

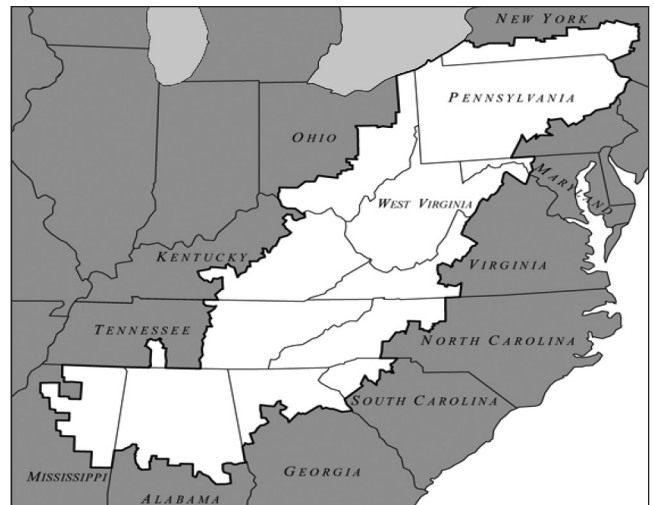
Home Grown – Appalachian Folklore

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Appalachian folklore can be heard in the stories of locals, the old wives' tales of the area and the spoken language of the people.

Folklore is defined as, “the traditional beliefs, customs, and stories of a community, passed through the generations by word of mouth.” For anyone who has visited West Virginia, or the greater Appalachian region, they have heard, and possibly even seen, that Appalachian folklore. It remains present in family traditions, like their recipe for apple butter, farming practices, techniques for weaving baskets and even their canning recipes. It can be heard in the stories of locals, the old wives' tales of the area and the spoken language of the people. That is Appalachian folklore!



A map of the Appalachian region.

Appalachian Language

Linguistics is the study of language, and people love exploring Appalachian language and dialect. Immigrants who settled the region, largely from Scotland and Ireland, along with others who have entered the area since, have led to a distinctly Appalachian dialect that varies throughout the region.

The Appalachian language includes vocabulary with different meanings like “sorry” (something of little or no value), “britches” (pants), “lick” (to hit), “poke” (a bag) and “afeared” (afraid). This language also is accompanied by strong accents! For instance, words ending with an “oh” may be pronounced with an “er,” like “holler” and “winder.” Those that end with an “ah,” may be replaced with a “y,” like “sody-pop,” and there are also unfamiliar contractions, like the use of “might could” or “a-prefixing” (a-courting). Finally, everyone knows how popular words like “y’all” are in Appalachia!

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This language and its dialects are just another ingredient in the mixture of customs and beliefs that make up Appalachian folklore.

Appalachian Folklore

Appalachian folklore is embedded with superstitions, beliefs and customs. Although people today may not live by these beliefs today, you still find sayings and habits deep within the mountain folk culture. Many have to do with death, sickness, weather and relationships – an understandable reaction to the dangers of this country’s early days of life. Whether or not you believe in them, you’re probably familiar with a few of these superstitions. But where did they come from?

A superstition is a half-belief or practice for which there appears to be no rational substance. Superstitions can sometimes have religious origins and are based more on cultural habits than actual beliefs. Here is an example:

Weather: *Winter will be cold and snow if corn husks are thick and tight.*

Since the beginning of time, man has found various ways to predict the weather. From this have come superstitions, old wives’ tales and cultural stories passed from one family member to another. Farmers have depended on these predictions and superstitions for planting their crops and harvesting the bounty for the coming season.

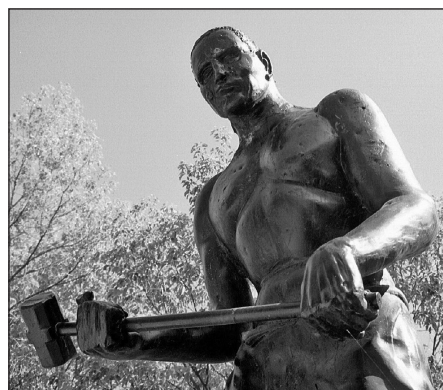
As fall approaches, farmers begin to gather their share of corn. Many old-timers would look to see how tight the corn husks were to determine how severe winter would be that year. Farmers believed thick, tight shucks on corn indicated a harsh winter. There might be some scientific insight as to why this may be true. Corn husks become tall and tight during a wetter season to protect themselves from the rain. An extremely wet year would likely be preceded by a somewhat wet winter that would produce snow in many cases.

Storytelling

Storytelling is the oldest form of narrative communication we have. In Appalachia, storytelling has served as an essential tool for the sharing of folklore and provided a perpetual reminder of who and what makes up the region’s history. Folklore only survives through this continued sharing of stories!

We all have stories to tell; stories we have lived from the inside out. Your stories and the stories of the people around you are unique, valuable treasures for your family and your community.

Using oral history techniques, you, your family and community members can preserve unwritten family and local history, large and small.



Statue of legendary railroad worker John Henry in Talcott, West Virginia. He is an example of real-life figures that evolved into popular folk tale subjects.

Keeping Folklore Alive

In a culture as unique and cherished as our West Virginia home, folklore is abound. While some may see the region as poor and rural, the early isolation of the area allowed history to live on through that folklore and the stories. There is pride in Appalachia that others may not understand; however, for that lore to remain, that storytelling must continue, superstitions should be shared and the next generation of Appalachia will continue to take pride in their homegrown roots.

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