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Introduction.
Researching and documenting Appalachian and Carpathian traditions: a comparative approach

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This address, delivered at the conference plenary, provides an overview of Appalachian/Carpathian scholarly exchanges over the last two decades. It also illuminates the many historical and cultural connections between Appalachia and the Carpathian. The presenter argues that there are more than just superficial similarities between the two mountain regions: individuals from the Appalachians and Carpathians practice the same land-use strategies as a result of "the Columbian Exchange." For two centuries, people in the Carpathians have been growing and consuming maize, tomatoes, beans, potatoes, peppers and sunflowers, all cultigens from North and South America. Conversely, Appalachians share a unique European ancestry and maintained many Old World cultural traditions well into the 20th century. Additionally, a significant number of Hungarians, Ukrainians, and Romanians settled in Appalachian coalmining communities during the early 20th century. Suggestions for future research and collaboration conclude the discussion.

Key-words: *plenary, Appalachian/Carpathian parallels, Columbian exchange*

1. Introduction

The eastern Carpathians remain one of the most isolated regions in all of Europe, possessing some of the most beautiful and picturesque landscapes on the continent, including extensive areas of old-growth forests. The mountains stretch from southeastern Poland to Braşov, Romania and cover an area of more than 40,000 square kilometers. The biodiversity of the Carpathians is quite remarkable as the mountains support species found nowhere else in the world and provide habitat to large mammals such as Brown bear, Gray wolf, and Eurasian lynx. The eastern Carpathians are also home to many different ethnic groups, a diverse peoples bound together by a highland way of life (Davis 2006; Amato 2008). In 2007, the United Nations designated two beech forests in the Carpathians as world heritage sites and continues to endorse the the articles of the Carpathian Convention, a treaty signed in Kiev in 2003. ***Article 2.1*** of the treaty underscores the "overarching

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goal" of the Convention, namely, "the protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians" (Carpathian Convention 2003, n.p.).

In the more remote parts of the eastern Carpathians, villagers continue to maintain subsistence traditions that have gone relatively unchanged for more than two centuries. According to Dr. Fedir Hamor of the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve in Rakhiv, Ukraine, the same highland pastures have been used for cattle and sheep grazing since the ninth-century, giving rise to an annual spring festival known as the "pasture procession" (Hamor 2005, 113). Wooden homes and structures still dominate many parts of the mountain landscape and mechanized agriculture has yet to fully invade much of the rural countryside (Sitko and Troll 2008; Davis 2008/2009). Interestingly, some parts of the eastern Carpathians share much with the American geographic region known as the Appalachians. Indeed, the cultural and ecological parallels between the southern Appalachians and eastern Carpathians are quite remarkable, as evidenced by the filming of the movie *Cold Mountain* in a rural area near Braşov, Romania (Inscoe 2004; Davis 2006; Stokes 2013).

2. Opening address

My first experience with the Carpathians came in 1998, when my friend David Kimbrough, a noted Appalachian historian, asked me to accompany him to Cluj-Napoca, Romania. I was on leave at Dalton State College that semester, due to a competitive research award, and decided to go with him. I knew very little about the country at that time but certainly wanted to learn more. Upon seeing the Carpathians from the train for the first time, along with the dozens of individuals who were still traveling by horse and cart--and certainly as many folks hoeing acres of corn and beans in the surrounding fields--I knew that I would one day return to the mountain region. As a direct result of that initial trip, the following year I was invited to present a week-long series of lectures on ecophilosophy and environmental history at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj. I was able to spend more time in the rural countryside and become somewhat familiar with the flora and fauna of the region. I also began collecting books, articles and other materials with the long-term goal of doing an environmental history of the Carpathians. As many of you know, my book *Where There Are Mountains* was released at that time so doing a similar book about the Carpathians seemed like a very good idea (Davis, 2005).

In 2002, I made my first trip to the Ukrainian side of the Carpathians, not only to observe subsistence practices there, but to explore the possibility of doing a community exchange program between Dalton, Georgia and Kalush, Ukraine. Kalush, the "Carpet Capital" of Ukraine, is located in the Carpathian foothills not more than forty miles from the highest mountain peaks (Canadian Institute of Canadian Studies 2001; Global Investment Center 2013). While the U.S./Ukraine Foundation and the largest carpet company in Kalush appeared to be open to the

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idea, neither the city of Dalton nor the local carpet industry offered funding for the project. The meeting did initiate dialogue between the Precarpathian National University and Dalton State College and would later result in a number of important Appalachian/Carpathian exchanges.

