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I Start as Early as I Can and Work as Hard as I Can: Mountain Craft Producers and Their Work

In 1933 Mrs. Nolan, a weaver from Pine Mountain, Kentucky, spent several days each week weaving twelve-treadle spreads in her home. She had been weaving for most of her sixty-four years, making her own dyes from madder and indigo. Her daughter helped in the tying up, and, before his eyesight failed, her father did the carding. Although she taught her daughters the simple patterns, Nolan found twelve-treadle weaving too hard and didn't press it upon her children. [1]

Weaver J. Clarence White worked under factory conditions on the handlooms at Biltmore Industries in Asheville, North Carolina. Described by one government investigator as "a real craftsman" knowledgeable about producing good cloth, White nevertheless described weaving as "wearisome work." Around 1920, though, he abandoned his preferred work of firing boilers to pursue the higher wages weaving offered. White worked at Biltmore nine hours a day, four days a week; his weekly pay of fifteen dollars helped support his wife and four young children.[2]

An independent craftswoman, Rebecca Ashe, placed an advertisement in a 1938 issue of *Touring* magazine, inviting customers to

pay a visit to her home in Sylva, North Carolina, where they could see her handweaving. Not only did Ashe maintain her own business, she also built her own loom and dyed her own materials. An astute businesswoman as well as weaver, Ashe found that some of her coverlets sold so well that she could not "even get to keep one when it comes from the loom." Such conditions led Ashe to hire neighboring women to weave for her and to plan a new building to house the business. [3]

The stories of Nolan, White, and Ashe, along with those of hundreds of other craftspeople, suggest a complex picture of handicraft production in the Appalachian South. As weavers, these three individuals shared skills and a craft. Their stories reveal, however, that mountain craftspeople worked under a variety of conditions and circumstances, maintaining different degrees of autonomy over matters of design, production, and materials, and their attitudes about their work as craft producers were diverse. The producers, as well as the benevolent and commercial craft industries, mountain schools, and government projects, did help to shape craft labor and its products. Their endeavors entwined them in a variety of social and political relationships that constructed the boundaries of craft production in the mountain region. To comprehend these boundaries—and to get beyond those sentimental notions of the preindustrial artisan persisting in 1930s Appalachia—we need to explore the identities of mountain craft producers and the ways in which they themselves adapted their own customs and needs to the demands and structures imposed by educators and industry. What were the circumstances and conditions under which craft producers worked? What were the processes of craft labor? How did craftspeople define the goods they made, and how did they identify themselves? Only through such inquiries can we reveal the ways in which Southern Appalachian craft producers negotiated their own social and cultural worlds in a changing order increasingly shaped by capital and industry. As the following discussion shows, the mountaineers were deliberate actors in a specific historical time rather than vague and shadowy remnants of a distant past.[4]

Much of our knowledge about the worlds of mountain craftspeople comes from field notes recorded by researchers from the Department of Labor's Women's Bureau during 1933 and 1934,

when the bureau undertook a study of handicraft production in southern mountain homes. As compelling as the Women's Bureau evidence is, however, it must be evaluated in the context of the bureau's specific goals and interests. It was concern for the possible exploitation of women's industrial labor, as carried out in the home rather than the factory, that prompted this study. Aware of the presence of a number of large commercial employers in the area, the Women's Bureau researchers hoped to uncover sweatshop conditions in mountain homes among those working for enterprises that had "cheaply commercialized" crafts. [5]

Even as the federal government laid plans to incorporate handicrafts into their regional program for economic reorganization, the Women's Bureau questioned the possibilities for developing crafts as a means of earning a living. They also wished to dispel idealized notions of southern mountain craftspeople; bureau officials intended to reveal the presence of urgent need surrounding craft production in the mountain area and the ways in which unprotected homeworkers were victimized by low piece rates and poor working conditions in their homes-turned-workshops.[6]

The evidence collected by the Women's Bureau study paints a decidedly unromantic portrait of regional craft production. Bureau fieldworkers discovered that more than 90 percent of all craft producers in Southern Appalachia in 1933 worked for commercial enterprises. Semiphilanthropic endeavors like settlements and schools—the most aggressive promoters of the romantic image of the mountain artisan—hired only 3 percent. Craft production was almost exclusively women's labor: of approximately fifteen thousand craftspeople, 95 percent were women. In 1933, ten thousand of these were actually engaged by craft-producing centers—centers that ordered crafts from mountaineers and paid upon receipt of the goods—and all but six hundred of these women worked in their homes. Almost half of the women who worked in producing centers were also students at craft schools. Most were married or widowed heads of household between the ages of thirty and fifty; very few craftworkers were male heads of household or sons.[7]

These statistics, of course, were influenced by conditions in the area the Women's Bureau defined for its survey—the mountainous areas of Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee,

Alabama, Georgia, and Kentucky. Because part of the Women's Bureau's agenda in this study was to identify potential earning opportunities for women in the Tennessee Valley in light of the TVA'S planning, they made an effort to include the mountain areas lying "largely within the Tennessee Valley," as well as certain northerly sections of Virginia, West Virginia, and western Kentucky. Thus, the bureau surveyed some areas of central and western Kentucky situated outside the region that mountain social workers referred to as the southern highlands because it believed that the proximity and nature of these areas had certain impact on mountain industries. As a result, the study included chair companies and quilted textile manufacturers based in central and western Kentucky "in order that handicraft endeavors in the Southern Appalachian Mountains might be reviewed in their entirety." Moreover, it is unlikely that many Americans distinguished between mountain and nonmountain Kentucky; given the common perceptions of Appalachia and its states in the 1930s, it is likely that if you were a craft-sperson from Kentucky, in the popular imagination you were identified as a mountaineer, whether or not that was the case. [8]

In 1934 fieldworkers visited almost 60 of 105 identified craft-producing centers that employed five or more workers, ranging from the small enterprises typically run by guild members to large commercial companies such as Cabin Crafts, which manufactured tufted bedspreads. Under the direction of Bertha Nienburg, the fieldworkers interviewed more than five hundred craft producers in their homes; of these, almost two-thirds worked tufting bedspreads or caning chairs for commercial companies. Thirty percent of the centers they visited were in North Carolina; Kentucky and north Georgia each accounted for 22 percent of the visits, the latter reflecting the considerable impact of bedspread manufacturers in north Georgia.[9]

The evidence from the Women's Bureau study must be considered in the context of its collection, however. The questions that field investigators asked craft leaders, manufacturers, and producers reflected not just the agendas of the Bureau itself but their own cultural and social perspectives. The Women's Bureau investigators were outsiders, "experienced home visitors"—college-educated, middle-class women dispatched into the mountain region for a spe-

cific purpose. There they encountered worlds alien to their own and ways of living that were critically deficient in those amenities that urban, middle-class Americans used to measure standards of living and success. [10]

One can imagine some of the encounters between local people and the Women's Bureau investigators. Having obtained contacts for individual craft producers through the benevolent and commercial industries, the fieldworkers came prepared with forms, from which they read their questions and on which they filled in the gathered data. They inquired about household composition and the identities of craftspeople in the family—their ages, experience, types of crafts they made and where, the hours they worked at crafts for their own use and for sale, and how they marketed their goods. They also asked informants about their methods and the time required to complete particular tasks—and, of course, about gross and net earnings from craftwork. Attempting to get a more complete picture of the household's need for income from handicrafts, they quizzed their subjects about other sources of cash income, the food they raised and purchased, and their relief status. They also inquired as to whether some members of the household preferred to do other work. Although much of the data on the Women's Bureau questionnaires was quantified, the investigators included written comments that elaborated particular issues arising from their conversations with the mountaineers.[11]

Thus, we must regard the surviving evidence of these encounters as a negotiation between at least two parties: representatives of the federal government who asked the questions and chose the data they needed to demonstrate their own theories and support their arguments, and the mountaineers who nonetheless generated their own responses.[12] The questions themselves sometimes revealed the cultural and social distances between fieldworkers and craftspeople. As a result, bureau workers sometimes made inappropriate assumptions based on the mountaineers' statements. Interviewers asked, for example, if the craftworkers ever used their skills to make objects for use in their own households. Although the typical response was that the producers lacked the means to purchase raw materials for work they would not sell, the bureau used this question to "determine their appreciation of their own handicraft."[13]

