

FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Center Gains Permanent Status

After being reauthorized eight times since it was created in 1976, the Center has now been authorized permanently by the Congress. The new status may be attributed to the work of members of the Center's Board of Trustees (and in particular former and current board chairs Judy McCulloh and Bill Kinney) and to the many persons around the country who sent letters of support to their congressional representatives. All of us at the Center are grateful for the

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FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

James Hardin, *Editor*

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Cover: Ray Dickens Jr., Kimberly Dickens, and Jeffrey Honaker selling ramps on Drew's Creek Road, Naoma, West Virginia, to motorists en route to the annual Ramp Supper in 1997. Photo by Lyntha Eiler.

Tending the Commons: Ramp Suppers, Biodiversity, and the Integrity of “The Mountains”



Ramps at Edna Turner's house, ready for cleaning. The roots are chopped off and the outer membrane (also known as the “slimer”) is removed. The roots can be replanted to start new ramp patches. Photo by Lyntha Eiler

By Mary Hufford

Biodiversity has been protected through the flourishing of cultural diversity. Utilizing indigenous knowledge systems, cultures have built decentralized economies and production systems that use and reproduce biodiversity. Monocultures, by contrast, which are produced and reproduced through centralized control, consume biodiversity.¹

The Ramp House on Drew's Creek

It is mid-April, and throughout the tributaries of West Virginia's

Big Coal River, peepers are announcing spring. High in the hills, coves drained by chortling creeks are alight with the whites of trillium, the yellows of spice bush, the reds of wake robins, and the bright greens of ramps. From the valleys the bare woods appear spangled with the russet blooms of “hard” maples, the green-tinged yellows of “soft” maples, the white bursts of “sarvice” and dogwoods, and the deep pinks of “Judas trees.” Soon, they say, the bass will be leaving the river and swimming up into the creeks to spawn.

I am sitting fairly high in the

hills myself, paring knife in hand, in a modest rectangular building officially known as “The Ramp House.” Perched as far up the hollow of Drew's Creek as a person can drive in a two-wheel drive car, the Ramp House faces the Delbert Free Will Baptist Church across a small parking lot. For more than forty years it has functioned as a community center, where women of the church hold weekly quilting bees, and families assemble for reunions. But its name registers its most public and celebrated purpose: sheltering friends, neighbors, and kin who come together each spring to feast upon ramps.

Ramps, *allium tricoccum*, are wild leeks. Thriving throughout the Appalachian range in rich, dark woodlands near mountain streams, ramps are among the first edible foods to appear in the early spring, when they pierce the gray and brown leaf mold with a spire of tightly furled, onion-scented leaves. In June the lance-shaped leaves wither and the plant sends up a stalk with an umbel of white flowers. Underground the stems swell into white bulbs connected by a mass of fibrous rootlets. These diminutive leeks smell like garlic, only stronger.

Throughout the Appalachian South, ramps are hailed with feasting at ramp suppers and festivals. The most famous of these community fundraisers include the Ramp Festival at Cosby, Tennessee,² and the Feast of the Ramson at Richwood, West Virginia. Richwood, in fact, is home to the NRA—the National Ramp Association. But many smaller events proliferate throughout April and

well into the month of May. From noon until 8 P.M., the women who organize this particular event will serve nearly five hundred plates piled high with potatoes, fried apples, pinto beans, cornbread, and ramps.

The week before the ramp supper is one of the year's busiest, and members of the Delbert Free Will Baptist Church divide the labor of production. Each evening the women meet in the Ramp House to clean and refrigerate the ramps brought in by the men from the upper-elevation hollows wrinkling the ridge-lines. The fe-



Mabel Brown, Jenny Bonds, and Peggy Gilfillen, cleaning ramps for the 1995 Ramp Supper. Photo by Terry Eiler



Patrons of the 1996 Ramp Supper greet one another on the porch of the Ramp House at the head of Drew's Creek (see map on page 9). Photo by Lyntha Eiler

male camaraderie on these evenings, pungent with the aroma of ramps, coffee, and sassafrass tea, and punctuated with laughter, makes this an event in its own right. "We sit in a circle and clean ramps and talk," Delores Workman told me at last year's ramp supper. "It's a lot of fun. I love my ramp circle."

"You should hear the tales Jenny tells," laughed Judy Griffy. Hoping to, this year I am in the Ramp House the night before Ramp Day, chopping ramps and tape-recording the talk of a dozen women, worn out from a week of preparation, but ex-

cited about the day ahead. Only one man is present, Laffon Pettry's husband, Bob. Bob tolerates the women's razzing with good humor. "You put down that cigarette and get your knife and get busy," Mabel Brown warns him as he tries to take a break. "You'll be the first one we fire, Bob!"

"He's slightly outnumbered, isn't he," murmurs Theresa Elkins.

"He'd better watch it here with this gang of females!" Mabel teases, brandishing her knife.

Dusk gathers outside, and in the wake of the setting sun the stars are brightening into the sign of the ram, for which it is said that ramps were long ago named "ramsons" by the Swedes.³ Inside, the air is thick with the smell and the talk of ramps. Jenny Bonds tells about a ramp-themed basket her granddaughter gave her for Christmas, containing ramp vinegar, ramp seeds, dried ramps, ramp jelly, pickled ramps, even ramp wine. "I had some of the jelly," said Jenny. "It stunk." Other

possibilities are advanced: ramp pizza or Jenny's ramp casserole, with sausage, potatoes, and cheese.

Crafting Locality

Historically, in these mountains, female sociality has flourished around the gathering and processing of greens and other wild produce. On the heels of ramps a host of other greens start popping up: dandelions, poke, shawnee lettuce, woolen britches, creasies, and lamb's tongue. And around these, women have fashioned womens' worlds. "That was the big deal when everybody used to go green picking," said Carrie Lou Jarrell, of Sylvester, on another occasion. "That was the event of the week. Mrs. Karen Thomas would come up and she always brought Jessie Graybill with her, and then Miss Haddad would come, and most of the time Maggie Wriston came with her. And usually Sylvia Williams was always there to do green picking with them. I knew from the time I came into the world that she was just a good friend. But that was the thrill of my life to get to go with all of these women, because they talked about good stuff."

Such talk is one means of crafting locality. It catches people up into a dense fabric of kinship and community and fastens that fabric to places and events in the mountains. Through such talk the women enunciate their place in the hills, a place remarkable not only for its biodiversity, but for the interweaving of biodiversity and community life. In the Ramp House the women laugh over how Violet Dickens once mistook sassafras tea for bacon grease and poured it over the frying ramps: "We need you to come season the ramps," Mabel kidded her the other day. They compare the aromas of poke and collard greens, and marvel at how window screens get black with flies when you're cooking them. They wonder where the creasies (dry land cress) are growing this year, and Jenny points out that creasies won't grow unless you till the soil.