In 2003, I returned briefly to both Romania and Ukraine in order to do more fieldwork and collect archival documents. With each passing day, the project became more daunting as not only did I learn that parts of the Carpathians had flown the flags of seven different countries**,** but the most important documents were written in as many languages, including Romanian, Hungarian, German, Ukrainian, Russian and Slovakian. However, the publication of Katherine Verdery's book--*The Vanishing Hectare: Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania* (2003)—gave me considerable hope that the project was indeed a doable one, even though her book is about a single village in a very specific part of southern Transylvania.

In Romania during that period, I began working with journalist Teophil Ivanciuc, who was compiling data for a book about Maramureş that he would later publish (Ivanciuc, 2006). I also discovered the work of Kathleen McLaughlin, an American photographer who had lived in Maramureş several years earlier. I was so impressed with her work that I invited her to speak at Dalton State College in 2004.[2] Her presentation not only captured the imagination of our North Georgia audience but also the heart of one of my Romanian students, herself a native of Bistriţa, a Romanian town located near the foothills of the beautiful Rodna Mountains.

It was also in 2004 that the movie "Cold Mountain" was released in the United States, a film directed by Anthony Minghella. By now it was becoming apparent that others were discovering parallels between the Appalachians and Carpathians, including prominent film makers. Minghella told interviewers that the film was shot in the Romanian Carpathians because there were fewer signs of modern life there--powerlines, telephone poles, paved roads, for example--and the location guaranteed the winter snows that were essential to the movie's closing scenes. He admitted the costs of production were cheaper in Romania, but concluded that since the crew and cast was comprised largely of UK and Italian nationals, only about 10% of the production costs were actually saved by filming in the Carpathians (Gritten, 2002; Imre, 2012).

Parts of the film were critically reviewed by Appalachianists, but overall the movie was praised for its honest portrayal of life in the mountains during the Civil War. Appalachian historian John Inscoe said the film provided a "unflinching portrayal of the bleak and unsettling realities of a far less familiar version of the Civil War, but one that would be all too recognizable to the thousands of hardscrabble southern men and women who lived through it" (Inscoe 2004, 1127).

[2] A book featuring a number of her Maramureş photographs was published in 2010. See Kathleen McLaughlin and H. Woods McLaughlin, *The Color of Hay: The Peasants of Maramureş*, Hong Kong, China: Oceanic Graphic Printing (2010).

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Regarding the portrayal of women in the movie, Inscoe added: "Even more powerful—and more historically based—are those incidents that convey the brutal toll taken on mountain women, who as mothers, wives, and widows were forced to protect their families, sometimes by violently retaliating against their tormentors" (Inscoe 2004, 1128). One such scene was filmed not more than ten miles from Braşov and will be one of our stops on Thursday's (October 8, 2015) tour.

The year 2005 was truly a watershed year for Appalachian/Carpathian collaborations. First of all, in March of that year, Teophil Ivanciuc attended the Appalachian Studies Conference in Radford, Virginia, becoming the first Romanian to attend the annual meeting.[3] The session was provocatively entitled: "More Appalachian than Appalachia: The Carpathians of Romania." Kathleen McLaughlin was scheduled to present at that session but a scheduling conflict prevented her from actually attending. Teophil and I were able to present and discuss her powerpoint images in a her absence, however, and David Kimbrough provided additional commentary. Before the conference we were able to visit the Museum of Appalachia in Morris, Tennessee, which Teophil not only found fascinating but representative of Romanian village life: "It was so close it was unbelievable," Teophil told a Dalton, Georgia reporter." "It reminded me that 11,000 peasants had left Maramureş for America. 11,000 in ten years, and maybe some of them came to America" (Beavers, 2005).

It was also in 2005 I began my first Fulbright fellowship in the Carpathians. I was placed at Babeş-Bolyai in Cluj, the university where I had previously lectured. There I taught an Introduction to Sociology course as well as a course in Qualitative Research Methods. I also designed and implemented a Master's level course entitled the "Geography of Appalachia," which required students to compare the Appalachians of America with the Carpathians of Romania. Term projects were presented to the class in the form of oral presentations and included topics such as mountaintop removal coalmining and the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

In September of that same year I also began field work in Romania even before my official teaching duties began. For nearly a week, I lived in a small Romanian village in Maramureş, staying with a family who possessed no indoor toilet and used only wood for heating. I also worked with the family doing daily chores, which included cutting and stacking hay, milking the family cow, collecting mushrooms, wood splitting, and gathering vegetables for the kitchen garden. The later exercise seemed especially very familiar to me, as almost everything in their garden I had cultivated in my own garden growing up in North Georgia. I even saw "leather britches" hanging from front porches and butter beans trellised on long poles.[4]

[3] The ASA meetings were held at Radford University in Radford, Virginia, March18-20, 2005.