Despite its flaws, the Women's Bureau study does help create a social portrait of Appalachian craftspeople in the 1930s. Many were farmers who raised part or all of their food. Others were displaced coal miners or other industrial workers who returned to the region during the Depression and found its resources insufficient to support their families. Clearly, craftworkers used their skills to obtain much-needed cash income, however small. The median annual income from crafts in 1933 was only fifty-two dollars, and those who earned three hundred dollars or more worked in production centers or as independent craftspeople. All of these wages compared poorly with the minimum earnings of factory workers in the South—twelve dollars a week, or six hundred dollars a year. Only 15 percent of the households visited by Women's Bureau fieldworkers depended entirely on their earnings from craft production for cash, but over three-quarters of the families had no other regular source of income. [14]

This sort of data helped the Women's Bureau in its efforts to draw a new picture of mountain craft producers that would dispel romantic notions of self-sufficient, traditional mountain artisans. The focus of its inquiry, and the people the bureau hoped to make visible, were the hundreds of mountain craft producers hidden in their homes, making goods out of need for cash but making profits for others. Relatively few of these craftspeople depended on skills passed down through the generations. Producers working through the benevolent institutions and schools frequently learned their skills at these centers (although a small number of weavers did claim long years of experience). Those working for the tufted bedspread and chair companies usually learned their techniques from neighbors or family members who were similarly employed. Many craftspeople, however, described themselves as self-taught. Such was the case with most of the women who worked for quilting and appliqué studios, although their mothers most likely taught them to sew. Some "self-taught" artisans were quite accomplished. At age seventy-one, Aunt Cordelia ("Aunt Cord") Ritchie of Hindman, Kentucky, became known for the fine workmanship and design of the willow baskets she taught herself to make some fifteen years earlier. Ritchie learned by copying pictures and taking apart extant baskets and studying their construction. The preparation

of her materials required much effort—gathering willows, boiling, peeling, and removing knots from the wood, and dyeing her baskets with solutions made from boiled peeled willows and spruce pine bark ooze. Her experiences differed greatly from those of chair caners who worked by the piece, or even from those of other basket-makers. [15]

Regardless of the sources of their knowledge, *all* mountain workers, the Women's Bureau found, saw their craft skills as a means to earn money. Only a few craftswomen considered their work primarily as a source of pleasure rather than a necessary form of labor, and they generally had other sources of income. Mrs. Finley Mast and her sister, ages seventy-three and seventy-nine, lived with Mast's family near Boone, North Carolina. Since the 1910s they had run a weaving business, producing rugs, coverlets, and bags that they sold mainly to summer tourists who boarded at their home. They established their industry in an old one-room house on their homestead, where they wove and exhibited their goods for visitors. They sold their coverlets for twelve to fifteen dollars each and their rugs for two to four dollars. Although Mast and her sister worked nine or ten hours a day at their weaving, they lived "far above the average mountain family" and were able to hire out their housework.[16]

Most craftswomen, however, found that even the low wages offered by handicrafts were crucial to their families' maintenance. With the added income, they could purchase groceries, clothing, schooling, shoes, and medical care. Although some, such as the widowed Mrs. Webb Coffey of Eton, Georgia, a tufter for Kenner and Rauschenberg, worked long hours in a "desperate effort" to educate her children, others relied on their handiwork to supply the bare necessities of food and shelter. Henry Atkinson of Livermore, Kentucky, "paid the rent out of the chairs then bought groceries. Nothing left over. Ain't got no clothes." And Effie Godwin, a chair caner for Green River Chair Company, noted: "[I] have raised my family with chairs. Sat and rocked the cradle with one foot and weaved seats with the other side of me."[17]

Despite the complexities of the Women's Bureau's survey and the social and cultural distance between informants and fieldworkers, the study clearly reveals three overarching structures that helped shape craft producers' work experiences: benevolent industries

based in social settlements and schools; small commercial businesses; and large manufacturing firms. Consideration of these structures is necessary if we are to understand the web of negotiations among workers, employers, reformers, and the government.

Ironically (or perhaps fittingly), those agencies that employed the fewest numbers of craftspeople had the greatest impact in promoting the romantic conception of the region, its inhabitants, and their labor. Settlement houses and schools provided many mountain craftspeople with training in handicrafts and sold their work through sponsored industries. As students, the mountaineers usually received a set wage during their instructional period; after they could produce work that met the institution's standard they earned a higher wage or were paid by the piece. At some schools, students' craftwork might pay tuition and other expenses while the institution provided materials and equipment. Berea College Student Industries, for example, offered training and work in weaving, broom making, furniture and woodworking, quilting, and rug hooking. Those enrolled at the college earned from nine to eighteen cents an hour for their craftwork, to be applied toward their education. Similarly, students at the Crossnore School in North Carolina and at the Pine Mountain Settlement School in Kentucky could work out their expenses in weaving and woodworking. At other institutions such as the Tallulah Falls Industrial School in Georgia, handicrafts functioned as components of overall manual training programs. [18]

Local craftspeople also enjoyed more informal arrangements for receiving craft orders from such benevolent enterprises in nearby communities. Two locally renowned basketmakers, Aunt Cord Ritchie of Hindman and Bird Owsley of Vest, Kentucky, for example, worked with Hindman Settlement School. A handful of independent producers around Pine Mountain—makers of hearth brooms, chairs, cornshuck rugs and mats, and coverlets—were paid by the piece to fill orders taken by Pine Mountain's Fireside Industries. Although benevolent institutions usually provided craft producers with materials, many workers supplied their own equipment; Penland Weavers and Potters, for example, helped mountain neighbors purchase locally made looms.[19]

The public presence of philanthropic enterprises within the Appalachian South and their widespread influence beyond the region

Teaching basketmaking, North Carolina, 1930s.
(Photograph by Bayard Wootten; courtesy of North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

fostered the romantic portrayal of mountain craftspeople. Yet the vast majority of mountaineers made goods not for themselves or for these benevolent enterprises, but for commercial businesses. Seventy-three of the 105 producing centers the Women's Bureau identified in 1933 were commercially operated. These centers manufactured candlewick tufted bedspreads, hand-quilted and appliquéd textiles, pottery, hooked rugs, woven goods, and wood products and chairs, which in turn were sold directly to department stores and specialty shops, mail-order houses, and jobbers. The nature of commercial craft companies varied considerably, however. Some were small, informal businesses closely related to the benevolent industries in their ideology and leadership, maintaining hand methods and small-scale production. Others were small industries that used both hand and machine techniques to increase speed and facilitate higher volume production. But the largest employers of hand labor in the mountains were large manufacturing firms that paid piece rates for handwork done in mountain homes. In 1933, commercial firms employed more than 9,400 women in the moun-

tains, most of them in just three industries: candlewick tufting, textile quilting, and chair caning. [20]

In the benevolent and commercial craft enterprises alike, craft leaders established the structures that helped govern their relationships with mountain craft producers. These structures enforced hierarchy and bounded the producers' autonomy in the areas of design, production, and access to work. They also defined—for Appalachian workers and Americans in general—the scope of "traditional" Appalachian handicrafts. These craft leaders tended to neglect established independent artisans. Potteries, for example, were generally small, local enterprises that operated independently of the social agencies and other craft organizations in the mountains. Craft leaders claimed a reluctance to undertake pottery production because of the cost of equipment, the losses through breakage, and the complex techniques involved. Such reformers, who presumably were devoted to the preservation of mountain tradition, ignored local potters working in long-established family businesses. The Meaders family of White County, Georgia, for example, had produced pottery continuously since the nineteenth century (and continues to this day). Government investigator Nathaniel Fairbank blamed the potters themselves for this neglect, saying they did not show any interest in working with the mountain craft organizations; he further attributed the continued independence of such craftspeople to "the peculiar personality of the old time potter, who considers his trade as a very exclusive one." In Fairbank's eyes, such independence could result in what he deemed unmarketable merchandise. Mountain pottery, Fairbank declared, was "cheap and inferior," with little "standardization of design, each piece being a separate study and creation by the potter." Ironically, the mountain pottery relatively untouched by revival organizations was excoriated for its uniqueness and authenticity.[21]

