Bulletin of the *Transilvania* University of Braşov – Special Issue
Series IV: Philology and Cultural Studies • Vol. 12 (61) – 2019
https://doi.org/10.31926/but.pcs.2019.61.12.32

The effects of industrial railroad logging on Batesville, Georgia

Kelsie B. MAYES[1]

I am investigating the environmental effects of the logging industry on the Batesville community; more specifically the effects of the logging industry on the Soque River. By unveiling the environmental effects of the logging industry on the Southern Appalachians and the Soque River in Batesville, I am adding a piece of Southern Appalachian history that has not been told. Furthermore, I am applying my findings of the Batesville community to other regional mountain communities.

Key-words: *Appalachian History, Industrial Logging, Invisibility, Environmental Changes*

Batesville, Georgia is an unincorporated Appalachian community in Northeast Georgia. Located in North Habersham County, the community centers around the Soque River, with the headwaters originating in Batesville's northernmost mountains. The community of Batesville traces back to the early years of the county. Georgia creates Habersham County in 1818 from land ceded from the Cherokee Nation and the residents of Batesville create Providence Baptist Church in 1825, the first communal development in the area. Before white settlers moved to the area, the land belonged to the Cherokee Indians. The Sakwiyi Cherokee community lived in the area of Batesville before white settlers, centered around the Soque River[2]. The logging industry profoundly changed the Batesville community due to its effects on the environment which directly impacts the social, cultural, and economic make up of Batesville. Batesville represents a microcosm of other Appalachian communities who share histories of destruction at the hands of industrial logging, making the effects of the logging industry on the Batesville community relevant to Appalachian studies and other regional mountain communities.

[1] University of North Georgia, KNBURK0187@ung.edu

[2] Lucian Lamar Knight, *A Standard History of Georgia and Georgians*. (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company), 1917, 629.

BDD-A31283 © 2019 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:56 UTC)

The lack of railroads limits the advancement of industrial logging in the Southern Appalachians before the 1880s. However, the scale of logging was much smaller and less detrimental to the environment. Before the railroad, locals participated in small scale logging on their own property for their personal use and in some cases to make some extra money when needed. With the introduction of the steam powered saw mill the demand for lumber drastically increased making trees the new cash crop to some local small scale farmers.

Industrial logging came into the Southern Appalachian Mountains with the expansion of railroads. The Southern Appalachians are notorious for their rugged terrain, steep mountainsides, and tight hollers. With the progression of railroads and innovative techniques, there was hardly any land that was off limits to lumber barons. The Batesville community in northern Habersham County experiences the same extent of lumber exploitation.

According to Donald Davis, renowned environmental historian and chestnut tree expert, land speculators often bought the newly "discovered" old growth forest lands in the Southern Appalachians. In many cases, the land speculators would never set foot onto their freshly purchased land. Instead they waited until the value of the land increased and when a lumber company was prepared to log the land, they would sell to the highest bidder. Land speculators often used deception to make their initial purchase from the locals. Local subsistence farmers did not see much value in their steep, uncultivable land on the mountainsides and would willingly sell that portion of their land to speculators for a very cheap price. Sometimes, local mountaineers would even accept a shotgun as payment[3].

Most of the land speculators were outside investors and in many cases international investors. One of these outside land speculators that operated in Habersham County was Robert Pinckney Tucker[4]. Tucker specialized in buying property from locals at a very low price and maximizing his profits by re-selling to lumber companies eager to log the land at a high price. Tucker was from South Carolina, so although he was not an international investor he is still considered an outside investor.

Outside land speculators were not the only dangers to the land in the Southern Appalachians. Local land speculators, viewed by their communities as trustworthy people, often took part in the business. In times when money was desperately needed, usually tax time, local land speculators often went around the community convincing the locals to sell their mineral rights or in this case their timber rights for some cash. Timber rights including not only the rights to cut down

[3] Donald Edward Davis. *Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians*. (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2000), 163.

[4] Matt Gedney. *The Story of Helen Georgia: Desperately Seeking Helen*. (Marietta, Georgia: Little Star Press), 2013, 54.

BDD-A31283 © 2019 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:56 UTC)

any timber on the property, but the usage of any rivers or waterways on the property, the construction of splash dams to help move logs down rivers or waterways, and other means necessary to extract the logs[5]. In Habersham and the surrounding counties, the local land speculator was a John Martin.

Martin acquired land throughout the 1890s until he reached his peak of 20,000 acres. Often paying less than $1 per acre, Martin sells the 20,000-acre tract to the outside land speculator, Robert P. Tucker. Another strategy Martin, along with other land speculators, used to acquire timberlands was to find property that had been tax neglected. If they paid the back tax on the property, they became the new owners[6]. Martin made a nice profit by selling his 20,000 acre plot of timberlands to Tucker for an average of $1.30 per acre[7].