[4] Leather britches, a term commonly used in Appalachia, refer to pole beans that are threaded on long strings to air dry. In Maramureş, leather britches are hung in attics or on front porches in exactly the same manner.

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After returning to Cluj, I focused on my teaching duties, but spent considerable time in university libraries and public archives in an attempt to track down important historical documents. By the end of Fall semester it was clear that doing additional field-work would be virtually impossible while teaching at Babeş-Bolyai, so I asked the Fulbright director to assign me to Transylvania University in Braşov. I chose Transylvania University because of its close proximity to the southern end of the Carpathians and because it has one of the oldest forestry schools in Europe. It was in Braşov that I also met Professor Norocel Nicolescu, who allowed me to make several presentations in his courses, including one focusing on the environmental history of Appalachia.

In Braşov not only was I able to do additional research on the Carpathians, I also made several more excursions in the surrounding villages, including an important outing into the Harghita region, where Hungarians are the dominant ethnic group. One of my goals was to observe how ethnicity influences land-use strategies in the Carpathians as well as to better understand how the mountains influence culture independent of ethnicity—a major finding of my environmental history of Appalachia. I was accompanied by Professor Nicolescu and one of his students—Katalin Kóvacs—who conducted the open-ended interviews. Focusing on the eldest individuals in each community, we were able to learn about landscape changes over the past half-century as well as the decline of certain plant and animal species in the surrounding forest.

Later in 2006 I returned to Maramureş, where I was again joined by Teophil Ivanciuc, who had presented with me at the ASA meetings in Radford, Virginia. Our goal was to visit a mountain community that had, as late as 2004, no electricity. The community is comprised of Hutsul Ukrainians who live more than ten miles from any public school, in an area with few passable roads during the coldest winter months. In Aloha, the name of the village, we were able to see not only the immediate impact of electricity on the lives of residents, but remnants of cultural traditions found nowhere else in Maramureş (Pawliczko, 1994; Rus, 2008).

Before leaving Braşov in July 2006, I was able to purchase, collect, and photocopy more than two boxes of research materials, one of which was ultimately lost in an international shipment back to the United States. Believe it or not, I just learned a week ago (September 30, 2015) that one box eventually made its way back to Romania…..and so now, nine years later, I have the documents in my possession! After returning to the U.S., I continued my research on the Carpathians and also initiated an official partnership between the Precarpathian National University and Dalton State College. The partnership included two separate visits by the then Pro-Rector of the Precarpathian National University--Yuri Moskalenko--and translator Roman Posnanskyy who now teaches at PNU. In 2008, an entire delegation of individuals from the Precarpathian National University visited Dalton, Georgia before traveling north to the Museum of Appalachia, Berea College, and Marshall University. At Marshall the delegation presented papers in what was the first all-

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Ukrainian session at the Appalachian Studies Conference, a happening that would continue nearly unabated for the next five years.

In September 2008, I led a small delegation of Berea College faculty to Ivano-Frankivsk in order to attend a "Mountain Schools Conference" sponsored by the PNU School of Education. Among the Berea delegates were Chad Berry, Chris Miller, and Rodney Wolfenbarger, all of whom made presentations at the conference. Another invited quest was Barbara Nelson, who was, at that time, the Director of the Romanian—U.S. Fulbright Commission [and who is in the audience today]. As a result of that visit, both Berea College and the Precarpathian National University signed a formal collaboration agreement in hopes of promoting future exchanges between the two institutions.

The following year I was also asked by the field director of Ukraine Peace Corps to submit a grant proposal to the State Department's International Volunteer Leadership Program. The idea was to introduce Ukrainians living in the Carpathians to sustainable development projects in Appalachia. Although I did not meet with the Ukrainian delegation upon their arrival in DC, I did spend an entire day with them during their visit to Berea College in Kentucky. Stops on the U.S. tour included *The Crooked Road* Heritage Trail in Abingdon, VA, the *Craft Co-op* and *Green Energy Park*, in Dillsboro, North Carolina, and yes, several bourbon distilleries in Kentucky. One of the members of the IVLP delegation—Viktor Zagreba—is in the audience today and we are fortunate to have him here at the conference. Had the delegation arrived in Berea a few months earlier, they would have been treated by an exhibition curated by Chris Miller, the Appalachian Center's associate director. The exhibition specifically addressed the cultural parallels between the Ukrainian Carpathians and Appalachia as well as differences. The exhibition was entitled: "Thinking Twice: Comparing the Material Worlds of the Ukrainian Carpathians and Appalachia" and featured numerous artifacts that Miller had acquired on his 2008 visit to the mountain region.