One way in which mountain social agencies structured craftwork was through gender. Their craft industries served mostly women, and gender determined the organization of particular types of craftwork and instruction therein; in this way, these institutions controlled access to work. The benevolent craft enterprises reflected and continued their late-nineteenth-century founders' predilections for the domestic textile arts. From their very inception, these proj-

ects centered on training mountain women in the production of homespun and handwoven textiles, the "lost arts" of their grandmothers. Women dominated in other needle crafts as well, such as candlewick tufting and rug hooking. By the mid-1940s, handweaving and its products represented over half of all the crafts produced and taught in each mountain state. [22]

Men, on the other hand, typically were encouraged to take up woodcarving and furniture production.[23] Woodworking had a long history in all areas of Southern Appalachia, but by 1937 the revival had introduced enough changes to allow Allen Eaton to identify two kinds of furniture made in the region, the "old mountain" and "modern" types. Craftsmen used local woods such as oak, ash, hickory, maple, and walnut to make "old mountain" furniture for their own homes—chairs, tables, benches, and bedsteads, for example. Perhaps the most representative "old mountain" furniture form was the curved-back "settin' chair," with seats of white oak splints or hickory bark. Rarely finished or decorated, the chairs often were made without use of screws, nails, or glue. "Settin' chairs" were quite distinct from the "modern" furniture emanating mainly from the schools, settlements, and woodworking shops in the region. Copying or adapting early American designs or unique pieces found in the mountains, such industries used machine tools for the initial production steps. Local craftsmen then finished the furniture by hand. In such woodworking shops, furniture production was an exclusively masculine venture.[24]

Many commercial craft enterprises in the mountains were small and informally organized. Nevertheless, mechanized production and high-volume output identified some as small industries; one such was a prominent commercial weaving company in North Carolina, Biltmore Industries. A major producer of woolens, Biltmore was established early in the century by Mrs. George Vanderbilt and was purchased by the owner of Asheville's Grove Park Inn, Fred L. Seely, during the 1910s. Seely was involved in a variety of philanthropic efforts around Asheville, and this business survived largely through his own contributions. Biltmore Industries specialized in homespuns and tweeds that were marketed all over the United States. Seely employed seven women and forty men in 1933, producing two hundred yards a day and keeping significant stock on

Advertisement, "Handmade Furniture," [1938].
(From *The Southern Highlanders, Inc., Handmade Gifts of Unusual Beauty*, sales catalog;
courtesy of Southern Highland Handicraft Guild, Folk Art Center,
Asheville, North Carolina)

hand. At Biltmore, workers combed and carded wool by machine and wove on hand looms. The pace at Biltmore was apparently demanding; Seely explained that he hired men as weavers because the work was too hard for women, although John D. Rockefeller Jr. reportedly reflected that the work seemed "too hard for men," too. **25**

Other small businesses maintained hand and home-based production. In 1933 more than 550 mountain women were employed in rug hooking. Some were hired as pieceworkers by temporary factories that supplied materials and designs, while others worked in their homes for such companies. Many hooked rugs as independent producers; indeed, one fieldworker traveling on the road between Burnsville and Asheville in North Carolina found hooked rugs displayed for sale at thirty homes. Mrs. B. E. Shepherd of Swiss, North Carolina, for example, employed herself, her two daughters, and two elderly women living on her farm. Shepherd gave the women old clothes in exchange for cutting strips several hours a day; she never paid them cash. Hers was a very small and meager business, but the income allowed Shepherd to send one of her daughters to Asheville Normal School and to pay off some debts. [26]

Even in the small businesses that typified the rug hooking industry, profits could be made at the expense of the craftspeople. At The Treasure Chest in Asheville, 95 percent of the business in 1933 came from hooked rugs that were made in a factory; just a year later, rugs hooked by homeworkers made up half its business. The Treasure Chest, which sold a variety of products to northern stores at wholesale, did not have to rely on local producers; it procured rugs from all over the country. Yet the store's practice of deducting the cost of materials and supplies from the crafters' wages surely made its trade in mountain-made rugs more lucrative.[27]

Some small commercial craft industries, however, more closely resembled and were often allied with the benevolent producing centers, either through the experience of their leaders or in their philosophies and practices. As did the benevolent industries, these small commercial enterprises generally kept tight control over design and production. Wilma Stone Viner, whose interest in weaving began during her work at Pine Mountain Settlement School, established her own studio—The Weave Shop—in Saluda, North Carolina, where she taught local women to weave. Although Viner supported the business partly with her personal income and felt responsible for the welfare of her workers in lean years, she did not consider hers a missionary endeavor; rather, she simply tried to keep and take care of the weavers she had trained. Viner's business practically supported the families of the three weavers she employed

Mr. and Mrs. Anderson making a hooked rug, Saluda, N.C.
(Photograph by Doris Ulmann; used with special permission of Berea College
and the Doris Ulmann Foundation)

for half of 1933. Viner's one-time partner, Clementine Douglas, established a similar handweaving business in Asheville, The Spinning Wheel, which she partially supported with her own funds. Douglas taught local women to weave and to produce a variety of woven goods and hooked cotton rugs; like other commercial firms, Douglas paid piece rates. [28]

A number of these small businesses actually grew out of settlement craft programs. Woodcrafters and Carvers at Gatlinburg, Tennessee, resulted from the efforts of O. J. Mattil, who began his work by founding and directing the Wood Craft Shop at Pi Beta Phi Settlement School. Managerial changes at the school closed the woodworking department, prompting Mattil to open his own shop nearby around 1932. The wages mattil earned as a woodworking teacher for the TVA at Norris helped him maintain the shop. Woodcrafters and Carvers produced a variety of items, including ladderback chairs with cornshuck seats, chests of drawers, beds, tables, and smaller items such as bowls and brooms. In 1933 Mattil employed three men at the shop and one woman who worked at home making cornshuck seating.[29]

The largest employers of hand labor in the mountains, however, were large manufacturing firms interested in hand production only to the extent that it brought them profits. Moreover, the tufted bedspread, quilted textile, and chair industries were highly organized ones, with hierarchical systems that certainly structured the workers' experiences. The greatest concentration of mountain craftspeople tufted for the candlewick bedspread manufacturers located in the area surrounding Dalton, Georgia. The Women's Bureau estimated that the twenty-five such firms they found employed between 7,500 and 8,000 women to tuft the spreads in their homes. The art of tufting and knotting designs on spreads was traditional in Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, and especially in north Georgia, where the large firms that standardized and commercialized the craft were concentrated in the 1930s.[30]

Although many of the commercial tufted spread companies began

in the homes of local craftswomen, they grew into large, profitable businesses built upon the cheap labor of faceless mountain women who tufted at home for low piece rates. As an industry, the candlewick spread business began around the turn of the century when a Dalton farm girl, Catherine Evans, saw some old candlewick spreads while visiting relatives "back in the hills." She subsequently learned to tuft and sold her spreads in the community. Evans eventually began selling to northern department stores, hiring out tufting as piecework to neighboring women to meet the production demand. Many of the women who began by working for Catherine Evans eventually went into business for themselves. [31]

The candlewick spread industry had tremendous profit potential for entrepreneurs. Because most of the work was done in mountain homes, there were few overhead expenses; a manufacturer needed only a line of credit and some orders for spreads to begin work. The four founders of one of Dalton's largest firms, Kenner and Rauschenberg, started the company in the late 1910s with only $150 in capital. By 1933 they were able to "retire and live comfortably" from their profits, which they claimed they made from the labor of six thousand families. Following Catherine Evans's lead, many local families started their own tufted spread businesses at home; some of these remained small in scale, but others did a large volume of business.[32]

Although most of the tufted textile manufacturing companies were initially founded by women, by the early 1920s businessmen, realizing the potential in tufted spread manufacturing, began appropriating the industry. One of the industry's largest companies, Cabin Crafts Company, which did about $1 million in business in 1940, was founded by the executives of a former hosiery mill in Dalton. Five new firms were capitalized and opened in 1934, in the depths of the Depression. Twenty companies sold over a million dollars' worth of goods in 1933, and the market peaked in 1937 at over $4 million.[33]

The organization of the spread industry placed burdens on the tufters themselves, enhancing the profits that went to the manufacturing firms. Tufters, for example, absorbed the costs of transporting the spreads to rural homes. Sometimes these "hauling" arrangements were quite informal. In other cases, large companies