Tucker accumulates an additional 16,000 acres to form a 36,000-acre empire of timberland in the Georgia Appalachians and by 1909 sells his massive timberlands to an outside lumber company, the Byrd-Matthews Lumber Company. The lumber companies themselves were land speculators too. The Gennett Brothers Lumber Company, an earlier lumber giant in North Georgia, recounts the uncertainty in ownership for potential timberlands being bought by his company in North Georgia. As he discusses the many lawsuits his company experienced, lawsuits dealing with rightful ownership, were one of the main types the Gennett Brothers dealt with. This shows how easy it was for big investors to take over small mountain communities.

This undoubtedly leads to increased tensions between the locals and the outside investors. *Sound Wormy: Memoir of Andrew Gennett, Lumberman* depicts tensions between local Tom Mitchell of Rabun County and the Gennett Brothers Lumber Company when he recounts his experience with his first lawsuit in Rabun County[8]. The lawsuit was over a breach in contract and Gennett explains his experience with local courts as not favorable to him. “This was my first introduction to country trials and convinced me that the foreigner has very little chance before a local jury against a local man.”[9] These types of lawsuits were quite common for lumber companies to encounter, but it is this type of outcome that shows the hostility from the locals towards the outsiders.

---

[5] The Southeastern Reporter, *Vol. 90 of National Reporter System-State Series*. (St. Paul: West Publishing Company), 1917, 960. https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=fR0LAAAAYAAJ&hl=en&pg=GBS.PR3 (accessed April 12, 2019).

[6] Donald Edward Davis. *Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians*. (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2000), 177.

[7] Matt Gedney. *The Story of Helen Georgia: Desperately Seeking Helen*. (Marietta, Georgia: Little Star Press), 2013, 55.

[8] John Alger and Andrew Gennett and Nicole Hayler. *Sound Wormy: Memoir of Andrew Gennett, Lumberman.* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2002), 76.

[9] Ibid, 77.

BDD-A31283 © 2019 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:56 UTC)

The logging industry had reached the Southern Appalachians as early as the 1880s, but the scale of logging the timberlands would drastically increase with the expansion of narrow gauge railroads[10]. Prior to the railroad, lumber companies relied on horse powered logging practices and rivers to transport the downed timber. The method of using splash dams proved to be proficient, but not easily controlled, subject to weather changes, and only a short term solution for loggers[11]. Some of these early smaller scaled logging companies in the Habersham area are the Oakey Mountain Lumber Company, an outfit of the larger Gennett Brothers Lumber Company, and Tallulah Lumber Company[12]. These smaller companies are quickly bought up by the outside lumber barons from New York that create the Morse Brothers Lumber Company.

The lumber company that became the lumber giant in Habersham County and much of Northeast Georgia is the Morse Brothers Lumber Company, due to their usage of narrow gauge railroads that allowed them to access steeper mountain terrain of old growth forests that had virtually been untouched. The Morse Brothers end up building over 150 miles of narrow gauge temporary railroads that allowed them to access the prized old growth timber[13]. Although the Morse Brothers Lumber Company operated out of Helen, Georgia located in neighboring White County, with the expansion of narrow gauge railroads the lumber company turned into a regional affair.

In the 1920s when the Morse Brothers make their way into Batesville, many Batesville locals not only worked for the lumber company as loggers, but many helped laid the track for the railroad. Batesville native, Naomi Huggins, who lives on the very land that the Morse Brothers ran narrow gauge tracks through, remembers her uncle, dad, aunt, and neighbors all participating in helping lay track for the lumber company. In fact, as a young child she remembers being a part of this as well[14]. People in Batesville, just like any other small subsistence farming community, faced an economic depression long before the Great Depression in the 1930s. Naomi remembers her uncle that worked the most on the railroad made twenty-five cents per hour[15]. Jobs working directly for the lumber company was not the only economic impact on the area. The number of sawmills increases along

[10] Gordon Sawyer. *Northeast Georgia: A History*. (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2001), 106.

[11] Donald Edward Davis. *Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians*. (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2000), 166.

[12] Habersham County Deed Book yy, 580.

[13] Gordon Sawyer. *Northeast Georgia: A History*. (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2001), 69.

[14] Naomi Wooten Huggins, (Interview by Burks, Kelsie: February 1, 2016. Batesville, Georgia).

[15] Ibid.

BDD-A31283 © 2019 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:56 UTC)

with tanneries which used chestnut bark to extract tannin acid. The lumber industry was economically beneficial for those that got jobs working for the new industry in the area, but ultimately the lumber industry would do more harm than good for the local economies. With the majority of land being owned by single outside entities, taxes became much cheaper for those outside investment industries which made the local tax pool shrink considerably compared to when the land ownership consisted of mainly local individuals.

