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Aristocracy and Appalachia: Edith Vanderbilt and Her Moonlight School

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Aristocracy and Appalachia: Edith Vanderbilt and Her Moonlight School

By

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Table of Contents

Illustrations

Prefatory Essay

Aristocracy and Appalachia: Edith Vanderbilt and Her Moonlight Schools has been a few years in the making. I began the research for this project in August 2009 in the Issues and Research course required of all MAPW students at Kennesaw State. The assignment asked that we each write a chapter of a book, one that could feasibly be published in the future. Since I am from the Appalachian area and was interested in Edith Vanderbilt of Biltmore Estate fame, I decided to write a chapter depicting her marriage to George Vanderbilt and her arrival at Biltmore. Additionally, I thought that she deserved her very own biography since one has never been written, even by The Biltmore Company. The field of biography had begun to intrigue me since I had taken Dr. Walters' Biography course the previous summer. I had no idea that Edith's life would have any relevance for the field of composition and rhetoric when I began, and I certainly never imagined that I would eventually be researching the field of literacy. However, *Aristocracy and Appalachia* became more than a biography: it became about the Appalachian people, their relationship with Edith, and her sponsorship of their advanced literacy.

In many ways, my capstone project reflects my growth as a student in this program because I started it in the beginning and finished it at the end. Dr. Daniell assigned the original chapter, and she was influential as I began my capstone. She guided me through the various difficult and fascinating literacy theories, and challenged me to become a better writer. Her original critiques of the biographical chapter made me aware of grammatical and style issues that plague my writing. Without her marks and corrections, I would not have worked on my own to correct some of these deficiencies. I am very grateful for her implicit insistence that I become a better writer.

Several courses in the MAPW capstone led to my development as a writer and researcher and, ultimately, the completion of this capstone project. Dr. Walters' biography course initiated me into the field of biography where I learned the basics of writing a biography; we also explored specific genres within biography like hagiography. I experimented with writing a biography of my relative, Grace Moore, a Metropolitan opera singer and actress in the 1940's. Through this endeavor, I practiced writing about someone's life and used research methods that I would repeat while investigating Edith's life. I located archives, read related books, and conducted telephone interviews for the project, and it was an invaluable foundation upon which to build Edith's biographical chapter.

While completing my capstone, I continued to learn, mostly about literacy. From Sohn, I learned that some historical problems with literacy acquisition are (unfortunately) still an issue for Appalachian women today, and that women may use acquired literacy as a way to function in their own world, rather than leave their communities behind. From Brandt, I learned that literacy can be attained through "sponsors" and literacy, when looked at through an economic lens, is a "commodity." From Freire, I determined that sometimes the dominant class (or government, or culture, etc.) can use literacy as a way to oppress and objectify if teachers use the rudimentary "banking system" that treats students as vessels to be filled with knowledge. Finally, from Powell, I learned that some of the Appalachian women did possess rhetorical skill; their letters reveal intelligence in a society long stereotyped as unintelligent and illiterate. This study also revealed that literacy is not always of the Standard English variety. Literacy became multi-dimensional: literacy can have varying roles for individuals even within the same language and can enrich or hinder dependent upon the rhetorical situation. For me (and I believe the students

of the Moonlight Schools), literacy is relational, spiritual, and personal all at the same time. It can be defined by our culture; it can define *us* if we allow it.

Additionally, the Research Methods course at the end of my program taught by Dr. Daniell familiarized me with qualitative and quantitative methods of research that are used by those in the composition field. I learned how to conduct archival research, how to interview, and how to condense my findings into a manageable proposal. I do not know how students who have not taken this course complete their capstone: it was that imperative to my project. Dr. Daniell whittled my ideas into a doable thesis, and gave me ample scholarly articles to read. I am a better researcher and writer because of this course as it challenged me to write more clearly and concisely while maintaining credibility. We wrote responses to articles that we had read that would be used in our capstone research. Dr. Daniell asked "Who profits?" at the top of the response that I had written about Brandt's sponsor of literacy article. At the time, I thought that only the Appalachian people profited from the Moonlight Schools. When I read her question, I began thinking that I may not be considering all of the factors that play into literacy acquisition. Who profits? Though the Appalachian people certainly did profit in that they learned an important skill that sometimes connected them with each other and their God in a way that little else could have done, I think that others benefitted as well. The people who had jobs-like the illiterate postmasters who learned from Cora Wilson Stewart in Kentucky—were better employees after acquiring literacy. Thus, the employers benefitted. Cora Wilson Stewart eventually earned herself a spot on the Democratic vice-presidential ticket; she was made famous through the Moonlight School movement. The Presbyterians and Episcopalians who encouraged the Moonlight School movement believed they were storing up some sort of treasure in heaven; they also received the spiritual benefit that comes from helping others. In other words, other

people did profit—just maybe not financially. This lesson was an important one in the development of my capstone.

Some courses may not directly relate to the capstone but have enriched my development as an educator. In Teaching Composition in High Schools and Colleges, I read leading scholars' work concerning the field of composition. Though this course may not have had a direct implication for my capstone project, Dr. Odom's course was invaluable because it gave me more information about how to teach writing. "Inventing the University" by Bartholomae taught me that students often feel as though they must be "experts" to complete college assignments, while Andrea Lunsford and Lise Ede's "Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked" reiterated that students often need a real audience in order to make assignments meaningful.

The History of Rhetoric course taught by Dr. Harper was the most illuminating class I have ever taken. Beginning with the Sophists, we explored rhetoric as it relates to the classroom. My prior knowledge of rhetoric was minimal; as an undergraduate student, I had only ever been exposed to Aristotle. However, this course not only introduced me to influential scholars and rhetors like St. Augustine, Foucalt, and Plato, but it also allowed me to transmit those theories to composition pedagogy. Students can be taught about utterances and the rhetorical proofs, and this knowledge can improve their writing—not to mention communication—skills. I cannot imagine graduating with the MAPW without a knowledge of rhetoric, and my newfound understanding of its pedagogical implications.

Though I am very proud of my growth as a writer and the fact that I have finally become more comfortable with grammar and style, I am most proud that the MAPW program has facilitated my growth as a teacher. I do not currently teach students writing, but I do hope to one day use the skills I have learned in the MAPW program in the classroom. Over the past two

years, my vision of teaching has changed: no longer do I place more importance on literature in the classroom than writing. Instead, I believe that writing is the way that our students can relate to us as well as one another. It is a way for them to explore self, learn, and ultimately mature into competent writers. Using rhetorical strategies, I can make the classroom relevant for students. Whether it is through requiring students to craft cover letters and resumés using the knowledge of ethos, pathos, or logos, or applying code switching in the Appalachian classroom, I now have more confidence in my ability to teach writing, which is not an east pursuit. However, I do not know of a profession with more immediate power to change lives or one where the rewards run deeper. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to grow in that profession through the MAPW program.

Aristocracy and Appalachia: Edith Vanderbilt and Her Moonlight Schools

Chapter 1

Introduction

"We are so accustomed to thinking of the Vanderbilts as pleasure lovers and members of the kill-time class of rich Americans that perhaps we have condemned them too broadly: certainly all of the great railroad creator have not made use of their inherited riches for the world's betterment…amid the Appalachian Mountains…go down into the valleys and along the hillsides…see the life of the people as it is, see what has been done to better their existence…and then you learn the truth…that Biltmore has become an open-air school…"

Day Allen Willey, *The Ladies World,* 1909

The passing of the Gilded Age in American history brought forth an era of great change. The Gilded Age—known for its greed, corruption, and vanity—had created an American aristocracy. In this time of great economic advancement, the Vanderbilts, the Astors, the Carnegies, and the Rockefellers became great dynasties: no other word but opulence could be used to describe their lives. Often, these dynasties' power lay on the backs of those who worked for and, sometimes, in spite of them. Those who carried the burden were often overworked, underpaid, and overwhelmed. However, change was coming. The Progressive Era—juxtaposed with the Gilded Age—was revolutionary. The reformation of healthcare, labor, and education all became part of a national movement that had religion as its guide; moral obligation and spiritual guidance required men and women to become involved in philanthropy. Slowly, the middle and upper classes began to take part in the sweeping philanthropy that would define the Progressive Era (Nelms 3).

Out of these efforts for better education in America and therefore literacy, the idea of Moonlight Schools was born. Cora Wilson Stewart developed the Schools in 1911 in Appalachian Kentucky, where illiteracy prevented the mountain people from voting, corresponding, and learning. The Moonlight Schools were taught by local teachers on nights of the full moon: the students learned how to read and write (Nelms 34). The Schools were a rousing success; in a span of two years, over a hundred thousand people had become literate. Edith Vanderbilt, who was married to George Vanderbilt of Biltmore Estate fame, heard of the Schools in 1916 (Klingner). As a Progressive philanthropist who had already established herself as the matron saint of Appalachia, the Schools provided a way to introduce a new literacy to the Appalachian people. It was a "new" form of literacy because some form of literacy already existed in the region, just not one that adhered to Standard English or allowed the residents to read their Bibles. Literacy has multiple definitions, but for this thesis, literacy is the ability to read, write, and interpret discourse. Edith established her version of literacy and adult literacy schools at Biltmore. Edith became a sponsor of literacy—using Deborah Brandt's definition—for the workers at Biltmore who attended her Moonlight Schools (167).

I. Review of Literature

Though much has been written about the Vanderbilt family and some information is available about the Moonlight Schools, no work exists that discusses the Biltmore Moonlight School in depth or its relevance to literacy theory. Edith Vanderbilt herself has been mostly ignored by the biography genre: there has not ever been a biography written solely about her. Certainly, no work exists that connects both the Moonlight Schools at Biltmore and their creator, Edith Vanderbilt. I seek to discuss Edith and the Moonlight Schools together, using Deborah Brandt's sponsor theory of literacy. Literacy, as characterized in Brandt's article, is acquired

through sponsors that either "enable, support, teach, model, or recruit" (166). She asserts that sponsors can be institutions, systems, or people; the economy is an example of a system that not only compels literacy but also influences those who seek it.

The Vanderbilts have intrigued America since the accumulation of their great fortune during the railroad industry's birth. Biographies have been written and rewritten of the members of this family; from Gloria to Gertrude, the legacy of the Vanderbilts has been explored. Works such as these abound and usually briefly mention Edith. Howard E. Covington Jr., with permission of the Biltmore Company, wrote the book *Lady on the Hill: How Biltmore Estate Became an American Icon* in 2006. This nonfiction work explores the actual history of the home and how George Vanderbilt affected the surrounding mountain community; however, only one chapter is named after Edith, and this chapter focuses on her biography and the creation of Biltmore Industries (37). She is not mentioned in other parts of the book, most likely due to the fact that Edith was a woman and was overshadowed by her Vanderbilt husband. When in competition with George for publishing space, I am sure that Edith ranks a low second. The second book that I found outlining her life was entitled *The Vanderbilt Women: Dynasty of Wealth, Glamour and Tragedy* by Clarice Stas. Edith, though mentioned, did not fit into her box. She was glamorous until she moved to the Appalachian Mountains; she did not lead a particularly tragic life. Stas seems to characterize the Vanderbilt women as they were but revels in the ones who have multiple warts in their personas. From Gertrude to Gloria, Stas discusses multiple marriages, love affairs, and dilettante socialites. Edith, who sat on the porch stoops of mountain women and served on the North Carolina Agriculture Commission, did not add much to the book in terms of scandal.

Images of America: Biltmore Estate contained the most information about Edith. Consisting mostly of pictures with short captions, the book gives an intimate view of what life was like for the Vanderbilts. One such picture shows Edith with Cornelia, in riding gear, while others depict her in full formalwear for an official portrait (16). While the book is very useful in piecing together what Edith's daily life was like, it does not give her complete biography. It also does not examine her philanthropy, the Moonlight Schools, or their tie to the field of literacy.

Even after reading the books I have mentioned, it was difficult to piece together a timeline of Edith's life. I did find that authors mention her in relation to someone or something else: often her husband or Biltmore take precedence. I found another book, entitled *Biltmore Estate: The Most Distinguished Private Place* written by John Bryan. The book gives an extensive history of the home and includes numerous details about the Vanderbilts' intimate circle of friends. A fourth book, written by Consuelo Vanderbilt entitled *The Glitter and the Gold,* describes the life of George which was helpful but not specifically what I was looking for (3). I could find very little information about how Edith created the Moonlight Schools.

Thus, there are books that do exist that shatter the myth of Edith as a typical twentieth century society wife. However, a biography that focuses on her philanthropy and tie to Appalachia has not been written. She has never been considered an influential patron of literacy acquisition or of education. And sadly, her work with the Moonlight Schools is not even mentioned in the books about the Vanderbilt family.

While researching the Moonlight Schools, I did find several articles and books that identify their origination and methodology. Cora Wilson Stewart's memoirs *Moonlight Schools for the Emancipation of Adult Illiterates* asserts the need for an adult literacy program in rural Kentucky (Stewart 9). Stewart started the first Moonlight School, ensured its success, and spread the

initiative to other states across America. Stewart—the first female superintendent of her rural county—was deeply troubled by the illiteracy present in Rowan County, Kentucky (10). She frequently helped the mountain people write letters to absent family members; through such interactions Stewart developed the idea of the very first Moonlight School. Stewart describes the methods used to teach the students: she created primers from newspapers and used the Bible as a resource (22). Though this work is an irreplaceable account of Moonlight School pedagogy from the initial initiator, it does not include the Biltmore Moonlight School or mention Edith Vanderbilt as a proponent of the movement.