Chris Miller returned to Ukraine in 2011 as a Fulbright scholar and would continue to explore parallels between Carpathian and Appalachian material culture. He curated additional exhibitions during and after his Fulbright tenure, including an exhibit of Carpathian and Appalachian images that were displayed in the Ivano-Frankivsk town hall. He also developed an exhibition for the Cultural Affairs office at the U.S Embassy in Kyiv that became part of the American Days street festival in Ivano-Frankivsk. The exhibition featured Appalachian images and was opened by the U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine, John Tefft. Another exhibition, "American Appalachia—Ukrainian Carpathians: Kindred Lands," was displayed at the first Appalachians/Carpathians International Conference in 2013 and now hangs as part of a permanent exhibition in the Institute of Pedagogy at the Precarpathian National University (Miller, 2014).

Miller also assisted in organizing the very first Appalachians/Carpathians International conference, which brought seventeen representatives from Appalachia

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to Ukraine in the Fall of 2013. Several of those attending that conference are in the audience this morning [kindly raise your hand]. I think all attendees would agree that the experience was important not only to their professional development, but also made them more fully aware of how important mountain regions are to their own scholarly work, if not the entire Appalachian Studies discipline.

Of course for those Romanians in the audience, it must appear that Appalachian scholars had, after 2008, lost interest in the southern half of the Carpathians. While I personally continued to promote and visit Romania during that period, most of the collaborative energy had, in fact, shifted northward. This would begin to change in 2012, however, when junior Fulbrighter Eli Ferbrache, a native of southern Ohio, made a presentation about the Appalachians here at Transylvania University. That presentation led to the creation of a Transatlantic Mountain Culture Lecture Series, an annual event organized and facilitated by professors Cristian Pralea and Georgeta Moarcas, our program committee co-chairs. The last of those meetings was held in April of this year and included a number of participants from Appalachia, including Dan Shope, Tyler Chadwell and Tiffany Martin.

So, after more than a decade of exchanges between the Appalachians and Carpathians, what have we learned? What issues are most worthy of our attention as we move forward? What is the desired outcome of this conference and others like it in the future? I wish to conclude this morning with a brief attempt to answer some of those questions—and perhaps pose a few more—before we introduce our next speaker.

First of all, the similarities between the Appalachians and Carpathians are hardly superficial. Communities in both regions evolved in close proximity to forested landscapes, which made wood and wood products economically important to their early development. Agriculture played less of a central role in both regions until the second half of the 19th century, with timbering and livestock production taking primacy over all other pursuits. Mountain settlements in both areas tended to be located in wider valleys nearer major water courses. Whereas transhumance--the seasonal movement of people and their livestock to the uplands was practiced in Appalachia only before the mid-20th century, it remains important in the Romanian Carpathians even today. In both mountain regions we see the creation of particular mountain landscapes caused by the presence of humans and livestock in the uplands. In Romania, it is the *poiană*, the biologically diverse mountain meadow that is the subject of much folklore and song; in Appalachia, it is the grassy bald, an expanse of mountain pastures created partially by the grazing of sheep, horses, and cattle on high elevation slopes (Amato, 2008).

Because the Appalachians and the Carpathians possess similar wooded landscapes it is logical that human life and culture in those areas would also be similar. In both regions, residents harvested timber from steep mountain slopes and the lack of railroad lines very often required the transportation of logs down major water courses. In Romania, the rafting of timber to large riverports downstream was

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a regular site in Carpathian villages well into the 1940s (Turnock, 2006)[5] In Appalachia, the rafting of felled timber was largely obsolete by the 1930s, after the region's major rivers had been damned for electricity and flood control. In both areas, the rafting of timber downstream required the presence of skilled oarsmen, individuals who often spent several days and nights getting the felled logs to their final destinations. Narrow gauge railroad lines were also later important in both areas, aiding in the removal of timber from even the most remote hillsides and mountaintops.

