the side gable onto which the two front doors open. Each front door give access to one of the two rooms. This trait, which is not limited to the double pen in general, will be discussed later in detail.

The Cumberland double pen cabin could have been built in entirety at one time, but the second pen also could have been built as an addition to a single pen house to enlarge the original structure. The difficulty here was connecting the two log walls. Because of the corner notching, the corner joints of the two pens could not be easily connected. As a result, log houses that had a log pen added at a later date have a small



separation between the structures, covered with boards or filled in with more logs. (see fig. 16)

Figure 16: An additive saddlebag house (described later) that stood in the Head of Hollybush, a small, now defunct community in Eastern Kentucky. Tom Caudill built the single pen log cabin (i) on the left in 1916 and added the second single pen (ii) on the right in 1937. The interior between the two rooms was covered with vertical planks and used for storage. (Charles Martin, *Hollybush*, 45)

Pioneers could avoid this problem by creating an intentional space between the two log structures. This space functioned like a breezeway or “dogtrot” between two pens connected under the same lengthwise gable (see fig. 17 and *Image Glossary*). The

³³ The Cumberland house is very similar to the *hall-and-parlor* house which proliferated from English Tidewater settlements throughout the South, as noted at the beginning of this Section.

dogtrot, as this type of double pen is called, like the Cumberland, could have built wholly at one time or by a later addition. The dogtrot had chimneys located on the gable ends providing one fireplace per room, as in the Cumberland. Unlike the Cumberland, though, the front doors could have opened from the two pens onto the breezeway instead of the front porch.



Figure 17: A dog-trot log cabin in Southeastern Kentucky. (Berea College Archives, Mountain Collection)

A variation on the dogtrot plan that I ran into several times in southeastern Kentucky was a one-and-a-half or two-story single pen with a back or side ell addition connected via a dogtrot. In one case, a house in nearby Clay County, Kentucky, was built by Dillon Asher shortly before 1800 as a two-story single pen hewn-log cabin (fig. 18). In 1968, a smaller log cabin was moved off a nearby mountainside and attached to the Asher cabin with a dogtrot, forming a back ell. Based on the proportion of dogtrot houses remaining of the total number of extant log structures in Harlan County



Figure 18: Original two-story log cabin built by Dillon Asher before 1800. It was restored in 1968 at which time the kitchen ell addition was relocated to the site from higher on the mountainside to form a dogtrot. The cabin is located in Clay County and is maintained by Red Bird Mission. (Photograph by author)

and the neighboring vicinity, this type of double pen was an important part of the pre-industrial landscape. Interestingly, this form does not reoccur with any frequency in coal camps or other houses that used more modern building technology.

The third type of double pen is similar to the Cumberland in that there is no open passage between the two pens. However, unlike either the dogtrot or the Cumberland, there is only one chimney, which splits the shared wall between the two pens. Two pens flank the central chimney like saddlebags flank a horse, thus giving the house its name: “saddlebag.”³⁴ With a chimney in the shared wall, there could have been fireplaces in both rooms, although this was not always the case.³⁵ This type of double-pen was built by adding a room onto the chimney gable end of an existing single pen, in which case the chimney had to be rebuilt if a hearth was desired in both rooms. In other cases, both pens

³⁴ Rehder, 103

³⁵ Betty Spicer, interview by author, 16 August 2005. Mrs. Spicer reported that in the saddlebag log cabin where she grew up there was no second fireplace.

were built simultaneously. The saddlebag house often had a front porch stretching the length of the side gable with two front doors exiting onto it.

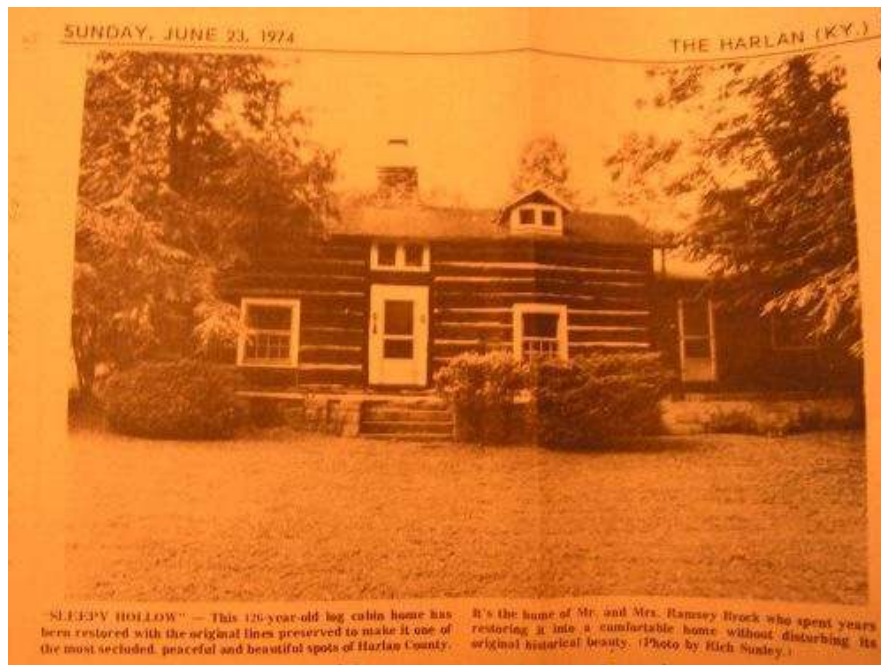


Figure 19: Wampus Creek cabin, Cawood, Kentucky. Double-pen log cabin when built in 1846 by John Farmer. Remodeled by Jayne Brock in the early 1950s. (Photograph courtesy Jayne Brock)

The Wampus Creek cabin (fig. 19), near Cawood, Kentucky, was originally a one-and-a-half story saddlebag log cabin built in 1847. The cabin has only one front door that opens into the center of the house. A steep staircase leading to the loft occupies the space opposite the door on the other side of the chimney where a ladder first stood. A staircase or ladder was regularly located near the chimney in cabins with a loft. The Wampus Creek cabin originally had a front porch, which has since been removed. Its last resident, Jayne Brock, proudly told the story of how this cabin was raised in two days by John Farmer and his extended family.³⁶ The cabin is locally recognized to be the oldest

³⁶ Jayne Brock, interview by author, 18 August 2005. Jayne and her husband, Ramsey, renovated the cabin at Wampus Creek in the 1950s. The extent of their renovations included raising the roof so the loft became a full second story, adding several rooms on the side and in the back, rebuilding the chimney, adding dormers, enlarging existing windows and adding windows above the door. The cabin is cited in *Ripley's Believe It Or Not* for its rapid construction.

extant, continuously lived-in log cabin in Harlan County, and possibly in all of Kentucky.³⁷

More than the other types of double pens, the saddlebag type reappeared in the coal camps. As we will see in the last section of this chapter the saddlebag double pen evolved into a four-room house in which the chimney still split the shared wall of the front two rooms but there were two additional rooms in the back that did not have a chimney.

A common element in these double pen plans was the number and location of front doors. With few exceptions, each room of a double pen house had a door to the outside. When I asked people in Evarts why houses had two front doors, they were initially also stumped. Perhaps the two doors were so embedded in building traditions of the past that the reason for them had ceased to be passed down. But given a few minutes to think about it, their answer struck me with its obviousness: fire escape. Large families of ten or twelve lived in these two room log houses, and in case of a fire—which was not a rare occurrence in the fire-heated homes—getting everyone out of the house quickly was a real concern. Several people remember that their parents would never sleep in a room without a door for fear of fire, or maybe for easier access to the privy. For both reasons, it was polite to sleep guests in a room with a door to the outside.

Another essential feature of early folk houses in the mountains was the outdoor toilet, occupying a small house on the back of the main house. There is not much to say about the outdoor privies in their relation to the main house, except that they contributed to the number of doors. A back door was common in both single and double pen houses

³⁷ *Harlan Daily Enterprise*. June 23, 1974.

(only one of the rooms of a double pen house had a back door), which could have been for more direct access to the outhouse and other back buildings.

Logs served as the primary material of construction for settlers in the central Appalachians well into the later half of the 18th century. This speaks to both the region's isolation from newer technologies and the efficiency of the solid wood walls.

Appalachians recount a common tale of how snow would sometimes drift in through the cracks in the logs onto their bed at night.³⁸ But they never report having been cold.



Elfair Frazier nostalgically remembered how the fireplace in her log house warmed the whole room where they slept even in the deep winter snows.³⁹ The logs provided thick, ample insulation.

Figure 20: Interior shot of the kitchen building of the Dillon Asher cabin in Clay County, Kentucky. Hewn logs provided a well insulated house whose thick walls were unmatched by the subsequent framing and boxing methods, which produced much thinner walls. Yet residents sacrificed the traditional logs for the lighter, easier-to-handle milled lumber of the sawmill era. (Photograph by author)

³⁸ Williams, *Homeplace*, 18-19. Michael Ann Williams heard this story repeated often in her oral testimonies in southwestern North Carolina.

³⁹ Frazier, interview.

Milled Lumber Construction

New building methods were inevitable as technology permeated into the mountains after the Civil War. Gristmills that ground corn into meal had long been in operation throughout Harlan County.⁴⁰ When Ben A. Rice built a gristmill on the Clover Fork River in the town of Harlan shortly after the Civil War he also included an “attachment to saw lumber with the same power that furnished the gristmill. The lumber sawed at this mill was used to build the third courthouse, which was of frame construction and a two-story frame jailhouse. This mill furnished lumber for many of the frame houses which were built in Harlan up until about 1895.”⁴¹ This is the first mention of a mill for sawing lumber that Mabel Condon gives in her history of the county. From this point, many of the other gristmills adapted to sawmills in addition to their corn-grinding capability.



Figure 21: A sawmill in Lynch c. 1917. Lumber increasingly became a commodity as sawmills appeared in the valleys of Harlan County. (SECC Appalachian Archive)

⁴⁰ Mabel Green Condon, *A History of Harlan County* (Nashville: The Parthenon Press, 1962), 124. Several current town names end in *mill* like Holmes Mill, Pounding Mill and Farmer’s Mill indicating former gristmill sites.

⁴¹ Condon, 125-126

In the period between 1870 and 1910, construction with lightweight sawn lumber grew in popularity across the county as two construction types rose to dominance: framed balloon (or simply *frame*) and board-and-batten. The transition from log housing to framed housing was not abrupt, nor did sawn lumber houses significantly transform or alter the landscape.⁴² With the farmhouse as the exception (explained in the following section), single and double pen plans continued relatively unchanged by the new material in the years immediately following its arrival. Even when a family could not afford to rebuild a log house with framed lumber, they could build appendages and extra rooms onto an existing log house with sawn lumber.



Figure 22: Two identical outbuildings stand side-by-side, one built of logs (right) and the other built of framed lumber. Photographed in Union County, Tennessee. (Tennessee Historical Commission, 1979, Rehder, 129)

Frame

One folk house type that was a part of the extended pen tradition and gained popularity with the introduction of frame construction is the farmhouse or “I” house. The farmhouse stands out in the architectural history of Appalachia, as it does across much of

⁴² Williams, *Appalachia*, 108.

the early American landscape as a symbol of economic achievement.⁴³ Kniffen was first to assert that this basic farmhouse, with a central passage cutting through the middle of a two-story house one room deep and two rooms wide, was built all across the Upland South, Lower South and Midwest having first originated on the Eastern Seaboard in English settlements.⁴⁴ Kniffen labeled this basic form an “I” house because he first recognized it in Indiana and subsequently traced it in Illinois and Iowa. Kniffen’s classification has become part of the American vernacular language. Scholars have used the terminology ever since to classify similar houses across the United States, giving credit to the impact and scale of Kniffen’s classification and recognition of its continuities across a broad area.

Some scholars, however, have chosen to refer to this house by its more universal trait, the *central passage*, that runs along the center axis of the first and often the second story. John Alexander Williams prefers to call this house form the “white house” because it was sided with milled lumber and frequently painted white in contrast to the worn gray walls of log houses. Williams, who himself grew up in such a white farmhouse, notes that the label of “white house” is used regularly by folk rather than the more scholarly “center-passage” or “I.”⁴⁵ Whatever this two-story, long, skinny house is called, its contribution to the evolution of the vernacular house in Harlan County was important. The farmhouse, or I-house, was a symbol of a certain economic attainment in

⁴³ Michael Ann Williams, “Pride and Prejudice:” The Appalachian Boxed House in Southwestern North Carolina” (*Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 25, No. 4 [Winter, 1990]), 219. Williams asserts that “non-log rural dwellings...are mostly houses built by the relatively well-off; for instance, those who prospered during the booms in flue-cured tobacco or timber, those who lived in fertile river valleys, and those who profited from the influx of tourists into the region.”

