

PEDIGREE OF THE  
"APPALACHIAN QUARTERLY"

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The "Appalachian Quarterly" was published from June 1996 to October 2009 by the Wise County Historical Society. This society was founded in 1992 <sup>(1)</sup>, and flourished until 2010, when their space in the Wise County Court House was closed to the public due to mandated security clearance requirements. The volume and scope of its production is very extensive, and was presented both in print and on line. This organization had a very old and prestigious heritage that will be presented here. As of June 2017 the Society is trying to reinvigorate itself.

The story begins with Lyman Draper. No other person of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century can claim a greater contribution to the collection, collation, presentation, and preservation of American historic documents than Draper. He became secretary of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. What he really did was to endlessly travel the Mid Appalachian Region in search of unwanted documents of historic value. Typically he would ride up to a county court house and talk the officials there out of their old unwanted documents, to which they attached little value. Typical of these were copies of militia officer's reports to their superiors from the period of the Indian Wars and the Revolutionary War. He was remarkably successful at this endeavor.

He familiarized himself with the people presented in this material, and then corresponded with these historic figures, or with their descendants. Thus, he created an entirely new body of material that would not have otherwise existed.<sup>(2)</sup>

Using this material he wrote a biography of Daniel Boone, and the story of the Battle of King's Mountain. It has been said that we of today would know little of Boone and this battle if it had not been for Draper. This is not much of an exaggeration, as many of these courthouses and their contents were burned during the Civil War.

This material wound up in the possession of the Historical Society of Wisconsin. It was randomly thrown into boxes. It was not inventoried nor indexed. After Draper's passing, few knew what information was contained in this body of data. Generations of researchers first gave identifying numbers to the documents, and gradually began to collate them into groupings of similar content. Ultimately each document was microfilmed, and massive cabinets of this microfilm were dispersed to the major libraries of the country. Recently they have become available on line.

But before any of this processing, there was nothing but a pile of paper. Then along came the Great Depression. Millions of people were out of work. The Federal Government started a number of projects to employ people in socially useful jobs, rather than to just issue them a welfare check. Perhaps the best remembered today is the Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC). It was for unmarried young men, and in Virginia they are best

remembered for their having build our first state parks in the Commonwealth, and for improvements to our National Forests. For older married people the Works Projects Administration (WPA) was set up. This organization was divided into a construction wing, and into an academic one. (3)

Emory L. Hamilton was a Wise Countian who lost his job with the Merchant Marine during the Great Depression. He came home, and applied to the WPA for a job documenting the early settlement of Wise County.(4) Fortunately for succeeding generations, he landed this job. It led him directly to the Draper Manuscripts.

Hamilton hired an associate in Madison, Wisconsin who looked for documents within the Draper Manuscripts that contained material that might be of interest to him. Hamilton, himself, stayed in Wise County and reviewed the material that had been sent to him. He did his own research in local courthouses, especially Washington Co., Va. By collating all his material in his head, he was able to identify numerous frontier forts in Southwest Virginia, and collected first hand the oral history about each of them. He published a large volume of articles and books on this forgotten history.(5)

With the onset of World War II the WPA was disbanded. Hamilton joined the Army Air Corp, and after the war he taught sheet metal work at the Wise Co. Vocational School. He continued his work in local frontier history as a hobby. He was a founding father and Secretary of the Historical Society of Southwest Virginia for 30 years. He was a major contributor to its journal, the "Historical Sketches of South West Virginia".

During all these activities his niece, Rhonda Robertson, was his doting shadow. She became his alter ego, and after his death in 1991, she carried on his work. She was a major founder of the Wise County Historical Society, and its publication, the "Appalachian Quarterly". With the advent of the internet, she placed much of Hamilton's work on line. She abstracted deeds and other historic documents in the Abingdon Court House. She was co-author of "Wise County's World War II Veterans", and the "Heritage of Wise County".(6) She was a resource to this author, who contributed a number of articles to the "Quarterly".

#### Bibliography:

- 1 - <http://www.visitwisecounty.com/historical-society.html>
- 2 - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyman\\_Draper](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyman_Draper)
- 3 - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Works\\_Progress\\_Administration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Works_Progress_Administration)
- 4 - <http://vagenweb.org/wise/biographyEH.html>
- 5 - personal communications from Rhonda Robertson to the author

6 - <http://wisevahistoricalsoc.org/2010/11/15/a-tribute-to-rhonda-robertson/>