In southern West Virginia a mixed mesophytic forest (known among ecologists as the world's most biologically diverse temperate-zone hardwood system) is not just a product of nature. It is integral to a cultural landscape that has taken shape over many generations. On Coal River, I have heard people say the best place to



Carrie Lou Jarrell, Sylvester, West Virginia. Photo by Lyntha Eiler

look for red mulberry trees, now in serious decline, is on farms; that the cows that grazed throughout the mountains well into the twentieth century kept the snake population down; and that Peach Tree Creek was named for peach trees encountered there by the first white settlers entering the region in the early 1800s. In the Ramp House they say you can start your own ramp patch from the bit of root they're chopping off at the ends.⁴ "Mabel has a few ramps growing in her yard," said Jenny. "I do, Edna does, and Sadie does. You don't, do you Theresa? You're going to have to plant you a patch of ramps and some molly moochers."

This week the molly moochers are coming in. Molly moochers are

more mushrooms. They say you can hear them popping up through the dried leaves when it rains. Old apple orchards, scattered throughout the woods where people used to live, make good places to go molly mooching. A neighbor found fifty-six today in an old apple orchard behind Laffon's house. "He found thirty-seven yesterday," said Laffon.

The salient feature of ramps is the smell. The Menominee Indians called it "pikwute sikakushia": the skunk. "Shikako," their name for a large ramp patch that once flourished in northern Illinois, has been anglicized to *Chicago*: "the skunk place."⁵ Our chopping of leaves is filling the air with aromatic organosulphur compounds, characteristic of members of the allium family but carried to extremes in ramps and their consumers.⁶ Some have seen in this practice of restoring the body while emitting a sulphurous odor a rite of death and resurrection, serendipitously coinciding with Easter.⁷ Actually with ramps the motif appears to be breath and insurrection. Liberating organosulfides seems to comprise, if not a rite of inversion, at least a delicious form of backtalk: the country backtalking the city, the improper backtalking propriety. The efforts of official institutions to quell this annual olfactory uprising have been rehearsed at every ramp supper I've attended.

"Let me get this down so I can move on," said John Flynn at the 1995 Ramp Supper. "We did not eat ramps. There were very strong women in my family who did not like the odor. Also, if you ate ramps and went to school, they sent you home because of the odor. There were a lot of authoritarians in the school, so you didn't do a lot of ramp eating. Someone might get up the guts to do it once, but they didn't do it twice. The odor was the issue." Ways of annulling the odor creep into ramp talk.

"I like them raw," said Jess Duncan, of Sylvester, "like you'd eat a hot pepper or something with a sandwich."

The Easter Onion

by Johnny Russell

Years gone by, still they gather
Tribute to a heritage, gloried past
Easter onions, in Appalachia called ramps
Family, friends, people from far and wide.

On Coal River, up Peachtree to Pine Knob
This time of year, everyone a memory to share
Good music, preaching, and food; thank you, Lord
The sun warming, trees making horizons green.

Blooms hanging heavy, petals fall like snow
With the spring, hope springs like flowers
Time to come together, everyone welcome
Fill your plate, come and set a spell.

A time to reminisce, spin a tall tale or two
Cars line the dusty lane, even a politician feels at home

The pungent smell gives way, heaven in the taste
In His infinite way, the Lord gave us the ramp.

A Savior risen, and so is the ramp
Food for the heart, food for the soul
Hopes renewed, yet another season
I awake each year, and spring's Easter onion.

Johnny Russell is a coal miner from Montcoal, West Virginia. He wrote this poem in 1996.

"Fried potatoes, pinto beans," added Pat Canterbury.

"You can't beat them," said Jess, "and they don't stink if you don't eat very many of them."

"They do too," said Pat.

"If you eat them with a sandwich, they don't," Jess insisted. "My wife's never complained."

"Now, if you're confined close," cautioned Bob Daniel, of Dry Creek, one morning in Syble's Bed and Barn, "say in an office with people, I'm sure it would offend people like that, but in my line of work I don't think I bother anybody with them."

"If you don't like the smell," laughed Mae Bongalis, "go the other way. Stay at your house!"

The most famous official censure of ramps was brought on by the late Jim Comstock, editor of the *West Virginia Hillbilly*. Comstock, inspired by scratch-and-sniff advertising for perfume and coffee in several local papers, announced the Richwood Ramp Supper one year by lacing the printer's ink for his spring issue with ramp juice. "We got a reprimand from the Postmaster General," Comstock recalled. "And we are probably the only paper in the United States that's under oath to the federal government not to smell bad."⁸

Behind the powerful aroma it appears there really is something good for what ails you. Ramps have long been recommended for

their germicidal and toning effects. The beliefs that ramps are good for the heart, that they thin and purify the blood, and that they relieve the common cold are widespread.⁹ Scientific research suggests that such faith in ramps is well-placed. The allicin (diallyl-sulfide oxide) in ramps, which has antibiotic properties, has been



Vivian Jarrell, of Dry Creek, with a jar of frozen ramps. Ramps must be stored in jars, according to Judy Griffy, in order to keep the odor from permeating other foods in the freezer. Photo by Lyntha Eiler

linked with reduced rates of cancer.¹⁰ Ramps are higher in vitamin C than oranges.¹¹ They contain cepaenes, which function as antithrombotic agents.¹² Ramps also contain flavanoids and other antioxidants that are free radical scavengers.¹³

As the first of the wild foods to appear, ramps satisfy the body's craving for living food at the end of a winter filled with produce that's been dried, canned, frozen, or shipped from faraway places. "They used to say," said Jenny Bonds, "that people that lived out like we did didn't live near grocery stores, so they said in the springtime you always need green things, like vegetables. So they said in the springtime the country people got ramps, that was our spring tonic."

"What does a spring tonic do?" I asked.

"Cure for spring fever, I guess," said Jenny.

"Strawberry rhubarb pie is my spring tonic," said Laffon Pettry.

Spring fever is twice cured by ramps, which lure people into the higher reaches of the mountains. "Ramps are fun to hunt," said John Flynn. "You can go out in the yard and get all the poke you want, but you have to go into the forest to look for ramps."

"The higher you go," said Woody Boggess on another occasion, "the more ramps and the bigger."