⁴⁴ The geographical classifications of Upland and Lower South are defined by Rehder (53). Kniffen puts forth his I-house classification in his paper “Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion,” 553.

⁴⁵ J. A. Williams, *Appalachia*, 108. The distinction between term usage is cited in footnote 53, where he also makes a connection to Michael Ann Williams’s rejection of the term “I” house.

the agricultural community, both in sheer physical height and in the milled lumber with which it was most often sided (fig. 23).

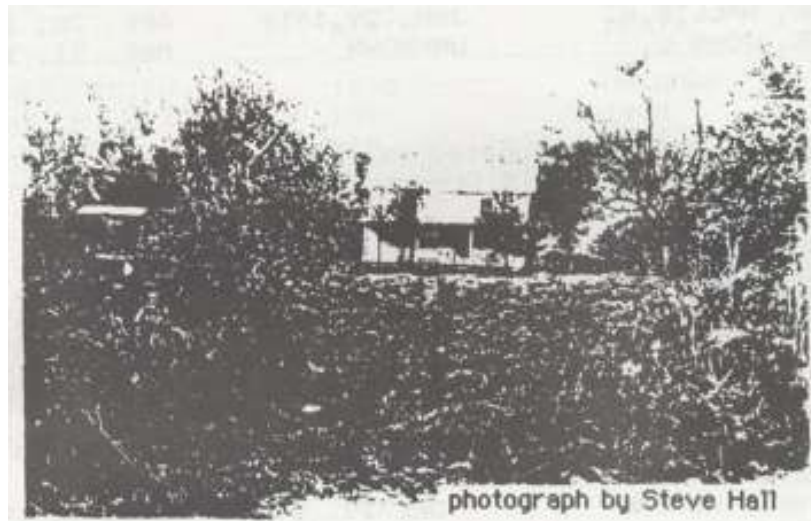


Figure 23: A log farmhouse built by Andrew Jackson Bailey c. 1850 outside Evarts was covered with weatherboard at some point in its history. (Photograph from *Taproots*, 129)

People I talked to in Harlan County whose families farmed in the early 20th century were likely to have lived in a farmhouse. By the turn of the century, milled lumber had become a common building material even in the still isolated, agrarian Harlan County. Ann McKnight, who was born and raised in a North Evarts farmhouse, reported that her father made a living by selling the excess produce they grew.⁴⁶ In an interview with Cathy Page, Elfair Frazier recalled how she grew up in a four-room log cabin (presumably two rooms stacked on two rooms).⁴⁷ Her family raised 500 bushels of corn in a season. They traded the excess for goods they could not make themselves. Mrs. Frazier's father also made and sold looms, spinning wheels, barrels and other wooden furniture, undoubtedly giving the family relative economic prosperity such that a two-story farmhouse was possible. Mrs. Frazier's childhood farmhouse was made of hewn

⁴⁶ Ann McKnight, interview by author, 15 August 2005.

⁴⁷ The log farmhouse was relatively rare because of the difficulty entailed in raising logs to that height.

logs and built near the year of her birth, 1886.⁴⁸ Just as farmhouses were a product of relative prosperity in Harlan County during the late 19th century, they later became associated with the more prosperous industrial coal camps of the 20th century (see Part III, **Camp House Typology**). This link suggests that the economic connotations in the pre-industrial vernacular associated with the agrarian farmhouse continued through to the coal camp I-house despite the change in economic livelihood.

These farmhouses typically had two exterior chimneys on either gable end and a central passage on both the first and second floors.⁴⁹ While this house form was built out of brick, stone, wood-frame and log throughout central Appalachia, it was most often framed. At its height, shortly after the Civil War, milled lumber was becoming



Figure 24: The Metcalf House in Farmers Mill, near Cawood, is a farmhouse with a back shed addition covered in milled weatherboard. This house may or may not have been originally built of log. Its size and weatherboarding made it a symbol of economic affluence. (Photograph by author)

⁴⁸ Frazier, interview.

⁴⁹ Williams, *Homeplace*, 93

increasingly accessible to the rising affluent sector of agrarians for whom stone was still too hard to find and brick not yet available. It was difficult to build a two-story log house, and families who wanted to display their economic affluence would have preferred to side their farmhouse with weatherboard, if available.⁵⁰ Kniffen ascertains that the basal structure of the “T” house was the one-story dogtrot house, to which was added a second story and a milled siding (painted white) if the original structure was log and the affluently growing family wanted to give their house a more modern facade.⁵¹

Both John Alexander Williams and Michael Ann Williams make a point of saying that the farmhouse, despite having twice as many rooms, was not a far departure from the double pen in terms of spatial use. Men and women who had grown up in smaller houses as children and moved into a farmhouse continued to live primarily in one or two rooms of the larger house, reserving the extra room(s) for more formal occasions or company.⁵²

Box Construction

Perhaps a more logical descendent of the log cabin was the boxed house. Within Appalachia’s vernacular tradition there was no other type of house that so aptly reflected a period of transition from the era of the handmade, “big house” dwelling to the era of the milled lumber, multi-roomed dwelling as did the box house of the early 20th century. The box house is pivotal to understanding the shifting vernacular in Harlan County, but it is also a complicated juncture in folk housing and raises difficult questions.

⁵⁰ J. A. Williams, 106.

⁵¹ Kniffen “Key to Diffusion,” 555; J. A. Williams, 106.

⁵² J. A. Williams, 108.

The box house gathers its name from its construction method and materials.⁵³ The “boxing,” also known as board-and-batten construction, required thick wide sawn planks (likely to be the cheapest and roughest board the mill produced). These wide boards were set up vertically and nailed side by side to a strip of wood running along the perimeter of the floor boards and to a beam running along the top. Skinny strips, or battens, were nailed over the cracks left between the larger boards (see *Image Glossary*).⁵⁴ As M. A. Williams aptly notes, the walls themselves were the boxed house’s only framing and roof support.⁵⁵ Load-bearing walls eliminated the need for internal framing, thus distinguishing a boxed house from a frame house and harkened back to log construction, where the walls were also load-bearing.

Families that built boxed houses were “those who could not afford to pay carpenters [to build a framed house] but found that their community or family could no longer afford the time to build a log house.”⁵⁶ Unlike the framed farmhouse, the box house was attainable by people of the middle and lower classes who could not afford to buy the quantity of evenly sawn boards with which to build a two-story house. The box house was for the sawmill era essentially what the log cabin had been for the frontier era: an accessible house within the economic means and physical ability of the resident/builder. Michael Ann Williams and Charles Martin make clear that box construction carried the community-oriented building process existent in Appalachian

⁵³ John Rehder argues that a box house is defined by its side gable orientation while others, notably Michael Ann Williams and Charles Martin hold that board-and-batten construction is the typifying attribute of a box house. See John Rehder *Appalachian Folkways*, 112; Michael Ann Williams *Homeplace*, 31-33; Charles Martin *Hollybush: Folk Building and Social Change in an Appalachian Community* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 72-73.

⁵⁴ Rehder, 112

⁵⁵ M. A. Williams, “Pride and Prejudice: The Appalachian Boxed House in Southwestern North Carolina,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 25, no. 4. (Winter 1990), 219.

⁵⁶ Michael Ann Williams, “Pride and Prejudice,” 226

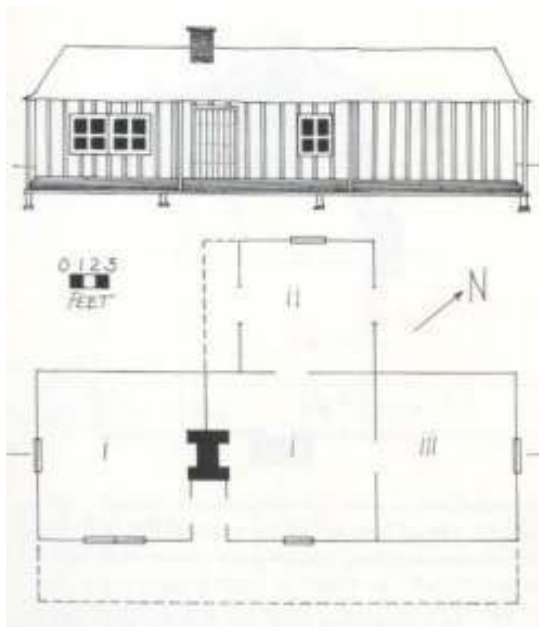
communities since settlement days. Just as men from several neighboring families would have gathered to help one man assemble his log house (as in the case of Aley Ledford's house on Martins Fork), the community would join a family to help them construct a house of planks.⁵⁷

Those who built box houses considered it a step up from its predecessor, the log cabin, saving the time and labor in the assembly of the relatively light boards. M.A.

Williams asserts:

Vertical-plank construction in many instances was a product of both tradition and change. This type of construction was probably known in the repertoire of many traditional builders, but the popularity of the vertical-plank dwelling was predicated on specific economic, environmental, and social conditions.⁵⁸

The boxed house (also known as the "vertical-plank" house or simply "box" house)



emerged in Harlan County at a pivotal time when the sleepy static traditions of isolated folk were just beginning to be confronted by newer technologies. At first, boxing was used to construct traditional forms previously made of log, notably the double pen house. (fig. 25)

Figure 25: The first two rooms of this house (indicated by the "I") were built by Benny Caudill in Hollybush, Kentucky in 1915 with board-and-batten construction. As the house existed in its original form in 1915, it followed a traditional double-pen form. The later additions were made between 1915 and 1935. (Drawing taken from Martin, 42)

⁵⁷ Martin, 52; Williams, "Pride and Prejudice," 224. M.A. Williams states that "boxed houses could be assembled very quickly...One did have to pay for milled lumber, but the lumber consisted of unfinished planks which could be purchased relatively inexpensively. Boxed houses were generally built by the owner with the unpaid help of community and family."

⁵⁸ Ibid, 218

It was natural for folk builders/residents to have first used board-and-batten construction to build houses with which they were already familiar. Another common manifestation of the new material was the addition of a boxed room to the rear of an existing log structure (see fig. 26). This alternative was popular across the region for families that did not (or could not) build a new house but needed to expand. In a few rare cases board-and-batten siding was nailed to the older log structure itself to make it resemble the newer addition.⁵⁹



Figure 26: Boxed addition on a log cabin in Letcher County, neighboring Harlan County. Back rooms that were added after the turn of the century were frequently of board-and-batten construction. (Photograph by author)

As box construction proliferated throughout the region, there were other concurrent departures from traditional building: shrinking room sizes (movement away from the “big house” mentality—see page 33), three or more rooms on a single story

⁵⁹ Martin, 52, 73

(movement away from the double and single pen tradition) and no half-story loft.⁶⁰

Martin's study of Hollybush revealed that the box houses built between 1920 and 1950 had no half-story loft and the sizes of the rooms were generally smaller than those of the log houses.⁶¹ M.A. Williams also notes the growing preference for several small rooms



Figure 27: Interior of house where at least three beds share a room that obviously has other functions as well. Photograph taken in Harlan County, 1890- 1904. (Ford Photo Album Collection, 1890-1904, Kentuckiana Digital Library)

in which living activities are spread out, rather than one or two large rooms.⁶² Smaller rooms could not hold as many beds, though, thus the sleeping function often spread into many small rooms, often taking up all the rooms except the kitchen.⁶³ M. A. Williams articulates the transition that occurred between traditional form (double pen houses) and

⁶⁰ Charles E. Martin, *Hollybush: Folk Building and Social Change in an Appalachian Community* (Knoxville: U. of Tennessee Press, 1984), 71.

⁶¹ Hollybush remained relatively unaffected by the industries that were coming into other Eastern Kentucky communities at this time. This may explain why all of the box houses built in Hollybush followed the pen tradition.

⁶² M.A. Williams *Homeplace*, 33.