James Canipe and Martha Decker published an article in 2004 entitled "Kentucky's Moonlight Schools: An Enduring Legacy of Adult Learning Principles and Practices." In their article, Canipe and Decker assert that the Moonlight Schools formed by Cora Wilson Stewart can teach modern day instructors valuable methods in dealing with adult learners. The authors give a brief summary of Stewart's initiatives. The article then undertakes to list the methods that would best fit the new adult learning classroom. First, learning must be meaningful to the students. The Moonlight Schools met this criterion because Stewart and other instructors visited the rural homes to drum up interest in the program and to ask what the students wished to learn. The second notable implication for education is that adult learners wish to make their own decisions regarding their education. Finally, that adult learners' life experience plays a role in the classroom and should be valued (Canipe and Decker 20). They suggest that these principles, despite the gap in time, can still be used in literacy education (Canipe and Decker 21). Though the authors suggest some implications for education, no specific tie to literacy theory is mentioned in the article.

The biography genre has not completely ignored the Moonlight School movement. Willie Nelms has published a biography of Cora Wilson Stewart, *Cora Wilson Stewart: Crusader Against Illiteracy*. The biographer describes the Moonlight Schools Stewart formed in Kentucky. Edith is not mentioned so this is not a source of information about her, but it paints a clear picture of the Moonlight Schools goals, methods, and traits. Nelms claims that students were taught letter writing, common words, and phonics at the Moonlight Schools, primarily writing an account of the Kentucky Moonlight Schools with no specific information about the spread of the movement or the Biltmore Moonlight Schools (35-37). It is mostly information with little analysis of Stewart's methods. However, the book greatly resembles my project in that it is a biography with literacy relevance and was invaluable because of its similarity and sheer amount of information.

My thesis is not aimed at simply presenting biographical information, nor primarily literacy theory or Moonlight School information. Instead, using Brandt's sponsor of literacy theory, I explore Edith's life and philanthropy as it related to her own literacy acquisition and the Appalachian people. By looking at Edith as a sponsor of literacy, I connect her to the Moonlight Schools, and ultimately, to the Appalachian people that she came to consider her community of friends. I describe the Moonlight Schools at the Biltmore dairy, the methodology used to teach the students, and Edith's role in replicating the movement at Biltmore. Through oral histories and primary documents, the thesis aims to share Edith's story and to allow the voices of the Appalachian people to be heard. Instead of collectively dismissing the Appalachian people as illiterate, the thesis will also cite research by Katrina Powell to suggest that some form of literacy (and rhetorical skill) did in fact exist before the existence of the Moonlight Schools. Finally, the capstone will invoke theories that have direct implications for the Moonlight Schools: Paulo

Freire's "banking" view of education, Kim Donehower's relational and communal literacy theory, Katherine Kellher Sohn's study of literacy among modern Appalachian women, and Beth Daniell's "little narratives" of literacy. All are used to interpret how the Moonlight Schools taught a new literacy to the Appalachian people. Finally, I argue that the Moonlight Schools established their own form of rural literacy: one that was agrarian, spiritual, relational, and functional all at the same time.

Research Questions

In order to make this argument, I needed to find the answer to several questions that guided my research. How did the Moonlight Schools originate and what were its methods? What intrigued Edith about this movement and led to her establishment of her Moonlight Schools? What was literacy like in the early twentieth century? What implications do the Moonlight Schools have for literacy? How can literacy theory be used to interpret the Moonlight Schools? What varying lenses/theories can be used to view the Moonlight Schools? What was Edith's life like and what special situations made her an advocate for literacy?

Additionally, I sought to find out who the woman behind the mansion was and how she spent her time. The answer surprised me. She is not the person I expected her to be and this element fascinates me. Why did she have such empathy for the Appalachian people? How did someone from the upper class establish herself as a fixture in the lives of a secluded, wary community? How did Edith end up in the mountains of North Carolina? Why did she leave New York, her family, and society to become a mountain philanthropist? Why did she care for the people, especially the women of Appalachia? What drove her to become a champion of education and literacy? Was it a result of her childhood upbringing? Though George Vanderbilt

receives much credit for his charitable works, Edith was the greater philanthropist and deserves for her story to be told.

As I am interested in the field of teaching writing, her story became more important to me personally as I realized that her work could have implications for that field. How did she teach these people who were probably initially resistant to her to write? I knew very little about what actually happened in the schools. Overall, the capstone research dealt mostly with literacy theory. I needed to discover a good working definition of literacy for my purposes, how it applies to the Appalachian community, and to these women that Edith taught.

Methodology

I soon discovered while conducting my initial research of the Biltmore Company website it maintains its own archive. Access to the archives is limited, and it is rare that permission is given to visit them in person. However, the archivist at Biltmore was willing to scan snippets of oral histories, photos, and newspaper articles and send them to me electronically. I was given permission from the Biltmore Company to use any information that the archivist found in the archive that directly related to the Moonlight Schools. The research indicates that the students appreciated attending school at night, since they came from an agrarian community (Klingner). Furthermore, the students assert that they would benefit the most from then being able to read the Bible. One student was delighted to have gained the skills to correspond with her family members. The oral histories could be the most important pieces of research that I have found: not only do they give intelligent voice to the much maligned Appalachian people, but they also allow insight into the students' perspective and illustrate the desire for literacy skills beyond the native and largely oral form that already existed.

In addition to consulting with the Biltmore Estate archivist, I also interviewed the Biltmore curator who is familiar with Edith and her influence upon the Appalachian area. This curator of interpretation (as Biltmore names its head curator) is specifically assigned to Edith and now works in the private archives to flesh out the woman previously known as the wife of George. Leslie Klingner, curator of interpretation for Biltmore, was the primary source of information on Edith's life and philanthropy. Through access to Edith's personal letters and memorabilia, Ms. Klingner has developed a great understanding of the various facets of the philanthropist. Biltmore Company had learned that tourists were not satisfied with the present information about Edith, and Leslie has worked to create new exhibits that showcase her efforts on the part of the mountain people. After years of researching Edith's life through letters, memos, and other primary documents, the Company soon learned it had hit the jackpot with Edith. Not only was her life fascinating, but she was a Progressive lobbyist and philanthropist. After interviewing Ms. Kligner several times and reading primary documents that she personally selected and sent to me, Edith eventually became "alive" to me. Her personal memos, letters, and history allowed me insight into her relationship with Appalachia and what motivated her to "sponsor" literacy. Much of the information in the biographical section—as well as the chapter describing the Biltmore Moonlight Schools—derives from these interviews and documents.

Ms. Klingner also provided me with links to oral history transcripts. Though she gave me many quotes by residents of the Appalachian area in regard to Edith, I wanted to read a full transcript. Leslie suggested Annie Nipson as a possibility; the Annie Nipson interview conducted by Radcliffe College was very beneficial. Nipson was a member of the School of Domestic Science which Edith created for African-American women in Asheville. They learned how to be maids in the homes of the wealthy so that they could earn higher paying jobs, as well

as how to read and write. Nipson's interview describes her time with the Vanderbilts, and she asserts that she benefitted greatly from Edith's School (Boehm 164). Her son went on to become editor of *Ebony* magazine in the 1970's ("Ebony"). This oral history provided first-hand information about Edith, and the generational influence of literacy acquisition.

For information about the Moonlight Schools in particular, I read Cora Wilson Stewart's memoirs as well the biography written by Willie Nelms. Additionally, I found primary documents describing the pedagogy of the Schools: the Arkansas and North Carolina Departments of Education issued primers to be used by the Moonlight Schools' teachers. The guide suggests that the teacher begin instruction by asking the students to write their own name, if in fact the students already knew how to do so. If not, the teacher would begin with the letters of the alphabet, culminating in the students being able to write their names and addresses. Since most schools only met for one week, the teachers were to focus on what was deemed most important: writing basic sentences, reading basic sentences, and composing basic letters. Some writing exercises consisted of phrases like "we raise crops" and "we like living on a farm" while others pushed the benefits of letter writing (North Carolina 10). Sample reading passages indicated the pleasures to be derived from "keeping our bodies clean" (12). Also, the State Superintendent of North Carolina at the time, J.Y. Joyner, penned an introduction that is telling. Joyner indicates that his goal is to eliminate illiteracy within one year and that it is a state-wide effort. He urges everyone to get involved; newspapers were asked to provide free papers to those enrolled in the Schools for reading and teachers were asked to help without pay. Joyner stresses the importance of extending the invitation and administering the schooling out of "sympathetic brotherhood and democratic equality" (North Carolina 5). In conclusion, he states that literacy is the job of "God and State" (6). In this one phrase, Joyner sums up the motivations

of most of the Moonlight Schools' teachers and even students: to connect literacy to spirituality and democracy.

As well as researching Edith and the Moonlight Schools, I needed to research the field of literacy and find theories that I could use to interpret them. Literacy is the backbone of the thesis. Thus, the theories that prevail in that academic discourse community shaped my argument and research. I used articles like Sohn's "Whistlin' and Crowin'" to better understand the pedagogy of the Moonlight Schools. Even though much time has passed between the Schools and Sohn's study, it was interesting to note that Appalachian women were still struggling with similar literacy hindrances in the 1990's. I found that the literacy theories and studies of literacy could teach me quite a bit about Appalachia as well. Why did the students write sentences based in religion and agriculture? Why was letter writing emphasized? Powell, Brandt, Daniell, and Donehower answer these questions not through direct information, but through implicit ideas that seek to characterize women, literacy, and Appalachia. I learned from them that literacy is relational, especially in the case of Appalachian literacy. Though literacy can have multiple meanings, they can all derive from context and place. The Appalachian people already possessed at least one form of literacy; it just may not have been the standard level of literacy often acknowledged as "correct" by society. Some of the Biltmore workers could read and write basic sentences, and they possessed an astonishing oral and rhetorical tradition. Literacy can be based in the spiritual and used as a way to connect to others and God simultaneously. Furthermore, the Powell study emphasizes that women often possessed rhetorical skill, perhaps in relation to the Appalachian oral tradition of storytelling and ballad singing. In addition, both Brandt and Freire—although with different conclusions—choose to look at literacy through an economic lens. I had not thought of literacy as a "good" to be distributed and passed along

generationally until reading Brandt's work. Finally, Freire introduced me to the notion that literacy should not be used to oppress: rather, the student and teacher should learn and teach together. Overall, this research can be applied to interpret the Moonlight Schools and the kind of literacy that they taught.

II. Table of Contents

Chapter Two: Biltmore Bound

The second chapter consists of biographical information: I discuss Edith's childhood briefly and then her subsequent marriage to George Vanderbilt. I describe how Edith came to live at Biltmore Estate and immediately began cultivating a relationship with the mountain families. Through this partial biography, I will examine how Edith's education, religion, and background led to her "sponsorship" of literacy in the Appalachian region.

Chapter Three: Edith and Her Moonlight Schools

The third chapter is a closer examination of Edith's Schools. After a brief historical discussion of twentieth century literacy, the Moonlight Schools and their origins in Kentucky, the project will then describe the methods used in Edith's version.

Conclusion: A New Form of Literacy

Finally, I argue that though the Moonlight Schools did provide a form of literacy to the Appalachian people that had not been previously acquired, a form of literacy did in fact exist in the region. Invoking Katherine Kelleher Sohn and Katrina Powell, I give some evidence of literacy acquisition sans formal instruction present in the surrounding region and explore the connection between the agrarian lifestyle and the literacy of the region itself.

I cannot fail to mention why this research has been meaningful for me. I grew up among the mountains and the mists in what John C. Campbell would have called central Appalachia. Different than southern Appalachia, central Appalachia is fully immersed in the distinctive culture of the region that is separate from any other in America. Biltmore is part of central Appalachia as well. As a lifelong resident, I have always been fascinated by Biltmore. It *is* fascinating: a fairy tale castle in the middle of a forest that can only be described as enchanting. I needed to understand how these people, who lived with such wealth, interacted with those who surrounded them. I wanted to know if they stuck their head in the sand and ignored the plight of the mountain people or if they helped them. I only expected to find that perhaps the Vanderbilts gave monetary donations to various groups. I could not have been more wrong. In a lesson that will stay with me for the rest of my life, I learned that generosity can be quiet; it can be life changing. To my intense pleasure, I have discovered that Edith has far more in common with my ancestors than first meets the eye. She loved her God, she loved her community, and she loved her family. She was an intriguing woman comprised of juxtaposing facets: the society heiress vs. the Appalachian philanthropist. She understood Appalachia, a hard task for anyone born in the "flatlands" as we like to call anywhere that is not mountainous. She understood the land: the stark beauty, the magic of the seasons, and the bounty of the harvest. She also understood that what can give life can also take it away, and that the hovering mountains can be as harsh as they can be awe-inspiring. Knowing this, she attempted to improve the quality of life for those who did not reside in the fairy tale castle in the forest. Most amazingly, she understood the people as they were: stoic, resilient, and proud. By the same token, they were generous, forgiving, and devout. She understood this distinction and used the knowledge to forge

relationships with them. And the people came. They came to Biltmore, they came to her, and they came to her Moonlight School. They came because of an intense desire to learn, to grow closer to God and man. They came because of her, but also because of themselves. Has there ever been a more fascinating culture? The ballad singers, the story weavers, the bean pickers, and the dairy workers create a culture rich in art and lore. The Moonlight Schools built upon this kind of literacy and forever embedded the Vanderbilt name within the fabric of Appalachia. This thesis, for me, was a story of hope. Hope for goodness in the world, hope that clashing cultures can find peace, and hope for the eradication of Appalachian stereotypes. Most importantly, I wish to shed light on an interesting movement within the history of Appalachia and the amazing woman who changed it forever.