Ramp Patches and the Commons of "The Mountains"

Ramp patches in the mountains have long functioned as a common resource. Most of the ramps served at the ramp supper, some fifteen bushels full, do not come from peoples' personal patches. They come from the upper-elevation coves rising high above the Ramp House. "I've got a few planted up the holler here," said Dennis Dickens, of Peachtree Creek, a beloved octogenarian who passed away this year. "They just grow at an elevation of about, I'd say 2,000 to 2,500 feet. Real rich soil."



Mabel Brown in her ramp patch, Brown's Hollow, Drew's Creek. Photo by Lyntha Eiler

For many, eating ramps in the mountains is as much a rite of spring as attending the ramp supper. "I love them," said Bob Daniel, over breakfast at Syble's Bed and Barn one spring morning. "I like to dig them and eat them right there. Sit down in the woods with a piece of cornbread and eat them."

"That's the fun part," said Mary Jarrell, speaking in Lloyd's Convenient, which she operates with her husband at the mouth of Rock Creek. "Getting them and cooking them out. We'd go to several places, like Hazy, where they've closed it off. We would always go and take a skillet and make



Patrons at the 1996 Ramp Supper. Photo by Lyntha Eiler

cornbread and take some potatoes and get the ramps and clean them and fix them on top of the mountains."

"We'd take our corn bread and pinto beans," said Mae Bongalis, of Naoma, during the 1995 ramp supper, "and go to the mountain, up Board Tree Hollow, dig ramps all afternoon. Then we'd clean them in a little stream coming through the patch, wash them and cook them, and then have dinner. They taste better that way, too."

The higher elevations, known simply as "the mountains," have long functioned as what anthropologist Beverly Brown terms a "de facto commons,"¹⁴ an open-access area where people go to hunt, picnic and party, gather a variety of roots, herbs, nuts, and fruit, or to enjoy some solitude. Ramps inaugurate an annual round of small-scale subsistence harvesting of woodland bounty, and afford the first opportunity to get back into the mountains. But they are fortifying throughout the growing season. "Ramps are sweet this time of year," said Tony Dickens of Pettry Bottom, one late September evening. "You'll come across a ramp patch when you're out ginsenging. Last week I dug more ramps than ginseng!"

Supporting an unusually diverse seasonal round, central Appalachia's mixed mesophytic forest distinguishes these moun-

tains among America's de facto commons. Telltale signs of this diversity abound in the hollows and coal camps, and in yards and homes on the river: the handful of butternuts curing on a step, the coal bucket of black walnuts ready for shelling, the hellgrammite seine at the ready on the porch, the ginseng drying in the rear window of a car, the squirrel meat marinating in a bowl, the gallon of blackberries ready for canning, the plastic bag full of homemade "deer jerky," the jar full of "lin" (white bass) honey, the paw paws in the freezer, the molly moochers soaking in salt water, the pickled ramps in the pantry.

The traditional knowledge sustaining this annual round of harvesting is anchored in a peoples' landscape inscribed all over the mountains, a literary work writ large.¹⁵

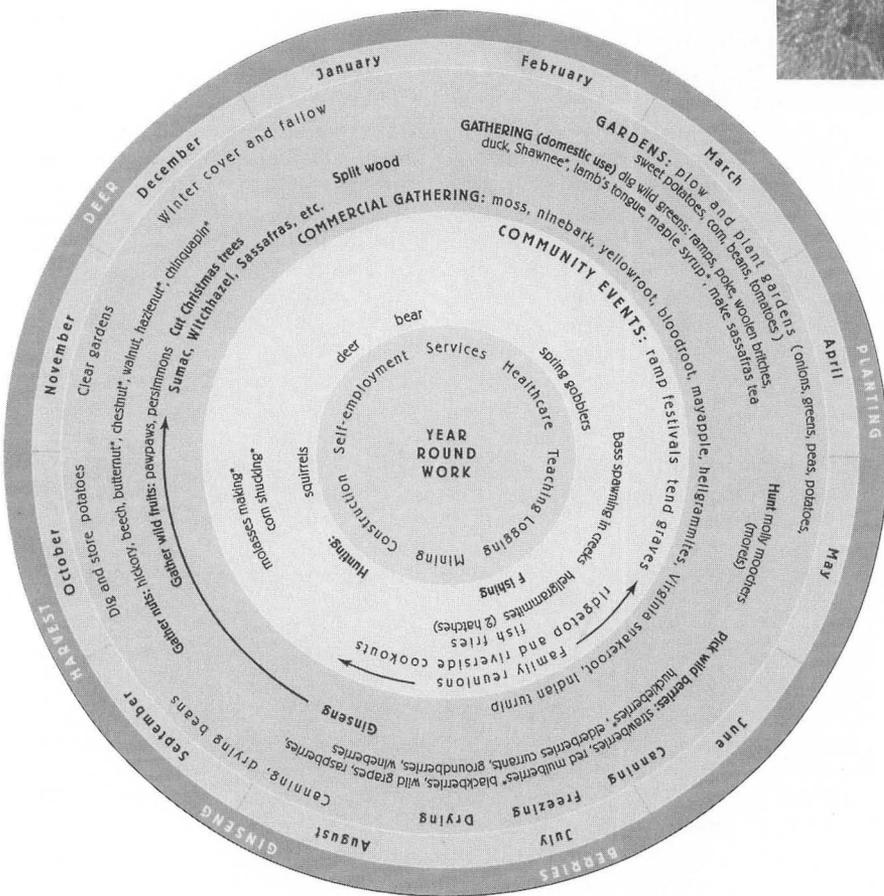
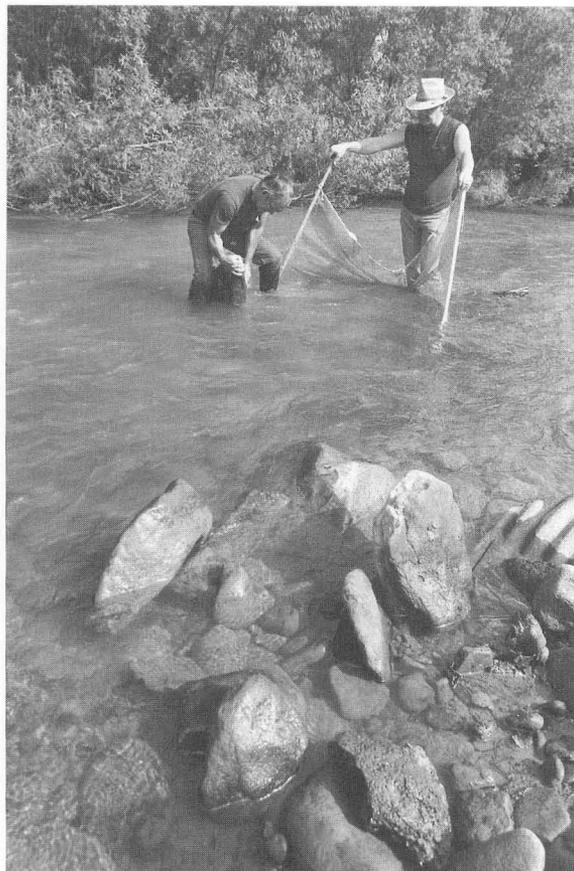
Reading the Cultural Landscape