⁶³ Evelyn Philpot and sisters, interview by author, 11 August 2005. Evelyn Philpot and her sisters recalled the four-room box house of their childhood as having “three bedrooms and a kitchen.” There was no living room or a space for just sitting; only a place to sleep and eat. Similarly in the double pen house, every room except the kitchen held beds. With large families as Evelyn had (five children) all the rooms in the house were needed for sleeping quarters. Similarly John Alexander Williams said of the farmhouse or I-house that the “bedrooms were used only for sleeping” (n. 56, 406) pointing to similar ways of spatial appropriation between the farmhouse in the pen tradition (two pens on each floor) and the box house not in considered in the pen tradition (four rooms on one floor). Charles Martin also found in houses in Hollybush that “families slept in every room but the kitchen.” *Hollybush*, 79.

changing spatial patterns: “The new acceptance of architectural forms inspired by popular style suggests a relinquishing of control over architectural forms that could be suited to regional patterns of spatial use.”⁶⁴ A “rethinking” of the double pen space involved changing perceptions of private and public areas as well a new acceptance of “popular” housing trends that emphasized clearly delineated spaces for various living functions.⁶⁵

It was possible under these influences that the box house evolved from a double pen where there were only two large rooms (plus a back kitchen) to a square plan containing four small rooms approximately 14-16 square feet each (the “four-on-one” plan⁶⁶ - see *Image Glossary*). There is little evidence identifying the exact time and circumstances of the first appearance of a four-on-one plan in central Appalachia, let alone Harlan County. Box houses with a four-on-one plan pre-dated coal camp houses and existed in areas where there was no mineable land,⁶⁷ suggesting that the form arrived to the folk builder’s repertoire in some other way. This issue remains unresolved and would require more research.

The delineation between the boxed and framed house was sharp among those who grew up in the early to mid-20th century. Williams observed in southwestern North Carolina how individuals of this generation clearly stated that they lived in *either* a

⁶⁴ M. A. Williams, *Homeplace*, 89,

⁶⁵ See M.A. Williams, *Homeplace* 73-92. In the chapter entitled “Rethinking the House: The Double Pen Plan,” Williams goes into greater detail about the delineation of space within the double pen and how trends slowly moved toward separation of spaces resulting eventually in folk houses with multiple small rooms instead of two large rooms.

⁶⁶ Rehder, 112

⁶⁷ Coal camp houses most often utilized the four-on-one plan and thus its presence in Harlan County is most readily linked to those houses. However Evelyn Philpot and her family lived in a four-room house at Holmes Mill in the 1920-30s, which was not a part of a coal camp. Similarly, Denver Turner and his family lived in a four-room boxed house on the north side of Pine Mountain in the 1940s, an area that contained no mineable coal seams and thus no company-built housing.



Figure 28: Frank Gates house, Balsam vicinity, Jackson Co., N.C. ca. 1948. The box house filled the role of the log house as the most accessible and cheap dwelling for the mountaineer. The box house reached a height of popularity soon after the turn of the century in Harlan County, KY, but was built in unmatched numbers during the coal boom. This box house has an end-gable orientation. (Photograph taken from Michael Ann Williams “Pride and Prejudice,” 225)

framed house or a box house.⁶⁸ This was true in southeastern Kentucky as well. Denver Turner grew up on the north side of Pine Mountain, an area dependent on subsistence farming well into the 20th century because of a lack of mineable coal seams. He told me he lived in a four-room box house with a front and back porch.⁶⁹ At one point when I referred to the house as a four-room framed house, he corrected me, saying it was boxed, not framed. Sometimes he could see to the outside through the cracks between the planks. The boxed house, for lack of internal framing and a ceiling, was not insulated. Mr. Turner recalls a chimney splitting the shared wall between the two front rooms, much the way a chimney split the two rooms of a saddlebag house. Chimney location was not diagnostically the same in all box houses, though.⁷⁰ Some box houses may have only

⁶⁸ M. A. Williams *Homeplace*, 32

⁶⁹ Denver Turner, interview by author, Evarts, Kentucky, 16 August, 2005.

⁷⁰ Rehder, 112. In addition to the fireplace(s) in box houses, there was almost always a stove pipe chimney in the back half of the house coming out of the kitchen.

had a stove pipe while others, like Mr. Turner's, may have had a hearth in addition to a stove pipe.

Gable orientation varied on box houses (see *Image Glossary*). With traditional double pen plans that were boxed, the gable was side-oriented, exactly as it had been when the double pen was constructed of logs. In boxed houses with four rooms in a square configuration, the gable orientation was most often still to the side, but it also could have been to the front (see fig. 28). As McAlester documents in *Field Guide to American Houses*, “light-weight lumber...permitted... simpler methods of light roof framing” which allowed houses to be two rooms deep with a variety of roof options including “side-gabled or pyramidal hipped roofs” covering “relatively large and flexible interior plans [which] slowly replaced the traditional one-room-deep hall-and-parlor and I-house forms.”⁷¹ The pyramidal and gabled roof both occurred on box houses in Harlan County. The side-gable roof would have been the most natural option as the double and single pen houses had set that precedent. There is no substantial evidence to prove that pyramidal roofs pre-dated coal camp houses in the area, although their frequency on these houses is discussed at length in the section on **Camp House Typology** in the second part of this thesis.

Neither M.A. Williams nor Rehder mention the number of doors on the front of the house as a notable trait of either the double pen or the box house. Just as with the double pen log house, the box house in southeastern Kentucky often had two doors exiting onto the front porch, one from each front room. In some cases, all four rooms of

⁷¹ McAlester, 98

a box house had doors to the outside.⁷² This trait, as mentioned earlier, was most likely to provide easy escape in case of fire, which continued to threaten large families living in a box or frame house just as it had threatened large families in log houses.

MORE so than the framed house, the box house provided the pivotal link in a shifting vernacular. The farmhouse was built in similar ways out of both log and frame and offers explicit continuities in house form despite changing materials. The box house's importance was not as explicit yet it presented a stronger link to the 20th century vernacular where one-story, four -roomed houses built with milled lumber came to replace the log pen tradition. Local residents and folk builders embraced the four-on-one box house despite its departure from tradition. The changes it introduced were both in material and spatial distribution. These changes were perhaps not so much a sacrifice for local people but rather a physical expression of shifting cultural values (desire for private space and inclusion of the kitchen in the main body of house), combined with the adoption of a new building technology.

Questions remain regarding the reasons box construction shifted from the double pen plan to the four-on-one plan, but this new construction type linked the traditional form with a new incarnation of vernacular form—a form that recurred with dominating force in coal camp architecture.

⁷² Evelyn Philpot and sisters, interview. Evelyn and her sisters, Florence and Vivian, remembered that the box house they lived in at Holmes Mill had a door to the outside out of every room.

III. THE ASCENDANCY OF COAL AND INDUSTRIAL HOUSING

*“Western civilization appears at the present time to be passing through some kind of major transition, a change so fundamental in character that it unsettles our basic institutions.... The great underlying cause appears to be the transition from pre-industrial folk society to modern industrial civilization.”*¹

-Robert Faris, from “Social Disorganization”

The impending coal boom that stood before Harlan County at the turn of the 19th century inevitably threatened traditional ways of living and building. The county had lain secluded and unaffected by the American culture of industrialism and capitalism that consumed the eastern seaboard. The isolated culture of Harlan County stood no chance of remaining tucked away once confronted with the discovery and accessibility of its vast hoards of rich, black “gold.” These thick seams of coal were woven in the undersides of the same mountains that had been the county’s natural barriers.

Coal mining in Eastern Kentucky developed relatively late as compared to the coal industry in Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Tennessee; the railroad reached these regions earlier.² As mining operations opened in the Harlan Coal Field, miners and operators from previously developed mines in West Virginia and Tennessee, now exhausted, migrated to Harlan where they joined the local people in a great flood of industry and work force. Between 1900 and 1930, Harlan County would grow in population by ten times. The traditional agrarian landscape was transformed into a

¹ Robert E. L. Faris, *Social Disorganization* (New York: The Ronald Press, 1948), 3

“modern” industrial feeding ground producing fuel that erected steel skyscrapers, sent North Pole expeditions, built automobiles and heated thousands of suburban homes outside the Appalachian region.



Figure 29: Warren Delano and his nephew Franklin D. Roosevelt were among speculative interests that came to Harlan County seeking titles for coal-rich land. (Kentuckiana Digital Library)

A county that was to produce fourteen million tons of coal per year, valued at twenty-five million dollars at its height in 1930, would need not only an enormous labor supply, but also acres of dense, inexpensive housing. This second part of the thesis will examine the ascendancy of the coal industry in Harlan County, the transformations it demanded in local housing culture and the ways in which the traditional vernacular became manifest in the mass-produced camp houses.

² Coal mining developed in Western Pennsylvania and West Virginia in the 1890s while the Harlan coal field was not tapped until approximately 1910.

The impact of coal mining on housing was twofold: the locally-owned mine operators made relatively slight alterations to the county's pre-industrial folk housing in order to adapt it for industrial use in their small-scale mining establishments; and the large absentee coal operations built industrial housing of a character very different from the county's pre-industrial traditions. In both cases though, to varying degrees and in different ways, the vernacular was maintained through form, construction and usage. Contrary to the words of Robert Faris, the industrialization of Harlan County did not “unsettle” the folk housing tradition; it re-used, adapted and mass-produced the folk tradition.



Figure 30: A coal miner's wife and child pump water from the camp well at PV & K coal camp in Lejunior, Kentucky. Water would have been collected from a spring in pre-industrial times. (Russell Lee Photographic Collection , 1979. Kentuckiana Digital Library)

Confronting the Isolation

Imagine a family sitting on the front porch of their log cabin after a days' work on the farm in 1890; the mother is weaving on her loom, the father is whittling, the children are playing a game. A man dressed in a suit comes walking up their hill. He comes to the porch. The mother greets him politely; the father looks at him suspiciously. They exchange conversational words about the weather. The man in the suit then gets to the reason he is there, and none too soon for the family on the porch. He gives a line like this:

“[The Kentenia Corporation] wants to buy the coal and mineral rights to your mountain land. It may never be mined and what we are giving you for it may well be a gift. You keep all of your bottom land where you grow your crops and you keep title to all of the mountain land.”³



Figure 31: Mountain Home in Southeastern Kentucky. Unknown location, circa 1900. Families like this one throughout Southeastern Kentucky were confronted by speculative buyers who wanted to “buy” the mineral rights to their land while maintaining the family could continue to live in their cabin home. (Berea College Archives, Mountain Collection)

³ Forrester, 4

When the mountain couple sat down at the kitchen table with the suited man to discuss the offer they were undoubtedly at an “astounding disadvantage. On one side of the crude table sat an astute trader, more often than not a graduate of a fine college and a man experienced in the larger business world...across the table on a puncheon bench sat a man and a woman out of a different age...” who had no understanding of “mineral rights,”⁴ let alone a fair value of their own. In this way, many mountain people signed away their mineral rights to the better-educated, suited man, who gave them a hundred dollars for their two hundred acres and told them they could keep living on the land like they had always done.

The mountaineer did not know that lying beneath his cabin and the whole of Harlan County were twelve seams of high-grade bituminous coal.⁵ The mountaineer had no way of predicting that in the years ahead, mining would extract one thousand to fifteen hundred tons of coal per acre foot. “A seam of coal five feet thick produced a minimum of five thousand tons [of coal] per acre” and if an acre happened to have more than one seam of coal it could have produced upwards of twenty thousand tons. The going rate for “mineral rights” paid to the average mountain family was fifty cents an acre.⁶

Despite the willingness of most mountaineers to sell their mineral rights, and despite the growing numbers of speculative corporations, the task of land acquisition in relatively inaccessible southeastern Kentucky progressed slowly. Yet by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, two-thirds of Harlan Countians had sold their

⁴ Harry Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* (USA: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1963), 75. Ownership of “mineral rights” allowed the buyer to explore, extract and receive royalties from the minerals that may or may not be embedded under the earth of a given property.