The Morse Brothers purchase their largest and primary outfit from the Byrd-Matthews Lumber Company. A pair from St. Louis, Missouri created the Byrd-Matthews Lumber Company which brings eminent change to the North Georgia mountains that shocked the locals. The Byrd-Matthews Lumber Company created the largest sawmill and lumber operation in the Southeastern United States, producing 125,000 board feet of lumber per day[16]. The Byrd-Matthews Lumber Company is also responsible for the creation and founding of the town of Helen. Although Byrd-Matthews created the massive dominating lumber company in Northeast Georgia, the Morse Brothers Lumber Company buys the operation and expands it even further.

Not only did the industrial loggers need temporary railroads for creating access to the rugged timberlands, but they also needed a permanent railroad to transport their lumber to the markets. Byrd-Matthews is responsible for bringing the Gainesville and Northwestern Railroad that connected the Byrd-Matthews Lumber Company operating out of the forming lumber town of Helen, Georgia to the closest big city, Gainesville, Georgia. The G.&N.W. railroad opens for operation in 1912 connecting the Helen to Gainesville with 37 miles of track[17].

Batesville and the surrounding forests consisted of a variety of tree species. In 1825 when the districts of Habersham county were originally surveyed, Batesville consisted of a variety of old growth trees including: post oaks, pine, chestnuts, red oaks, white oaks, blackjack oak, sourwood, hickory, Spanish oak, buckeye, and poplar. In the Batesville area, the three dominant species were the pine tree calculating at 31%, the post oak tree at 19%, and the chestnut tree at 17%[18].

The most prized tree in the Southern Appalachians is the chestnut. Averaging from five to six feet in diameter, not only the locals but also the logging companies saw chestnuts as a prized possession. The chestnut tree was a central component

[16] Gordon Sawyer. *Northeast Georgia: A History*. (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2001), 107.

[17] Ibid, 66.

[18] Habersham County District 6 map 1825, District Plats of Survey, Survey Records, Surveyor General, RG 3-3-24, Georgia Archives. https://vault.georgiaarchives.org/digital/collection/dmf/id/221/rec/10 (accessed March 15, 2019).

BDD-A31283 © 2019 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:56 UTC)

to the people of Southern Appalachia due to its wide range of uses. The wood itself was incredibly resistant to decay and rot which made it the primary building material for homes. In the Smoky Mountain National Park there is a cabin made by a single chestnut tree that is still strong and standing today[19].

The chestnuts produced by the tree were a staple food source for people, game, and livestock. In the fall when the chestnuts are ready to harvest, entire communities in the Southern Appalachians would participate in harvesting. Not only were chestnuts of great nutritional value, but they were often a source of income for many families. The locals were not the only species dependent on the chestnut, they were in competition with the game and roaming livestock too. Farmers used an open-range method for pig farming due to the vast amounts of chestnuts for the pigs to eat. Still today, a pig fed solely on chestnuts is a prized possession because of the drastic difference of the taste and flavor of the pork. Wild game also consumed a vast amounts of chestnuts[20].

The most devastating effect of Morse Brothers Lumber Company, and other lumber companies in the Southern Appalachians, is the destruction of the American chestnut tree. The lumber companies are not completely responsible for the decimation of this species, but arguably the most accountable for the chestnut trees' demise. The true killer of the chestnuts is a blight that is brought in on Japanese chestnut trees. American chestnut trees are genetically disadvantaged to withstand the blight[21]. We cannot blame the lumber companies for the blight, but we can charge them with the massive spreading of the blight. Natural forces are also responsible for spreading the spores of the blight such as winds, rains, and storms, but the lumber companies that are in constant exchange with different forests and lumber are undoubtedly responsible for increasing the spread of the blight[22].

The logging industry indisputably affected the environment of the Southern Appalachians. Industrial loggers cut down any and all trees by using the clear cutting method to log the timberlands. The falling of larger trees and subsequent removal of the timber destroys all the smaller growth in the forest. The logging companies were only interested in lumber that they would be able to make a profit from by processing it though a sawmill. This resulted in massive brush piles of small limbs and underbrush that the loggers left behind after they finished clear cutting the area. These large piles create a big fire hazard as they are essentially giant piles

[19] Donald Edward Davis. *Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians*. (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2000), 165.

[20] Ibid, 166.

[21] Davis, Donald Edward. "The American Chestnut in North Georgia: Past, Present, and Future". History of Appalachia, University of North Georgia, Dahlonega, Georgia, March 26, 2019.

[22] Ibid.

BDD-A31283 © 2019 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:56 UTC)

of kindling easily ignited by the lumber company's locomotive sparks[23]. Forest fires become a huge threat to the locals and wildlife in the area.