The hills rising away from the Ramp House are rich in family and community history. Names bestowed on every wrinkle in the ridgeline commemorate people, events, and moments in the seasonal round. What appears to be a jumble of coves, ridges, creeks, knobs, branches, gaps, and forks is as legible to some residents as a metropolitan grid is to an urbanite. "These different little hol-

lows," said Howard Miller, "they had a name for each one, so when a neighbor talked to another neighbor about a certain thing that happened at this holler, they knew exactly where it was at, they knew even from Beckley down to Racine down to Madison."

The names for the coves anchor local history and knowledge in the land: Mill Holler, Peach Orchard Holler, School House Holler, and Bee Light Holler, where they baited bees in order to "line" them to wild hives, filled with honey from mixed mesophytic flowering trees like basswood ("lin"), tuliptree ("yellow poplar"), and yellow locust ("mountain locust"). Thus indexed, the landscape is a dynamic repository of rural life, knowledge, and history, which elderly raconteurs render into narrative. "Quill Holler's below the Ramp House," Howard went on. "They used to get a hollow straw

Using a net suspended between two broom handles, Ray Cottrell and Randy Sprouse seine for hellgrammites on Coal River near the mouth of Hazy. The technique involves raising rocks and allowing the water to carry what's underneath into the net held downstream. Hellgrammites, also known as grampus, are the larva of the dobson fly, and are favored by the small-mouthed bass in Coal River. Sprouse directs the newly formed Coal River Mountain Watch, a Whitesville-based organization dedicated to cultural and environmental conservation on Coal River. Photo by Terry Eiler



The seasonal round on Coal River, showing the continuing role of the mixed mesophytic forest in community life. Many of these activities rely on common pool resources located in the mountains. Produced by Suzuki Graphics, based on interviews and a field sketch by Mary Hufford

and drink sugar water where they notched a sugar tree. Something like these straws at a restaurant, but it's a plant."

The cultural landscape is rife with landmarks. Over generations of working the seasonal round, a language for navigating the mountains discriminates them into a wide array of landmarks: not only the highwalls, mine breaks, augur holes, and other traces of industry, but into "knobs," "drains," "coves," "swags," "ridges," "crossings," "gaps," "flats," "bear wallows," "orchards," "homeplaces," "sink holes," "walk paths," "hill climbs," "camp rocks," "bottoms," "brakes," "graveyards," "bee trees," "den trees," and "benches."

This landscape supports the common world celebrated in the Ramp House. Cultural practices like ramp suppers, ramp talk, and roaming the mountains have co-evolved with an industrial landscape¹⁶ as ways of holding together a world chronically visited with environmental, social, and economic crisis. Only by bracketing out the civic commons is it

possible to reduce a mountain to "a worthless piece of dirt," as one industry spokesman put it, "good for nothing, save for snakes and scrub pine."¹⁷ An alternative view—of biodiversity flourishing in the context of community life—is rehearsed in stories and jaunts that map the commons back onto the land.

Ramp Talk and the Cultural Landscape of Hazy Creek

Many of the ramps for this year's ramp supper came from Hazy Creek, a long, lush, meandering hollow that hooks around Shumate's Branch like a sheltering arm. Hundreds of people lived at the mouth of Hazy in the nineteen-forties when the coal town of Edwight was the bustling hub of the river between Whitesville and Glen Daniel. Though Hazy Creek and Shumate's Branch were evacuated of dwellings in the 1980s,¹⁸ people continue to comb the hollows of Hazy Creek for ramps, ginseng, molly moochers, yellow root, mayapple, bloodroot, berries, and signs of history.

Though the coal industry has closed Hazy Creek to the public (Cherry Pond Mountain is slated for mountaintop removal), people still enter with permission to gather plants and hunt, or to visit historic sites and cemeteries.

On a trek up Hazy for ramps in 1996, Dave Bailey and Woody Boggess distilled sights on the overgrown landscape into signs of former communities everywhere: the rusting incline hidden on the hillside; the sludge pond, its banks "reclaimed" in thorny field locust; a stand of Indian corn near Charlie Rock, named for Charles Wiley; the remains of a "splash dam" once used as a skidway for easing timber out of the mountains; red dog from the slate dump that burned for years and was haunted by an old woman's ghost; a big rock that Woody says Hobart Clay could have cleared in his Hazy machine, and camp sites marked by the presence of ramps. "People have camped there for years," commented Dave. "They set them out so they'd have some."

