The People of the Plateau
Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

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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 how the reality of this place is 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 core parts 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 Smoky 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 nations leading Nuclear Engineering programs and it is home to the Oak Ridge National Labs, on of the worlds leaders in nuclear research.

Economy

The economy of the Plateau moved from a agricultural 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

Reed Hurst, Chemist

Lowell Hurst, Chemist

John Newton Hurst

JN Hurst, Chemist

Lois Hurst, Nurse

Sources


The Plateau Today

Today, the Plateau is a unique place. When looking at Appalachian statistics, the three counties comprising the Plateau (Knox, Sevier and Blount), are anomalies in contrast to the majority of Appalachia. Below, I’ve included two examples of this. [7]

The Cumberland Plateau is a living example that shows the danger of judging a people without knowing them. The Plateau is proof that despite the stereotypes assigned to it any group of people can rise above there circumstances and create a vibrant economy that is respectful of the environment.

The People of the Plateau

Kennesaw State

Tennesee