The Morse Brothers Lumber Company, along with many others, used the skidding method to move downed trees as well. The skidding method transported logs by dragging them across the ground using a cable system overhead. This resulted in massive gouges and ruts carved into the dirt which creates an even greater erosion problem. When it rains or snows, these manmade ruts multiply in size as they become ditches that funnel the surrounding water. In some areas, the scars left behind by the skidding log removal are still visible today[24].

Another environmental effect of the logging industry is the increase in erosion. Old growth forests provided excellent root systems and leaves to cover the forests floors. This creates a layer of topsoil that acts like a sponge[25]. With the removal of the trees, comes the destruction of the sponge like layer which results in compromising of the soil's stability and it subsequently gets washed down into the nearest stream or river. This creates another problem for the environment, the rivers are now being flooded with massive amounts of displaced dirt which eventually leads to the rivers filling up with dirt and becoming much more shallow. This causes great distress for native species of mussels and fish which were food staples for the locals[26]. This leads to a drastic cultural shift in Batesville and the Southern Appalachians.

Locals expressed the yeoman mentality of being self-sufficient and independent. Locals in Batesville used the subsistence plus farming method to make sure they produced enough crops for themselves and to provide some income to help pay taxes, or use to trade for other needed items. Southern Appalachians also used the safety plus agriculture method in which families would plant a variety of crops for nutritional purposes, but more importantly to even out the loss if one type of crop did not do well[27]. Common crops planted were corn, wheat, rye, barley, potatoes, buckwheat, and sorghum. Having this independence to provide the necessities for your family and interdependence within the community is a cornerstone value for Appalachian communities like Batesville. Although Appalachian yeoman farmers were independent subsistence farmers,

[23] Donald Edward Davis. *Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians*. (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2000), 169.

[24] Folk Pottery Museum of Northeast Georgia, "Lidgerwood Tower Skidder," exhibit, History Room, accessed March 9, 2019.

[25] Donald Edward Davis. *Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians*. (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2000), 169.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Barry Whittemore, "History of Appalachia class lecture", University of North Georgia, Dahlonega, Georgia, January 29, 2019.

BDD-A31283 © 2019 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:56 UTC)

there is a level of interdependence required in order to survive. Barry Whittemore refers to this as the yeoman paradox. The environmental changes caused by industrial logging strips away this type of autonomy that was so essential to the yeoman farmer.

When the land is clear cut and the mountains are left bald, everything changes for the locals. Now they have many problems to worry about such as forest fires, floods, the loss of fish and mussels, the loss of wild game to hunt, and the loss of chestnuts. All of these changes in the environment takes away the ability for locals to practice their yeomanesque way of life. They can no longer provide food for their families, which creates a dependence on store bought food items. Instead of the traditional locally produced sweetener of sorghum, store bought cane sugar becomes a staple sweetener[28]. These changes lead to a greater loss of Appalachian culture and heritage.

The destruction of the sponge like layer of soil also leads to another problem: flooding. Instead of soaking up the rain and adding the rain to the water table, now the spongeless soil funnels down into the bottom lands and rivers[29]. With the increased concern and danger of flooding in areas that had been clear cut by lumber companies, the federal government passes the Weeks Act of 1911[30]. Also responsible for the creation of many eastern national forests, the Weeks Act creates protection for already cut timberlands in an effort to end the frequent floods. The commerce clause in the U.S. Constitution, allows the passage of the Weeks Act due to research that shows the direct connection between lands that have been clear cut and the negative impact it had on the navigability of the rivers[31]. The Gennett Brothers Lumber Company become the first to sell their land to the Forest Service in Northeast Georgia which becomes a national forest. The Morse Brothers Lumber Company sells the land holdings, including land in Batesville, in 1931 and 1932 to the national government which becomes part of the Chattahoochee National Forest.

The Weeks Act did not stop the logging of forests in the Southern Appalachians. In fact, one of the primary goals of the Weeks Act is to protect the timberlands. This is a gilded goal due to the reason behind it. The Weeks Act is protecting the timberlands so that future lumber companies will have timber to

[28] Donald Edward Davis, "The American Chestnut in North Georgia: Past, Present, and Future". History of Appalachia, University of North Georgia, Dahlonega, Georgia, March 26, 2019.

[29] Donald Edward Davis. *Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians*. (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2000), 170.

[30] Ibid, 171.

[31] Forest History Society. "The Weeks Act." Forest History Society. https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=fR0LAAAAYAAJ&hl=en&pg=GBS.PR3 (accessed April 12, 2019).

BDD-A31283 © 2019 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:56 UTC)

log[32]. In the 1940s when the U.S. gets involved in the Second World War, lumber production skyrockets for many lumber companies in the Southern Appalachians.