Tufted candlewick spread, "Blue Bell" pattern, late nineteenth to early twentieth century, Allanstand Cottage Industries.
(Courtesy of Southern Highland Handicraft Guild, Folk Art Center, Asheville, North Carolina)

with a wide geographical distribution of tufters relied on complex systems of haulers and subhaulers, and they sometimes established "spread sheds" in rural areas as bases of distribution; the haulers' commissions came out of the price for each spread and thus out of the craftswomen's wages. [34]

Beginning in 1933, however, the tufted bedspread industry and its homeworkers, like all mountain craft enterprises, were faced with the federal government's first efforts to regulate industrial homework since the First World War. The National Industrial Recovery Act of that year called for the development of industrial codes on an industry-by-industry basis; these codes established standards for minimum wages, hours of work, and child labor. Still, industries found ways to maximize their own profits. Many of the new codes banned homework altogether, but in practice employers found ample opportunities for circumventing both the codes and their enforcers. Under pressure from the NRA, candlewick spread manufacturers had agreed by 1935 to pay homeworkers directly

Advertisement for Eleanor Beard's hand-quilted coats, 1930s.
(From *Eleanor Beard: Original Design in Fine Hand Quilting*, catalog; courtesy of Women's Bureau Records, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; used by permission of Eleanor Beard, Inc., Hardinsburg, Kentucky)

and to pay distributing agents as company employees; the NRA was not, however, able to increase piece rates enough to bring about a more reasonable wage. In 1935 the NRA was nullified, and the task of homework regulation fell instead to the state legislatures. Continued attempts at regulation pushed some manufacturers to bring more work into the factories, where they paid tufters to work

either by hand or on new tufting or "chenille" machines. Although some tufting was done on small machines in homes in the 1920s, the first patent for a single-needle machine—to Glen Looper—was not issued until 1936. The wage-and-hour laws further discouraged home-based hand labor and nurtured the mechanization of the industry in the later 1930s. [35]

Manufacturers eventually created a profitable tufted textile industry based on machine production. This was not the case with quilted goods, however. Candlewicking allowed repetition of a single pattern on multiple pieces, but hand quilting generally was custom work. In 1933 more than eight hundred women did hand quilting for twelve firms whose studios were located in Kentucky's Hardin and Breckinridge Counties. These manufacturers had established factories or studios near the mountain area expressly to obtain handcrafted goods that they sold nationwide. Nine such firms sold around $400,000 worth of goods in 1933.[36]

The women of Kentucky who worked for the quilting studios became known for their exceptional needle skills, and products advertised as the work of Kentucky quiltmakers drew attention and suggested quality. These firms manufactured "American," trapunto, and appliquéd quilts, pillows, comforters, spreads, baby blankets. and clothing, and women's goods such as robes and bed jackets. Even consumers who weren't interested in the completed products could buy a Kentucky craftswoman's skill. *Good Housekeeping* editor Anne Orr ran advertisements for quilt and needlework patterns, with the suggestion that women lacking the time, inclination, or skill to make their own quilts consider purchasing the services of Kentucky needlewomen.[37]

Such advertisements disguised the fact that local needlewomen rarely devised or controlled the designs of their work. Indeed, some companies had New York headquarters that supplied materials, instructions, and designs and often set piece rates as well. The studios of American Needlecrafts, Inc., in Hardinsburg and Elizabethtown, Kentucky, were essentially work distribution centers that shipped finished products directly to consumers; the main offices were located on Fifth Avenue in New York. The Elizabethtown plant hired seventy-five to a hundred homeworkers on a regular basis in 1934. One local Kentucky concern, Elizabethtown Needle-

crafts, contracted with three New York firms that sent instructions and materials to the Kentucky studio and set piece rates. Other firms did have local roots. Eleanor Beard, for example, whose husband owned a local general store, opened her studio in Hardinsburg, Kentucky; by 1929, Beard had sales outlets in Pasadena, Santa Barbara, and Chicago. In 1931, two local tailors who were laid off by Beard began the firm Galante, Inc., also in Hardinsburg, and one of Beard's quilters, Mrs. A. H. Withers, later opened her own business in Kirk, Kentucky. [38] Although these needlework firms varied greatly in size—Elizabethtown Needlecrafts hired only six house-holds to work at home for them in 1934, whereas Miller Brothers of Elizabethtown employed two hundred families of homeworkers that year—the average company retained one hundred or more households on a regular basis. Some individuals also worked at the studios as cutters, stampers, and inspectors.[39]

In some areas of the Tennessee Valley and western Kentucky, chair manufacturers hired large numbers of local women to weave chair seats. Morristown Chair Company in Morristown, Tennessee, and the Livermore Chair Company and Greene River Chair Company in Livermore, Kentucky, together employed almost five hundred women and men to seat straight-backed and rocking chairs in 1933. These firms had considerable impact on their local communities. Although the Depression had hit the chair industry hard, one worker claimed that chair manufacturers had the city of Livermore "all tied up." Other industries that attempted to locate in the town had been kept out by the chair companies, who also, he said, "control the relief and everything." In addition to the one hundred to two hundred families each company hired to cane chair seats at home, each also employed men at its shops to construct the frames and finish the goods.[40]

We cannot, however, view Appalachian craft producers solely as laborers or as preservers of long-practiced family or community traditions. The craftworkers' economic status, social relationships, and local and family customs, as well as the conditions and terms of craft labor, shaped their experiences. Indeed, craft producers' ambivalent reflections upon their work suggest the complex and shifting meanings of craft labor in a changing world increasingly bounded by industrialism.

Whether a homeworker working at piece rates, an independent entrepreneur managing her own business, or a student at a social settlement learning a craft, the 1930s mountaineer saw in handicraft work opportunities for a cash income. Moreover, the long hours that women and men labored at their craftwork, together with the low wages and exploitation they endured, suggest that they well understood craft production to be a form of disciplined labor. Despite craft leaders' insistence that this was supplementary income earned in leisure hours, women often pursued craftwork as a full- or part-time job, rather than working at it at odd times between other primary chores. Bedspread tufters, quilters, and chair caners for commercial firms, in particular, worked long hours to complete orders quickly so that they could obtain more work. The majority of women tufted anywhere from seven to ten hours a day to meet their orders, sometimes stopping only for the midday meal. Others in the household assumed responsibility for chores and child care so that these women could work full time at the tufting (or "turfing," as it was then called), and at rush times families would postpone household chores, giving the spreads priority over all other activities. These were certainly not mountain artisans working in off hours for pleasure or to meet the needs merely of their households or local communities. [41]

Such devotion to their work yielded only meager incomes. In 1933–34 tufters made only five to fourteen cents an hour in wages; code changes in 1934 raised piece rates but resulted in earnings of only ten to fifteen cents an hour before the deduction of haulers' commissions. About 30 percent of all candlewick workers earned one to two dollars a week, though more than a fourth earned less than a dollar. Fewer than 25 percent made two to three dollars a week. The industry's distribution system in the mountains had tremendous impact on tufters' wages. Tufters who obtained their work directly from the factory could make eighteen cents a spread, whereas women who acquired their materials from spread sheds made four cents less, and workers who relied on subhaulers for their materials received only twelve cents for each spread.[42]

Tufters' earnings were consistently hampered by low piece rates, and only a few companies posted varying rates for particular patterns. Spread companies rarely performed time tests on their pat-

terns to determine fair rates, and even when they did, the conditions under which they tested their workers did not reflect the particular situations of mountain homeworkers. The C. B. Woods Company did conduct a time test of all its patterns, but it used three people who worked in the center, not at home, under conditions that homeworkers could not possibly have maintained day after day. The company's testers were also given Coca-Colas during rest periods each morning and afternoon to speed up their work. After June 1934, NRA codes encouraged the industry to base piece rates on the amount of yarn and the kind of muslin used for each pattern, but there still remained great discrepancies in the time it took to complete different patterns using the same amounts of yarn. [43]

Women who sewed for quilting and appliqué firms had similar experiences. They worked long days and frequently into the night; Alberta Walls of Hardinsburg, Kentucky, routinely worked from 4:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. and sometimes until midnight or 1:00 A.M. in the winter. Lulu Snyder of Harned, Kentucky, began work for Eleanor Beard at 5:30 or 6:00 A.M., or sometimes as early as 3:00 A.M. She interrupted her work to prepare the noon meal but continued quilting after supper until 10:30 or 11:00 P.M. Furthermore, American Needlecrafts' Hardinsburg workers complained that they were never informed about specific piece rates until they returned the finished work to the studio. Over 40 percent of all hand quilters earned an annual sum of one hundred dollars or more, but 30 percent earned fifty dollars or less.[44]