⁵ Paul F. Cressey, “Social Disorganization and Reorganization in Harlan County, Kentucky” *American Sociological Review* 14 (June 1949): 389.

mineral rights, and 85 per cent of the mineral rights on the Cumberland Plateau were in the possession of non-residents, or absentee owners.⁷ A family owned little more than the house they had built and the top soil on which it stood, “not realizing that they sold their birthright for a mess of pottage.”⁸

Many of the men in suits traversing the rugged Harlan County landscape belonged to the Kentenia Corporation. The Kentenia Corporation was formed in 1902 by the heirs of Edward Davis, a Philadelphia businessman, who in 1870 purchased 86,000 acres of virgin timber and coal fields in Harlan and neighboring Bell County. Davis had done little with the land (except to pay taxes)⁹ because of lack of transportation in or out of the mountains for himself or his company, let alone the coal or timber in which he was most likely interested.

In 1901, Henry Davis (grandson and heir of Edward Davis) realized that the land his grandfather had bought and on which they had paid taxes for thirty years was still occupied by the descendents of those who had allegedly sold the property. Up until this point multiple independently-working land surveyors had divided the land each in their own way, resulting in a myriad of overlapping land titles and no clear sense of who owned what or what was available for sale.

⁶ Information and figures in this paragraph are from Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberlandlands*, 75.

⁷ Forrester, 4; Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberlandlands*, 75

⁸ Forrester, 4. William Forrester is a local historian in Harlan who adds local color to his history by using colloquialisms like this phrase. A mess of pottage is something trivial like the half dollar most mountaineers received for their acres of coal-rich land (not to mention their homeland).

⁹ “Supplement to *The Harlan Daily Enterprise*.” Charles H. Davis, grandson of Edward Davis, reports in this article that his family paid a total of \$30,000 from the time of purchase in 1870 until 1901. A figure that was doubled, according to Davis, by the interest it would have accrued. As Davis goes on to write, this was “a good deal of money—paid in good faith to the people of Harlan and Bell Counties and utilized for their (your) benefit.”

Henry Davis formed the Kentenia Corporation in order to reestablish title on the land his grandfather bought. In some cases this was as easy as coercing an unassuming mountain family. If the mountaineer argued his own title and refused to give up the land, Kentenia pursued civil suit.¹⁰ The Kentenia Corporation created both enemies and allies in this fashion. For some mountaineers, Kentenia's insensitivity toward generational heritage angered them. For those who desired to see Harlan County develop its natural resources, Kentenia opened up the county.

In a supplement to Harlan's local newspaper, Davis wrote to the residents of Harlan and Bell County explaining the injustice inflicted upon his family (referring to the taxes paid and effort spent in regaining what was presumably theirs). In this newspaper article, Davis also intended to muster support for his plan to develop and modernize the two-county region. After first citing conflict with angry locals, Davis reported that there were some who shared his interests:

On the other hand, I have met with nothing but cooperation from those of you who have your (and my) best interests at heart; from those of you who desire to see our beautiful and rich country traversed by a railroad; from those of you who wish for coal mines, coke ovens, schools, libraries, churches, and all the other material and moral activities which make for our best development of modern civilization."¹¹

Despite the patriotic pride Davis invoked, his interests in the region were no doubt self-serving; Northern interest had peaked in the central Appalachian region. West Virginia coal was in strong demand, and even finer coal was promised in southeastern Kentucky.

¹⁰ Hevener, 3

¹¹ "Supplement to *The Harlan Daily Enterprise*, " 1905.

One of the first actions of the Kentenia Corporation was to inaugurate a new geological survey of the land in order to assess the mineral worth of the land.¹²

The growing tide of absentee interest in Harlan County's coal resources extended beyond Kentenia to include corporations like US Steel, International Harvester and the Ford Motor Company. The rush to mine Harlan coal was slowed only by the county's lack of adequate roads and rail service.

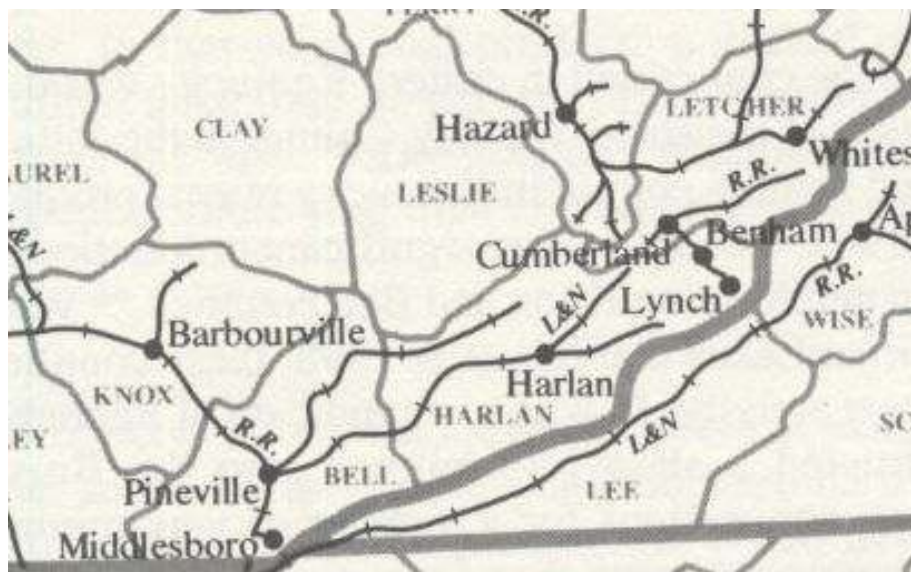


Figure 32: The L & N Railroad reached into Harlan County in 1910, the last of Eastern Kentucky's counties to be penetrated by the railroad. (Map modified from Ron Eller *Miners, Millhands and Mountaineers*, 142)

Building the Industry

In 1907 the “most momentous single occurrence in the history of the Cumberlands”¹³ happened when one wealthy local resident aspired to the “development

¹² Ibid. The Kentenia Corporation provided half of the money needed for this survey to a team of the U.S. Geological Survey and the Kentucky State Geological Survey who then carried out the survey, keeping the partiality of Kentenia undisclosed.

¹³ Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, 75

of civilization”¹⁴ as Kentenia had envisioned it. Thomas Jefferson Asher, fed up with fruitless appeals to railroad companies, independently laid a track connecting his property in a small part of Harlan County to Pineville in Bell County where a Louisville and Nashville track was already in operation. Until that point, no railroad companies could be persuaded to build a line into the very mountainous Harlan County. Three years after Asher laid down his track, though, the Louisville and Nashville Railroad (L & N) took it over and quickly extended it to the county seat, Harlan (at the time called Mt. Pleasant).

The arrival of the L & N railroad, more than anything else, ignited the boom of the coal industry. In the words of Bill Forrester, a local historian, “the railroad led to paths of rapid change in social and economic activities. It transformed a sleepy, backward mountain county into a booming industrial giant in a short period of time.”¹⁵ The railroad meant people, building materials and natural resources could now move in and out of the valleys. (fig. 32)

From 1910 to 1920 the population of Harlan County tripled from 10,566 to 31,546. From 1920 to 1930 the population doubled again to 64,557.¹⁶ A rush of mine operators and laborers flooded into the county to unearth the twelve seams of high-grade coal. Within a period of three years the county reached an annual production of over one million tons. By 1920 Harlan County was producing nearly seven million tons annually and had become the leading coal producer in the state;¹⁷ in fact, “so rapidly did the industrial world overwhelm Harlan County that in a mere eight years (1911-1918) coal

¹⁴ Davis, Supplement to *The Harlan Daily Enterprise*.

¹⁵ Forrester, 4

¹⁶ U.S. Census, Harlan County Population 1910-1930

¹⁷ Ron Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 146.

production increased from 1,440 to 3,210,733 tons, while the number of miners grew from 169 to 4,123.”¹⁸ Harlan County quickly went from an agrarian landscape of isolated pioneers to a roaring industrial zone where coal camps and machinery flooded nearly every bottom land in the county.



Figure 33: A man carries a model camp house on the back of a truck in the 1929 Fourth of July parade in Lynch. The banner over the house states: “A well kept home is a declaration of independence. Builds health, happiness and contentment.” (SECC Appalachian Archive)

The explosion of capitalist interest in the region came primarily from absentee corporate interests¹⁹ which developed large-scale mining establishments. But a few local entrepreneurs, mainly successful lawyers and judges, hoping to cash in on the boom, established small-scale mines along the L & N line. From these two subsets of interested capitalists emerged two types of mining establishments. On one side, local developers

¹⁸ Harry Caudill, *Theirs Be the Powers: The Moguls of Eastern Kentucky* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 92

¹⁹ *Absentee corporate interest*, as defined in the Introduction (pg. 8, n.17)

accounted for the temporary nature of mining at any given location (especially if the coal seams were known to be small) and built the camp with a tippie, commissary and houses as cheaply and quickly as possible. On the other side (of the mountain literally), corporate interest and a different conception of the “ideal” company town emerged. Under the principle that better living conditions would increase recruitment and output, and reduce turnover rates, the coal camps at Benham and Lynch prided themselves on being model camps where house type diversity, town planning and well maintained facilities created “ideal” living conditions.²⁰ (see fig. 33)

Between the years 1912 and 1929 a total of fifty-nine coal camps were constructed in Harlan County, both absentee and locally owned.²¹ The coal companies,

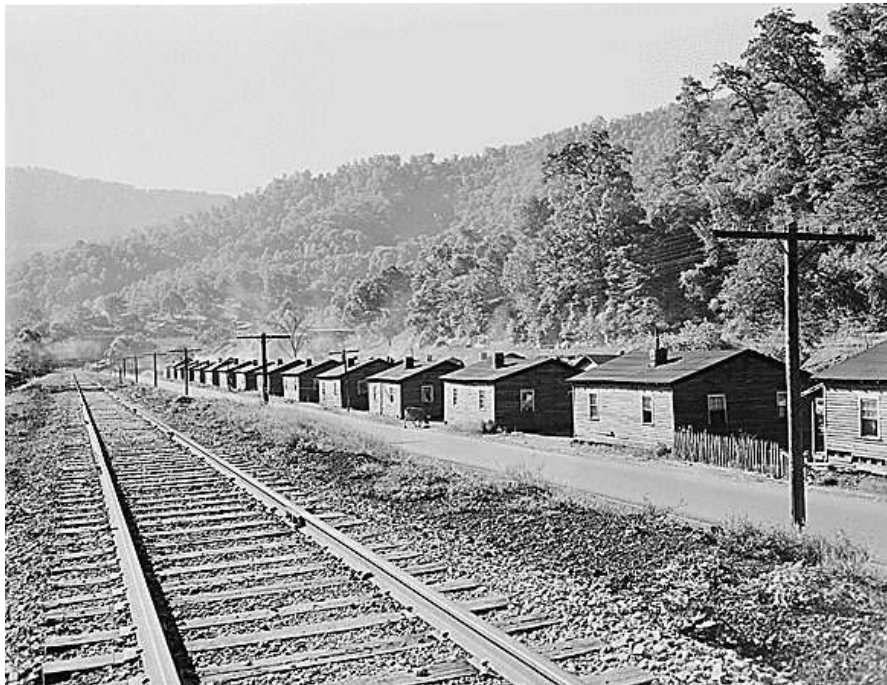


Figure 34: Camp houses line the railroad tracks at P V & K camp in Lejunior, Ky. (Kentuckiana Digital Library)

²⁰ See Caudill, *Theirs Be the Powers*, “The Kingdom of Lynch,” 85-102.

²¹ Hevener, 3

small or large, well-funded or just scraping by, needed several essential structures to set up a coal mining establishment: a coal tipple, a metal-sided structure standing over the train tracks where coal was loaded into the cars for shipment; the commissary, a general store that supplied miners' families with everything from flour and coffee to shirts and shoes; and housing, rows of tightly packed single and double unit houses for miners and their families. For the smaller camps, these were the only buildings. Larger camps, both absentee and locally owned, had hundreds of structures including schools, churches, recreational facilities and boarding houses. Regardless of size, however, the predominant characteristic of any camp was dozens of houses lining the roads and railroads in the valley bottom. (fig. 34)

According to the report of the U.S. Coal Commission in 1925, two-thirds to four-fifths of all mineworkers in the Southern Appalachian region were living in company housing in controlled communities.²² As Margaret Mulrooney brings out in her research on coal camps in the western Pennsylvania coal fields, "company housing was intended to accomplish several goals: first, to attract labor; and second, to reduce turnover."²³ The same was true in Harlan County, where distinct and regulated camps around the coal mines attracted miners and their families with both housing and a town.