The solution used to fix the flooding problem was the creation of many dams which means the creation of many manmade lakes[33]. This results in the forever destruction of some of the most prized land in Appalachia, the bottom lands of many mountain communities. The Tennessee Valley Authority is the most well-known and largest dam building operation in the Southern Appalachians. This forced removal of Appalachian communities completely strips away any yeomanesque qualities. The roots of the yeoman mentality derive from the need of owning your own land to do with as you wish in order to provide for you and your family. Now, the land that has been passed down through generations has now been stripped away and forever buried under billions of gallons of water.

Davis refers to a man named Glen Elliot who sums up his heartache over the matter. "The land was in our family for seven generations prior to TVA moving us out. We lost out homeplace. It erased us off the map, so to speak. I tell people that I'm from a little town in Tennessee called Carden's Bluff, it is all under water now."[34] When Elliot says, "It erased us off the map, so to speak," he hits on a very important part of Appalachian consciousness. Elliot is conveying the power of place and what that means to him. The power of place is a sentimental attachment to a location because it evokes strong memories, nostalgia, and emotion. Elliot can never feel the power of place in his homeplace anymore because it is underwater. Even after draining the lake and exposing the land, it would look so unrecognizable that Elliot would not feel personally connected to the land. This loss of the power of place also happens when farmers lose their land to timber companies to be clear cut. By the time the lumber company finishes with the land it looks unrecognizable to the original owner. People in the Southern Appalachians are still battling this fight against the loss of the power of place, however it is not at the hands of railroad, power, or lumber companies, but rather large developments such as gated communities and country clubs.

There is scientific evidence to back up this idea behind the power of place. Neuroscientists refer to "place cells" being located in the hippocampus section of the brain and describe them as being very powerful in sensory memory and

[32] Donald Edward Davis. *Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians*. (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2000), 175.

[33] Ibid, 182.

[34] Donald Edward Davis. *Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians*. (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2000), 186.

BDD-A31283 © 2019 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:56 UTC)

emotion[35]. The federal government was not the only means of threat to the yeoman way of life, local railroads and power companies funded by outside investors also made the same devastating choices. The creation of the Burton Dam and consequential Lake Burton affected many of the residents of Batesville. Lake Burton sits in Rabun County just over the mountain from the Goshen Valley, in the northernmost part of Batesville at the headwaters of the Soque River. The Georgia Railway and Power Company construct a series of dams stretching 28 miles to create water reservoirs and electricity through the hydroelectric dams. The Tallulah, Tugalo, and Chattooga Rivers were the target water source for this project[36]. In 1918 the Burton Dam is under construction and Bennie Eller recounts his experiences of clearing the area for the Morse Brothers Lumber Company.

Starting at the age of sixteen, Eller worked for the Morse Brothers Lumber Company for eight years and started working with them in the heart of Batesville in the Goshen Valley. Throughout his eight years Eller worked a variety of jobs. He helped subgrade to lay the railroad on, logged, and helped build trestles. His account offers insight into how the locals involved in the logging industry felt about it. Eller discusses his times in the logging camps and the amount of work the average man would put in every day. "We'd start at seven and work straight through ten hours a day for three dollars."[37] He speaks highly of the food at the camps and recounts that the company did not charge for room and board or food. "They gave you your board free. They sure did feed, too. In camps that I was in they generally had a woman cook – maybe two or three women would cook. They'd give you good food, anything you wanted if they had it, and just as much of it as you wanted."[38] The conditions Eller describes about the Morse Brothers Lumber Company's camps are drastically different than coal camps in other parts of Appalachia.

Corbin describes the conditions and realities of coal company camps in his book *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields*. Coal companies created camps on a much larger scale than the lumber company camps created in Northeast Georgia. The lumber company camps consisted of only the workers for the company, not their families like the coal company camps. The Morse Brothers Lumber Company camps also did not charge their workers for food or boarding. The Morse Brothers camps were also not overly controlling of their workers. Bennie Eller, who worked

[35] Michelle Mcclellan."Place-based epistemology: This is your brain on historic sites." National Council on Public History. https://ncph.org/history-at-work/place-based-epistemology/ (accessed April 12, 2019).

[36] Donald Edward Davis. *Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians*. (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2000), 183.

[37] George P. Reynolds and His Students, ed. *Foxfire 10: Railroad lore, boardinghouses, Depression-era Appalachia, chairmaking, whirligigs, snake canes, and gourd art.* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 180.

[38] Ibid.

BDD-A31283 © 2019 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:56 UTC)

for the company for eight years and lived in many of their camps, describes his time off the job as very enjoyable filled with hunting trips, drinking, and fishing[39]. On the other hand, the coal company camps went as far as to hire the preachers, to preach what they company wanted, and expected the workers and their families to worship with and look to them for spiritual guidance[40].