Moreover, most of the expenses for tools and transportation were borne by the craftworkers. Although these needlewomen didn't lose part of their earnings to haulers, they never received compensation for the time and money they spent picking up materials and delivering finished goods to the studios; because the studios often omitted pattern pieces or supplied inadequate amounts of materials to finish the goods, many women had to make several trips per week. A few firms sent work out through the mail, especially when workers lived far from town. Louisville's Regina, Inc., paid one-way postage for materials sent to women in their homes, but they trained women only at the studio when introducing a new kind of work or design. As a rule, quilting firms furnished the wool, cotton, crepes, silks, satins, velvets, and thread, but workers provided their own equip-

ment—thimbles, needles, sewing machine, scissors, quilting frame, and iron. [45]

Methods for determining quilting piece rates varied, possibly reflecting the experiences and personal histories of business owners. Mrs. Kleinjohn, owner of Regina, Inc., claimed to strike a balance between the rate she had in mind and her workers' accounts of the time required for the job. Regina, Inc., apparently paid higher rates than some other firms, for Kleinjohn complained that the Hardinsburg firms paid seventy-five cents to a dollar on quilts for which she paid three dollars. Mrs. Withers, a former homeworker for Eleanor Beard who became co-owner of her own quilting firm, figured piece rates for new goods by the yardage of thread used or by comparison with similarly worked pieces. As a former homeworker herself, Withers claimed sensitivity to the rights and needs of her employees. She declared that she had paid as high as thirty dollars for a piece and divided the profits with her workers, who were "friends and neighbors." Withers often passed on to local workers her customers' requests for someone to do the quilting on quilt tops they had made themselves; on such jobs she took a 50 percent commission. Eleanor Beard maintained that she discussed completion times for the goods with her homeworkers. Beard made no apologies for her profits, however, and admitted having "made a beautiful living"; she believed twenty cents an hour "a grand price for country people." As Beard commented: "Never said I was an altruist."[46]

Low piece rates were only one of the wage inequities that homeworkers had to bear; they also absorbed many of the hidden costs of manufacturing. Chair caners, for example, received no compensation for storing chairs in their already cramped homes. Some firms gave out no fewer than two dozen chairs with each caning order, and these were distributed early in the week, remaining at the workers' homes until company haulers collected them. In the meantime, the workers were responsible for keeping them clean and dry. Some families stacked them on the porch, but those without porches were forced to keep the chairs inside their small and crowded cabins. At the Morristown Chair Company in 1933, twenty-five men worked eight-hour days and together earned almost $4,000 in wages. The same sum went to the two hundred women caners who each earned $1.00 per dozen seats for basketweave and $1.20 for a dozen of the

more complicated herringbone weave. Caners were rarely docked for poor work; the companies usually gave them a couple of chances to prove their skill and then simply ceased to hire those who produced substandard work. [47]

Producers employed by smaller firms might work long hours but could draw higher wages. Rug hookers frequently worked eight- to ten-hour days. Working together in their shop, Mrs. M. A. Stewart and her husband produced three rugs daily, two feet by four feet in size, and completed twenty-seven square feet a day on larger pieces. The couple had steady work hooking rugs for The Treasure Chest for most of 1933. They received 12 1/2 cents per square foot, regardless of the design, and together they earned about $750 for the year. At the Madison Rug Shop, Mrs. S. M. Robinson worked ten or more hours a day punching hooked rugs for 10 cents a square foot, acquiring almost $60 in six weeks; her colleague, Mrs. Chandler of Mars Hill, North Carolina, earned 80 cents per ten-hour day as a "string cutter," or $140 a year. Mrs. S. A. Armstrong of Knoxville paid four women 25 cents per square foot to make hooked rugs at home from materials Armstrong supplied. By comparison, in 1933 Clementine Douglas of The Spinning Wheel offered her workers 60 cents a square foot for weaving rugs, for which they also furnished all materials.[48]

Hours and wages among craftworkers for benevolent agencies and schools varied according to the needs of workers, the work available, and in some cases the particular craft and sex of the producer. Almost half of those working for the benevolent centers earned $50 or less annually, and about a third made $50 to $100 each year. At one of the most successful producing centers, workers earned piece rates that brought them about 30 cents an hour. They averaged $16 a month, or just under $200 a year. Bertha Nienburg, director of the Women's Bureau survey, complained that both the philanthropic and commercial centers believed that wages of 10 to 12 cents an hour for craftswomen and 20 to 25 cents an hour for craftsmen were sufficient. Such low hourly wages, Nienburg protested, reflected an ignorance of craft processes that set insufficient piece rates.[49]

Women and girls learning to weave at the settlement schools generally received an hourly wage during the learning period, re-

gardless of what prices were set for the finished goods. Crossnore School students received 10 cents an hour for the six hours each week they spent learning to weave. Once they became accomplished at their craft, their wages and hours varied, but earnings remained low. Generally, women move six hours a day once or twice a week at the school, earning by the piece. Mrs. Cuthbertson earned about $35 in one year, making 15 cents on bags and 75 on blankets that sold for $1.50 and $3.50, respectively. [50]

As did the commercial companies, benevolent craft industries often failed to compensate craftworkers for some of the hidden costs of their labor. At Pine Mountain Settlement School, for example, Mrs. Nolan earned a dollar for each yard of material she wove, but neither she nor most other women were paid for time they spent preparing the loom. Mrs. Nolan could complete about one yard each five- to seven-hour day on her twelve-treadle spreads. Nevertheless, it also took her a day to thread the loom, another day to tie up, and yet another to wind bobbins. In 1933 Nolan made three spreads, which she sold for about $25 each, but she furnished all materials herself. After deductions for those, Nolan netted $37 for the three spreads. On average, women weaving for the sponsored craft industries earned $53 a year. Their hours varied, but often they worked full days for about 75 cents or a dollar per yard.[51]

Wages, piece rates, and hours were only one area of concern to craft producers. Other labor-related issues, such as the work process and their attitudes toward the products, also colored producers' reactions to the job. Many craftspeople found their work tedious and stressful. Most complaints of this ilk came from industries in which workers put in exceptionally long hours to fill orders and ensure future work. Bedspread tufters, for example, invariably described their work as hard and tiring; they complained about pains in their backs, sides, shoulders, and hands. The comments of two women who tufted for Kenner and Rauschenberg and B. J. Bandy were typical: "We like the money we make, that's all"; "I start as early as I can and work as hard as I can, and I'm not doing it for pleasure"; and "It's the hardest work I ever did do." Most producers who were able to get to town to pick up their own work chose patterns that paid well and were easily worked. Even those who liked the work felt the stress of trying to finish orders on time. Bonnie

Dunn of Tennga, Georgia, a tufter for Kenner and Rauschenberg, explained that she liked handling the work, "the new design and the colors." Still, she noted, "you are bound to get nervous," as "you've got to get it finished on time." If not, you would be "a long time getting another one to do." Any work that tufters kept in their own homes consisted mostly of pieces that they were forced to buy from the companies as a result of damage; they often repaired these pieces and sold them "on the line" to tourists. [52]

Hooked rug producers often complained that their work was physically demanding and painful. The positions in which hookers sat at the frame cramped their shoulders, arms, and hands. They worried about the long-term physical consequences of their work, and some even believed that rug hooking was responsible for deaths and illnesses among fellow workers. Mrs. Kaneaster of Apison, Tennessee, reported that a doctor had attributed one woman's death to her sitting in a cramped position that clogged her intestines. Ellen Wilson believed that women who kept hooking would end up with "their womb pushed over against their ovary."[53]

Descriptions like these came from a group of women in Tennessee who shared rug orders and organized themselves as the Apison Handicrafters. Although these women ultimately joined the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild to gain access to its markets, they did not express the love of their work and the appreciation of their craft encouraged by the guild. Hooking, Lee Bates explained, was "slow and tedious," while another characterized it as "a killing job." The Apison women didn't hook rugs for their own use because, as they variously remarked, "I've seen too much of it," "I don't care for it," and "I wouldn't have one." Evelyn Hill of Swiss, North Carolina, who hooked rugs for Mrs. B. E. Shepherd, suggested that the rugs would be inappropriate for her own home, because "we live in the country and don't need things like that. There's too much mud and dust."[54]