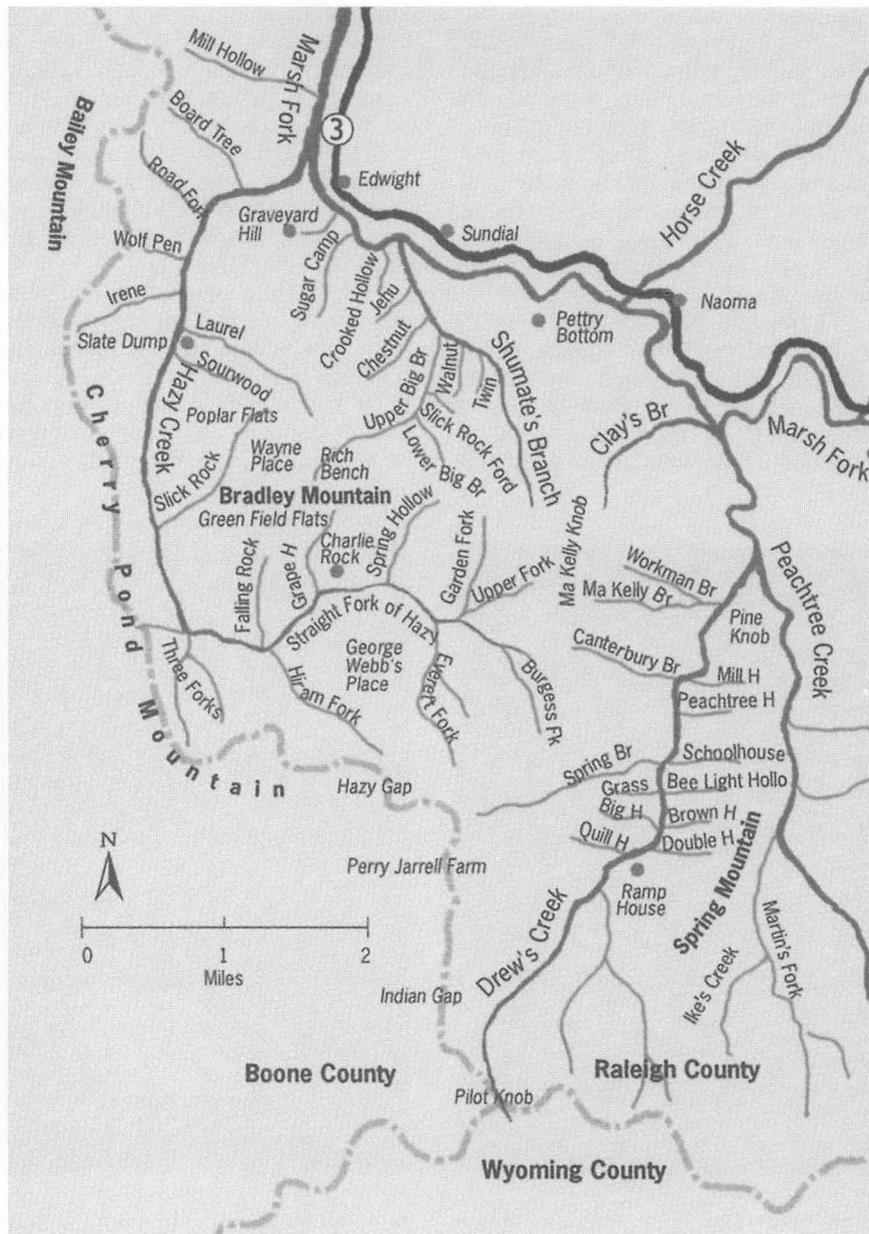
As access is increasingly curtailed, people vividly reconstitute Hazy Creek through stories. In a

conversation that Woody Boggess videotaped in Andrew, Dave Bailey and Cuba Wiley conjure and re-occupy Hazy as a capacious and generous landscape where they both lived for many years. Cuba, who hasn't been up in Hazy lately, wonders what it's like since the people moved out in the late 1980s. "People tell me I wouldn't know it up that hollow now," he says.

Dave imaginatively takes him up there, and Hazy Creek floods into the room through their words and gestures. "You go up there,

Cuby, where the mines is, you go across that creek, go over to the left, go right on up that road to the mines. You can stop the car where the road's washed out, you walk maybe to the top of the hill, and the side of the mountain is covered with ramps."

"Well," picks up Cuba, invoking another space where ramps grew, "what about the Straight Fork of Hazy, where Three Forks used to come in together, and I used to go in the Straight Fork of Hazy, and just go up there a little



The cultural landscape of a de facto commons on Hazy Creek. For elderly raconteurs, the place names and structures on this landscape index an oral history of land-use and settlement that begins before the Civil War. Map produced by Suzuki Graphics, based on interviews and field sketches by Mary Hufford

piece on up that hollow and walk in on the right, and that scoundrel mountain was lined with them."

"That's right," says Dave. "Just as far as you could see."

They go on to the Everett Fork, Hiram Fork, and Bradley Mountain (where Lige Bradley fled from marauding Yankee and Confederate troops during the Civil War, and where people returned to tend and harvest apples in the Wayne Bradley Field long after Bradley was evacuated for strip-mining). On the way out, Dave and Cuba pause for a moment at Road Fork and Sugar Camp.

"You know what?" says Cuba, "I'm gonna tell you something. I was in Sugar Camp, way up in there, I could look down over there at the Coffee Pot Restaurant and all that, and that walk path that goes right on up through there takes you to Bradley."

"Yup," says Dave. "I know where it's at."

"I believe I could find it yet," Cuba resumes. "That walk path, I'd turn left and go up just a little ridge, about fifty or seventy-five yards and that scoundrel ridge was lined with ramps, and I'll tell

you who else went in there and found them before he died: Calvin Clay. Calvin Clay and them found that patch."

"I didn't know they were in there," Dave marvelled.

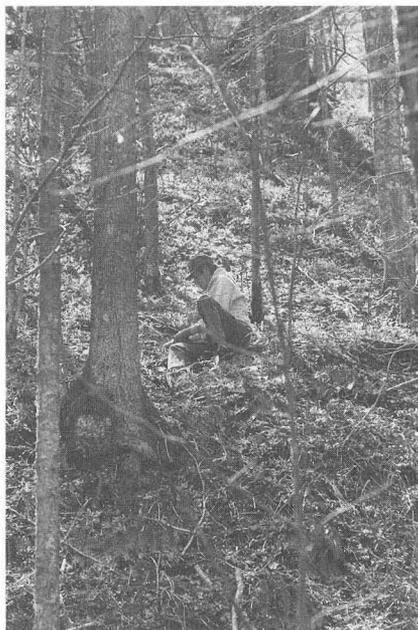
"Sugar Camp," says Cuba. "Good patch, buddy."

Reconstituting Hazy, Dave and Cuba walk its paths, populate it with fellow gatherers, and savor its views, routes, and destinations. Stories of plying the seasonal round, of gathering ramps, molly moochers, fishing bait, and ginseng, are like beacons lighting up Hazy's coves, benches, walk paths, historic ruins, and camp rocks. In fact, such stories and inscriptions constitute a rural industrial landscape as coherent, as saturated with "traditional cultural properties,"¹⁹ as representative of America's rural-industrial history as any landscape recorded on the National Register.

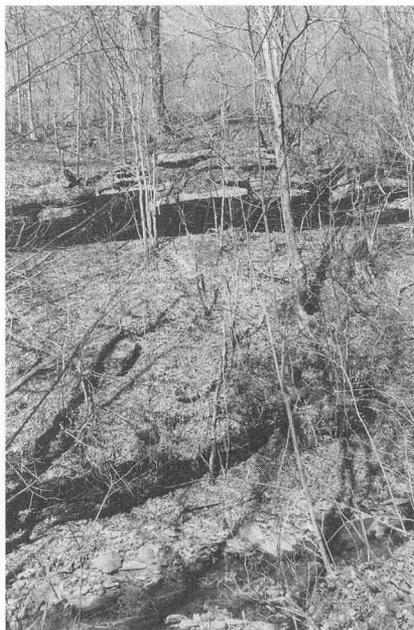
Like other productions of the commons, ramps, ramp patches, and ramp talk are resources for holding together a way of life that is continually dismantled by plans for progress.²⁰ The civic commons of the Ramp House and the com-

mons of the cultural landscape are mutually sustaining and cannot be reclaimed by covering a stream with spoil and putting a pond on top of a highland complex, moving a smokehouse from a homeplace to a pioneer village, or relocating a family cemetery from its ancestral grounds to a commercial cemetery many miles away.

