

CONCLUSION

Silas Noah Butts signed his last will and testament on the 14th day of August, 1956. Twelve days later, he died at his house in Brasstown of a heart attack. Lengthy obituaries appeared that week in the local newspapers, often on the front page. The "old man of the mountains" had lived 76 years which encompassed the growth of an industrial society in nearby towns, two World Wars and the Great Depression.

Silas created and maintained a unique lifestyle. As mentioned throughout this study, everything in his life seemed to work together for his reputation as a local legend. Somewhere in the midst of time and all of the stories, Louisa Butts' name got lost. Her efforts and accomplishments are not remembered despite her obvious contributions to Silas' legacy. By taking in the children, Silas fulfilled a need within the community while at the same time, he fulfilled a need for work on his farm. Silas would make and sell liquor to support his "homemade orphanage" but when he found himself in trouble with the law, it was the children that helped to get him out of trouble. Silas built these children a school on

his farm but yet he could not read or write. Despite whether he actually realized the need for education or just used the school to sway public opinion in favor of his humanitarian efforts, education of the children worked to his advantage as well because people now remember him as a good man who did good things.

Realistically, there is no doubt that Silas was not perfect. Whether he is to be praised or blamed is beyond the reach of this study. However, almost fifty years have passed since his death and yet his name is known by nearly everyone native to Oconee County. It is not so much Silas as a man that is remembered as it is what Silas "accomplished" that lingers today. He was a legend long before he died and his legacy lives on. Memories often work for another purpose besides unbiased remembering. They often serve a purpose. The legacy of Silas Butts, created by those who "remember" and retell stories, serves as the transition that he represents. Silas, "the old man from the mountains," represents a shift from the romanticized memories of self-sufficient living to the realities of a modern world. Whether the "romanticized memories" and the "modern world" are truly separate and distinct with Silas as the mediator is not the issue. The fact that people believe that Silas'

legacy represents a shift between these two "worlds" has created its own truth.

Further evidence that Silas serves as a transition can be seen in the Butts family itself. Originally from Ducktown, Tennessee, his grandfather moved into the Brasstown Valley in the early part of the nineteenth century. This denotes a move down through the mountains. The location of Brasstown, at the edge of the Appalachian region also fuels the notion of Silas as a transition. With railroads and textile mills creating towns such nearby Westminster, Seneca and Newry in the late nineteenth century people such as the Butts came closer and closer to people moving westward, up through South Carolina. Silas, therefore, was simply in the right place at the right time to serve as this transitory figure, exposing Appalachia to the "modern world."

There is still, for local people, a mystique about the Butts' farm today which remains much as it was during Silas' life. Parents still take their children up to Brasstown to show them the house, school, grist mill or graveyard that are all no longer in use. There is something about the stories of Silas Butts that evokes images of a romanticized time in history that obviously is no more. Seeing the two rock chimneys, the huge, open

attic and the large, overshot waterwheel touches even the hearts of those who never experienced this type of lifestyle. John Bigham, the reporter from Columbia, understood this when, in 1953, he accurately predicted, "When Silas and Louisa are dead and gone, the stories about them will live on and the mountain kids they have befriended will for years to come keep their memory alive in the foothills of the Blue Ridge."¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Bigham.