Regarding agricultural pursuits, the parallels are much more obvious as individuals from the Appalachians and Carpathians adopted the same basic food production regimes as a result of what Alfred Crosby has called "The Columbian Exchange" (Crosby, 2003; Mann, 2012). The Columbian Exchange refers to the fact that not only did Europeans take crops and animals with them to the Americas after its "discovery," but the reverse is also true. By the late 18th century, people living in the Carpathians were growing and consuming maize, tomatoes, beans, potatoes, pumpkins, and sunflowers, all cultigens from the Americas. Conversely, in the Appalachians, the growing of buckwheat, flax, wheat, rye, apples and cabbage only became common after established European settlement. This also explains why garden landscapes in the Carpathians and Appalachians are so similar and contain the exact same fruits and vegetables.

Not surprisingly, we find that both places are genetic repositories for unique heirloom landraces such as scarlet runner beans—which are Native American in origin (Hornakova, 2003; Richards, 2008). In more recent decades, American Pokeweed has even made its way to Romania, and can be found growing in vacant lots and villages throughout the country. Romanians have already used images of the plant in fine art and have even advertised it medicinal properties online. A much earlier American introduction to the Carpathians is Jerusalem artichoke, which grows nearly everywhere in Romania, especially along the edges of cornfields and roadsides (Filep et al., 2010). Some Romanians are even selling the roots as a cash-crop, advertising them on websites such as Alibaba.com for 700 Euros per ton (Alibaba.com 2015). Besides agricultural crops, numerous tree species endemic to the Appalachians have also become naturalized in Romania, including Black locust, Black cherry, Black walnut, Boxelder, and Northern Catalpa. Black Locust has become particularly important to Romanians, especially beekeepers, who perennially place their wooden hives near the trees so make acacia honey (Redei, Osvath-Bujtas and Veperdi, 2008; Enescu and Danescu, 2013).

[5] In remote areas, the practice continued for several mores decades. See, for example, Nikolai Nikolaevich Mikailov, *A Book about Russia: in the Union of Equals* (1988). "In 1965," Mikailov writes, "I was fortunate enough to witness the floating of timber down the Carpathian rivers in rafts" (p. 64). His descriptions of the practice refer specifically to Transcarpathia.

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While individuals living in the Carpathians and Appalachians have shared similar highland landscapes and many of the same agricultural practices, culturally, we find fewer parallels. But even here there are comparisons to be made. In Appalachia, as a result of its relative geographic isolation, European cultural traditions were preserved well into the 20th century. The majority of Appalachian residents were of European ancestry, so it makes sense that they would preserve traditions from their native homelands, including not only the highlands of Scotland, but also the rural villages of Wales, Ireland, France, England, Germany, and Scandinavia (Jordan and Kaups, 1992; Jackson, 2006; Milnes, 2012). For this reason, we find an entire range of Appalachian cultural practices that have their origins in Europe, including loom weaving and wood carving, folk music and dance, alcohol distilling, beekeeping, log-cabin construction, folk medicine, and even holiday celebrations.

There are also very real historical connections between the two mountain regions as a result of immigration from the Austro-Hungarian Empire to America during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Literally hundreds of thousands of eastern Europeans emigrated to West Virginia, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania during that period seeking work in the Appalachian coalfields and steelmills (Warne, 1904; Warzeski, 1973; Weiner, 2006; Lewis, 2008). Labor historian Lou Martin estimates the number of emigrants from Transylvania who settled in West Virginia alone to be in the several thousands, although he thinks that future research will reveal much higher numbers. His own family emigrated from the Harghita village of Lueta during the first decade of the 20th century, settling in the Beech Bottom community of West Virginia in 1914 (Martin, 2014).[6]

So given the many cultural and ecological parallels between the Appalachians and Carpathians, it is little wonder that we find ourselves here today, sharing histories, literatures, and cultural experiences. Of course many of the things that have occurred in these two mountain ranges are only understandable within their own unique historical and social contexts. Obviously we have a lot to learn from each other and will continue to do so in the coming years. I sincerely hope that over the next two days the sessions will enlighten and challenge everyone, as well as provide a very real foundation for future collaboration. Most importantly, the conference should inspire all of us to become better scholars, as well as better spokespersons for mountain regions and the people who call mountain regions home.

[6] Martin's paper was presented at an Appalachian Studies Association conference session entitled "From the Carpathians to the Appalachians: Slavic and Hungarian Immigration in West Virginia and the Pennsylvania Coalfields," which I organized and convened on March 29, 2014.

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