The commons on Coal River models an alternative, integrated, community-based approach to the conservation of natural and cultural resources. The seasonal round, itself a cultural production, outlines a roster of "services" we might expect from central Appalachia's post-mining landscapes. Common pool resources like the ramp patches of the named systems of coves might qualify for protection not as endangered species, but as vital resources for mountain life—"traditional cultural properties." Such sites, scattered throughout the mountains, define the social collective, serving both as touchstones to a shared past, and as thresholds to a future in which a historic, mixed mesophytic landscape continues to form a hedge against social, environmental, and economic crises.



(Left) David Bailey, of Stickney, digging ramps on Hazy Creek, not far from the Poplar Flats. (Right) Charlie Rock, a "camping rock" near Spring Hollow on Hazy Creek, known as a place to camp out when digging ramps in the spring or



hunting for ginseng in the fall. Such named rock shelters are found throughout the mountains, and many of them are prolific sources of Native American artifacts. Photos by Lyntha Eiler

Notes

1. Vandana, Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (Boston: South End Press, 1997), p. 72.

2. For a discussion of the festival at Cosby, Tennessee, see Michael Ann Williams, *Great Smoky Mountain Folklife* (Oxford, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), pp. 172-77.

3. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *ramps*, *rams*, and *ramsons* all apply to the broad-leaved garlic, *allium ursinum*. *Ramson* derives from the Swedish plural for *rams*. Several sources link this term with the sign of the ram, *Aries*. See Doug Elliott, *Roots: An Underground Botany* (Old Greenwich, Connecticut: Chatham Press, 1976), p. 46.

4. This practice is widely attributed to the Cherokee as something that occurred in the past. See, for instance, Runkel and Bull: "The Cherokees gathered wild leek bulbs by cutting or breaking off the little stub under the bulb—actually the stem from which roots come—and replanting it so the plant would continue to grow. This is an excellent example of resource conservation." *Wildflowers of Iowa Woodlands* (Ames: University of Iowa Press, 1987), p. 151.

5. *Ibid.* Runkel and Bull, p. 251.



A "valley fill" in the foreground of a mountaintop removal project near Clear Fork. Designed to store excess rock and spoil from the mines, such structures have displaced more than nine hundred miles of streams and coves, according to a recent survey by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Also displaced are populations of ramps, ginseng, and other resources of the commons that flourish in native hardwood coves. Photo by Lyntha Eiler

6. Marilyn Singer, *The Fanatic's Ecstatic, Aromatic Guide to Onions, Garlic, Shallots, and Leeks* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1981), p. 106.

7. William J. Darby, Paul Ghalioungui, Louis Grivetti, *Food: The Gift of Osiris*, Vol. II (New York: Academic Press, 1976), p. 662.

8. Jim Comstock, "Ramps in the Ink," *Golden Seal* 20 (Winter 1994):23.

9. See also *Popular Beliefs and Superstitions: A Compendium of American Folklore from the Ohio Collections of Newbell Niles Puckett*, Vol. I, Wayland D. Hand, Anna Casetta, Sondra B. Thiederman, eds. (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981), p. 325.

10. Eric Block, "Organoselenium and Organosulfur Phytochemicals from Genus Allium Plants: Relevance for Cancer Protection," in *Food Factors for Cancer Prevention*, H. Ohigashi, T. Osawa, J. Terao, S. Watanabe, T. Yoshikawa, eds. (Tokyo: Springer, 1997), pp. 215-21.

11. Thomas M. Zennie and C. Dwayne Ogzewalla, "Ascorbic Acid and Vitamin A Content of Edible Wild Plants of Ohio and Kentucky," *Economic Botany* 31 (1997):76-79.

12. See Elizabeth M. Calvey, Kevin D. White, Jean E. Matusik, Deyou sha, and Erick Block, "Allium Chemistry: Identification of Organosulfur Compounds in Ramp (*Allium tricoccum*) Homogenates," *Phytochemistry* 49 (1998):359-64.

13. Crellin and Philpott observe that allcin "has a mild stimulating action that lies behind the reputation as a counterirritant." *Herbal Medicine: Past and Present: A Reference Guide to Medicinal Plants*, Vol. II (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), p. 319.

14. Beverly Brown, "Fencing the Northwest Forests: Decline of Public and Accustomed Rights," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (Spring 1996), pp. 50-52.

15. In this array of wild produce we glimpse the outcroppings of an alternative, rural economy that enables survival outside the mainstream. On the central Appalachian plateaus, a patchwork of strategies that includes gardening, wage labor, and forms of subsistence-borrow-and-barter is richly adumbrated by resources from the mixed mesophytic forest. See Rhoda Halprin, *The Livelihood of Kin: Making Ends Meet "The Kentucky Way"* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), and Paul Salstrom, *Appalachia's Path To Dependency* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

16. For a fuller account of the "industrial landscape" in the region, see Mary Hufford, "American Ginseng and the Idea of the Commons," *Folklife Center News* XIX, nos. 1 and 2 (Winter-Spring 1997), p. 3.

17. Fred Holroyd, "State Agencies Send Mixed Messages in Land Use," *West Virginia Coal Bell* (July 1998), p. 4.

18. Shumate's Branch has been turned into a "coal refuse impoundment." See Mary Hufford, "Weathering the Storm: Cultural Survival in an Appalachian Valley," in Harvard Ayers, Charles Little, and Jenny Hager, eds., *An Appalachian Tragedy: Air Pollution and Tree Death in the Eastern United States* (San Francisco: Sierra Books, 1998).

19. See Patricia Parker and Thomas King, "Protecting Traditional Cultural Properties," *Department of the Interior Bulletin* 38.

20. Hundreds of square miles in southern West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky have been approved for a method of coal mining known as "mountaintop removal," which removes the top of a mountain (the "overburden") in order to recover multiple seams of coal. The overburden is disposed of in coves and streams, producing a landscape of "highland mounds," "wetland drainage areas," and "valley fills." For a study of the ecological impact of this form of mining, see Stacy Edmunds (with Orie Loucks), "A Landscape View of Mountaintop Removal." Master's thesis, Miami University, in progress.