²² *What the Coal Commission Found: An Authoritative Summary by the Staff*. ed. Eyre Hunt et al. (Baltimore: The Williams & Wilkins Company, 1925), 139-140. The Southern Appalachian region is defined by the Coal Commission to be West Virginia, Eastern Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, Maryland and Alabama. Coal operations that were located in the more remote areas of these states, like Harlan County, provided the higher end of these statistics; "In other words, nearly nine-tenths [of company-housed miners] are more than five miles from the resources of community life and the institutions of civil liberty that characterize the ordinary American urban center."

²³ Margaret M. Mulrooney. *A Legacy of Coal: The Coal Company Towns of Southwestern Pennsylvania*. Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (Washington D.C.: National Park Service, U.S. Department of Interior, 1989), 9.



Figure 35 : The locally-owned and built Creech Coal Company camp at Twila, Kentucky, built in 1916. (Photograph courtesy Evarts Congregational United Methodist Church)

Local labor almost entirely supplied Harlan County's mines.²⁴ Mountaineers whose mineral rights had been bought by absentee corporate interest moved down from the mountainside in order to obtain an income working in the mines. A few men from Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina and West Virginia also migrated to the mines in Harlan County with their families from "worked-out" mines (mines whose coal had been depleted).²⁵ The relatively late development of Harlan County coal mines, as well as the density of high grade coal within the county, meant that labor was in high demand.

²⁴ Local labor meaning men from within Harlan County and the neighboring counties.

²⁵ Forrester, interview

The U.S. Coal Commission in 1922 studied 713 company-controlled communities in the United States primarily located in the Eastern United States.²⁶ In those 713 communities, 95 percent of the houses were constructed of wood with three to five rooms. Over two-thirds were finished on the outside with weatherboard. Over 25 percent of these wood-constructed houses were board-and-batten construction (which the Commission notes as the cheapest type of construction).²⁷ The majority of all camp houses, excluding duplexes, stood on post foundations, elevated off the ground by varying amounts. These statistics can be applied to Harlan County with surprising accuracy, suggesting uniformity among coal camps across the Appalachian and Mid-Western coalfields.²⁸



Figure 36: A board-and-batten shotgun camp house at the PV & K coal camp. The majority of company-built housing was constructed as cheaply and quickly as possible. (Russell Lee Photographic Collection, 1979. Kentuckiana Digital Library)

²⁶ *What the Coal Commission Found*, 142-146. It should be noted that at the time of the Commission's investigation (1922-23) the concentration of coal industry was in the Appalachian Mountains and the Mid-West, thus the Commission's findings are generally reflective of conditions in these areas.

²⁷ The cheapness of board-and-batten construction is confirmed by Michael Ann Williams and John Rehder (Williams, *Pride and Prejudice*, 223; Rehder, 112).

²⁸ Information here is summarized from the U.S. Coal Commission's report to Congress in 1925 by the staff of that Commission in *What the Coal Commission Found*, 143.

Company housing itself, as a building typology, in the United States is well documented, ranging from the mill towns in the North to textile factory towns in the South. Coal camps differ from other types of company housing in that the coal company built a complete, self-sustained town. This was necessary because the mine sites were geographically isolated from any pre-established towns. The company-owned town also provided an environment which the company could control completely. Besides building the houses, companies often provided maintenance, painting and repairing as often as once a year. According to one Lynch resident, the maintenance was not of the best quality and “they just showed up without warning,” but it was guaranteed.²⁹

In 1946, the Boone Report shed negative light on living conditions in coal towns. Standards for the report relied on those set forth by the National Housing Agency and the U.S. Public Health Service. The report described the “average” coal camp as having “monotonous rows of houses and privies, all in the same faded hues, standing alongside the railroad tracks close to a foul creek...”³⁰ Shifflet defended the camps by responding that the national, middle-class standards with which the Appalachian coal camps were compared did not exist throughout *much* of the rural South regardless of whether a community was company-owned or not.³¹ Coal camps were viewed negatively by national standards, but in reality their conditions were comparable to independent towns and villages throughout the Appalachian region.

Besides negative reports, both Appalachian folklorists and architectural scholars have overlooked the architecture of coal camp houses. In fact, the premise that coal

²⁹ Junita Boggs, interview

³⁰ Crandall Shifflet, *Coal Towns: Life, Work and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia 1880-1960* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 146.

camp houses constitute “architecture” is not widely accepted. Mulrooney stated in her analysis of coal towns in Pennsylvania that “mine workers’ housing ... became irrevocably associated with industry rather than architecture.”³² In fact, miners’ housing represented a complex assortment of values and forms—some of which echoed vernacular building traditions outside of the Appalachian region, and some of which carried on Harlan County’s own vernacular traditions.



Figure 37: An early view of Lynch, Kentucky, in 1921, Harlan’s largest coal camp. (SECC Appalachian Archive)

Harlan’s Camp Dichotomy

This section describes what made the absentee corporate camp different from the locally-owned camp. Once this dichotomy is clear, the typology of houses in each will make sense contextually. The differences between types of housing are striking in some

³¹ Ibid.

³² Mulrooney, 9

cases, and in other cases minimal. My analysis of these houses is based on the folk architecture vocabulary established in the first part of this thesis, and also the vocabulary assigned by the few scholars who have addressed these houses in an architectural light.

Absentee Corporation Coal Camps

In 1911, the L & N Railroad extended a line into Looney Creek on the Poor Fork of the Cumberland River in Harlan County, with much encouragement from International Harvester Corporation's subsidiary Wisconsin Steel. Wisconsin Steel picked a tract of land along the Poor Fork at the base of Kentucky's tallest mountain, Big Black.³³ Wisconsin Steel immediately began construction on a coal town they called Benham, and began extracting high grade bituminous coal for steel production in South Chicago.³⁴ International Harvester's extension into Harlan County marked the first absentee corporate camp in the county and also the first "captive" mine operation, meaning all coal mined within that corporation's facilities went to fuel its own industries elsewhere. The steel produced in Wisconsin Steel's plant in Chicago made the farm equipment for which International Harvester was famous.³⁵

³³ Coke was a product made from the residue of bituminous coal after it is burned. Coke was used as fuel and for making steel.

³⁴ *Coal Steel, Machines, and Men: The Benham Story*, Videocassette; W. R. Peck and R. J. Sampson, "The Harlan Coal Field in Kentucky," (*Coal Age* 3, no. 21 May 1913), 799-800.

³⁵ Cyrus McCormick, the inventor of the mechanical reaper, formed International Harvester and based the company in Chicago where they became a world leader in farm equipment manufacturing.



Figure 38: Benham, Kentucky. Benham was built by Wisconsin Steel, a subsidiary of International Harvester. The company town layout (highlighted in purple) was based roughly on a grid system. (Map from the Kingdom Come Parkway website, kingdomcome.org)

Serious construction of Benham began in 1912, with a coal tipple, club house, commissary and two hundred “modern mine houses of various designs and painted in different colors... and a handsome residence for the superintendent.”³⁶ In 1918 the mining operations and camp expanded due to the increased need for high volatile bituminous coal in World War I. With this expansion, the total number of houses in Benham increased to 520 units making Benham the largest concentration of people in Harlan County. (see fig. 38)

Wisconsin Steel was not the only large corporation to take an interest in the Poor Fork Valley. Just two miles up Looney Creek from the “spic-and-span” new town of Benham, a subsidiary of U.S. Steel purchased 14,405 acres of land containing millions of tons of coal.³⁷ U.S. Coal & Coke began constructing the mining town of Lynch, a town that would become the world’s largest coal camp, and which advertised itself as

³⁶ Peck and Sampson, 799

³⁷ Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 93

“America’s Model Coal Camp” (see fig. 41).³⁸ Construction in Lynch unfolded in 1917 as architects and town planners went to work for the Morgan-Rockefeller corporation.



Figure 39: Construction of 1,000 housing units began in Lynch, Kentucky in 1917. These houses were designed by architects that worked for U.S. Steel’s subsidiary U.S. Coal & Coke. House on this street are duplexes, some with gambrel roofs and others with side and front-facing gables. (SECC Appalachian Archive)

Train car after train car rolled into Lynch carrying “[Italian] stone cutters, brick masons, carpenters and hod-carriers” and with them came materials like “nails...roofing, lumber, doors, windows, locks, sashes, tar, paint, paint thinner, and kerosene.”³⁹ At its height, Lynch had approximately 10,000 residents occupying 1,000 company-owned structures (see fig. 40).

³⁸ An unidentified newspaper advertisement framed in the Harlan Library identified the camp as “America’s Model Coal Town.”

³⁹ Caudill *Theirs Be the Powers*, 94

Plan Number	Type	Number of Rooms	Bath	Number of Houses	Total Number of Rooms	Number of Families
Supt. 46	Single	8	Yes	1	8	1
Officials						
33	Single	7	Yes	6	42	6
40	Single	6	Yes	6	36	6
41	Single	5	Yes	6	30	6
32	Single	4	Yes	7	28	7
37	Single	3	No	18	54	18
38	Single	3	No	42	126	42
39	Single	4	No	95	380	95
35	Single	5	No	15	75	15
42	Single	23	Yes	5	115	5
14	Double	8	No	182	1456	364
29	Double	8	No	58	464	116
36	Double	10	No	30	300	60
34	Double	12	No	10	120	20
31	Double	6	No	120	720	240
				600	3954	1000

Figure 40: A table of company-built dwellings in Lynch, Kentucky shows which houses were constructed based on a number assigned to a certain plan, the number of rooms in each of these houses and whether there was a bath. There were a total of 1000 dwellings built including one Superintendent's house and several Official's houses which were by nature larger than the miners' housing. (Courtesy Theresa Osborne)



Figure 41: New homes in Lynch, Kentucky. The caption in the photograph reads "A sectional view of Lynch, Kentucky, 'America's Model Coal Town.' These houses are not occupied by 'Bosses and white-collar Men,' but by the rank and file of the coal-digging fraternity." (Photograph by the author of a framed newspaper clipping found in the Harlan County Public Library, Harlan, KY.)

As many as ten large national corporations opened absentee mines in Harlan County between 1911 and 1920.⁴⁰ The camps built by these corporations brought a number of cultural, economic, and sociological anomalies for Harlan County, but their housing was perhaps the most obvious physical departure from folk dwelling precedents in the county (house types are discussed in the last section).

Locally and Independently-Owned Coal Camps

Beginning as early as 1906, local men who had gained some degree of success in law or politics began to realize and act on the potential of Harlan County's promised natural resources. These men either owned property themselves (as in the case of the Bennett family at Lejunior and the Cornett-Lewis families at Louellen) or leased land from absentee landowners and built small coal operations along the expanding L & N railroad. Joining the local entrepreneurs were independent coal operators who had reserved capital and some mine experience in the surrounding areas.⁴¹

A major share of the increased production and population growth in the region resulted from the arrival of hundreds in independent coal operators, who established mines on land leased from the big absentee land companies. In some counties, the proliferation of small, independent mines led to a concentration of coal camps, one after another, for miles along the narrow hollows. Most of these mines employed from 10 to 300 men and produced on the average about 200,000 tons of coal per year.⁴²

A prevailing sense of impermanency governed the type and quality of locally owned camps. As Yarbrough found in his study of the Cloverfork micro-region in Harlan County, "the building standards in the camps were directly proportioned to the

⁴⁰ Hevener, 4. Among these ten were International Harvester, Koppers Company, Detroit-Edison, United States Steel Corporation, Peabody Coal Corporation, Insull, and the Ford Motor Company.