Particular parts of the production processes or the quality of materials could sometimes cause physical pain and injury. Quilters for the needlework studios considered the adhesive tape that they used to protect the fingertips of their left hands as significant a part of their equipment as their needle. Chair caners also tried to protect their hands from brittle splits. They wore gloves to chain the warp

strands and wrapped their fingers with rags to weave, for as Maggie Estis put it, "You never have to cut your fingernails when you bottom chairs—they get worn to the quick." The stooping, reaching, pulling, and sitting "hunkered over" all day hurt caners' necks and shoulders, for "pretty nearly standing on your head all day is the hardest work a woman can do." Most chair caners discovered that the quality of the materials determined the ease of their work, for poor splits broke easily and required reworking, and these were also more likely to hurt their fingers. By the mid-1930s most caners did two types of weaves for the companies: "old way weave," or herringbone, and "new way," or basketweave. Although caners differed on the relative ease of the two weaves, all agreed that bad and brittle splits could increase the caning time from thirty-five or forty minutes per chair to one-and-a-half to two hours each. [55]

Weavers—whether working in small industries or for the benevolent craft enterprises—likewise described their work as tiring and demanding. At Biltmore Industries in Asheville, the weaving was done on hand looms, and most of the weavers were men. Biltmore weaver Ed Jones remarked that he would like to do many other things, and in fact he would "rather have President Roosevelt's job than weave." His fellow weaver Rex Stewart found the work interesting only while he was learning it, after which it became "monotonous." No one in his family, he claimed, had "a special fondness" for the craft.[56]

Working for a commercial firm may have exacerbated the demands for speed placed on these workers and thus caused them to find less satisfaction in their jobs, but other weavers made similar observations. Mary Bagley, who wove five full days a week for Fireside Industries in Wooton, Kentucky, described weaving as "slow and hard." "You got to be steadily at it to make anything," she explained, and "it makes you ache all through your chest." Dallie Hayes's seventy-five-year-old mother, who did ten-harness weaving for Hindman Settlement School, did not want her daughters to take up such taxing work, hoping they would avoid the back pain and lint dust that plagued her. She found weaving "as hard as any labor a woman could do."[57]

Despite the tedium and physical discomfort, though, craft producers could still find their work and the items they made reward-

ing. Moreover, putting their financial priorities first did not mean that craftspeople couldn't appreciate the design and skill involved in their work. Sometimes, working with the designs and colors captured the workers' interest, and providing them with training to improve their skills and enhance their design abilities may have encouraged their regard for craftwork itself. Mrs. Willbanks, a bedspread tufter from Ramhearst, Georgia, liked working with different colors and believed this was the reason that she could complete a thirty-color design so quickly. Even so, she felt that if she could "earn a little more, then it would be pleasant." Prudy Cuthbertson and her mother, weavers at the Crossnore School in North Carolina, enjoyed weaving even though, as they remarked respectively, "I could like other things too," and "I'd like a job at any work." A number of Penland weavers who received design instruction spoke positively of their goods. Florence Willis, for example, described the pieces that she wove for herself as the "most beautiful work I ever saw." [58]

Indeed, mountain craft producers' experiences were influenced as much by matters of design, standards, and methods as by the demanding physical labor. Production and design imperatives imposed by philanthropic and commercial craft enterprises certainly circumscribed the mountaineers' work lives—so much so that the Women's Bureau concluded that the "mass of craftswomen and men were copyists working under instructions." Certain practices imposed to maintain quality control could alienate the producers from their work. Candlewick spread manufacturers, for example, commonly docked workers for damaged goods or below-standard work. Typical damages included sheeting torn by pulling needles through the spreads, cuts from clipping, or burns from fireplace sparks. Haulers passed along the costs of such damages by fining the worker against her labor or requiring her to pay for the material, thus in effect buying the spread.[59]

The special materials used in making quilted and appliquéd products for commercial studios placed burdens on workers that altered the ways in which they went about their work. The comforters, quilts, and clothing made from silks, satins, and velvets could not be laundered before sale; therefore quilters had to use extreme caution to avoid soiling the pieces. As a result, women were forced

to work indoors, in a room large enough to accommodate a quilting frame and light enough to illuminate their task. Nor could they quilt in odd moments stolen from other household chores, because their clothing and hands had to be clean and the quilt covered; few families had a spare room in which to keep the quilting frame permanently erected, and so it had to stand covered against the wall when not being worked. Some spots from blood and flies were inevitable; generally these could be removed, but if not, the worker's pay could be docked. At Regina, Inc., when mistakes or damages could not be fixed, they were charged against the worker, and the company asked customers to accept the goods at a reduced price. Kentucky Cottage Industries took a similar approach; they refused to give work out to just "any" family, for they wished to send the costly fabrics only to clean homes. [60]

Quilted goods manufacturers maintained exacting standards for piecework assembled in mountain homes. They tried to ensure that only the women they hired worked on these expensive materials. It was presumed that only one woman would work goods calling for "American" quilting—single-piece goods of luxurious fabrics, which were then quilted or sometimes appliquéd with fabric designs applied to the top of the quilt—because multiple workers on such pieces would likely result in uneven stitches and inconsistent work. (Trapunto—a high-relief quilting technique—tolerated a variety of skill levels because the process could be divided into quilting, stuffing, and finishing.) Managers at Regina, Inc., required that only one worker in each family work on an item because they wanted the stitches consistent and uniform; variations tipping them off to extra workers on a piece would result in their dropping the worker from their employ.[61]

Such efforts to control the production process reflected, in part, the industries' desire to assert authority over product design. At the Campbell Folk School, carvers whittled down the square shapes of wooden animals that were "blocked out" in the school carpentry shop, "giving individuality and artistic touches to the finished product." Sometimes the introduction of a particular piece of equipment helped craft leaders get the finished products they desired. Berea College initiated the replacement of old mountain looms with lighter modern versions and also introduced Swedish weaving designs and

methods. The new looms were more appropriate for goods aimed at urban consumers—runners, scarves, and towels, for example. Even the old southern mountain coverlet designs, when made on the modern looms, differed from those produced on the heavier mountain types. Because so many mountain teachers and weavers trained at the college, Berea's efforts had a profound influence on regional handweaving. [62]

The large commercial firms often employed professional designers. Cabin Crafts, a tufted spread company that hired about five hundred women to tuft in their homes, engaged a full-time designer and offered about fifty standard patterns. Designs for spring 1934 included popcorn, dots and crosses, laurel and diamond, tulip, and plaid. Customers could order certain specifications on standard patterns, although the firm rarely provided custom designs. Owners of locally based quilting companies such as Galante and Withers usually designed their own work. Because it felt it could not trust its workers' design abilities when it came to "really artistic stuff," the quilting firm Regina, Inc., of Louisville used the services of a paid designer; by and large, its workers would "mostly copy stuff."[63]

Thus both quilters and tufters worked from copied patterns supplied by the manufacturing companies. Quilters received material on which the patterns had been stamped lightly with powder, along with the cut pieces for each article. In the tufting industry, the hauler used a finished spread to stamp off one pattern for each of the spreads he provided to his tufters, frequently bringing his own family along to the factory to help stamp. Workers calling at the factory or spread shed laid off the patterns for one spread of each design; they did the others at home from a finished spread. Sometimes children transferred the patterns while women waited for inspection of their finished work.[64]

For the benevolent craft industries and independent craftspeople, the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild and Southern Highlanders, Inc., provided links to the marketplace and acted as authorities on product design and styling. Indeed, these organizations placed great emphasis on the craft producers' willingness to follow design and production advice. The extent of Southern Highlanders's guidance varied from simply providing books to craftspeople to detailed instructions regarding color, size, materials, technique, and design.

Advertisement for Cabin Crafts needletufted bedspreads, 1942.
(*House and Garden,* June 1942; used by permission of Cabin Crafts Carpets, a division of Shaw Industries, Inc.)