Mary Hufford is a folklife specialist at the American Folklife Center. This article is part of a larger study of the cultural impact of mountaintop removal and reclamation.

Bicentennial Project to Document Local Traditions



Folklife Center staffers James Hardin and Peter Bartis review photographs of Center field documentation projects, which will be used with Local Legacies informational material to provide examples of traditional activities that might be documented for the project. Library of Congress photo by Glenn Krankowski

By James Hardin

The Library of Congress Bicentennial Program in cooperation with the American Folklife Center has launched a nationwide project called Local Legacies, as part of a larger program to commemorate the Bicentennial of the Library of Congress, which was founded April 24, 1800. The objective of the project is to increase public and congressional awareness of, support for, and participation in local, state, and national programs and activities that document, preserve, and present traditional culture.

The Local Legacies project encourages the formation of teams in every state and congressional district to document aspects of our

nation's diverse culture and assemble a selection of documentary materials to be presented to the Library of Congress for sharing with others. The project will culminate in a special event in May 2000, to which all participants and their senators and congressional representatives will be invited. The documentary material will be made available online on the World Wide Web and added to the Library's collections, so as to provide present and future generations of researchers with information about the nation's community life and grassroots culture.

The idea for the project was suggested by the Librarian of Congress, James H. Billington, during the May 12, 1997, meeting of the

American Folklife Center's Board of Trustees in New Orleans. Billington suggested that each congressional district might nominate an example of "extraordinary creativity" to be placed in the Archive of Folk Culture and have digitized to share with the rest of the country on the Internet.

All 50 states, the 435 congressional districts, the U.S. Trusts and Territories, and the District of Columbia have been invited to launch community-based Local Legacies projects. Cultural documentation is performed by persons conducting interviews, taking photographs, and writing notes on their observations and discoveries. Documentary materials include photographs, written

reports, sound and video recordings, and miscellaneous material, such as local newspaper clippings, posters, and flyers, relating to the subject of study. The Local Legacies project teams will be sponsored by Senate and House congressional offices in the states and districts; members of Congress will name team leaders to represent each state and district; and resource persons invited to help will include state and local librarians, folklorists, and state arts and culture specialists.

A "local legacy" is defined as a traditional activity or event, identified as emblematic of a particular area or having special significance for a community, and worthy of documentation and preservation for future generations. A local legacy might be a rodeo,

powwow, auction, market-day celebration, or annual parade, procession, or traditional music festival—a "signature" event that many know. It might include the music, crafts, and foods that represent the traditional life in a particular region or district. A local legacy might also include the artistry of individuals performing traditional music and dance or working at crafts and trades, such as fishing, farming, or ranching.

Since documentation of some events may be extensive, the Library is asking for only a selection of material: photographs, a written report, and administrative information. That selection, made in close consultation with senators, congressional representatives, and resource persons, should be sent to the Library of Congress by De-

ember 31, 1999. The resource persons, among them the state librarians, may also recommend that the entire collection of project materials be deposited in a local or state archive, library, or other repository as a resource for the community.

As the nation's Library, serving all the people, the Library of Congress encourages the participation of every citizen in this Local Legacies project to highlight America's cultural heritage and provide future generations with "snapshots" of everyday life in America at the turn of the century. Readers with Internet access who wish to learn about other Library of Congress Bicentennial projects, can visit the Library's web pages: <http://lcweb.loc.gov/bicentennial/>

American Folklife Center Gains Permanent Authorization

By James Hardin

When President Clinton signed the 1999 Legislative Branch Appropriations bill on October 21, 1998, the American Folklife Center gained permanent authorization, a goal sought by the Center's Board of Trustees and supported by many of its friends from around the country. Former board chair Judith McCulloh, who spearheaded a 1997 and 1998 nationwide campaign to enlist support for the Center, said, "Fantastic! Thanks are due to everyone who kept the faith and rallied to support the Center when support was most needed. All of us who have enjoyed working with the Center and its staff over the years look forward to continuing that relationship. I'm off the Center's board of trustees, but as a Center supporter I'm still on-board."

The Center had been reauthorized eight times since it was created in 1976 by Public Law 94-201, the American Folklife Preservation

Act. Many board members and some members of Congress have regarded the periodic review of the Center associated with congressional reauthorization hearings as a good way for the Center to maintain relations with Congress and congressional constituencies.

But attempts to gain reauthorization for fiscal year 1996 were unsuccessful, and only the intervention and strong support of Sen. Mark Hatfield (a cosponsor of the original legislation creating the Center) during the summer of 1996 resulted in a two-year authorization for the Center for fiscal 1997 and 1998. At the time, Senator Hatfield recommended that the Center's Board of Trustees and the folklore community work to increase fundraising activity and expressed the hope that "the next Congress will enact a permanent authorization for the center."

Over the past year and a half, the Center's board solicited the help of hundreds of friends and

supporters from every state and region of the country, who responded with letters, telephone calls, faxes, email messages, and direct-contact conversations with members of Congress in both the House and the Senate—all endorsing the work of the Center and affirming the national importance of the Archive of Folk Culture. The campaign not only helped to create new supporters but reassured previous supporters that the Center had an active, concerned constituency.

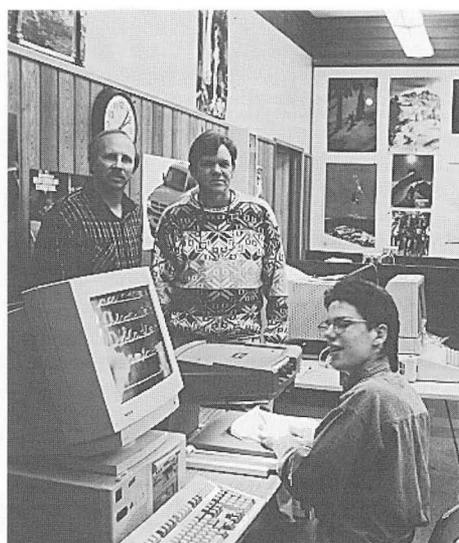
On March 4, at a meeting of the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, Sen. Thad Cochran spoke in support of permanent authorization and later introduced a bill in the Senate to that effect. The language from the Cochran bill was included in the Legislative Branch Appropriations bill, with provisions calling for permanent authorization for the Center, the elimination of a salary

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News from the Montana Heritage Project



