The People of the Plateau
Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow
Macey Hurst

Introduction

In East Tennessee, there’s a part of Appalachia between the Appalachian and Cumberland Mountains called the Cumberland Plateau. Many of the people that know of this area of Appalachia label it as backwoods, redneck or hillbilly. It is thought to be an uneducated and impoverished place. To many, it’s a fun place to go and visit quaint country towns, but it isn’t perceived as a place that holds modern values such as education and conservation.

Today, through personal family accounts, I’ll be exploring the reality of this place and not what many think it to be. Through studying this region during the Great Depression, I’ll show that this is a community is a powerhouse of conservation efforts, a hub of education and scientific history, and a place with a rich and fascinating history of perseverance and progress.

Below, I’ve listed three values that most wouldn’t associate with East Tennessee’s Cumberland Plateau. By exploring the history of the Plateau through the Great Depression and today, I’ll show how each of these values are a core part of the Plateau.

Conservation

The Plateau has a rich history of conservation. As a primarily agricultural community up until the Great Depression, most people depended on the land to stay alive. Today, the Plateau’s passion for their home is evident. The Smokey Mountains are a treasured part of the Plateau’s history.

Education

Since the Great Depression the Plateau has become a hub of education research. It has one of the nation’s leading Nuclear Engineering programs and is home to the Oak Ridge National Labs, one of the world leaders in nuclear research.

Economy

The economy of the Plateau moved from a focus before the Great Depression to broad mix of energy production, manufacturing, education, agriculture and tourism.

My Family

Mary Jane Hurst, Nurse
Sarah Hurst, Nurse
JN Hurst, Chemist
Reed Hurst, Chemist
Sarah Hurst, Nurse
John Newton Hurst
Jesse Hurst, Historian
Lois Hurst, Nurse

Sources