One source credited Mary Rodney, the manager of Southern Highlanders's New York shop, with designing the cooperative's handicrafts while allowing the craftspeople "to use originality in working it [the design] out." Yet producers in the mountains received their instructions through local craft leaders who in turn communicated with Rodney. Isadora Williams, for example, sent local basketwork to Rodney for her critique, and Rodney sent sketches for certain forms and designs to local leaders with suggestions and instructions regarding styles, colors, and finishes to pass along to workers. Mrs. Ernest Rogers of Mooresburg, Tennessee, received an order for pine needle boutonnieres with explicit details. Some were to have little burrs inside, others acorn cups alone, and others beech nut burrs with pine needles. Each type also required three pointed cornshuck leaves. Half were to be light and the other half dark, but bright, Rodney wanted them large, noting that "up here people do not like little boutonnieres." [65]

Customer responses and requests also reached local craft leaders through the New York manager. Consumers, Southern Highlanders claimed, approved the cooperative's "work toward modernization of styling and design and away from the traditional." Southern Highlanders acted as an agent to obtain made-to-order goods for New York customers, who came to the store with their own personal home-decorating and clothing preferences. Rodney passed along one customer's request to Mrs. A.J. Denton, a maker of cornshuck belts. The customer requested certain modifications to Denton's belts: two rows of braid instead of three, and a particular kind of button-and-loop closing. Rodney's instructions to Denton closed with a request for a sample from which to take a definite order. Occasionally, craftspeople might be allowed some of their own initiative in making up an order. Louis, a potter, received an order for twenty-eight pigs and fat sows, with "real bulgy fat stomachs." Rodney suggested that Louis study carefully the next ridgerunner pigs he saw in order to make some "ridge-runner families," as well and asked him to "experiment" with a hound dog.[66]

Leaders at the guild and Southern Highlanders admired the craft producer who accommodated their concerns and demands. They found much to praise, for example, in Rebecca Ashe of Sylva, North Carolina, an independent craftswoman who built herself a loom in

1929 and began learning to weave, proceeding from rag rugs to wool suitings. Ashe sold her goods locally and through friends until she was visited by Paul Johnson and Clementine Douglas in the early 1930s. Both offered her advice on weaving and selling her products and gave her orders. Soon after, she joined Southern Highlanders and later the guild. Louise Pitman described Ashe as "one of the musts" for doing business with the Southern Highlanders shop in New York. They valued her not only for her fine work, but for her intelligence and her correct attitude; specifically, Ashe appreciated the Southern Highlanders and apparently liked doing work in quantity. She was, in Pitman's estimation, almost the only craftswoman they had found "actually looking for a good market." [67]

Evidence suggests that some mountain craftspeople may have challenged such infringements on their cultural autonomy and occupational independence. A few may have resisted by declining to make products they felt conflicted with their own interests. Southern Highlanders complained, for example, about a craftsman who was refusing to make a type of button that he had formerly supplied because he had now developed a new type that was less trouble to make. Others may have reserved some autonomy over their work by making crafts for their own use that differed from those they made for market. Such was the case of Elmer Kear, a maker of hearth brooms for the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School. At the very least, craftspeople sometimes wondered about certain objects Mary Rodney requested of them. The producers, Rodney noted, often thought the goods she suggested as marketable "very queer."[68]

Homeworkers for philanthropic and commercial concerns did enjoy some autonomy over the organization of production in their own households. As with most other farm labor, craftwork became the responsibility of the household unit. Craftswomen generally had help from others living in the home, most often teenage daughters or other adult women, but also children and men. With some crafts, workers distributed tasks according to age and gender. Mrs. E. M. McCarter's young daughters helped her weave baskets for Arrow Craft Shop from splits made by their father. Children might also help their families in making hooked rugs; in Ellen Navy's family, rug making was an endeavor that involved the whole family when business was good and orders plentiful. Men and women some-

times worked as a team, as with Elmer Kear and his wife, who made brooms, and with Mr. and Mrs. Joe Brown, who made baskets. Sometimes family labor was compelled by an infirmity on the part of the skilled member of the household. William Stacy, a woodworker for Hindman Settlement School, managed to practice his craft despite health problems because family members turned his lathe for him. [69]

Among workers for the large, organized candlewick spread and chair-caning industries, family labor was the rule rather than the exception. Tufting was considered women's work, but many times husbands and even entire families helped with the production. Children stamped patterns onto the samples at the haulers' sheds or at the factory when their mothers went to return finished goods and pick up new work. They frequently clipped the tufts or perhaps hemmed the finished pieces. Men participated as haulers of goods from the factories to spread sheds or mountain homes, but they also helped their wives by clipping the tufts and knotting. Ruth Dennington's family in Chatsworth, Georgia, took over her work for the Bandy Company in Dalton when she became ill. Dennington rarely worked after her illness, but her four daughters, ranging in age from eleven to seventeen, tufted while her husband clipped. Edna Lee Smith's family in Dalton picked up and returned spreads for about twelve families whenever they transported their own work, which was about once or twice a month. They charged these families ten cents on a dollar's worth of work; the fees offered them a bit over the expenses of their car in transporting the spreads.[70]

Chair caning was also a family affair in most households, although the wife was considered the primary producer. There was a division of labor between men and women in many chair-caning families. The wife generally put in the warp strands ("making the warp"), the most important and difficult part of the work. Her husband was responsible for the weaving and running in ("filling out") of the splits, because, as one worker put it, the husband could not be trusted to put in the warp carefully.[71]

Craft families reacted variously to the institution of new NRA codes regulating child labor in the early 1930s. Many families did stop their children from working. Indeed, they may have feared the example of the Dalton family that was fined by the Morristown Chair

Farm family weaving chair bottoms as homework for a local chair factory,
Knott County, Ky., 1933.
(Courtesy of National Archives, Washington, D.C.,no. 83-G BAE)

Company for allowing the daughters to work. Yet other families, perhaps reluctantly, permitted their children to continue work, citing a natural talent or propensity for specific tasks. Sadie Johnson's fourteen-year-old son worked eight to ten chairs a day with an ease allowed by his smaller fingers, and the Hazelipp family claimed that its four children, ages seven to fourteen, were "good bottomers." [72]

Quilting was strictly women's work, and women often formed or reinforced social networks through this form of labor. Despite the companies' wishes, women frequently worked with other adult women in their household to fill orders, and if there were no family members available they shared the work with neighbors, especially when work was scarce or when there was a rush. Sometimes the shared work extended to working on the same piece. These women split their earnings evenly and shared the burden of making trips to the studio—and perhaps, too, companionship over their work.[73]

Mountain craft producers also established areas of autonomy by

remaining outside the employee-employer relationship as independent producers or by launching their own businesses; sometimes they acted as small-time employers while exploiting the particular systems of each industry. Independent craft producers often had trouble finding markets for their work, although this may have resulted more from difficult economic times than from their independent status. Typically, they resorted to a variety of methods to sell their goods, including going through firms and shops like The Spinning Wheel, rug sellers, gift shops both inside and outside the mountains, and extension markets. Individual orders could be obtained via friends and relatives, and roadside stands set up outside their homes or along the highway provided an outlet for some goods. Some independent producers, like Joe Brown, peddled by car to individuals and shops in such tourist centers as Tryon, Chimney Rock, and Asheville, North Carolina. [74]

Their independent position also allowed these craftspeople to control, to a certain extent, the prices of their goods and to sometimes operate outside the cash economy to obtain necessities. Because she was not desperate for cash, Eugenia Jarvis, who asked $1.50 each for her hooked rugs, was able to refuse an offer of fifty cents apiece from a man who intended to resell the rugs in Georgia. Some traded their crafts, with certain discretion. Jarvis traded for goods that suited her, such as blankets, but not for crockery and flowerpots. Mrs. Leonard Rominger, who generally sold her hooked rugs and mats through a hotel in Boone, North Carolina, traded some of her work for needed used clothing when she was low on orders.[75]

Other mountaineers found that the organized industries offered them opportunities to act as small-time employers themselves. Some mountain women "let out" tufting for the companies. Mrs. Kaye of Fairmount, Georgia, for example, received a commission from M. W. Cannon Company for distributing spreads and wages to local families from her home; for this service she received from the firm five cents on each spread. In other instances, independent producers might cooperate to fill large orders, sharing work and materials with a consistent group of neighbors and relatives. The Apison Handicrafters worked this way to complete large orders of hooked mats. When one of these women received an order, she fur-

nished the materials to her neighbors, who worked for half of what she received for the goods. At another time, this same woman would in turn work to fill another woman's order. Craftswomen might also "run a line" to sell not only their own crafts to passing tourists, but also those of women who did not live on or near a highway. Mrs. Fletcher of Adairsville, Georgia, charged fifty cents per spread and twenty-five cents per rug for other women's goods that she sold on her line. She also took mail orders for work, paying other women to help fill orders beyond her own capacity. [76]