Hall discusses the role the relationship between capitalist outside investors and geologist played in the development of industry in the Southern Appalachians. Hall explains how the railroad companies that are coming into the Southern Appalachians are coming into the region for one thing: to make money. They are going to do so by exploiting the natural resources in the area. In Batesville and the rest of the Northeast Georgia Appalachians, the natural resource is timber. Hall describes how the railroad companies hire geologists to inspect the area which they plan to develop and circulate their findings which are basically a sales pitch to northern investors to come into the area to extract the resources. One of the main extractive industries that Hall discusses is the iron ore industry, but the lumber companies used the same tactics in Northeast Georgia.

Instead of circulating geological reports, the *Southern Lumberman,* the leading trade magazine for industrial loggers, sent photographers to find the biggest trees to photograph in the region. The photographers even use the technology of the camera lenses of the time to distort the size of the trees in the pictures to make them appear to be larger than they really are[41]. Davis refers to a well-known image taken in 1890 that uses this visual deception. The image shows a group of five American chestnut trees with two loggers posing by two of the trees. One of the loggers stands in the center of the photograph against the tree furthest from the camera. The two trees closest to the camera appear to be nearly twice the size of those in the back next to the man. This is because the lens in the camera during that time exaggerated the size of the objects that were closest in the shot. This camera lens flaw worked to the advantage of railroad companies that wanted to increase the influx of outside investors in the timberlands of Southern Appalachia.

The era of industrial railroad logging ends in Batesville and most of the rest of North Georgia in 1931 and 1932. The Morse Brothers Lumber Company sold their timberlands because the land lost its value. Old growth forests now look like a barren wasteland. So the Morse Brothers disassemble the saw mill and ship it off to

[39] George P. Reynolds and His Students, ed. *Foxfire 10: Railroad lore, boardinghouses, Depression-era Appalachia, chairmaking, whirligigs, snake canes, and gourd art.* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 181.

[40] David A. Corbin *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922.* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2015), 143.

[41] Donald Edward Davis, "The American Chestnut in North Georgia: Past, Present, and Future". History of Appalachia, University of North Georgia, Dahlonega, Georgia, March 26, 2019.

BDD-A31283 © 2019 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:56 UTC)

their next site of interest in Texas. The Morse Brothers sold their timberlands to the National Forest Service Commission. The lands acquired from various other logging companies, most notable the Gennett Brothers Lumber Company that sold 31,000 acres of North Georgia timberlands in 1911, eventually created the Chattahoochee National Forest in 1936 after splitting off from the Nantahala National Forest[42].

Once the Great Depression occurred, President Roosevelt issued the Relief of Unemployment through the Performance of Useful Public Works which resulted in the creation of many agencies such as the Civilian Conservation Corps. Starting in 1911 with the passage of the Weeks Act, Ranger Roscoe Nicholson, often referred to as "Ranger Nick" managed the Habersham area along with other nearby regions that had recently been sold to the Forest Service. Ranger Nick is also responsible for overseeing the works of the CCC in the Northeast Georgia area. There were two camps made for the young men working for the CCC, both housed in Rabun County. One was on Lake Burton which neighbors Batesville of Habersham County, while the other was on Moccasin Creek also not far from Batesville[43]. Ranger Nick and the CCC had a tremendous effect on the Northeast Georgia region during the 1930s.

> In two years, the young men he supervised in his forest conservation and improvement programs had built almost 150 miles of new roads and maintained 1,120 miles of existing road; strung some 40 miles of telephone lines while maintaining 300; covered some 37,000 acres in their timber stand improvement program; constructed 3 miles of new foot trails and maintained almost 170; surveyed over 129,000 acres of timber; built 28 new bridges; on almost 4,100 acres; controlled erosion on 14,000 feet of roadbanks; maintained 2 lookout towers; constructed a new picnic ground; and built 2 new public campgrounds and 2 fish pools.[44]

Now, developers are buying many of the communities affected by industrial logging in the early 20th century and turning them into gated communities for wealthy outsiders to live for their retirement. These gated communities are incredibly expensive to live in and do nothing for the preservation of the community and heritage of its people. In many cases, gated communities raise the taxes in the county in which they reside which negatively impacts the locals. Besides the negative economic effects of gated communities, they have an even bigger negative effect on the heritage of the community. Gated communities serve

[42] George P. Reynolds and His Students, ed. *Foxfire 10: Railroad lore, boardinghouses, Depression-era Appalachia, chairmaking, whirligigs, snake canes, and gourd art.* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 232.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid, 233-234.