(Left) The Library of Congress has donated 110 recycled computers to schools participating in the Montana Heritage Project. Center Folklife Specialist Peter Bartis worked out the donation with James Kopp, who coordinates the Library's participation in a government-wide computer recycling program called "Computers for Learning." In this photograph, Teri Cinnell, project manager, loads computers into a horse trailer at the Montana Heritage Project office for the final leg of their long



journey from Washington, D.C., to Libby, in the remote northwest corner of Montana. Libby received 25 of the 110 machines. (Right) Libby, Montana, high school student Chris Pearson checks out one of the donated computers. Pearson has a visual impairment and needs the computer to do regular schoolwork. In the background are teacher Rod Tempel and Montana Heritage Project director Michael Umphrey. Montana Heritage Project photos



In the Library's Prints and Photographs Division, curator Beverly Brannan (right) shows historical photographs of Montana to visiting Montana Heritage Project students and teachers, April 30, 1998. From left to right: teacher Philip Leonardi, Annemarie Webber, Gale Price, Kate Campbell, teacher Annmarie Kanenwisher, Matt Martindell, and Brannan. Photo by Peter Bartis



At the October 6 meeting of the Center's Board of Trustees, Board chair William Kinney reviews the provisions included in the Legislative Branch Appropriations bill that provide permanent authorization for the Center, along with fellow trustees: (from left, front) Alan Jabbour, Kinney, James Hoy, and Charles Trimble. Looking on are Christa Maher (digital conversion specialist); Joseph Hickerson (former staff member), Ann Hoog (reference specialist) Geraldine Otremba (director of the Library's Congressional Relations Office), Rachel Howard (digital conversion specialist); Stephen Kelley (congressional relations specialist); Thomas Bramel (team leader, digital conversion project); and Nora Yeh (processing archivist).

for board members, elimination of the position of deputy director (which has remained unfilled since the retirement of Ray Dockstader in 1993), and the addition to the board of six new positions—four appointed by the Librarian of Congress and two ex officio (the presidents of the American Folklife Society and the Society for Ethnomusicology). The

Librarian is instructed to name to the board "individuals who are widely recognized by virtue of their scholarship, experience, creativity, or interest in American folklife traditions and arts."

Center director Alan Jabbour was elated by the news. "Permanent authorization will allow the Center to undertake more effective long-range planning, fundraising,

and the acquisition of major folklife collections," he said. "The Center is now shifting to a new stage. Permanent authorization will change the conversation within and outside the Center, allowing us to show new leadership nationally and accomplish new things within the Library of Congress."

EDITOR'S NOTES *from page 2*

eloquence and enthusiasm of those letters and heartened by the tribute they paid to the Center and to the work of folklorists and of folklife programs and organizations in general. Many thanks for your help.

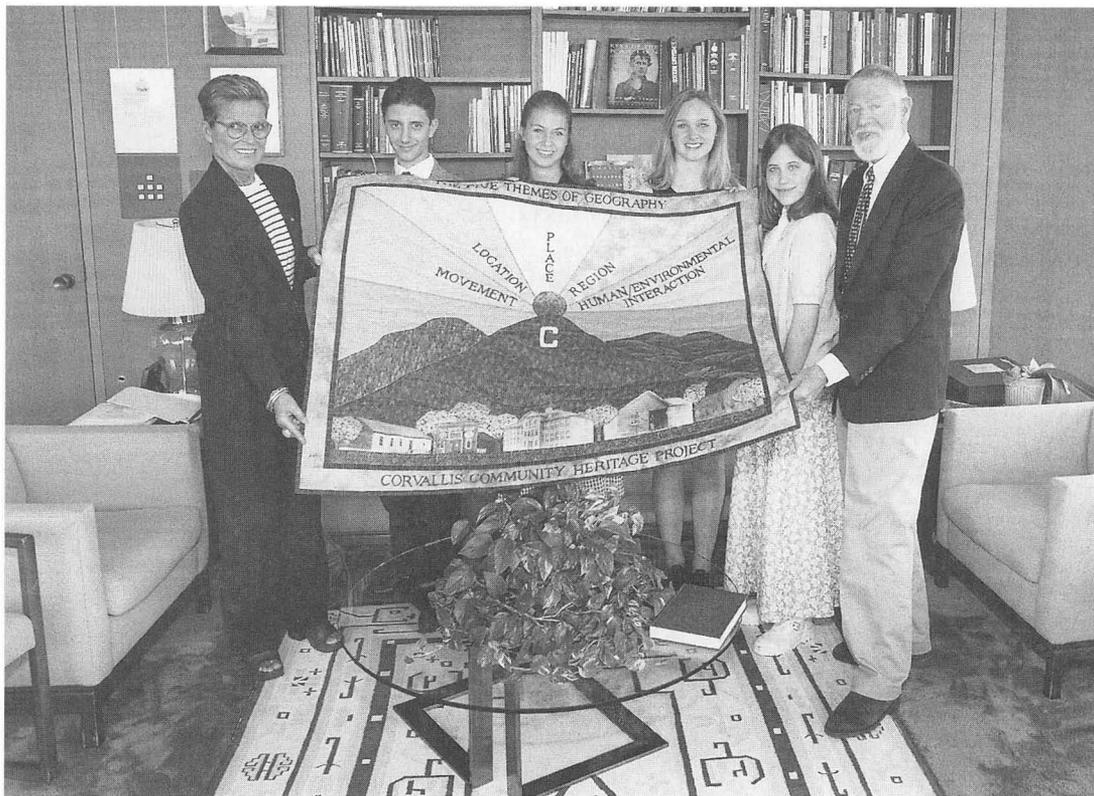
Library Launches Local Legacies Project

The Library of Congress was founded on April 24, 1800, and

currently has underway a number of projects to celebrate its bicentennial. One of the largest, and a favorite of the Librarian, James H. Billington, is a project to document local community traditions. This Local Legacies project will be the most comprehensive national documentation project ever engaged in by the Center. And we are gratified that many state folklorists and folk arts coordinators have expressed enthusiasm for the project and a willingness to participate.

Ramp Suppers

An excellent example of a "local legacy" that might be documented for the Library's project is the ramp supper that Mary Hufford describes in her article in this issue. Hufford shows the way seeking out, preparing, and talking about ramps ties a West Virginia community to its local landscape and to one another.



Liz Claiborne (left) and Art Ortenberg (right) meet with student participants in the Center's Montana Heritage Project during their visit to the Library of Congress on April 30, 1998. The project has been supported for three years by generous grants from the Liz Claiborne and Art Ortenberg Foundation, and students from Corvallis High School presented the couple with this quilt in appreciation. Pictured behind the quilt are students Matt Martindell, Gale Price, Kate Campbell, and Annemarie Webber. Photo by John Nelson

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