Tufters also gave out to others the more difficult work that they either did not find worth the wages or simply did not wish to do themselves. Frequently such tasks were passed along to African Americans who could not get work directly from the companies. Two women working on a spread for Mrs. Woods's company in Dalton found themselves unable to finish it after three days' work. It was, they claimed, "awfully hard," and, mindful of the poor wages they would receive, they decided to "give it to the niggers." The Scotts, an African American family in Calhoun, Georgia, received tufting work from neighbors, who explained: "We give all the hard work to the niggers. They take anything they kin get. The company won't give to niggers but they don't know."[77]

Some mountain craftspeople launched their own small businesses from the work they began doing at or for settlement and school craft enterprises. Jim Husky learned woodworking at Berea College twenty years before he started his own shop in 1934. He taught cabinet making and carving at the college, where his wife learned to weave cornshuck seats for chairs. At his own shop, he had eight electric-powered machines that he built from wrecked car parts. Husky specialized in small wooden items such as folding knives made of rhododendron wood, rustic log cabin cigarette boxes, and wooden buttons and buckles. Bob Scroggs opened his own woodworking shop with William Johnson in 1934, building on the woodworking he did at the Campbell Folk School. Scroggs and Johnson both did handcarving, but their shop was equipped with power tools. They hoped eventually to make furniture as well as smaller items such as candlesticks, lamps, and puzzles.[78]

Whether they worked independently or in the employ of commercial or benevolent industries, craft producers' interests and cus-

Souvenir stand with candlewick spreads, hooked rugs, and other crafts,
Route 41, Georgia, 1930s.
(Courtesy of National Archives, Washington, D.C., no. 86-G-6A-5)

toms sometimes collided with the craft leaders' middle-class standards and marketplace priorities, resulting in acrimonious conflicts. Certain of their own aesthetic sense and their knowledge of fashion and the market, and confident in their ways of conducting business, craft leaders often treated mountain producers in a condescending and paternalistic manner. Louis Pitman acknowledged that problems existed between the Southern Highlanders shop and the small, isolated producers who understood neither marketing nor business procedures, but were accustomed to the informality of local transactions. Thus, Southern Highlanders fostered "the discipline" of sales, which was unfamiliar to mountain producers; after a time the cooperative noted improvement among craftspeople in attending to business details like invoices and written records. Marian Heard expressed similar concerns, pointing to the rural craftsperson's difficulties in working with distant markets that demanded correspondence and business forms alien to the mountaineers' accustomed sphere of personal contacts. Mountain craftworkers, she claimed, were reluctant to figure out the cost of their materials and labor and could not understand the concept of overhead because they had no

experience in paying rent for their houses, or even paying for heat and hot water. These problems only compounded the disadvantage of the producers' lack of knowledge about color, design, and standard product sizes. However, the "better-trained craftsmen," Heard asserted, were more conscious of their need for help. [79]

A common cause of misunderstandings was basic differences in the way craft leaders and producers handled transactions. Basket-maker Aunt Cordelia Ritchie believed that Hindman Settlement School owed her $15 for baskets but doubted that she would receive the money, as the amount was marked "paid" on the books. The fieldworker suggested that Ritchie did not keep books well and that she might be confused over how many baskets were actually made and sold; Ritchie, however, did not feel comfortable explaining her doubts and questions to the school or asking to see the records.[80]

Mountain craftspeople were also uncomfortable with some of the more clearly mass-market-oriented demands placed on their production. Leaders often requested exact duplicates of particular objects and required specific completion deadlines, demands that made little sense in some contexts of mountain craft production. In response, workers sometimes refused to duplicate any design with precision or declined to submit to prescribed delivery times.[81] Paul Johnson of Southern Highlanders reported "a new attitude of cooperation" among members in 1937, suggested by an increased willingness to accept design and style advice and to fill large orders; they were now bringing to their work, Johnson explained, "certain needed characteristics of small-industry production." Yet craft leaders' praise of Rebecca Ashe as one of few craftspeople truly aware of market interests further suggests that many mountain producers persisted in making goods that satisfied their own aesthetic, cultural, and economic needs.[82]

Furthermore, mountain craft producers demonstrated the power to sell their own work and to create products that proved desirable in the marketplace, sometimes by building on the very industries that exploited them. Perhaps the most compelling example of this lies in the story of the development and success of the peacock tufted bedspreads, designed and marketed by spread workers along U.S. Highway 41 in the area around Dalton, Georgia. The peacock spread was the people's spread. It apparently originated with spread workers

who put to good use the different colored scraps of yarn they collected as the refuse from their work for the spread companies. The result was a peacock design that allowed them to use many colors. Spread workers hung these "gaudy" spreads on their roadside "spread lines," which began appearing in front of houses, stores, and gas stations as early as the 1920s, intended to catch the attention of tourists traveling to and from Florida. Although tufters also sold other patterns in this way, the peacock spreads—initially unavailable through the bedspread manufacturers—dominated. Described by one journalist as "the acme of bad taste," impossible to incorporate into "a well appointed house or bedroom," the spreads were nevertheless very popular with travelers. Indeed, the owner of one spread company, Whitener Chenilles, identified the peacock as the best-selling spread in 1943. That the spread workers themselves had no aesthetic appreciation for the peacock spreads they made was of little concern, one journalist claimed; in 1947 the peacock pattern outsold all other patterns many times over. Eventually manufacturers were forced to acknowledge the success of this people's spread, and by the 1950s a few companies offered "highway designs," including the peacock, as novelty items in their catalogs. **83**

The successful strategies of the home-based entrepreneurs selling peacock designs from their spread lines in Georgia were very different from those of, for example, weaver Rebecca Ashe. Indeed, Ashe may have shared little beyond particular skills with her fellow weavers, Mrs. Nolan of Pine Mountain and J. Clarence White of Biltmore Industries. Ashe, as an independent craftswoman, made business decisions, hired others to work for her, and designed her own textiles, bearing in mind the advice and the orders she received from the guild and Southern Highlanders. Ashe taught herself to weave as an adult, unlike Mrs. Nolan, who had practiced the art most of her life. Nolan only completed a yard of her woven spreads in each workday, an amount that J. Clarence White outstripped twenty to thirty times over at Biltmore. Each of these mountain craft producers pursued their weaving under very different conditions. At the same time, their relationships with those who purchased

their work or their labor varied, as did the degree and nature of the autonomy they exercised as craftspeople.

These three weavers did share a need for cash income that they were able to obtain through their craft skills; moreover, they saw their craftwork as a form of labor for which they received remuneration. Their disparate stories also tell us that their weaving did not simply represent the continuation of traditions learned from their ancestors to fulfill the everyday needs of their homes and local communities. Their work and their attitudes toward it were informed by the demands of the philanthropic and commercial industries that hired out craftwork in the mountains, by the national network of consumers, manufacturers, and producers that made up the marketplace, by personal need, by their individual experiences as craft laborers, and finally by family and community practices. In the end, what they show us is that mountain craftspeople played active roles in the organization and practice of handicraft labor in Southern Appalachia, even within the seemingly impenetrable structures and controls imposed by government, benefactors, industry, and the marketplace.

The evidence collected and presented by the Women's Bureau study gives us insights into the perspectives of the mountain craftspeople themselves, as "articulated" by their own behaviors, decisions, and words. This evidence, however, was interpreted by middle-class government reformers aiming to protect rural homeworkers as well as industrial factory laborers. Women's Bureau officials believed that the circumstances under which southern mountain craftspeople worked during the 1930s defined them as laborers rather than as preservers of cultural traditions. The questions that the bureau investigators asked during their home visits guided the directions of those interviews and slanted the nature of the evidence and the conclusions that the bureau presented to the federal government and the American public.

Ultimately, although the Women's Bureau study did not overtly address issues of class consciousness, it did reveal many of the historical circumstances from which class consciousness emerges. Thus it illuminated, for example, the particularly class-based nature of the relationships between mountain craftswomen and the leaders

of benevolent and commercial craft industries. [84] The Women's Bureau used this evidence to transform the discourse about southern mountain craft producers and the meaning of their work; in so doing, they challenged the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild's notions about the relationship between craft production and tradition. Armed with its empirical data, the bureau introduced the Appalachian mountaineers to America as industrial workers.