BDD-A31283 © 2019 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:56 UTC)

outsiders not locals, which means that when gated communities form, an influx of mostly retired outsiders into the region with a lot of time and money on their hands follows. What this turns into is a bunch of people getting local political power, due to all their extra time and money, and they suddenly have more power and choice over what happens to local communities than the people who make up the community. I suggest that there should be a residential requirement to fix this problem and perhaps evidence to prove ancestral connection to the community or place. This would help prevent outsiders coming into Appalachian communities to gain local political power. An additional way to protect local mountain communities is to create legislation that prohibits the construction of gated communities on the grounds of historical heritage and cultural preservation. The federal government passed the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966 for the purpose of preserving historic and archaeological sites in the nation. Section 106 of the act details more about the cultural preservation of historic places[45]. To ensure local autonomy and not too much regulation, the key to this would be to have strong protecting measures for the community from outside influences, but also not be regulated to the point of not allowing the locals to practice the yeomanesque lifestyle they want to preserve. Creating legislation through the state rather than the federal government gives locals more autonomy in this process.

Batesville battles the beginnings of the gated community problem today. Phil Deguire, a developer from Atlanta, Georgia purchased over 306 acres in the Goshen Valley which houses the coveted headwaters of the Soque River. His purchases include 90 acres from local individuals and 218 acres from the Georgia Power Company and Soque River Hunting Club[46]. Additionally, he also owns a $1.6 million lake house on the neighboring Lake Burton that he purchased in 2013[47]. Geographically, the only thing that separates Deguire's two parcels is one mountain. He has already reopened an abandoned county road over the mountain that connects the two properties. He has also made several other changes to the lands he purchased in Batesville. He has built a skeet shooting building, torn down three homes, and cleared many of the large spruce trees around the Soque River, specifically near the site of the old Wilson Falls trestle bridge built by the Morse

[45] National Park Service: American Indian Liaison Office. "National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106: A Quick Guide for Preserving Native American Cultural Resources." https://www.nps.gov/history/tribes/Documents/106.pdf (accessed April 12, 2019).

[46] Habersham County Tax Records. https://qpublic.schneidercorp.com/Application.aspx?AppID=1010&LayerID=20413&PageTypeID=4&PageID=8926&Q=1679480815&KeyValue=031+001 (accessed April 12, 2019).

[47] Rabun County Tax Records. https://qpublic.schneidercorp.com/Application.aspx?AppID=674&LayerID=11359&PageTypeID=4&PageID=4744&Q=1789267444&KeyValue=LB05++052++L (accessed April 12, 2019).

BDD-A31283 © 2019 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:56 UTC)

Brothers Lumber Company. He has also altered the flow of the Soque River by inserting objects to create pools and small waterfalls to help concentrate the prized rainbow trout in the river.

Deguire has not announced that his plan is to create a gated community, but all of his actions are indicative of that result. For instance, the first purchase he makes is the lake house property on Lake Burton in 2013. He purchased the property under the name Wilkinson Burton LLC rather than his personal name. This is significant because the name of the firm he is a part of is called the Wilkinson Group under the Wilkinson Real Estate Advisors Inc.[48] The grantee's name on the Lake Burton property indicates future plans for the company to develop the area.

Communities battling industrial loggers today exist in other mountain regions as well. For instance, the communities in the Carpathian Mountains which covers much of Romania in Eastern Europe, are actively fighting lumber companies for illegal clear cutting and subsequent environmental damages. Perhaps communities in the Carpathians could have a different fate than those of the Southern Appalachians during the early 20th century. The first problem on the agenda is the illegal industrial logging in Romania and specifically Rodna National Park. The logging company that is responsible for this is the notorious Holzindustrie Schweighofer based out of Austria. The same environmental damages such as the loss of unique biodiversity, and erosion, that happened in the Southern Appalachians a century ago are now happening in the Carpathian Mountains. The Environmental Investigation Agency is documenting the illegal activity and calling for legal action to protect the Rodna National Forest[49].

Flooding may become another problem the communities in the Carpathians caused by massive clear cutting. An alternative solution may be a different method for solving flooding issues in the Carpathians than the one used in the Southern Appalachians. Instead of creating manmade dams and lakes that flood entire communities, a different method of flood managements may lead to more favorable results. Depending on how the erosion already is, flooding may decrease with the reconstruction of the sponge like layer of topsoil that helps add rain to the water table instead of to the water levels of rivers. This is similar to what the CCC did for areas affected by industrial logging in the United States.

The CCC created jobs for young men who were out of work due to the Great Depression during the 1930s. These men are responsible for the creation of many

[48] Wilkinson Real Estate Advisors. "The Wilkinson Group." Yardi Systems, Inc. https://www.wilkinsonrea.com/wilkinson-group.aspx (accessed April 12, 2019).