Aristocracy and Appalachia: Edith Vanderbilt and Her Moonlight Schools

Chapter 2

Biltmore Bound

"This is a day when women have come into their own, and each one of us must shoulder her responsibilities along with the men and try to fulfill her duty to her Community, State and Country, at the same time remembering her obligations to her home, and following the high-minded examples of the men who founded our government and are responsible for its success, and the success of its institutions."
Edith Vanderbilt

I. Rhode Island Royalty

Sponsors of literacy can take many forms. A sponsor could be an institution, movement, or person. If the sponsor is a person, then it is imperative to understand the background of that individual (Brandt 170). What created in that individual a desire to encourage literacy acquisition? In Edith's case, education seems to have played a huge role in her life, and she began her studies early with sound instruction. She also knew loss; she could have found solace in reading and writing and wished to share that skill with others. The future Biltmore philanthropist seems to have been molded by her childhood and adolescence, as well as her marriage to George Vanderbilt.

Born to Colonel George Warren Dresser and Susan Fish Leroy Dresser in New Port, Rhode Island, on January 17, 1873, Edith Stuyvesant Dresser immediately had the world at her fingertips. She was the descendent of Peter Stuyvesant, the first Dutch Governor of New York. Her great-grandfather—Nicholas Fish—played a large role in the American Revolution as he was a well-known Federalist and confidante of Alexander Hamilton. Nicholas' son— Hamilton Fish—was appointed the Secretary of State during the Ulysses Grant administration. Her father, a West Point graduate, came from another old American dynasty. Edith and her four siblings—

Daniel, Natalie, Pauline, and Susan spent most of their formative years at their two residences in New York and Rhode Island, under the care of their mother, Susan. According to her sister Pauline's memoirs, it is evident that her early years were spent much like those of other girls in her class (Clark 1). However, in 1883, both of Edith's parents died. Their maternal grandparents took Edith and her siblings into their home in Newport, ensuring that they continued to live a life of privilege (Clark 2) .

Soon after the Dresser children became accustomed to their new home, however, their grandfather also died unexpectedly. This event seems to have had little impact upon the children's lives: they were closer to their grandmother and soon adjusted once again to loss. Under her grandmother's rule, Edith was privately tutored under a strict schedule enforced by a British instructor. The girls learned about decorum, seemliness, and manners: they also studied classical subjects and learned to speak French fluently. However, there was time for play: the children frequently went to the beach and had an array of strange pets including several turtles, an alligator, and numerous dogs. The girls were frequently invited to house parties, even though their grandmother forced them to retire early for her own soirees. Pauline describes childhood mischief in her memoirs when she recounts that, "Edith and I used to climb out on the tin roof over the dining room and peer down through the skylight at the guests, scuttling back to bed when the roof creaked and we feared detection" (Clark 2). Edith and her sisters had many friends and an active social life. One such friend was Edith Jones, who would eventually become Edith Wharton (Klingner).

Though as a child Edith had been perfectly ensconced within the high society life of New England, a great loss soon threatened to take away all that was familiar. In 1892, Ediths grandmother passed away at the age of 87. They mourned greatly for their grandmother, who

they had held as a mother figure for eleven years. Edith and her siblings again faced death and the uncertainty of being left to fend for themselves (Clark 3).

II. Love and Marriage

If Edith had a difficult childhood marked by loss, it was not a precursor to how she lived the rest of her life. Instead of becoming bitter, Edith would use her life to campaign for literacy, education, and the welfare of others. The pain of her parents' and grandparents' death soon subsided to a manageable level and she began to interact with others socially again in a manner suiting her Stuyvesant and Dresser lineage (Klingner).

As members of the Rhode Island and New York aristocracy, the young women were accustomed to lavish social affairs. However, their bank account was sadly depleted due to the sale of their home and belongings to other relatives. As women, the sisters had very little control over their grandparents' estate. They soon became aware of the hard facts of life for women in the nineteenth century; the estate was divided among remaining male relatives with little left over for Edith and her sisters. The Dresser girls were given a total of one month to leave the house they had called a home during their time with their grandparents. It was then that they decided that they would not be able to continue to live the extravagant lifestyle that was their birthright. After a series of discussions, the Dressers decided that they would move overseas where they could live a more congenial lifestyle while using fewer funds (Biltmore).

The Dressers planned to set sail for Paris in October of 1893. Their French governess, called "Boy" by the girls, probably played a role in this decision and she chaperoned them on their journey as was appropriate at that time. It was an uneventful voyage and one that Pauline Dresserwrote little about in her memoir entitled "Reminiscence." Usually, Pauline was a prolific writer and recorded many events of the Dressers lives (3). When they arrived, they were quick

to find a place to rent and ended up choosing an inexpensive flat. Though the apartment may have not had much in the way of creature comforts, the sisters seemed to have enjoyed their months spent there.

After waiting out the cold Parisian winter, they decided to take a holiday to Switzerland for the summer of 1894. Upon returning to Paris after the refreshing vacation, they were given money from numerous relatives in order to continue their privileged way of life. Thus, the cheap flat was traded in for a substantial apartment near the Arc de Triomphe and Champs-Élysées (Clark 3).

With both the Stuyvesant and Dresser lineage, the girls were in high demand for attendance at the *ton*'s most prestigious events. Edith and her sisters were invited to join the famous Piggy Picnic Club along with other wealthy American expatriates. Howard Covington writes in *Lady on the Hill* that at twenty-five, Edith "was tall—nearly six feet—with prominent features, brown hair, and dark hazel eyes" (40). Her figure was voluptuous; obviously, she did not go without suitors. Some of her callers included several future governors and assorted royalty (Klingner). However, she was not a superficial society girl, and in the beginning, had no interest in marriage of any kind, though her sisters did begin to marry. Natalie was the first to marry John Nicholas Brown, followed closely by Pauline who married an Episcopalian minister named George Grenville Merrill. By the winter of 1897, only two of the Dresser girls remained unwed, but that would not be the case for long. Pauline asserted in her journal "so Edith postponed her sailing date and was my maid of honor December 1, 1897. By Edith's side was GWV[George Washington Vanderbilt] and Willie Field on their way to India. Six months later, Edith and George were married in the American Church in Paris and our fortuitous girlhoods

came to a close" (Clark 3). Edith had already met George at this time, but they did not become engaged until later in 1897.

While the Dressers were making a splash upon the European scene, George Vanderbilt—of the railroad tycoon family—and noted as both introverted and introspective, had begun a European tour that started in London. As a descendent of the affluent Commodore Vanderbilt, George was afforded all of the luxuries money could buy. The son of William Henry Vanderbilt and Maria Louisa Kissam, George Washington Vanderbilt III was born in 1862. His education was extensive and he studied both in private school and with a tutor as was customary at that time. As the youngest son, Vanderbilt did not have many obligations and was free to live a life mostly of leisure (Biltmore). However, he was an avid reader and at the age of twelve began a notebook listing all of the books he had read. From this list, it has been assumed that he read at least eighty-one books per year (Klingner). When George was not reading or traveling, he was involving himself in philanthropic activities to better the state of New York.

By 1897, George had already made a name for himself as a philanthropist and aspiring architectural scholar. He had donated the money to create a Teacher's College at Columbia University. Since he valued education and learning, George also funded the first library to serve patrons; the library would become New York Public Library (Klingner). Though he did remove his nose from a book long enough to help others, he was a remarkably private individual. However, he did have one personal project that had consumed him for years. The building of Biltmore Estate would be the biggest accomplishment of George's life and it is where he spent his happiest moments.

George had visited Asheville, North Carolina with his mother in the late 1880's. The mountains were thought at this time to have healing properties, and it is here that he came to fix

the breathing problem that perpetually ailed him. He and his mother greatly enjoyed the temperate climate and breathtaking scenery; George hiked the area extensively and was enamored by the mountain vistas. When he decided to build another mansion in the manner of all Vanderbilts, he chose Asheville for the spot. Despite the cold winters and lack of industry, George felt that the mountains would make the perfect backdrop for the grand chateau he envisioned (Covington 19). After hiring Richard Morris Hunt, who had planned numerous architectural projects for the Vanderbilts, George began construction on Biltmore Estate in 1890. Built in the French Renaissance style, the home was based on three chateaus in France. The house was completed in 1895 (Covington 21). It was and still remains the largest private residence in the United States with 250 rooms. He opened the house to his family on Christmas Eve in 1895 and continued to reside primarily at Biltmore, though he did retain his homes in New York and Washington (Biltmore).

In the spring of 1898, he was traveling through France and England to learn more about architecture while Edith made her social rounds across the Continent. Though looked upon as new money, the Vanderbilts were well-known across the Atlantic and Edith and George's path must have crossed on several occasions before they were formerly introduced. It was at Queen Victoria's Jubilee in London that they met for the first time and immediate attraction ensued. They began writing letters at this time, and it is known the two traveled together in a large group at one time, which would have been appropriate during the late 1800's (Klingner). Edith was quickly interested in the brooding Vanderbilt whom had been described by his niece, Consuelo Vanderbilt Balsan, as having "dark hair and eyes… and a narrow sensitive face" (3). Edith, the more charismatic of the pair, seemed to intrigue George. Leslie Klingner, curator of interpretation at Biltmore, claims that indeed "George was very distracted…while on a trip to

India with his friend. It became apparent that he was thinking of Edith and I personally think that is very cute." His travel companion remarked in a letter to his own betrothed that George needed to go and see Edith because he was obviously in love with her. Despite differences in age and disposition, George fell madly in love with Edith. He decided to return early and propose. She agreed to the marriage and the couple soon announced their engagement to marry, setting the gossip circuit reeling. American society was not expecting the news that their most eligible bachelor was soon to become a married man (Biltmore).

The impending marriage kept the gossip magazines busy for several months. American society still regarded the Vanderbilts as a little gauche—although George possessed a large fortune, a grand house, and a charitable sensibility. The Dresser family, on the other hand, had less money than the Vanderbilts but had esteemed American lineage. The engagement was brief, and it fed the American curiosity about everything Vanderbilt for weeks. Information about Edith's family was not readily available: it provided great fun for the journalists who began to dig into her past. The press declared Edith worthy of the most eligible bachelor due to her excellent breeding and stunning good looks. She seemed to bring the class the Vanderbilts were missing due to their new money status in society. It seems that though the classy and old Dresser family differed from the "new money" Vanderbilts, Edith and George were found to be a satisfactory couple (Klingner). After two weddings in 1898—including one in America and one in Europe—the Vanderbilts began a lengthy honeymoon touring Europe. Most of the six month holiday was spent in Italy where letters reveal they went sunbathing, sightseeing, and driving through the Italian countryside (Clark 4).

The curator of interpretation at Biltmore (the lead archivist) asserted that she often receives questions about the Vanderbilt's marriage. Most assume that it was mostly arranged

and that it brought two great American lines together in marriage. Klingner asserted that this is a common assumption, claiming that "I expected to find a traditional high society marriage when I came here and I could not have been more wrong." It is obvious from existing correspondence that George and Edith were very much in love, which was not always the case during this time period with married couples. Letters from George to Edith seem to prove this. While on his pre-matrimony travels, he wrote of how much he missed her and how he longed to make her his wife. Several friends of the Vanderbilts, —including Ann Wheeler, wife of the Estate veterinarian—,wrote in her personal memoir about the great affection George and Edith had for one another (Klingner).. The archives have pictures of the Vanderbilts during their honeymoon and newly wedded years and it is apparent from their sunny smiles that they are both very much in love and happy. For Edith, it was a romantic fairy-tale complete with the Prince Charming and castle. Biltmore was soon to inherit a lady of the manor, one who had been groomed and shaped to be a spectacular influence upon the area.

II. Lady of the Manor

Before marriage, George had been consumed by his architectural dream of building the Biltmore Estate, and he was very excited to bring Edith with him to the Southern Appalachian area. Edith and George were to make Biltmore their main residence, and though George had several other homes, he longed to set up house with his bride at his architectural pride and joy. Covington states in *Lady on the Hill* that Edith "was raised in New York and Newport with no knowledge of the Southern Appalachians…but came to share her husband's appreciation of the North Carolina mountains and the people who lived there" (40). Her personal letters reveal that the splendor of the mountains stunned Edith, and she was immediately in love with the region. No existing correspondence hints that Edith may not have been excited at the prospect of moving

from New England to North Carolina. All communication written by Edith is overwhelmingly positive about her move to the Appalachian area. In her middle twenties, Edith was not a simpering society girl and she looked upon the move as an adventure (Klingner). Her welcome to the Estate by the Appalachian residents set the tone for the rest of her time at Biltmore.

George, due to his tolerant personality and philanthropic outlook, was well liked by the workers on the Estate. In an effort to please George, a memo sent from the estate manager at Biltmore suggested that the workers gather to welcome Edith to the Estate to make her feel welcome in her new home. The memo said that the event would be "something understated to suit George's taste" (Klingner). However, the event was anything but understated. Every worker and member of the Biltmore Village wanted to greet George's new wife. Since they did not yet know Edith, it was planned not just for her benefit but to let George know they welcomed the new lady of the Estate. The workers lined the road to Biltmore with cows, bells, and garlands of flowers. The workers carried the tools of their trade, which is an Old English tradition. They had a wreath of flowers that spelled "good luck." They waited patiently for the carriage to come around the tunnel of trees and then bombarded Edith with their good wishes (Clark 4). *The Asheville Daily Citizen* said of the event that "the men of the Dairy wore suits of white duck and each one held the halter strap of a Jersey calf. The nurserymen tossed flowers to the Bride as the carriage passed" (Biltmore). Later in the night, Biltmore was illuminated by a parade of torches marching down the long drive. Foresters lit bonfires on the tops of the mountains that George owned so that Edith could see how far their land expanded; fireworks danced over the Estate. To Edith, the Estate resembled a fairy tale castle in an enchanted forest of light. She wrote later in letters that this welcoming celebration touched her immensely and

that she would never be able to completely show her gratitude (Klingner). Such displays of welcome surely helped Edith form her charitable attitude to the inhabitants of the mountains.