⁴¹ Ronald E. Yarbrough, "A Geographical Study of a Micro-Region in Appalachia—The Clover Fork River Valley of Harlan County, Kentucky" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee, 1972), 31



Figure 42: A woodblock print of a locally-owned coal camp house at Verda. The caption for this picture reads "A new era for these people, a people once hardy, has brought them to an inferior and cheap civilization. Rows of dirty shacks and filthy yards..." (John A. Spellman, *At Home in the Hills* [Pine Mountain, Kentucky: Pine Mountain Print Shop, 1939]).

size of the property holdings or to the length of time in which the operator deemed the resource would last.”⁴³ Local companies owned significantly less coal-rich land than the larger companies. This factor, coupled with the lack of substantial initial capital, led the smaller companies to build cheaper camps. These houses stood on stilts, and perched precariously along the mountainside. Local builders built them out of board-and-batten construction with unseasoned wood (see fig. J). The coal operations at Benito are just one example of a locally owned camp. The Benito Coal Company was started in 1921 near LeJunior, Kentucky by the Bennett family, employing fifty miners.⁴⁴ The dwellings

⁴² Eller, 134

⁴³ Yarbrough, 42-43

⁴⁴ Facts and figures for Harlan Coal Mines were compiled from Gordon Dodrill, *20,000 Coal Company Stores in the United State* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne Lithographic Company, 1971); *Taproots: A History of Cloverfork, Harlan Co., Kentucky* (Evarts, Ky: Shoestring Press, 1988), 172-173.



(fig. 43) were side-oriented box houses. Local builders would have been hired to build these houses explaining their similarity to pre-coal box houses (see fig. 25).

Figure 43: The Benito Coal Company in Lejunior, Kentucky, was in operation from 1921-1925 with fifty miners. Pictured here are the rows of dwellings and the tipple. Benito was locally owned and built by the Bennett family. (Kentuckiana Digital Library)

Camp House Typology

In locally owned and even most absentee-owned camps there was little if any documentation of house plans or camp layout, nor has any documentation, if it existed in the first place, survived to the present. Many of the small coal companies that dotted Harlan County dissolved after only a few years of operation, or were bought by a larger company. Any papers that had existed at the construction of the camp were likely lost or damaged.⁴⁵ One known exception to this lack of documentation is the camp at Lynch. Construction blueprints exist for many of the buildings in the local museum.

⁴⁵ Mack H. Gillenwater, "Cultural and Historical Geography of Mining Settlements in the Pocahontas Coal Fields of Southern West Virginia, 1880 to 1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee, 1972), 69. Gillenwater reports that he found a similar situation in the Pocahontas Coal Field of West Virginia.

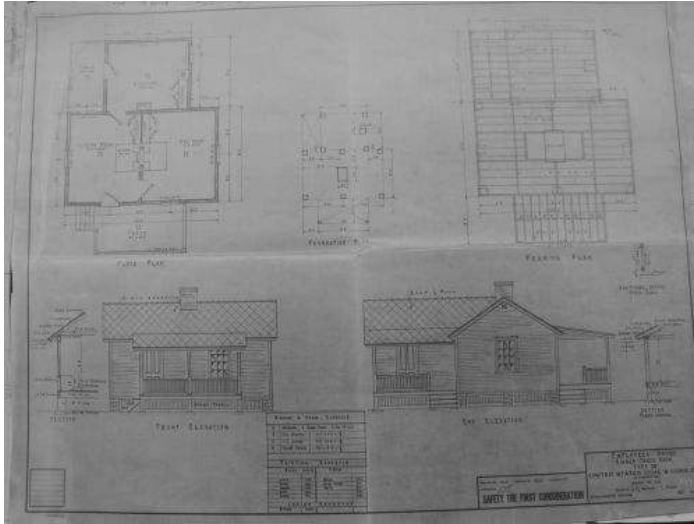


Figure 44: A three-room miner's house designed for Gary, WV and built also in Lynch, KY. From the front elevation, the proportions of the house appear similar to the double pen cabin. (Kentucky Coal Miners' Museum, Benham, KY)

A lack of documentation for the majority of camp houses is compounded by the absence of the actual camp houses in today's landscape. Between 1906 and 1940 there were approximately 140 coal companies established within Harlan County. They employed over 40,000 men at the peak, almost all of whom would have been housed by their employer.⁴⁶ Thousands of company-owned miner dwellings must have existed in Harlan County at different increments between 1904 and 1940. Today a large number of these houses have left the landscape through decay or demolition. The camp houses that remain are privately owned, and residents have altered the basic forms by closing in porches and adding rooms and dormers. Other structural alterations have been made in cases where the whole house has been lifted onto a story of cinderblocks to raise it above the flood plain. A study of the extant camp houses alone does not provide sufficient understanding of their meaning and dominant form on the landscape eighty years ago.

As a doctoral student at West Virginia University in 1972, Mack Gillenwater documented the coal camp structures of a group of several communities in the West

Virginia coal field of Pocahontas. Gillenwater's documentation begins to fill a gap in the literature surrounding coal camp architecture. The Pocahontas Coal Field consisted of some 10,000 dwellings in 100 mining communities. Gillenwater organized these dwellings into eight "morphological groups": one-story L, pyramidal, bungalow, basic I-house, two-story four-pen, two-story shotgun, saltbox, two-story L and superintendent's house (see below).⁴⁷ Gillenwater does not make explicit connections between these groups and the region's preceding folk architecture, even though some of the terms he applies to the morphological groups are derived from a folk architecture vocabulary. While Gillenwater makes the connection between some camp houses and their pre-industrial folk antecedents this point was unrelated to his main argument. Gillenwater's analysis is helpful in that he took a specific coal mining region and documented all of its housing types by form and plan.

The Pocahontas Coal Field is on the other side of West Virginia from Harlan County, but Gillenwater's documentation applies to camp dwellings all across the region where these house forms appear. In the Harlan Coal Field, I encountered all of the morphological groups Gillenwater describes except the two-story L.⁴⁸ Using Gillenwater's analysis as a model, my own descriptions of the house groups that occurred in Harlan coal camps include my own hypotheses on folk influences.

⁴⁶ Some short-lived companies who employed fewer than fifty men may not have provided housing.

⁴⁷ Gillenwater, iv; Rehder, 186-189. The Pocahontas Coal Field in West Virginia was more than 300 miles away from the Harlan Coal Field, but much of the research on house types in Pocahontas done by Gillenwater (and later reinforced by John Rehder) can be applied to Harlan's camps. Gillenwater and Rehder are the most explicit in their categorization of camp housing into recognized architectural groups. Rehder's asserts that some of these camp house types are folk in origin, not necessarily Appalachian "folk."

⁴⁸ The saltbox and the two-story L may have existed in camps around the county but there was no oral testimony, plans or extant structures to confirm their existence.

The *bungalow* group, as defined by other researchers in the field, was a house based loosely on the popular style sweeping the United States in the 20th century. In its coal camp manifestation, the bungalow was two rooms wide and two or more rooms deep with a front-facing gable and varying chimney placement.⁴⁹ The bungalow group, in my classification, extends to include the box house, a square four-room house with an end-gable roof. In the Harlan coal camps, the bungalow and box house are the dominant house types. The bungalow and box house most often had four rooms of equal size in the “four-on-one” plan, although five-room incarnations of the bungalow occurred (most often for mine officials). Front and back porches lining the ends of the house were also common. (see fig. 45)



Figure 45: The bungalow was the most common camp house in Harlan County being straightforward in form and easily expanded by enclosing either the back or front porches. This bungalow still stands in what used to be the Black Mountain coal camp. The basic four room plan has been enlarged with an enclosed back porch. (Photograph by author)

As Gillenwater notes, and substantial field evidence suggested, the bungalow group most easily allowed for exterior modifications. Camp houses that exist today are

⁴⁹ Gillenwater, 75; Fred Kniffen, “Louisiana House Types” *Readings in Cultural Geography*. ed. P.L. Wagner and M.W. Mikesell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), 165; Rehder, 112; M.A.

often in the bungalow group because they have been more flexible to additions and renovations. The front and back porches were enclosed to create extra rooms, carports were added onto the side and two or more rooms were added to the back of the bungalow on the end of the gable to extend its depth.



Figure 46: Box houses were one of the most dominant camp house types. The box house was four rooms square with an end-gable. Here box houses covered in clapboard line the street at Three Point, a camp of 210 employees in existence from 1931-1957. (Photograph courtesy John Cody)

The bungalow and box houses, like the pyramidal houses, were not introduced to the county by the coal industry. They were, in fact, products of the earlier external influence, saw mill technology. The “four-on-one” plan that was common in most bungalow and box houses may or may not have been an evolution from the earlier pen tradition but it held a firm place in the pre-industrial vernacular building tradition. Many box houses in the coal camps were built of board-and-batten construction as the name

Williams, *Homeplace*, 33-34.

suggests, although some were constructed with frame and covered with siding (see fig. 46). Board-and-batten construction enjoyed a wide proliferation in Harlan County at least three decades before coal camps were built. Builders of camp houses utilized this particular building method because it had been established in the county as cheap and available.⁵⁰

The *pyramidal* group is made up of one-story square houses containing four rooms of equal size (the “four-on-one” plan Rehder describes).⁵¹ The defining trait of the pyramidal house is a roof in which all four roof panels slope at the same angle to a single point at the roof’s apex (see fig. 47 and *Image Glossary*).



Figure 47: The characteristic trait of the pyramidal house is its roof which slopes from all four walls toward a central apex. This pyramidal house in Evarts has two front doors, one leading into each of the front rooms. (Photograph by author)

⁵⁰ Available in the sense that all the primary materials needed to construct it could have been found or made within the county (i.e. roughly sawn, unseasoned lumber).

⁵¹ Rehder, 112

According to a carpenter in Harlan County, the pyramidal roof was cheaper to build because it did not require the longer pieces of lumber needed to span the length of a gable. The distance to the apex of the pyramidal roof was shorter than the end-to-end length of the gable roof.⁵² A chimney was often at the apex of the pointed roof serving all four rooms with an opening, while a stove pipe exited one of the exterior kitchen walls. The spatial functions assigned to the rooms were loosely followed. By Gillenwater's assessment, a living room and bedroom made up the two front rooms while a kitchen and another bedroom made up the two back rooms. Grouped within the *pyramidal* category are houses with hipped roofs that similarly slope inward on all four sides, but meet at a horizontal shoulder instead of a single point (see fig. 48).

Based on the number of remaining extant camp houses, it appears that the pyramidal house did not dominate the coal camps of Harlan County. However, this type of houses was primarily built cheaply predicated a short life-span.⁵³ The vast majority of pyramidal houses in Harlan County belonged to smaller, locally-owned impermanent camps.⁵⁴

The pyramidal roof apparently did not make its introduction into Harlan County via coal camps, based on a few pictures predating the coal industry. In an aerial

⁵² Jim Banks, interview by author, Evarts Kentucky, 14 August 2005.

⁵³ I am grateful to Jeff Chapman-Crane, a local artist, who first called my attention to the uniqueness and abundance of this roof type in Harlan County. Jeff observed that out of the other places he had been and lived in central Appalachia (mainly northeastern Tennessee), nowhere was the pyramidal roof more abundant than in Harlan County.