[49] Environmental Investigation Agency. "Illegal Logging in Rodna Mountains National Park, Northern Romania, October 2017." Environmental Investigation Agency. https://eia-global.org/reports/2017-illegal-logging-in-rodna-mountains (accessed April 12, 2019).

BDD-A31283 © 2019 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:56 UTC)

state and national parks, planting trees in areas that had been clear cut to battle deforestation, and much more. Creating jobs to protect areas against deforestation the local community would benefit in multiple ways. Locals could fill those job positions which not only does this create jobs for local people in the community, but their work battles the very action that puts their community in jeopardy.

Industrial logging forever changed the communities in the Southern Appalachians. The Morse Brothers Lumber Company changed the environment of Batesville which resulted in social, cultural, and economic changes in the community. Although the damages are irreversible for the Southern Appalachians there is hope to use the fate of the Southern Appalachians as a lesson in hopes of preventing the same travesty in other regional mountain communities.

References

Alger, John, Andrew Gennett, and Nicole Hayler. 2002. *Sound Wormy: Memoir of Andrew Gennett, Lumberman.* Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press.

Corbin, David A. 2015. *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922.* Morgantown: West Virginia University Press.

Davis, Donald Edward. 2000. *Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians*. Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press.

Davis, Donald Edward. 2019. "The American Chestnut in North Georgia: Past, Present, and Future". *History of Appalachia*, University of North Georgia, Dahlonega, Georgia, March 26.

Environmental Investigation Agency. "Illegal Logging in Rodna Mountains National Park,Northern Romania, October 2017." Environmental Investigation Agency. https://eiaglobal.org/reports/2017-illegal-logging-in-rodna-mountains (accessed April 12, 2019).

Folk Pottery Museum of Northeast Georgia, "Lidgerwood Tower Skidder," exhibit, History Room, accessed March 9, 2019.

Forest History Society. "The Weeks Act." Forest History Society. https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=fR0LAAAAYAAJ&hl=en&pg=GBS.PR3 (accessed April 12, 2019).

Gedney, Matt. 2013. *The Story of Helen Georgia: Desperately Seeking Helen*. Marietta, Georgia: LittleStar Press.

Habersham County Deed Book yy: 580.

Habersham County Deed Book uu: 141.

BDD-A31283 © 2019 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:56 UTC)

Habersham County District 6 map 1825, District Plats of Survey, Survey Records, Surveyor General, RG 3-3-24, Georgia Archives. https://vault.georgiaarchives.org/digital/collection/dmf/id/221/rec/10 (accessed March 15,2019).

Habersham County Tax Records. https://qpublic.schneidercorp.com/Application.aspx?AppID=1010&LayerID=20413&PaeTypeID=4&PageID=8926&Q=1679480815&KeyValue=031+001 (accessed April 12, 2019).

Hall, Randal L. 2012. *Mountains on the Market: Industry, the Environment, and the South*. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky.

Huggins, Naomi Wooten. *Interview by Burks, Kelsie*: February 1, 2016. Batesville, Georgia.

Knight, Lucian Lamar. 1917. *A Standard History of Georgia and Georgians*. Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company: 639.

Mcclellan, Michelle. "Place-based epistemology: This is your brain on historic sites." National Council on Public History. https://ncph.org/history-at-work/place-based-epistemology/ (accessed April 12, 2019).

National Park Service: American Indian Liaison Office. "National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106: A Quick Guide for Preserving Native American Cultural Resources." https://www.nps.gov/history/tribes/Documents/106.pdf (accessed April 12, 2019).

Rabun County Tax Records. https://qpublic.schneidercorp.com/Application.aspx?AppID=674&LayerID=11359&PaTypeID=4&PageID=4744&Q=1789267444&KeyValue=LB05++052++L (accessed April 12, 2019).

Reynolds, George P. and his Students, ed. *Foxfire 10: Railroad lore, boardinghouses, Depression-era Appalachia, chairmaking, whirligigs, snake canes, and gourd art.* New York: Doubleday, 1993: 232.

Sawyer, Gordon. 2001. *Northeast Georgia: A History*. Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing.

The Southeastern Reporter. Vol. 90 *of National Reporter System-State Series*. St. Paul: West Publishing Company, 1917. https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=fR0LAAAAYAAJ&hl=en&pg=GBS.PR3 (accessed April 12, 2019).

Whittemore, Barry. 2019. *History of Appalachia class lecture*. University of North Georgia, Dahlonega, Georgia, January 31.

Whittemore, Barry. 2019. *History of Appalachia class lecture*. University of North Georgia, Dahlonega, Georgia, January 29.

Wilkinson Real Estate Advisors. "The Wilkinson Group." Yardi Systems, Inc. https://www.wilkinsonrea.com/wilkinson-group.aspx (accessed April 12, 2019).

BDD-A31283 © 2019 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:56 UTC)