The next two years seemed to pass in contentment. In 1900, two years after their marriage, Edith became pregnant. Edith was extremely happy and watched the days pass with great excitement. The labor and delivery of a baby girl went very well according to Edith's physician's documents (Clark 5). They named her Cornelia and she was destined to be the only heir to the Biltmore legacy. Klingner asserted that she is frequently asked why Edith and George had only one child. Her answer is surprising. Klingner says that "either Edith could not become pregnant again or they mutually decided not to have any more children. It is assumed that they were happy with one child." During this time period, it was not uncommon for a girl to have little merit within society. In fact, laws still existed that prevented a female from inheriting the estate of her parents. George's family and friends were surprised to find that George was ecstatic at the news of the birth. His letters reveal that he was not upset by the gender of his only child and was indeed very happy with his daughter (Klingner). Neither George nor Edith perceived a need to expand their family to include a son. The Biltmore community welcomed the baby; *The Asheville Daily Citizen* reported that "the little stranger is a Buncombe county baby—pretty as babies go—but with the Buncombe birthright of…mountain health" (Biltmore). The mountain people had once again proven their acceptance of the Vanderbilts within Appalachia. Everyone from scullery maid to dairy worker doted on Cornelia who lived the life of a twentieth-century princess within the walls of Biltmore.

Edith's mothering style was very different than other methods used by women in her same class and time. Edith was a very active mother. Pictures exist of Edith—not the Biltmore nanny—playing with Cornelia on the front lawn. In one such picture, they are seated together on

the grass, their skirts spread around them, reading together (Biltmore). She was involved in Cornelia's daily routine, including her eventual education. She remained close to Cornelia throughout her life and even moved with her when Cornelia attended school in Washington, D.C (Rickman 16). It is apparent that though this family lived an opulent life that would have been foreign to those around them, they also loved one another just like any other family. This quality probably endeared the mountain people to the Vanderbilts since it would have resembled their own family relationships. It is Edith's unique experiences as both a child and mother that helped shape her charitable outlook toward the people of Appalachia.

III. Blessed is *She* that Considereth the Poor: Becoming the Matron Saint of Appalachia

If the Appalachian people's acceptance of the Vanderbilts is surprising, so too is the amount of philanthropy Edith began in the area. It is evident from accounts of Edith's life that she did not suffer from the ennui that often plagued women of her social status. She felt it necessary to give to others and her contributions to the Appalachian region are numerous. When asked if she believed that there was a guiding principle to Edith's works and if she had a religious affiliation, the Biltmore curator responded that "most of George's philanthropy was through the church…I am confident that he was a strong believing Christian. With Edith, that influence is not as evident…but I am 99.9 percent sure she was a strong believer as well." Though Edith did set up several Sunday Schools for children in the area, she did not conduct most of her philanthropy through the church. She seemed to empathize with the women of the area the most. She was especially interested in literacy acquisition for the women and their children (Klingner).

The plight of women during this time period was tremendously difficult and they sometimes had a much harder life than the men. Their bodies worn out from multiple births, the

women did not have a long lifespan. The lack of medical care usually resulted in deaths of even young women. *Folk Medicine in Southern Appalachia* by Anthony Cavender explains that "several factors contributed to the high mortality rate for mothers: poor nutrition, bearing children at an early age, (marriage at fourteen was not uncommon…) having many children in rapid succession, unsanitary birth environments, and…lay midwives" (21). In addition to the poor healthcare, many women struggled to read and write, though they were not without rhetorical ability. They were left with little option for employment, which made them dependent upon their husbands for survival. Since domestic abuse reared its ugly head with regularity in the area, dependency was not to be desired. Edith became aware of these problems early in her residency in the mountains and wanted to help. Thus, Edith made it her mission to get to know these women in order to form a plan of action.

Edith's view of philanthropy was in opposition to that of her husband. George reportedly bought the land around Biltmore to rid himself of the mountain people as neighbors. Though both he and Edith were supporters of the Progressive Movement, George harbored a general distrust of those from the lower class, even though he did fund projects to help them. Edith, on the other hand, felt that she must immerse herself in the Appalachian area to better understand the needs of those who lived there. Thus, shortly after the birth of Cornelia, Edith began making horseback and car trips around the Estate to visit the women of the area.

In an essay entitled "Mrs. George W. Vanderbilt" the Estate veterinarian's wife, Mrs. Wheeler, described Edith's charitable contribution:

> The southern mountaineers lived more or less remote from each other in their log cabins with enough ground to take care of a small garden, a cow, and the usual ox. There was an occasional grouping of a few cabins … There were many, many such holdings on the vast estate … The Southern highlander is a fine type … He is always appreciative of interest and help, but it must be offered with tact and understanding … Mrs. Vanderbilt's unfailing use of these methods, coupled with

> the charm of her personality soon made her a friend of all who were fortunate enough to know her" (Clark 4).

Edith seemed to know that she had to approach the people on their own terms in order to get to know them. The Appalachian women who peered out of their windows to see Edith's personal car careening down the path to their home might have been intimidated by the stately Mrs. Vanderbilt. Edith, on many occasions, visited the Biltmore Estate families within the 125,000 acres of land she and George owned. Anyone who lived on their land was subject to a call from Edith who came during sickness, childbirth, or celebration. Memoirs of the Biltmore workers describe her as being very approachable and nice (Klingner). When she would come to visit, she would frequently sit on the porch stoops, laughing with the other women. Paul A. Towe, the son of a Biltmore dairy worker, recorded in the Biltmore Oral History Project that Edith visited several times each week to converse with the women as well as compare recipes (Clark 4).

She became a fixture in the home of the Biltmore Estate workers, and in one oral history, a nameless mountain inhabitant refers to her as "plain as an old shoe" (Biltmore). Any given day she could be found sitting on the porch stoop, visiting with other women. It was common for Edith to take young Cornelia with her on her visits, and she shared stories about motherhood with the mountain women. They were able to find common ground as wives and mothers. Edith usually presented the little girls with clothes that she had personally bought Cornelia. To make herself more approachable, Edith began buying homespun material to make her clothes. Ironically, she would wear these clothes even on visits to New York and started a homespun fashion in high society (Clark 6).

Edith frequently used her own car to take blankets, baskets of food, and medical supplies to the families of the Estate. During childbirth, Edith would sometimes follow the midwife into

the room and bring baskets filled with newborn necessities. Once, when a flu epidemic ravaged the area; Edith took her car to retrieve the patients and take them back to the Estate for medical care. She would also retrieve the corpses of those who had succumbed to the disease and risked exposure to the illness (Klingner). The lack of medical care was a great concern, and Edith frequently offered the use of her personal physician to care for the Appalachian children. At a party held for the Biltmore Estate workers, Edith noticed a small child with a sling on his arm. After inquiring how long his arm had been broken, Edith sent a memo to the staff physician with the boy's address so that his arm could be treated. Nellie Lipe, daughter of the chief Biltmore carpenter, suffered from a type of paralysis. Edith and George supplied the money for her to undergo surgery to correct the ailment (Klingner). She made sure that those without any means for care had a way to survive the sometimes harsh mountain environment.

Part of the reason sickness abounded in the region was the general lack of hygiene. Though Edith and her philanthropy were generally well received, any effort to change the hygiene of the people was met with resistance. Once, Edith gave a stove to a mountain family who did not have any means of heat during the winter. She had it moved to the middle of their home so that it would better heat the other rooms. Upon visiting the family, Edith found the unused stove in the corner. She asked the family why they did not use it and they asserted that if they had left the stove in the middle of the room, they would not have had anywhere to spit their tobacco (Wheeler 4). Horrified, Edith realized that it would take more than her insistence to change the basic habits of the mountaineers. Thus, she regularly brought in healthcare specialists to speak to the community about communicable diseases and the need for cleanliness. Gradually, Edith did begin to see that the families were working to include daily hygiene practices into their schedule.

Another factor that led to illness was poor diet. Due to the climate of the Appalachian area, most of the farmers raised pigs instead of cows or chicken. Vegetables were often frostbitten; thus, starches and meat were the main food staples. Edith decided to launch a contest with money as the reward. She bought seeds for the farmers and the farmer who could grow the most diverse amount of vegetables was rewarded with the money. The competition for the money was fierce and soon the vegetables made their way onto the tables of the Appalachian people (Clark 7). Edith had successfully launched a campaign for a better way of life and it caught on quickly.

Edith was not just concerned about the workers' physical well-being. She wanted the workers and their children to have Christmas every year, complete with a party and Christmas gifts. To make this happen, Edith personally picked, wrapped, and stored over fifteen hundred Christmas presents for Estate workers, their spouses, and their children (Biltmore). The children would then receive the presents at the annual Biltmore Estate Christmas party that Edith planned and hosted. Edith would use the event to connect with the workers and get to know them personally. The children would not only receive toys but also would get useful items such as winter coats. Eugenia Chandler, daughter of an Estate worker said "I never thought that they didn't want me in Biltmore House. That never entered my head. They never showed it, and I know they would have been just as glad if I hadn't been there, but I was" (Clark 8). Agnes Todd Duke, the daughter of the Estate pianist, recalls:

> I remember my mother was upstairs and I sneaked between the waiter's legs and went and sidled up to Mrs. Vanderbilt's chair and she put her arm around me and said, "Little one, what are you doing up here?" I said, "I came to see you." I bet my mother died 1000 times up there playing" (Clark 5)!

Obviously, Edith loved children and wanted the best for their lives. With the children's physical and emotional well-being taken care of, Edith next focused her attention upon the education the children (and adults) were receiving in the mountain community.

III. Devotion to Education and Literacy

Edith was a highly educated and literate woman; she and George both valued education and knowledge not just for social advancement but also for the enhancement of life. Edith believed that literacy especially could improve the daily workings of the Biltmore community. Indeed, many people in the area desired to learn how to both read and write, but the opportunity just did not exist in the secluded mountain area. Sadly, few Appalachian children could attend school because of other responsibilities. Due to the harsh climate, inaccessible roads, and lack of teachers, the children typically did not attend any form of public school. They stayed at home and helped with the daily tasks of running a farm. Edith worried about the future of these children and realized that the tide of industry was changing twentieth- century America. She wanted the younger generation to be able to break the pattern of poverty. Thus, she created several schools in the area with the first one being located in what was to become Biltmore Village. The children of the workers were the first ones to attend but slowly Edith began allowing children from all of Buncombe County to enroll. Teachers from Columbia University—who were the crème de la crème of instruction at the time—came because of the Vanderbilt name, and the schools were soon booming (Klingner).

Beyond working at the Estate or on a farm, there was little job opportunity in the area for the adults. The economy was in decline and it affected the poor the most. During the early 1900's, Edith also began a sewing industry in the mountains. In order to make women more financially independent and provide them with a way to clothe and feed their families, Edith

would hire the local mountain women to make various cloths. The women would weave from home so that they could still care for their children, with or without a husband. She supplied them with the wool and materials on horseback and the women would make beautiful cloth to be sold to the higher society set. Edith herself personally taught many of the sewing classes. She also acted as their agent and sold the goods to her friends. There is one instance where the First Lady herself bought tweed that was woven by these women in the North Carolina Mountains. Edith's willingness to market the products for the women was ground-breaking (Klingner). She set the region up for the craft revival that would change the area in coming years and is generally credited with beginning the craft movement that is still present in Asheville today. By providing a market for the goods of the region, Edith made a lasting impact upon the Appalachian economy.

Though the white women's plight was harsh, the African-Americans in the region had a harder life because they faced discrimination and oppression. The African-American women were especially low on society's rung. Edith felt that this demographic suffered the most; not only were the women the wrong gender according to society, but they were also the wrong race. There was little opportunity present, especially in the mountains. Many of the problems, including health issues, could be solved if she could somehow increase the availability of jobs and training for the women of the area. Thus, the idea for the School of Domestic Science was born.

In 1901, the School of Domestic Science was formed mainly for the African-American women of the area though a few white women did eventually attend. They could not find jobs to support their children themselves and remained with abusive partners to avoid starvation. Slavery had left the African-American men in menial jobs due to continued oppression, but the

women had even less options (Boehm 164). Edith wanted the women to be able to find their own employment and be economically secure so that they could determine their own path in life. Edith formed the School to teach women how to be maids in the homes of the wealthy (McKendree 5). Though modern day historians have sometimes criticized domestic schools, Edith perceived a need and met it the best way she knew how. Edith certainly did not create the School under the assumption that domestic work was all an African-American woman could do. She knew that they needed jobs to better their quality of life and set about giving them the tools they needed to be hired in relatively high paying jobs. She could not fix society's stereotypes and biases; however, she could offer a solution to the unemployment situation. According to Klingner "the idea was very progressive...to set up an African-American school in the South was unheard of." The women learned how to sew, knit, iron, and embroider. Edith taught some of these sewing lessons. More importantly, they were taught basic reading and writing skills. The students were also taught how to plan functions for the Asheville elite. By the end of the session, they were able to make floral bouquets, fashion complex menus, and organize society galas. With these skills, they could be hired by wealthy citizens of Asheville. This job would allow them to support their families and give their children the opportunity for a better life (McKendree 5).