⁵⁴ Residents and local builders do not refer to these roofs as pyramidal and hipped which made it difficult to ascertain the shape of a roof from a person's oral testimony. It seemed that there was no word for these roofs in the local vernacular until a local carpenter informed me that he knew them as "hurricane" roofs. He was not sure why they were called as such given the lack of hurricane-like weather in the mountains.

photograph taken in 1895 of Evarts, a small town on the Clover Fork, multiple houses appear to have either a pyramidal or high-hipped roof. Based on this information

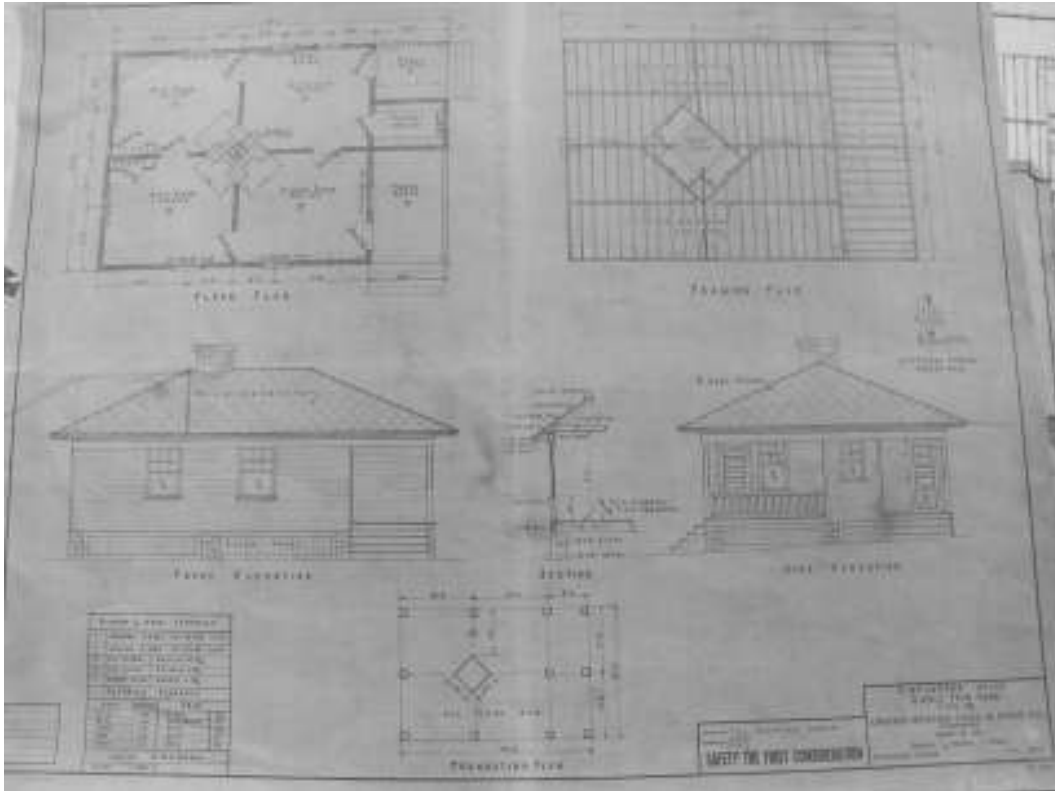


Figure 48: The hipped roof was similar to the pyramidal roof, although not as frequently built. Hipped roof houses were more common in the larger camps like Lynch, where this house was built. (Kentucky Coal Miners' Museum, Benham, KY)

it is clear that the pyramidal roof was being added to folk houses in Harlan County nearly two decades before coal camps utilized the roof form. But there is also no traditional precedent for this roof type in the pre-industrial building tradition. The question remains as to how and by what means the pyramidal roof made its way into the Harlan vernacular at the turn of the 19th century. It is clear that the coal camps proliferated this pre-coal industry roof form, most likely because it was cheaply constructed and already in the building repertoire of local carpenters. (see fig. 49)



Figure 49: A Harlin Wallins Coal Company camp in Harlan County. To the right of the tipple a scattering of pyramidal and box houses climb the hillside. (Kentuckiana Digital Library)

The *one-story L* group includes all houses that had two adjacent rooms on the front facade and a third room projecting perpendicularly from the back of either of the two front rooms creating an “L” or “T” shape (see fig. 44). A side-oriented gable covers the two front rooms, while the back room can be covered by either a perpendicular gable or shed roof (see fig. 50 and *Image Glossary*). As Gillenwater noted, there are two chimneys on the *one-story L*: one dividing the two front rooms with a fireplace opening in each room; and one serving a stove pipe along a wall of the back room which was usually the kitchen.⁵⁵ The two adjacent rooms functioned theoretically as living rooms and bedrooms. As was often the case in this house, room assignments were

⁵⁵ Gillenwater, 71



Figure 50: *One-story L* houses in Gary, WV. Gary was built by U.S. Steel thirty years earlier than Lynch in the 1890s. Many of the house types built in Gary were repeated in Lynch like this one. The projecting room on the back of these “L” shaped houses is covered by a gable as opposed to a shed. (Russell Lee Collection, 1979. Kentuckiana Digital Library)

arbitrary. A three-room house occupied by a large family was likely to have “all bedrooms and a kitchen” with no room appropriated for sitting and “living.”⁵⁶ The *one-story L* could also have been oriented so that what was previously described as the kitchen projected out of the front façade. In this orientation, the kitchen “L” was always covered by a front-facing gable.

The one-story L house manifests a form identical to that of the double-pen saddlebag house with back ell addition (see fig. 51). Both house forms were commonly lined with a front porch. The saddlebag, like the other double pen plans, often had two

⁵⁶ Philpot, et al., interview



Figure 51: This saddlebag house (in front and side views) was built in Evarts in the 1920's and the back ell was added sometime later. It was never a coal camp house, but its "L" shape resembles the one-story L house. (Photographs by author)

front doors, one leading into each front room—although this was not always the case (see fig. 51). From the pictures and plans that remain of the *one-story L* camp houses it is difficult to determine if they had one or two front doors. It is likely that some did and some did not. The parallels between the *one-story L* camp house and the folk saddlebag house with rear ell addition assert this form's continuity between the pre-industrial and industrial building periods.

The *Basic I* group consists of two-story structures, two rooms wide and one room deep on each floor, and a gable-end roof (see fig. 52).⁵⁷ Houses of this type were almost exclusively built of frame construction in coal camps (as opposed to board-and-batten). The chimney was typically in the center of the house with fireplace openings in each of the four rooms. The *Basic I* group appeared only in the largest camps, namely Black Mountain (owned by Peabody), Lynch (owned by US Steel), Benham (owned by International Harvester) and Closplint (owned by the Cloversplint Coal Company). The I-

⁵⁷ This group was so named by Gillenwater but the term "I-house" itself was coined by Fred Kniffen when he named folk houses with a common one-room deep, two-room wide, two story plan in Indiana, Illinois and Iowa "I-houses." This name has remained the most universally accepted term to describe this very common house type. (See Kniffen, "Key to Diffusion")

house varied in plan slightly depending on the number of families intended to live there and the class of that family.⁵⁸ In these camps, the *Basic I* form varied from a two-room wide, one-room deep house to a four-room wide, one-room deep house. As Gillenwater notes, the *Basic I* group worked well on the hilly topography. Since it was “only one-room deep, it could easily be situated with the contour along the valley slopes without extensive excavation.”⁵⁹ Along these same lines, the narrowness of the I-house compared with the box house and bungalow did not require pilasters to support the structure on the mountainsides as the wider houses often did.

The *Basic I* group belongs to a family of houses that first proliferated in pre-industrial vernacular tradition.⁶⁰ As an industrial dwelling type all over the United States,

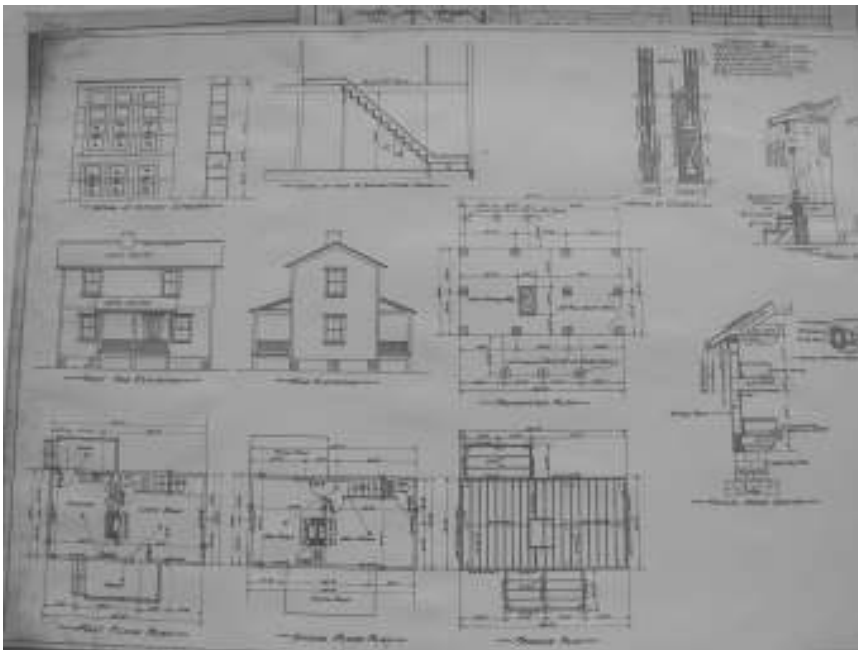


Figure 52: The Basic I-house was built in Lynch from these plans. The I-house was one room deep, two rooms wide and two stories tall. (Kentucky Coal Miners' Museum, Benham, KY)

⁵⁸ Within the coal camp economy there were generally three classes of workers, which governed living conditions: the officials, who lived in generous single-family houses; the middle class who were white miners of no official status living in single- and double- family dwellings; and the lower class, made up of ethnic minority miners who lived in single- and double-family dwellings as well, but generally grouped in their own separate section of the camp.

⁵⁹ Gillenwater, 77

⁶⁰ See Kniffen, “Key to Diffusion,” for a full description and analysis of the I-house and its prevalence across the eastern United States.

the I-house has significant folk precedents, including Harlan County where the form was present throughout the 19th century and called a farmhouse (see *Image Glossary*). The two-story farmhouse and the industrial I-house, however, were constructed by residents and companies that had an economic advantage. Even though the two-story I-house was a pre-industrial folk house in Harlan County throughout the 18th century, small local coal companies did not erect the two-story I-house in their camp because it was a relatively expensive house to build. On the other hand, large corporations often had the means to support camps filled with these two-story houses.

The *two-story four-pen* group includes houses that are two stories tall and have four rooms on the first story in a square arrangement and two-four rooms on the second



Figure 53: Two-story four pen houses with front-gable, side-gable and pyramidal roofs line the street at Closplint, a camp built by Cloversplint Coal Company in 1928 to house 350 employees. (Photograph by author)

story. The *two-story four-pen*, like the *Basic I*, was built only in the larger camps that could afford to erect dwellings of this size. These houses were in every case duplexes, or two-family houses. In Lynch, houses of this type clearly delineated the living space into

two units. The front porch originally had a wall running down the middle of it dividing it in two halves on which a door entered into each family's side of the house. Each side of the house had a staircase leading up to the one or two rooms on the second story. These houses had varying roof forms including front-gable, side-gable, pyramidal and gambrel roofs, a technique employed by the company to diversify the rows of identical houses (see fig. 53).

While the *two-story four-pen* has little to no folk precedent in Harlan County (despite the name's allusion to the pen tradition), the spatial use within these camp houses merits note. Because this house was a duplex, two families shared it, each having two rooms on the first floor and one or two on the second floor. It happened sometimes that a family lived within the two rooms of the first story and rented the second story to another family in order to supplement their income.⁶¹ This practice of living within two rooms would not have seemed out of the ordinary for mountaineers-turned-miners who had moved from a double pen house to the coal camp. In this way traditional spatial use

carried over from the pre-industrial to the industrial houses.



Figure 54: A longitudinal section of a gambrel-roofed two-story four-pen duplex in Lynch. The upstairs room was often rented out by the family to another family or single boarder. (Kentucky Coal Miners' Museum, Benham, KY)

⁶¹Theresa Osborne, interview by author, Cumberland, Kentucky, 4 and 8 August 2005; Gillenwater, 79. It was common for the company to employ more people in their mines than they could house, thus there was often an overflow of families looking for houses, or rooms in these cases, to rent.

The *shotgun* group includes all camp houses that are one-room wide, two or more rooms deep and one story tall. This was essentially a double pen house rotated ninety degrees so that the gable-end now faced front. The front door was on this gable end, as well as a porch in most cases. Variations on this type include the “camel back” and two-story shotgun (see fig. 36 and 55).⁶² Shotgun houses rarely had fireplaces, instead a stove pipe which was often located in the back room.



Figure 55: A camelback shotgun from the back with a side appendage located nearby the former Hall High School in Grays Knob. This house would have been built by the Wilson Berger Coal Company, begun in 1916. (Photograph by author)

The shotgun could be easily appended by adding additional rooms to the back gable end. The term “shotgun” goes back to folk tradition in which a shotgun could be

⁶² See Foster 192-5. A two-story shotgun is identical to the single-story shotgun with the addition of a second floor. The camelback shotgun was similar to the one story shotgun except that the back room was

fired through the front door and travel straight through the house without hitting anything because the doors from one room to the next were aligned.⁶³ Not all camp houses that maintained the one-room wide, two-or-more-room deep form have doors aligned in this way but were still considered “shotguns” because the form had become so ingrained with the name.