The benefits of the School for Domestic Science can be shown through the life of one of the students who attended, Annie Nipson. Annie Nipson was born in1884 in the Asheville area and was raised almost completely by her grandmother. She enrolled in the School of Domestic Science; she learned quickly and soon came to master the skills she was taught. The students were required to complete an apprenticeship with a wealthy family in Asheville, and Nipson served at Biltmore Estate before moving to a home in downtown Asheville (Boehm 164). She

and others completed the apprenticeship with the hope they might earn employment after its completion. At Biltmore, Annie worked with both African-American and Caucasian women on the staff and described it as being "very pleasant" most of the time. Though her training could not eliminate the racist stereotypes of the time, it could at least guarantee her a paycheck. Nipson had this to say about the School of Domestic Science:

> "That domestic work, was something that I could do, something I was interested in, and I worked very hard in this course. And now, after I was there, I don't remember just how long I was there, but it was a course there for, oh, a couple of years or something like that. And I finished that and got my little diploma. And then, from then on, I was able to get with a with[sic] a very rich class of people. That was a wonderful thing for all of us" (McKendree 5).

Nipson eventually moved to Pennsylvania and married. Her children all became professionals with college educations. She frequently credited her ability to provide financially for her children as the primary reason they achieved higher education. In fact, her son would eventually become the executive editor of *Ebony* magazine in the late 1970's ("Ebony"). Though causation may not be inferred, certainly Nipson's opportunities were correlated with Edith's philanthropy.

In the first few years of her time in Appalachia, Edith had already made quite an impact. Though George was responsible for starting the feeling of goodwill toward the Vanderbilts, it was Edith who had come into the mountaineers' homes. Soon, Edith was recognized far more easily than George along the Appalachian roads. Edith knew that the first way to enact change was to start in the home and she had made an impact upon the lives of the people.

Personally, Edith was thrilled with the birth of her daughter and in her letters it is easy to see that the beginning of her time at Biltmore was a happy one. With a constant swirl of guests—including Edith Wharton, the Astors, and the Carnegies—Edith was never without work.

While hosting several of the other Vanderbilt families, the Biltmore workers could not help but notice the difference between the other women and Edith. The Vanderbilt women were a glamorous lot; many of them posed for Pond's cold cream commercials to raise money for charity (Klingner). This juxtaposition makes the work Edith did even more unbelievable. George liked the fact that Edith was not the typical society debutante and they got along quite well. Despite their opposing dispositions in that he was introverted while she was outgoing, it is apparent that in many ways she was the perfect wife for him.

However, a lifelong partnership was not to be. George was frequently ill and Edith would eventually be faced with his early death. In 1914, George passed away due to an emergency appendectomy procedure (Biltmore). Edith and Cornelia deeply mourned the loss of George; Edith went abroad for a year to recover. Instead of losing herself in her grief for a vast expanse of time, however, Edith eventually returned to the Estate that she had shared with her husband. After selling eighty thousand acres of land that would eventually become the Pisgah National Forest, Edith and Cornelia continued to make their home among the people who were now like family to them (Clark 5). The years to come were not to be easy ones for Edith because of financial strain and lingering grief, but she continued her projects in Appalachia through the trying time.

One such initiative was the creation of the Moonlight Schools at the Biltmore dairy. After perceiving the success of the Village schools, Edith wanted the adults in the community to have much of the same opportunity to become literate. Therefore, she began a school at night at the Dairy for the adult workers and their spouses (McKendree 3). These schools ended up becoming Moonlight Schools that had gained popularity by the 1900's. Edith was to become a

promoter of the program and used her Dairy school as an example. The Moonlight Schools at Biltmore were arguably Edith's most important contribution to education and literacy.

Aristocracy and Appalachia: Edith Vanderbilt and Her Moonlight Schools

Chapter 3

Edith and Her Moonlight Schools

It is said that every great movement for freedom originated among mountain people…

Cora Wilson Stewart

Though other parts of the country were beginning to embrace literacy for all people, the Appalachian culture was behind the rest of American society. The isolation of the mountains led to fewer schools, fewer teachers, and even fewer opportunities to attend formal school. The Progressive philanthropists sought to change that: they lobbied for greater access to literacy. Edith and other women began initiatives to enhance literacy, and in the process, created new forms of Appalachian literacy for all who attended their schools.

I. A Picture of Literacy in the Early Twentieth Century

Edith was greatly concerned with the lack of literacy present in the mountain community, especially among the women. Since Edith was well-read and had great respect for education, she sought to ensure that the women (and men) had some sort of opportunity to learn to read and write. For Edith, literacy was a chief priority in combating poverty, domestic abuse, and even depression in the community. This belief—combined with her prestigious connections—made her a persuasive promoter of the literacy movement that swept the nation during the turn of the century. However, not all women in America were as fortunate as Edith when it came to literacy acquisition.

For centuries, European men were more literate than their female counterparts: women were often not taught to read or write, especially if they were not of the aristocracy. However, America differed from Europe in that her settlers usually had acquired literacy without regard for gender. Women could read and they used this skill to read the Bible. Literacy, from the beginning of American society, has been tied to spirituality. Being able to read “appropriate”

literature was considered a necessary trait in a potential wife and mother (Carr 54). Though the ability to read the Bible was obviously a well-thought of trait, the women settlers could not always write. The act of composing—thus of creating rhetorical documents—was not encouraged. In fact literacy at that time was purely defined through a reading lens; one was literate if one could read works of literature or works of religious significance. It would take a Revolution to pave the way for greater women's literacy (Hobbs 10).

After the American Revolution was fought and won, the American family changed forever. Women, instead of men, were charged with the task of preparing their children to lead the new democracy: to do so, the women had to know how to read and write critically. With this new responsibility, women began educating their own children (Hobbs 5). This shift in society took place as another American institution began its own revolution—the Protestant Great Awakening. The Great Awakening called for a revival of the nation and was a call to action for the Protestants in America. Literacy became tied not only to country, but also to God. In *Nineteenth-Century Women Learn to Write,* Catherine Hobbs suggests that "women's participation in the great revivals…helped form the discourse of True Womanhood" (5). According to Hobbs, the "discourse of True Womanhood" consisted of "service to family, their own economic needs, and the educational needs of a developing nation (5)." The idea of women as educators evolved from the home to the schoolhouse, and women began teaching in mass numbers. Teaching afforded women access to a higher degree of literacy, both for those who taught and those who learned.

It was in this new society of female empowerment and great religious awareness that the Progressive movement began in the early 1910's. The Progressive era would be a time of great change for American society: reformation for education, government, and healthcare all took

center stage as the middle and upper class, including Edith Vanderbilt, began to correct some social injustices. Men and women felt morally obligated and spiritually guided to become involved in philanthropy (McKendree 3). However, it seems that women took the opportunity to better their own circumstances as well, regardless of class. Women fought for the right to vote and for greater liberties in general like birth control (Hobbs 19). These women, who were well-versed in rhetorical traditions (like the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato) due to formal education, used their high level of literacy to enact change for those who did not possess literacy at all. Negotiations for a better quality of life were taking place among the literate: the higher classes made decisions that affected those who could not read or write. Slowly, women's literacy became more and more accepted.

The late nineteenth-century was a renaissance of literacy for those women who possessed the right economic and social positions. Basic literacy, simply meaning the ability to read and write but perhaps not critically, gave way to the need for higher levels of literacy. Girls from well-to-do families were expected to participate in book clubs, lectures, poetry readings, and bible studies. Privately, young women wrote in journals, diaries, and personal planners and learned to correspond through letters, as befit their social station. The presence of women writers helped to encourage women's literacy and eventually society viewed literacy as "a suitable activity for young girls, one that helped them learn mental and moral discipline and that allowed their…families to monitor their inner thoughts and desires" (Carr 54). Parents chose the books and literature that was morally "appropriate" for their daughters. Though seemingly a positive step, women were still restricted. They were not taught to analyze or critically interpret texts; instead, they were influenced to accept information. Women still did not attend college in the

same number as men. It was a sign of privilege if one was well-read but not necessarily in possession of a degree.

It is these literate women who often served as sponsors of literacy for those in the lower economic class. "Sponsors of Literacy" by Deborah Brandt characterizes the sponsorship of an individual or group literacy. According to Deborah Brandt, literacy is acquired through sponsors that either "enable, support, teach, model, or recruit" (166). She asserts that sponsors can be institutions, systems, or people; the economy is an example of a system that not only compels literacy but also influences those who seek it. The word "sponsor" seems carefully chosen to suggest power and persuasion. The systems or people with power, either economic or political, are responsible for sponsoring literacy to those with less control over their lives (167). Though this definition may insinuate that sponsors attempt to control those whom they sponsor, Brandt asserts that is not always the case (172). In fact, literacy sponsorship can be a positive endeavor; it can serve to teach literacy for those who may not acquire it otherwise. Edith, in establishing the Moonlight Schools at the Biltmore dairy, acted as a sponsor of literacy for the Appalachian women.

It seems that Edith was very much a product of this nineteenth-century literacy awakening—she could read in several languages and was an accomplished writer. If Edith was the "sponsor" of literacy for the Appalachian women, it is important to understand her own level of literacy. Edith's experience with literacy would have been much like that of other privileged women: she was an avid reader who did not graduate from college. Edith was well-read; she received books for presents instead of diamonds or gowns (Klingner). She and her husband George had an astounding library and it is obvious that they both enjoyed reading for pleasure and knowledge. As a child, she had several tutors and one governess of whom she was very fond (Clark 1). Her

contemporaries considered her to be highly educated. While living in Europe, Edith attended classes at the Sarbonne, though the curator at Biltmore has not uncovered much information about her studies there (Klingner). However, it is apparent that Edith was well-educated as well as being well-read. Because of the unique opportunities afforded her as a member of the upper class, she would have possessed a high degree of literacy.

Another factor in her increased literacy could have been her exposure to organized religion. She grew up in an Episcopal home where she and her family read the Bible frequently. As an adult, she and George attended the Episcopal church in Asheville (Clark 8). Good works were part of the Christian doctrine, and her literacy was intertwined with spirituality. Another influence could have been her father's military background; he had high expectations for his children's education. The contrast between Edith's literacy background and those of the women who attended the Moonlight Schools she established is worth noting. Later in life, Edith would advocate in Washington and Raleigh for the Appalachian people, and she used her excellent rhetorical skills to enact social change. Thus, as a sponsor of literacy, it would seem that she did see the need to place an emphasis on critical thinking in the Moonlight Schools and her literacy background could explain why.

II. The Inception of the Moonlight Schools

Though Edith did establish Moonlight Schools at the Biltmore dairy in the early twentieth-century, the idea did not originate with her. Instead, the movement began in rural Kentucky in 1911 (Nelms 35). Interestingly, it was another woman who noticed that the Appalachian people struggled with reading and writing and sought to improve literacy. Cora Wilson Stewart started the first Moonlight School, ensured its success, and spread the initiative to other states across America. Stewart, the first female superintendent of her rural county, was deeply troubled by the

illiteracy present in Rowan County, Kentucky. She frequently helped the mountain people write letters to absent family members; through such interactions, Stewart developed the idea of the very first Moonlight School (Nelms 29).

Stewart writes in her memoir that three incidents led her to create the Schools. First, she regularly deciphered letters written from an absent daughter living in the North for her mother who resided in Kentucky. However, because the woman frequently could not get to Cora for several days—flooding, chores, or the school schedule kept her from getting the help that she needed—the woman bought a "speller" from the local general store and taught herself to read and write by candlelight every night long after her children and husband had retired. She no longer required Cora's help and became extremely proud of her accomplishment (Stewart 11). Similarly, Stewart offered to loan some of her books to an older man who came to visit her often; he tearfully declined because he could not read the stories and asserted he would be willing to give up "twenty years of his life" if it meant he could learn to read (Stewart 12). Finally, Cora observed a young man singing a haunting ballad that he had composed. When asked if he would write the words down for her, the young man ashamedly shook his head. With eyes downcast, he informed her that he could not read or write. Stewart credits these events with instilling in her a desire to teach the mountain people how to read and write, no matter the methods used (13). She knew that she must make literacy available to the women, men and children who could not vote in elections, write letters to faraway loved ones, or explore their own talents in their current state.

Though Cora debated the advantages of having school for the adults during the day, she ultimately decided nighttime would enable the agrarian community to attend her literacy school. However, she was concerned about the students becoming lost or injured in the dark Kentucky

nights. Finally, she decided that full moon nights would be best for the literacy schools: students could use the light of the moon to make their way to the one-room schoolhouses that were standard during that time. The Moonlight Schools were intended to occur a few nights a month, with teachers volunteering their time to instruct the adults who attended (Stewart 15).

On Labor Day, September 4, 1911, Stewart and other instructors visited the rural homes to drum up interest in the program and to ask what the students wished to learn (Stewart 15). This measure was reformative in that the Appalachian people were consulted in the building of curriculum. By visiting the students in their home environment as well as consulting them regarding the literacy process, Stewart and the other instructors showed an interest in them as human beings, an activity that most Progressive reformers would endorse. Learning thus became meaningful because it became personal, empowering the students through the process. The Appalachian people were convinced: On September 5, twelve hundred students made their way over treacherous land to attend Stewart's new Moonlight School. The students ranged in age from eighteen to eighty- six; they came because they sought to learn to read their Bible, correspond with their families, or to cast their own ballot (Stewart 16). The mountain people had to go to great lengths to attend: their days were filled with manual labor on their farms and it must have been quite tiring to walk several miles over rough terrain to reach the school. However, they came in droves. This enthusiasm encouraged Cora and her instructors and reassured them that the students had a true desire to learn to read and write. The desire for knowledge so impressed Cora that she asserted "the strongest urge of the mountaineer's soul [is] his eager, hungry, insatiable desire for knowledge" (Stewart 3).

The curriculum of the very first Moonlight Schools further endeared the Appalachian people to the goal of literacy acquisition. After students had mastered the alphabet, Cora notes in

her memoir that they moved on to basic sentence completion (19). A small newspaper intended as a primer was printed for each Moonlight School monthly; this way, the students did not have to use textbooks that frequently contained juvenile sentences. The newspapers contained simple sentences that discussed local politics, church events, and neighborhood gossip. The gossip proved to be a great motivator; the students eagerly devoured all of the material that was printed in the newspaper (Stewart 21). This measure was quite progressive. Previously, educators had not attempted to make learning meaningful for the students that they taught. Additionally, students were curious about American history. Seeing the primer as an opportunity to teach students about democracy and the foundations of their country, Stewart created sentences that described the current President, noteworthy current events, and the beginnings of the country. This information was sorely needed as some students were under the impression that "Uncle Sam" was the President of the United States (Stewart 25). Obviously, this perception arose not because of a lack of intelligence but because the students were isolated from politics because of their illiteracy. In other words, the Moonlight Schools served to teach more than just reading and writing to the students whom attended. The students also copied sentences that touted the benefits of rural life in Kentucky. One sample sentence simply states, "The best people on earth live in Rowan County" (Stewart 23). The locals approved of such assertions, and it made their learning integral to their identity as a Rowan County resident. Overall, the tone of the primer was positive and stressed personal perseverance as well as personal connectivity to literacy.

The primer—near the end of the sessions—began to include poetry as well. Stewart favored poems about nature: the Appalachian citizens have always been known for their tie to the land and the seasons. Tennyson, Wordsworth, and Longfellow all made an appearance in the little newsletter (Stewart 30). Students were responsible for memorizing one poem,

Longfellow's "Psalm of Life." From the primer, students moved to letter composition. Letters played an important role in the early twentieth century-they were the primary manner of communication. The pupils wanted to learn how to compose letters for a variety of purposes: to conduct business, to correspond with family members, and to advocate for political change (Stewart 19). Teaching the students to compose rhetorical documents in the form of letters was revolutionary as writing had not been previously emphasized to anyone but the American upper-class men. Since women had learned to write rhetorically, the focus then spread to other groups from whom literacy had previously been withheld. The fact that the Moonlight schools taught the students to read and write is surprising; reading was emphasized in other literacy schools of the Progressive era, but writing overall was not encouraged. This lack may be due to the nature of writing. Writing has always been revolutionary in nature, to say nothing of its reliance upon critical thinking and analysis. The mountain people learned the dictates of good letter writing and were thus exposed to the tenets of rhetoric: ethos, pathos, and logos (Stewart 20). Though Aristotle was not explicitly taught, students were implicitly taught about audience awareness, credibility, and logical argument.

Thus, the first Moonlight School was extremely progressive for its time. Indeed it can teach current instructors quite a bit about literacy acquisition. The students were treated with respect and consulted regarding the pedagogical process. Stewart reported in her memoir that psychologists and educators alike condemned the Moonlight Schools as they did not believe it was possible to teach adult learners anything, much less reading and writing. However, Cora and her methods prevailed; she asked the psychologists to reconsider their theories in light of the evidence the Moonlight Schools provided (Stewart 28).

James Canipe and Martha Decker, modern adult education scholars, have contended that valuable methods can be learned from the Moonlight Schools in Kentucky and Cora's methods. Their article undertakes to list the methods that would best fit the new adult learning classroom. First, learning must be meaningful to the students. The Moonlight Schools met this criterion because Stewart and other instructors visited the rural homes to ask what the students wished to learn. Additionally, that adult learners wish to make their own decisions regarding their education. Finally, that adult learners' life experience plays a role in the classroom and should be valued (Canipe and Decker 20). Recognizing that adults are products of experience and that these experiences affect their ability to learn was radical for the time as it seems a true interest in students as human beings is present in the Moonlight Schools. The authors suggest that these principles, despite the gap in time, can still be used in literacy education (Canipe and Decker 21). This assumption seems to be correct, as good pedagogy is timeless. It was this good pedagogy that led to Moonlight School movement that eventually extended to the rest of Kentucky and beyond.

The first session was so successful in Rowan County that it led to a second session. Sixteen hundred men, women, and children attended and more instructors agreed to teach to accommodate the burgeoning classes. Since these teachers did not always know the best pedagogy for teaching adults, an institute for Moonlight School instructors was created. The institute used methodology from the first session to show the teachers how literacy could be taught to any age group (Stewart 32). This institute, if nothing else, served to connect the instructors with one another and created a network of night school teachers. They could consult one another regarding materials and problems that arose. As more and more teachers acclimated to the idea of teaching literacy, the movement spread. The other parts of the state (especially the

mountain region) wholeheartedly embraced the idea of the Moonlight Schools. Soon, versions were popping up in counties where illiteracy was rampant. The Schools proved to not just be a chance success. Obviously, Cora knew what she was doing: within a two-year timeframe, her efforts resulted in the literacy acquisition of 130,000 students, a worthy accomplishment for any Progressive reformer (Stewart 121). At Cora's urging, Kentucky formed an Illiteracy Commission that managed all literacy initiatives. The Illiteracy Commission drew attention to the movement on not just a state level but also on a national scale (Nelms 47). Other states began to notice Stewart and the Illiteracy Commission; the states in the southeast portion of the country were especially attracted to the Moonlight Schools' practices as illiteracy rates were higher in the more secluded areas of the country (Nelms 108). Eventually, Cora used her new status as a literacy crusader to begin campaigning for a national movement, one that would eradicate illiteracy from the Appalachian region and, perhaps, the nation.

The Moonlight School movement began its progression south, to Alabama. Another Illiteracy Commission was established there and North Carolina quickly followed suit (Stewart 61). A statewide Moonlight School month was established in 1915 by Dr. J.Y. Joyner, the state superintendent of schools (Stewart 61). He penned an introduction to the North Carolina primer that is telling. Joyner indicates that his goal is to eliminate illiteracy within one year and that it is a state-wide effort (North Carolina 6). He urges everyone to get involved; newspapers were asked to provide free papers to those enrolled in the Schools for reading and teachers were asked to help without pay. The month of November was appointed Moonlight School month and Joyner urges personal invitations to go out in October to potential students (North Carolina 7). He stresses the importance of extending the invitation and administering the schooling out of "sympathetic brotherhood and democratic equality" (North Carolina 5). In conclusion, he states

that literacy is the job of "God and State" (North Carolina 5). In this one phrase, Joyner sums up the motivations of most of the Moonlight Schools' teachers and even students: to connect literacy to spirituality and democracy.

III. Implications of the First Moonlight School for Literacy

As students began to learn to read and write, inspirational stories came to light. For example, one instructor reported the presence of two postmasters in her class. When asked how they performed their jobs without basic literacy, the postmasters revealed that it was their daughters who read the printed addresses and names (Stewart 39). Their daughters, practicing literacy at the behest of a man, showed that stereotypical gender roles seemed to have no place within the condition of illiteracy. The students, regardless of gender, were equally reliant upon others who possessed literate skills. In the heavily patriarchal Appalachian society, literacy was a way for the women to have some sort of power over their circumstances. When Edith Vanderbilt eventually established her version of the Moonlight Schools at Biltmore, this empowerment was a goal of the initiative.

Katherine Kelleher Sohn completed research in the early 1990's studying such gender roles and literacy. "Whistlin' and Crowin' Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices Since College," by Sohn is an explication of her research involving eight Appalachian women as literacy figures. The women were enrolled in Sohn's composition courses in the early 1990's, and she completes case studies on the women after college graduation to see how literacy has shaped their lives. They were all non-traditional students (Sohn 424). Additionally, they were the first generation to graduate from college within their family. The research, conducted through qualitative interviews, results in the arguments that literacy for Appalachian women "provides context to negotiate social, cultural, and religious identity," is attained through

expressivist writing, has intergenerational consequences, leads to traditional job placements, and does not "destroy community" (Sohn 433). It does not have immediate implications for literacy research in the early twentieth century, but it does correlate as the women have some similarities. The women were taught to read and write along with other occupational skills, and the research by Sohn illuminates issues that were present one hundred years prior to her study. The women of the study used the Bible as a literacy tool in ways similar to the women in the early twentieth century. Many of the writing for both groups revolved around domesticity like writing grocery lists, letters, and chore schedules. Both groups of women struggled with literacy and the notion of a woman becoming too smart or too educated (Sohn 438). The similarities are not surprising as Appalachia is a region resistant to change for good or bad, but it is interesting that this study could illuminate the Moonlight Schools pedagogy. However, there were also differences in their lives as well. Obviously, the women who attended the Moonlight Schools needed literacy in a way that later twentieth century women can probably not comprehend. But, this article suggests that perhaps women have different values for literacy; maybe they use it as a tool to function in their own world, rather than leave their community (and family) behind.

Spirituality also played a role in the Moonlight Schools. Cora Wilson reports that four Baptist ministers attended her Kentucky Moonlight School. Obviously, the ministers—and their congregations—were hindered by illiteracy; it seems that other people were responsible for reading the Bible to the minster. Sometimes this led to misinterpretations of the scriptures: one of the ministers assured his congregation that instead of the Biblical figure Jacob making "booths" for his cattle, he made "boots." The congregation thought Jacob must be the figure of kindness itself, if he would go to the trouble to make shoes for an animal (Stewart 39). These types of situations were not ideal and the ministers sought to correct their lack of knowledge.

After achieving literacy themselves, they encouraged their congregations to also attend the schools, acting as sponsors of literacy themselves.

Many of the students reported elation at their new ability to read the Bible. For them, the long nights were worth all of the effort to just be able to read God's word as written in scripture. Literacy, as defined by most of the Moonlight Schools' students, was spiritual in nature. Beth Daniell explores this type of literacy in "Narratives of Literacy: Connecting Composition to Culture" She establishes a connection between literacy and composition: namely, that "various narratives of literacy have influenced and continue to shape the images we in composition studies have of who we are, what we do, and how we do it" (Daniell 3). Daniell describes two different literacy debates which revolved around E.D. Hirsch's cultural literacy theory and Eric Havelock and Walter Ong's literacy orality theory. In deconstructing the great leap narrative that claimed literacy led to "leaps in cognition" and thus mobilized individuals and then cultures, the author suggests that literacy can vary from place to place and from culture to culture (Daniell 395). Ultimately, Daniell says that the "little narratives" of literacy—those that examine literacy within context—show us that literacy is multiple, relational, and personal all at the same time (404). This article had several implications for the Moonlight Schools.

Although the Appalachian people did not always possess a written form of literacy, their oral nature often flourished. Ballads and folk tales of the area show that the region was largely based upon oral interaction; the area was rich with storytelling and other oral pastimes. Moreover, that spirituality and literacy can be interconnected, and it probably was for the women and men of the Moonlight Schools. Third, just because the people may not have used their newfound literacy for upward mobility, like career advancement, does not mean that it did not enrich their lives. The Moonlight Schools created their own form of rural literacy. Interweaving

elements of spiritual practices, agrarian principles, and gender interrelations, the Moonlight School version of literacy provided the mountain people a framework from which to build upon a basic literacy that revolved around orality and rhetoric that seems to have already been in place.

The students who attended the Moonlight Schools in Kentucky, and eventually in Edith's Moonlight Schools at Biltmore already had some form of literacy, despite contrary stereotypes that depict the mountain people as ignorant and unintelligent. In her study of Virginia women, Katrina Powell notes how these women wrote to government officials during the early twentieth-century. Powell's research describes the letters written by the women who were displaced from their homes during the acquisition of the land that became Shenandoah National Park. Wealthy businessmen bought the land and then donated it to the government, forcing the local mountaineers to relinquish their homesteads. Though they were compensated in the form of a new home built elsewhere, many of the mountain families resented the government takeover. Appalachian traditions center on connection to the land and the past. Surprisingly, the women's letters do not rail against the forced removal: instead, they ask for favors from the government. Several women, writing for their husbands, ask to pick apples that other families were forced to abandon when they were relocated (Powell 79). Others ask the government officials to mediate a dispute between neighbors. Though differing in content and in tone, the letters testify that the women did possess rhetorical skill. In this scenario, the literacy of the woman was a positive addition to her family and one that helped them gain access to government. Though the patriarchal society was evident in the way the women signed their missives (e.g. "Mrs. Haywood Nicholson") the women still recognized that their literacy equaled power to work to enact

change. Powell contends that writing itself is resistance and that the letters reveal intelligence in a society long stereotyped as unintelligent and illiterate.

This study attests to the theory that basic literacy did exist in the Appalachian region. Though the letters lacked adherence to Standard English, they still use persuasion and audience awareness. Furthermore, the alphabet is used to spell out the way the people spoke the words, which is not a small accomplishment. Again, literacy is used in relation to other people and the government in this example and others from Appalachia.

Thus, by the time the Moonlight Schools were implemented by Edith Vanderbilt at Biltmore, the original Moonlight Schools already had rousing success. Literacy was being acquired, no matter the definition or form it was taking. The people of Biltmore were especially attracted to the idea of learning to read and write: they too wanted a chance to interpret their Bible for themselves as well as communicate with family in other parts of Appalachia.

IV. The Biltmore Moonlight School

The Biltmore Moonlight School began in 1915, at the urging of Edith. She was especially interested in developing a school for the Biltmore dairy workers, and she knew that this school would have to meet at night in order to avoid interfering with the dairy's schedule (Klingner). There are no primary documents in the form of letters or transcribed oral histories that attest to a meeting between Cora Wilson Stewart and Edith Vanderbilt. Though their paths may have crossed a social functions or political meetings, it is unclear whether or not the two were ever formally introduced (Klingner). There is reference to Cora Wilson Stewart in a document penned by the Biltmore Company; the discourse on the Vanderbilt's philanthropy suggests that "Ms. Stewart sought out well-known people for their support…Edith Vanderbilt

became a spokesperson for the [Moonlight School] movement" (McKendree 6). It is clear from the name of the school (the Biltmore Moonlight School) that Edith was aware of the Moonlight School movement and pedagogy. Edith was also known to follow current Progressive trends; in the four years since the start of the movement, it had gained considerable popularity in the Southern states (McKendree 3). It is likely that Edith heard of the movement through her involvement with the state agriculture department (Klingner). Using Cora's methods as a springboard from which to launch her own initiative, Edith brought a new form of literacy to the Appalachian community residing at the Biltmore Dairy.