Shotgun houses were popular throughout the southern landscape, particularly in the upland south as temporary dwellings for railroad construction workers. The narrow footprint of the shotgun house made it useful in camps or towns where the lot size was narrow.⁶⁴ The shotgun house did not evolve from the pen tradition established in the county by the first white settlers, but rather from building traditions of southern Black and Creole populations. The shotgun tradition most likely moved into the mountains as populations from the South also moved north to look for work with the railroad or in the coal mines.

The *saltbox* group consists of one house type. It is two rooms wide, two rooms deep and two stories tall under a side gable whose back slope extended further than its front (see fig. 56). The plan differs from the two-story four-pen in that the back half of the saltbox is one large elongated room, usually the kitchen, where the staircase is also located. The second floor is similarly divided but on a smaller scale because of the intervening roof pitch. The saltbox occurred rarely in Harlan coal camps, limited only to Lynch. The saltbox evolved as a distinct house from the I-house in New England, where I-houses were commonly appended with

two stories.

⁶³Foster, 194

⁶⁴Foster, 192

a back shed running the breadth of house. This practice became so common that house builders began incorporating the back shed into the original design. The saltbox house is a perfect example of another region's vernacular house brought into Harlan County from outside the mountain region by a coal company. The introduction of the saltbox form parallels the introduction of other house forms into the pre-industrial landscape that had come from the outside, most notably log construction and the pen tradition. While the saltbox did not achieve the same degree of proliferation, it made a mark on the landscape of Harlan County and should be considered a part of the adoptive and evolved vernacular tradition.



Figure 56: The saltbox house was built in limited numbers in Harlan coal camps. Houses were built in Lynch from these plans. (Kentucky Coal Miners' Museum, Benham, KY)

The box house, bungalow, one-story L, I-house and shotgun were not introduced to Harlan County solely by the coal companies, although the industry proliferated them. Materials and construction techniques (framing and boxing) remained unchanged from the late pre-industrial period to the industrial period due mostly to the fact that local builders were hired to build camp houses. These camp house forms were evolutions of folk patterns present, for the most part, in Harlan County throughout the 18th century (with the exception of the box house and bungalow which appeared toward the end of the 18th century). In turn the two-story four-pen and the saltbox house forms had no established folk precedent in the county before their construction at the larger, corporate camps.

The railroad brought into Harlan County a massive industrial boom that demanded a material culture of mass production. This did not, however, demand a departure from folk building patterns which were by nature inexpensive and quickly assembled—qualities the coal companies sought. With a few exceptions in the camps owned and operated by outside interests, coal camp dwellings maintained folk building processes, usage and forms; they continued the vernacular.

CONCLUSION

“We call buildings vernacular to highlight the cultural and contingent nature of all building.”

-Henry Glassie, *Vernacular Architecture*¹

Paramount in the study of the folk house in Harlan County has been the reoccurring suggestion that there never was an “original” vernacular house. The log cabin, which is generally considered to be an essentially American icon, was not a new and original creation in Appalachia, but a conglomeration of vernacular elements from continental Europe that first amassed in the colonies and then moved into the mountains. Likewise the coal camp house in Harlan County, even in its corporate/local dichotomy, was a conglomeration of various elements, many of which came directly from preceding Appalachian building traditions, while others came from other outside vernacular traditions.

This thesis has written a history for two of Harlan County’s main periods: the pre-industrial settlement period and the industrial proliferation period. The most common houses were the single pen, the double pen, the I-house and the “four-on-one.”² Essentially these houses and other less common house types (mainly the saltbox and the one-story “L”) are adaptations and expansions of the single pen. Jean Sizemore, after a field study of Ozark vernacular houses, concluded with a similar assertion: “of paramount importance is the fact that these forms can be viewed as conceptually additive forms arrived at in solving the problem of adding onto a single pen log house, which was often one of the first houses in early settlement.”³ Sizemore aptly adds

¹ Glassie *Vernacular Architecture*, 21

² The “four-on-one” houses refer to those that are single-story and have four small rooms arranged in a square plan. These houses were typically boxed in the pre-industrial vernacular while the industrial vernacular proliferated the form in both a boxed and balloon-framed construction.

³ Jean Sizemore, *Ozark Vernacular Houses* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 204. Sizemore found six most common forms in the Ozark vernacular to which she refers in this passage: the single pen, the double

that these same house forms continued to be built in a similar fashion after log construction became obsolete.

The additive nature of pre-industrial evolutions of the single pen house served a function of necessity whether it was an expansion of one adjacent room or a full second story. The single pen mentality which all of these houses maintained is illustrated by the folk concept of “big house.”⁴ The “big house,” an essentially spatial concept, was the multi-functional, not-so-big room of a single pen cabin. Here in this one room, sleeping, eating,



Figure 57: A coal miner gets ready for work. The rooms of camp houses often contained multiple beds.

cooking and housework took place: “The beds went in the big house, and then, you sat in there too. It was all the fireplace and back here was all kinds of beds.”⁵

Michael Ann Williams’ documentation of the “big house” found that even in partitioned single pen plans, it was most often the “individual room where the majority of living took place” that was referred to by inhabitants as the “big house.”⁶ As additive house forms like the double pen and the I-house proliferated, the “big house” mentality remained central even though the houses may

have had two, three or four rooms. Sleeping and living often shared space, while cooking and eating was increasingly relegated to a back building or back room addition. The “four-on-one” plan houses introduced the first significant shift away from additive folk building when the

pen, the dogtrot, the one-story central hall cottage, the two-story I-house, and the saddlebag house. Sizemore points out in her study that much of the cultural influence in Ozark architecture diffused from the Central Appalachians.

⁴ Michael Ann Williams is credited with bringing this folk concept into the academic discussion of Appalachian vernacular architecture. See Williams, *Homeplace*, Chapter Two: “Big House: Use of the Single Pen Plan,” 38-72.

⁵ Kate Rogers, from oral testimony gathered by Michael Ann Williams. *Homeplace*, 38.

⁶ *Ibid*, 39.

kitchen and extra bedroom were incorporated into the main body of the house from the beginning. Yet even this four-room house maintained the spatial mentality of the “big house.” As Evelyn Philpot and her sisters remembered, their four-room box house had “all bedrooms and a kitchen” with no separate room just for sitting or daily housework. In a similar way, many coal camp houses also embodied the spatial configurations handed down from pre-industrial precedents. Theresa Osborne reported that in some of Lynch’s three and four-room camp houses the family would relegate all of their living to two rooms while renting the other one or two.

Spatial use is one way in which the vernacular is expressed continuously in pre-industrial and industrial houses in Harlan County. Continuities can also be seen in the form of additive building. The log double pen house frequently had an added kitchen in the back making it a three room, “L” shaped house (see *Image Glossary*), although it was never referred to as such by folk builders. The one-story “L” documented in a few of Harlan’s coal camps is similar to the double pen with kitchen addition. The back room of the one-story “L” camp house would have almost exclusively been used as the kitchen while the front two rooms would have been multifunctional “big house” spaces. Similarly, the saltbox camp house form evolved from an additive building practice where a back shed running the width of the house was added to a two-story, four room house (often referred to as an I-house or farmhouse). The posthumously added shed to the back of the I-house became so common that folk builders began including it in the original design.⁷ The saltbox, as so designated by its builder, was erected in limited numbers only in Lynch, yet it embodies the additive heritage of Harlan County’s pre-industrial farmhouse.

Collective folk perception tends to classify buildings by the material of construction. For example, the “box” house does not refer to the house’s square, box-like form, rather to the

⁷ The saltbox has been well-documented as having proliferated firstly in New England although the practice of adding a back shed to an I-house was common throughout the country, as well as in Harlan County (see part II, Figure 56).

technique of nailing planks around the perimeter of the house to “box” it in. This research found that wood was the overwhelming material of choice for vernacular builders in Harlan County throughout the settlement and industrialization periods, with the three most prominent types of construction being horizontal log, vertical plank and frame. These findings correspond to the conclusions of Henry Glassie and Fred Kniffen in “Building in Wood in the Eastern United States:” “European America has known three general methods of building in wood: with framed walls; with walls of closely set vertical timbers; and with walls of horizontal timbers.”⁸ Glassie



Figure 58: A two-story four pen duplex in Lynch built out of frame construction. (SECC Appalachian Archive)

and Kniffen’s extensive fieldwork on the subject as well as their other publications on cultural

diffusion throughout the Eastern United States reveal the various material cultures brought to this

⁸ Fred Kniffen and Henry Glassie, “Building in Wood in the Eastern United States,” *Geographical Review* 56 (1966): 40

country and carried along different paths inland. The English built framed houses throughout New England while the Swedish and German constructed dwellings out of horizontal logs. The later method proved most efficient in the wilderness frontier where there were no sawmills and an abundance of logs. Thus log construction was embraced by the second and third generation of European descendents who forged their way west into the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Log construction endured as the most efficient method of house building for many decades, while the Appalachian region remained isolated from newer building technology. When sawmills finally appeared along the rivers and sawn lumber became a commodity, log construction waned and in its place houses were built of frame or vertical plank construction. Frame and vertical plank construction offered a bridge between the pre-industrial house forms like the double pen which were originally built in log construction but were then constructed out of sawn lumber as it became available. Eventually the boxed double pen was replaced by the boxed four-room house, which was eventually embraced by coal operators and proliferated.

From the beginning of the discussion about what is vernacular and what is not, material of construction was at the forefront of determination. Early English writers on the subject argued that vernacular architecture was composed of local materials, making vernacular buildings geographically unique.⁹ Against this theory, commercially-produced lumber would have stood out as “oblivious to geographic differences,”¹⁰ capable of being produced on any river in any region where there was a sawmill. Yet the wane of log construction and the rise of framed and vertical plank construction in Harlan County did not signal the end of the region’s vernacular traditions, but facilitated an evolution to new forms. The “four-on-one plan” was never built out of pre-industrial log technology. This may have been because log technology could not span the

⁹ Glassie, *Vernacular Architecture*, 25

¹⁰ Ibid.

larger width of the square house. The lighter sawn lumber would have allowed a larger roof span such that the box house was a form only possible with an advancement of building technology. After sawn lumber became a commodity, box houses multiplied across the region, becoming the default cheap, accessible folk house, filling the role that the log cabin had previously filled. In this way the material of construction played a role in the evolution of the vernacular house. The isolated, static folk dwelling of pre-industrial Harlan County contrasts with the rapid explosion and frequency of company housing during the coal boom. The ascendancy of coal industry in Harlan County brought the first substantial challenge to the mountaineers' "arrested frontier culture,"¹¹ bringing unprecedented development and consequent tumult. The architecture of the houses built before the coal industry and those built by the industry differed little in form, construction and usage, and therefore were not outside of the regional vernacular. The coal industry demanded mass-production and rapid installations of cheap, small houses in camps intended only to be temporary. But the pre-industrial mountaineer had already embraced these values in both log construction and the lighter building material sawmills enabled. With respect to small, practical houses, this was all the mountaineer knew how to build coming out of a tradition of one, two, three and four room dwellings with little architectural adornment. The mountaineer also knew how to make houses as cheaply as possible, cutting costs and labor by building thin and often load-bearing walls with few windows. It was not such a far stretch for local builders in Harlan County when coal companies set up operation and hired out to locals to build fifty to five hundred camp houses in as little as six months.

¹¹ Caudill *Theirs Be the Power*, 91



Figures 59 and 60: Some things never change: a pioneer family poses outside their single pen log cabin in the 19th century in southeastern Kentucky (top) and a coal miner's family poses outside their four-room framed camp house in the 20th century in Brookside, KY (bottom). Housing traditions can link generations across centuries. (Top photograph from Berea College Archive, Mountain Collection; Bottom photograph from Kentuckiana Digital Library)

In a case study of vernacular architecture, such as this one in Harlan County, the material is always more complicated than originally thought. The sections of this thesis have attempted to divide Harlan's past houses by period and type, yet even these categories fall short of revealing the breadth of dwelling evolution and vernacular manifestation. In many ways this research stands on its own as a descriptive history and application of vernacular theory. But this research can also be a starting point to begin to examine the ways in which the vernacular continues to evolve and manifest in the present. How are houses built today a continuation of vernacular construction, usage and form? Can the mobile homes and trailers of Harlan County's post coal-camp landscape be considered vernacular? Only with a broadened definition of vernacular houses that includes both the handmade *and* the mass-produced house as defined by this thesis could these questions even be posed.

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