Although the Biltmore Dairy has a long and interesting history, it unfortunately no longer exists. However, the structures that once housed the Vanderbilt enterprise linger on the vast land surrounding the estate. The creamery and stables became the Biltmore Winery in 1985: around one million wine tasters visit the winery for tasting and tours yearly (Biltmore). Before Biltmore wine was ever conceived in the mind of Edith's grandson, William AV Cecil, the dairy was an innovative part of the estate's self-sustaining enterprises. When George Vanderbilt built Biltmore Estate, he sought to create a home that could sustain itself through agriculture and forestry. The Biltmore Dairy was a large part of that mission: it housed hundreds of Jersey cows during its years of operation. Originally intended to supply milk products solely to the estate, the dairy grew to commercial status within the mid-twentieth century. It eventually sold milk, ice cream, butter and other products to local hotels and even private residences (Biltmore). Pictures still exist of the old Biltmore Dairy ice cream trucks delivering their goods at night, so that the ice cream would not melt (Klingner). It was before this time period, when the Dairy still mainly serviced the Biltmore Estate, that the Moonlight School was formed.

Anne Wheeler, the estate veterinarian's wife, indicates in her article "Mrs. George Vanderbilt" that the Vanderbilts "policy always was to give positions to the mountain people in their various enterprises as far as it was possible. She writes that "the development of the farms…and dairy gave many opportunities to those who were able and interested" (Wheeler 3). All of the employees of the Biltmore Dairy lived nearby and some had small cabins on the surrounding Biltmore acreage. Those who did not already live on the Estate were given room and board at the renovated Antler Hall.

Antler Hall was a sprawling antebellum style manor that was originally built by Gilbert B. Tennen of Charleston, South Carolina. It was located on the land called "Antler Hill" by the locals, and the Biltmore Inn now sits on the same plot of land (Biltmore). When George Vanderbilt bought the 125,000 acres surrounding Biltmore, he purchased the aging manor and eventually renovated it into a dormitory-type residence for farm and dairy workers. At first, only bachelors and young married couples were allowed to live in Antler Hall, but eventually young families also resided there. The individual residents and families of Antler Hall were a close community: they held dances, picnics, and festivals at the manor (Klingner). Since they worked and lived together, the dairy workers were very close. The Biltmore Christmas party that Edith planned every year was held at Antler Hall several times. It was at this party that Edith would distribute over a thousand gifts that she had personally bought and selected for the Biltmore workers (Wheeler 9). Antler Hall was a family, and this dynamic affected the way in which the Moonlight School at Biltmore operated. When the Moonlight Schools began, a kind of communal learning took place as the students studied, worked, and lived together.

Edith realized that although the workers at the dairy could perform their job duties, they by and large could not read or write. Illiteracy was a common problem in western North

Carolina in 1915, partially due to the isolation of the Appalachian Mountains from outside influences. The Vanderbilts had already established several schools within the area: the School of Domestic Science taught young African-American women to read and write along with vocational skills, the All Soul's Episcopal day school offered core subjects as well as religion to children, and the Asheville Young Men's College was a precursor to the modern YMCA (McKendree 3). George had created the first lending library in New York. He had funded and founded Colombia University and continued to support the University through money for land and books (Klingner). Obviously, both Vanderbilts valued education, especially reading and writing. All of their philanthropy seemed to be guided and united by the common thread of equal education for all, despite social station. In this spirit, Edith wished to make books available to the local residents, but understood that the books would do little good if the recipients could not read them. Moonlight Schools that allowed the students to work during the day and attend school at night seemed like the perfect solution.

Oral histories reveal that the dairy workers were not compelled to go: instead, the usually silent and stoic mountaineers chose to attend the Moonlight School because they desired a new form of literacy (Wheeler 4). In fact, from all reports, the dairy workers were elated at the prospect. Anne Wheeler, the estate veterinarian's wife helped with some of the Moonlight School sessions. She reports that "as they [the mountain people] rarely gave outward expression of their feelings, it was touching to hear one of the oldest in the class say 'Now I can read my Bible!'"(Wheeler 4). Though some of them could make out simple sentences, the Bible is not an easy text. They wanted to not just be able to read it, but also to interpret it.

Religion played a huge role in the culture of Appalachia. Though they did not always practice a form of organized religion, individual spirituality was prevalent. God was the source

of hope: crops grew because He blessed them, children were a gift chosen by Him, and salvation was available to everyone no matter wealth or position. The notion that all who were saved by the grace of God would go to a common Heaven and that those who avoided God's call would be sent to a collective Hell was widely accepted. In what Deborah McCauley and most Appalachian scholars (if not the actual residents of the region) have dubbed "mountain religion," orality plays a huge role in the interpretation of the scripture (52). Since the Appalachian oral tradition flourished and most individuals did not possess a form of literacy that allowed them to read and interpret their Bible, ministers' sermons served as the primary connection to God. Additionally, mountain religion stressed the importance of goodwill or kindness over knowledge (McCauley 10). While it is inaccurate to assert that knowledge was not valued, as many wayward scholars have done, it was goodwill that had merit in God's eyes.

The eagerness and enthusiasm reported in oral histories of both Moonlight School instructors and the students themselves counteract the assumption that these were people with no regard for education. But perhaps that argument is too simplistic. In order to understand the desire for a new literacy among these dairy workers, it may be necessary to further explore their spiritual lives. Though mountain religion did emphasize goodwill and support the prevailing oral tradition, it also demanded a personal, intense relationship with one's own God: not that spirituality was not practiced communally, but that community worship was meant to enhance one's own personal tie to the Creator. Deborah McCauley explains that "mountain people teach…that the image of God in each person lives in the heart, that the Holy Spirit takes up residence in the heart, that the Word of God lodges itself in the heart, and that the heart is meant to guide the head" (11). But, if one cannot read the Word of God, hide it away in the heart, then the head cannot make godly decisions. Therefore, the dairy workers needed to be able to read

and interpret the scriptures themselves, so that they could put it in their own heart for daily guidance. The heart, in this example, functions as the recipient of knowledge instead of the human mind, which works well within the Appalachian religious framework.

Spirituality may provide a reason as to why the dairy workers came, but it was the curriculum and structure of the Moonlight School that kept them interested. An image donated by a descendent of a Moonlight School student shows a large, cozy room with men and women sitting at desks together. Edith did not want the students to have to travel far to attend; in juxtaposition to the Moonlight Schools in Kentucky, the students did not traverse several miles in order to come and learn. Since Antler Hall was located right behind the Biltmore dairy, most students only walked across a few cow and sheep pastures to the old horse barn. Inside the horse barn, a room was renovated into a schoolroom (Klingner). A pot belly stove provided warmth, and high windows let in the sight of a fat mountain moon. Desks were arranged facing one another. Since only dairy workers could attend, men and women learned together even though Edith certainly desired literacy for the women the most. It is interesting to note that the teachers were Colombia University interns and graduates: Colombia University's teaching program was arguably the best in the nation during this time. Some of the teachers who taught at the Moonlight School taught George and Edith's daughter as well. The students were receiving some of the best instruction available in the nation. The picture on the next page is of the Moonlight School students, with their instructors.

The Moonlight School Students and Instructors

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Apparently, Edith was not content to sit back and allow the instructors free reign when it came to the curriculum or instruction. She chose the textbook that students would use, and the one that she chose furthers the theory that Edith had some interaction with Cora Wilson Stewart. Edith chose Cora Wilson Stewart's *The Country Life Reader*, published in 1915 by Johnson Publishing Company in Virginia. Stewart was— by this time— the president of the Kentucky Illiteracy Commission (Klingner). Thus, Edith's school greatly resembled those created and

taught by Stewart. Interestingly, Edith also taught several lessons at the Moonlight Schools. It is an interesting picture: one of the world's richest women, member of the Vanderbilt tycoon family, teaching dairy workers how to read and write in a horse barn in the mountains of North Carolina. In a way, they formed their own community, one that combined American aristocracy with Appalachian traditions. This interaction embedded Edith even more firmly into the esteem of the local men and women.

The Country Life Reader is structured much like the primer Cora printed weekly for her students in Kentucky. The book begins with the alphabet, and then moves to reading and writing simple sentences. The sentences revolve around agrarian life; students copy sentences about spraying crops and the honor of rural life (*Country* 14). Bible stories and proverbs are present as sample reading passages to be copied and read (*Country* 84). An entire chapter of the primer instructs the students on how to write a letter. Sample letters provide appropriate format. Students were required to actually stamp and mail a letter to someone at the end of the curriculum unit (*Country* 53). Hygiene lessons are given from a germ perspective: students read about the value of fresh air and cleanliness in keeping illness at bay. Poems, like those of Ralph Waldo Emerson, are given for recitation. They focus primarily on nature, and illustrative pictures of mountain brooks and forests accompany the poems (*Country* 71).. Finally, the primer concludes with parables from the Bible for reading and interpreting.

Stewart's textbook seems ideal for the dairy workers; it combines the pleasures of agrarian life with the importance of the parables to create a book that the Appalachian students would have been interested in. Edith's astute understanding of the culture of the dairy workers provided a way for her to link their interests with literacy and thus learning in general. Oral

histories assert that the School was very successful: all of the students had learned to read and write by the end of the sessions.

Edith's success with the Moonlight School movement at Biltmore motivated the state of North Carolina to replicate the endeavor. October of 1915 was declared Moonlight School Month by the State Department of Public Instruction. Public school teachers were asked to teach one night per full moon week. That way, the burden would not be too much for the already overworked and underpaid teachers, and the students would still have instruction available to them. By the end of the session, the goal was for every student to learn how to read and write. J.Y. Joyner, state superintendent of North Carolina, connected the Moonlight Schools to God and patriotism as well as the belief that it was the duty of the literate to impart literacy to those who could not read or write (North Carolina 6). The state published a teacher's manual to be used in the Moonlight Schools. Even though the curator at Biltmore could not locate any interaction between Joyner and Edith (besides his request to discover the name of her landscaper), it appears that they did in fact know one another. Edith became a spokesperson for the movement and several newspaper articles show Edith speaking on behalf of the Biltmore Moonlight School. She also hosted a Moonlight School Commencement at Biltmore for the local schools; the students carried signs signifying where they had attended (Klingner). Edith gave the Commencement address, thus solidifying her support for the Moonlight School movement. The signs below Edith reiterate the religious and spiritual implications for the School: the students could now read their Bible. Edith had once again used her social status to bring about change for the region that she now considered home.

Mrs. Vanderbilt gives an address at the Moonlight School Commencement.
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The Moonlight School Students at Commencement holding their Moonlight School's sign.
Copyright, The Biltmore Company

Aristocracy and Appalachia: Edith Vanderbilt and Her Moonlight Schools

Chapter 4

Conclusion: A New Form of Mountain Literacy

"We say philanthropy and generosity for as we rode through the estate today and were told of what was being done,--we could see in all this mighty work something superior to selfishness and greed that characterizes many millionaires…There is a deeper and broader meaning to Biltmore and its magnificent environments than most Americans imagine…

Eugene J. Hall

I. "Illiterates" and Freire

Illiteracy carries with it a stigma. This stigma is what motivates the ignorant to discuss the "backward" highlanders with reprehension in their voices; it allows those who do not understand the thriving art, music, and culture of a region to remark on how "unlearned" those from the Appalachian region were and are, despite the presence of haunting ballads, rich stories, and brilliant woodcraft. It allowed the much revered Horace Kephart, who traveled the Appalachian Mountains in the early twentieth century, to stage pictures depicting the proud people of the mountains in settings he deemed "appropriate": usually, this meant placing his subjects in front of quilts, shacks, and moonshine kegs. The hillbilly stereotype is sewed into the fabric of American lore: from the movie *Deliverance* to a current political ad casting "hillbillies" to play the part of native West Virginians, Appalachian people are not always represented with respect. Thus, the word "illiteracy" or worse yet, "illiterate," feels odd on the tongue of one born and raised in the area. Call it hypersensitivity, or perhaps self-indulgence, but to describe my ancestors as "illiterates" feels at best disrespectful, and at worst, bigoted. I have resisted using

the word throughout this thesis, partially because of its connotation, but also because of its inaccuracy.

Katrina Powell's study of the Appalachian women who wrote letters to government officials during the forced removal of the mountain people from the Shenandoah Valley is remarkable in that it shows that some form of literacy did exist in the Appalachian region, without the requirement of any formal schooling. The women who I discussed in Chapter 2 used knowledge of rhetoric: namely, ethos, pathos, and logos to attain favors from the officials that they wrote. They probably did not use Aristotle's terms for what they were writing, but they were careful to establish credibility by asserting their identity and claim to the land (ethos), use a placating tone instead of an incensed one (pathos), and appeal to logical conclusions, like the woman who asked to harvest fruit on what used to be her land instead of letting it rot on the ground (logos). Obviously, they understood rhetorical skill and used it to their advantage.

Additionally, the cultural traditions of the region attest to some form of literacy. Ballads carried down from their Scots-Irish heritage use the cadence of words to create bittersweet tales of love won and lost. Storytelling was a pastime that was brought out like good china for any social event. Oral sermons were the primary form of worship, and many people owned Bibles. The oral tradition is different from a written tradition, but it illustrates that they were familiar with words, musicality of language, rhetoric, and possibly the alphabet. It seems that individuals this immersed in words and their use could not be totally illiterate.

When asked about the literacy of the locals during the Biltmore era, Leslie Klingner advocated that indeed the Biltmore workers did in fact possess some sort of literacy before the Moonlight School. Recently, the curators were discussing the presence of books within the maids' chambers: they were not sure if the maids could read or write and wanted the rooms to be

historically accurate. Klingner asserts that after looking at the maids' backgrounds and written communications like memos and notes, it is apparent that they knew how to write basic sentences and read them as well. The maids were, for the most part, from either the British Isles or the local Appalachian area. Leslie further investigated the archive and found that some of the dairy workers could do the same, though she did acknowledge that there was a slight difference between the dairy and farm workers and the housemaids. The housemaids' tasks would have required a higher form of literacy, whereas dairy and farm workers could perform their job duties with a more basic form. However, the archive does have letters from dairy and farm workers who were able to represent themselves well to whomever they were writing. While grammar and spelling errors are certainly in the communications, it is apparent that some of the workers did have a basic, oral based literacy.

Though the Moonlight Schools did bring a form of literacy to the workers, it was different from the basic form of literacy that they already had. The Moonlight School focused on Standard English: while access to the standard form of language certainly helped them to compose letters and read the Bible, their own dialect was never lost. The Moonlight School did not seek to assimilate mountain people to the "correct" form of English. The Moonlight School never resulted in the complete use of Standard English, nor did it cleanse the language of the students. Instead, the students practiced a form of code switching. Code switching is the conscious choice to change from a dialectal form of English to Standard English, dependent upon occasion. This practice did not come into prominence until modern times and would not have been ubiquitous in the early 1900s. When it did begin, it was used mostly in urban schools, so it was revolutionary that a form of code switching was being taught in 1915 in the middle of Appalachia.

When discussing the literacy acquisition of a subculture, it is impossible to ignore Paulo Freire's influential *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* which features a chapter entitled "The Banking Concept of Education," that changed the field of literacy and education. Freire contends that education is "suffering from narration sickness," a disease that treats students like empty vessels to be filled by the instructor's narrative (71). Freire rails against the idea that students are "banks" to "deposit" information: such a comparison is disrespectful to the students that we teach (72). This method assumes that the student is malleable and ready to be turned into whatever the instructor sees fit. Simply imparting information to students leads to dehumanization as we are expecting them to be empty, ready for our fount of endless knowledge that we are so good to give to them. Freire believes that this is oppression—and objectification—in its most basic form. Worse, it does not encourage students to think critically, analyze, or argue. This method of giving and receiving information keeps the students dependent upon the teacher and thus the establishments that the instructor prescribes. Freire argues that the dominant class (or government, or culture, etc.) uses the banking method of education to keep those in their thrall obedient and content (73). Rote memorization and the regurgitation of ideas are key elements to the banking pedagogy.

Furthermore, Freire advocates for communication between student and teacher. Through communication, our teaching—and thus ourselves—has meaning (80). Learning is based upon interactions with others; it is relational, much like literacy itself. Teachers should also be students and students should be teachers. In this endless cycle of learning and then teaching, both components of the process are equals. This idea stresses the importance of avoiding stagnation as an educator and learning from students who have unique experiences that they can bring into the classroom. Though Freire emphasizes the need for students to then enact social

change, that element does not necessarily have to be present for his model to work. The communication pedagogy he suggests offers a better way for those who teach composition to relate and challenge their students.

When using Freire's theory to evaluate the Moonlight Schools, I find it interesting that the primers used to teach the Moonlight Schools' students did use rote memorization and repetition to teach the students to read and write. Even the skills stressed—like letter writing—do not require much analytical thought. However, students were certainly not treated like the students in the nearby Cherokee assimilation schools: the integrity or dignity of the student was never in jeopardy. Instead, Edith created a school that used a primer they would be interested in, that asserted the honor of agrarian life, and that used scripture to enhance their understanding of their own spirituality. Though some of the Moonlight Schools in other states may have treated students like vessels, this model does not fit the Biltmore Moonlight School. Edith knew these individuals; she considered them an extended part of her family. Edith's character is without question, and her motives could not have been more pure. Freire's theory, while applicable to many situations and useful as a lens to interpret the Moonlight School pedagogy, cannot accurately portray literacy learning at Biltmore.

II. A New Form of Literacy

Not only did the Moonlight School enhance the literacy that was already present, but it also created a new form of literacy among the students. Literacy became agrarian, communal, and spiritual: it was tied to farming, community, and spirituality. This new literacy allowed the students to acquire a higher form of literacy; they were able to write letters as well as read and interpret their Bibles. But, this higher form was made attainable and attractive to the students

because it was presented in a way that emphasized their attachment to land, community, and God.

Appalachian people are deeply connected to their surroundings. The earth, in turn, nurtures and challenges the people of the mountains: they harvest its bounty in order to survive its harsh winters. The farming way of life provides ample opportunity for the farmers to become familiar with the land and its seasons: the residents of Appalachia have always been familiar with the hazy days of summers giving way to the incandescent days of autumn and the leaves dropping to the tune of a white requiem. While not pagan, the Appalachian people possess a great knowledge of the mountains that hover around them. They find honor and pride in their work. Agriculture was more than just a way to earn a living—it was a way of life for the dairy and farm workers. Combining literacy with the agrarian was an ingenious way to ensure that the students were interested in the coursework. Students copied sentences about plowing and crops: the Bible passages were about sowing seeds and the fruits of the spirit (*Country* 80*)*. The curriculum upheld their belief that farming was pleasurable and respectable, and created a literacy that was largely based on agriculture. Students would have known how to spell "corn" or "apple," but perhaps not "ocean" or "desert." Thus, their literacy revolved around their way of life and enhanced their understanding of it, but did not change their culture or practices.

Furthermore, the students' literacy was community based. The students lived together, worked together, and attended schools together. The Moonlight School at Biltmore is only one example of communal literacy. Another example is provided by Beth Daniell who discusses a community of Al-Anon members in her book, *Communion of Friendship*. Daniell examines and interprets a series of interviews with members of Al-Anon—all women—who use writing and reading as a way to understand themselves and how their lives have been affected by alcohol.

Certainly the study emphasizes the role of self and of spirituality in literacy practices, but it also is about a community formed by women, bonded by a common thread (Daniell 1). Much like the women in Daniell's study, the students who attended the Moonlight School were bound by a common culture. It seems that this commonality and community made literacy acquisition more meaningful.

Daniell's other work has implications for the Moonlight Schools as well. Her article "Narratives of Literacy: Connecting Composition to Culture" suggests that "various narratives of literacy have influenced and continue to shape the images we in composition studies have of who we are, what we do, and how we do it" (394). Invoking Paulo Freire, the article explains how the "banking" pedagogy does not work, and, even worse, is detrimental to students. Though Freire's work cannot be completely related to American colleges and universities of the present day, Daniell argues that his theories can teach us how to treat our students with respect. This seems to have been the case in the Moonlight Schools. It is also interesting to note that instead of social upward mobility, the students achieved spiritual growth, which would have been considered more valuable.

Kim Donehower gave an address in 2002 at *CCCC* entitled "Women, Literacy, and the Management of Identity, whose theme is the management of identity. As part of a rural women and literacy study, Donehower had completed a study on women in an Appalachian town and was beginning a similar study in North Dakota. The author emphasizes that literacy can be used to manage identity—either personally or in connection to a larger group (4). For the women in the study, these groups could be religious or cultural. She uses Brandt's term of "sponsor" to describe how recipients of literacy must choose between identifying with their own group or with that of the sponsor's culture (4). Though men did attend the Moonlight School, Donehower's

theory seems to still have relevance. The identity of the dairy workers—as farmers and as Christians—was further established through their literacy acquisition. Edith's identity as a sponsor of literacy affected how she taught the students: namely, that she respected their culture. However, the students were not forced to identify with her culture. They further integrated themselves into their own Biltmore community.

Thus, the Moonlight School did more than just teach students how to write a letter or read their Bible, important as those skills may be. The School brought together a group of people who had already formed a community and allowed them to explore themselves, their religion, and their work through reading and writing. Literacy, to the students, became meaningful as a way to communicate with a higher being and with one another. Describing the Moonlight School as a literacy initiative is simplification. It is a testament to sound pedagogy, and has implications for our classrooms today. If we treat students with respect while contextualizing their literacy learning, we can reach students from a diverse range of cultures and backgrounds. If we consider that these students who sit in our classes are human beings, that they read and write from shared human experience, and that writing can enhance these experiences, we can then truly make writing—and writing instruction—meaningful. The Moonlight Schools may have taken place over a century ago, but they are evidence that students can and will learn when pedagogy encourages rather than dictates. They are evidence that good pedagogy is good pedagogy, no matter the time in history. Lastly, they are evidence of a true, undying passion for learning that characterizes Appalachia, despite stereotypes to the contrary. Thomas Wolfe once said that the "[Appalachian] people will endure" (Foster 636). He was referring to the various circumstances that plague the area: coal mining, poverty, and prejudice. However, the Moonlight Schools portray Appalachia at its very best—thriving, never simply enduring.

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May 2008

SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

- Instructional Competencies: Experienced working with both academically at-risk and honors students. Certified to teach English for grades 6-12 in Georgia and North Carolina.
- Strong Communication Skills: Articulate in both written and verbal communications—effectively convey ideas and information.
- Computer Abilities: Experienced with databases (SCT Banner and NOLIJWeb), word processing (MS Word), spreadsheet (Excel), and slide presentation (Power Point) applications.
- Organization and Time Management Skills: Effectively plan and follow through on tasks.
- Interpersonal Skills: Work well with others and in team settings. Comfortable working with faculty and staff from both units within a college and departments across campus. Experienced working with diverse populations, including but not limited to prospective, international, traditional, and non-traditional students.
- Confident in adapting and utilizing new skills.

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

Academic Associate II ***Kennesaw, Georgia***
Coles College of Business, Kennesaw State University
July 2008 to Present

- Advise current and prospective students on course selection, curriculum, course substitutions, institutional policies, graduation petitions, and various other academic issues.
- Process admission applications for the upper division program within Coles College of Business and maintain admissions database.
- Present information on academic success strategies, college requirements and expectations, and institutional policies at new and transfer student orientation sessions for students. Answer questions about institutional policies and procedures.
- Maintain database of student advising sessions to assist with retention efforts.
- Perform degree audits for students to track degree progression.
- Frequently work with both faculty and staff across campus to ensure academic success for both current and prospective students within the Coles College of Business.
- Actively recruit prospective students for the Coles College of Business both on and off campus.
- Maintain knowledge of current trends within Academic Advising through seminars, webinars, and academic literature.
- Meet with other staff members to discuss issues impacting students.

INSTRUCTIONAL EXPERIENCE

Substitute Teacher K-12 ***Clay County, North Carolina***
Clay County School District
August 2006 to May 2008

- Filled in for absent teachers on short term assignments.
- Implemented teaching programs outlined and maintained order in and outside of the classroom.
- Completed appropriate report forms for academic supervisors.

Substitute Teacher K-12 ***Cherokee County, North Carolina***
Cherokee County School District
August 2006 to May 2008

- Filled in for absent teachers on short term assignments.
- Implemented teaching programs outlined and maintained order in and outside of the classroom.
- Completed appropriate report forms for academic supervisors.

Teaching Intern ***Hayesville, North Carolina***
Hayesville High School
January 2008 to May 2008

- Instructed two sections of English II – World Literature and one section of Publications and SAT Verbal, consisting of roughly 15-30 students in each section, including one section comprised of academically at-risk students.
- Responsible for developing lesson plans, conveying course goals and objectives, ensuring adherence to curriculum guidelines outlined by North Carolina.
- Developed rubrics and assessment instruments to determine student progress.
- Maintained achievement and attendance records in accordance with school policy.
- Met with students to discuss academic progress as necessary.
- Completed appropriate report forms for academic supervisors.
- Met with parents to discuss student progression and/or need for enrollment in special education programs.

Teaching Intern ***Hayesville, North Carolina***
Hayesville High School
August 2007 to December 2007

- Responsible for teaching and developing lesson plans for eight lessons over the course of the semester.
- Developed assessment instruments to determine student progress.
- Observed teaching style of a North Carolina State Teacher of the Year finalist.

HONORS AND PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

- Completed an internship with the Kennesaw State University Writing Center to develop a series of workshops for business students.
- Recipient of the 2008 Outstanding Prospective Teacher Award at Western Carolina University.
- Earned both the 2008 Excellence in English Student Teaching from the College of Education and Allied Professions and the 2008 Outstanding English Student Teaching Award from the College of Arts and Sciences at Western Carolina University within the same year.
- Keynote speaker for the Dean of the College of Education and Allied Professionals annual Teacher Celebration.
- Member of the English Honor Society Sigma Tau Delta.
- Attended seminars in both Diversity and Teaching in July 2007.
- Awarded a North Carolina Teaching Fellowship, requiring strong academic standing and rigorous interviews on the district, county, and regional level with a state representative.
- Participated in a statewide tour of North Carolina schools in 2006 to gain perspective on various instructional formats and mediums.
- As part of the capstone experience at Western Carolina University, created a Teacher Work Sample (TWS). The TWS documented instructional plans, lessons, rubrics, assessment instruments created and valuable insights gained through the teaching experience. The TWS included examples of my demonstrated ability to adapt instructional format and lesson plans based on the needs/learning styles of students. In addition, the TWS included scanned student work with my comments attached.
- Published a piece "Appalachia" in the *Nomad* literary magazine.