

REVIEW

Mountain Speech, Mountain Splendor

Dictionary of Southern Appalachian English

By Michael B. Montgomery and Jennifer K. N. Heinmiller

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Magnum opus. That is the only word that comes to mind when one cracks open the *Dictionary of Southern Appalachian English* (DSAE) by Michael B. Montgomery and Jennifer K. N. Heinmiller. *Magnum opus* is a word that many associate with stage, screen, or fiction—that work that defines an auteur’s style to such a degree that the contribution to the field is obvious. Such is the case with the DSAE. The pure scale of the endeavor and the detail captured within represents a life’s work, and it was the work that Montgomery was doing at his untimely passing. The onus for the work shifted to the skilled and capable hands of Heinmiller, who saw the work to fruition. They were a true team, both with a clear passion for the work and the ability to do it. I must state at the outset of this review that Dr. Montgomery was a dear friend and mentor, and I saw the effort he put into this work on a near daily basis during my Ph.D. studies. Further, I am friends with Dr. Heinmiller, and I know the blood, sweat, and tears she put in to bring this volume to the public. I will attempt to review this with an objective lens, but my personal connections to this work are undeniable.

The work captures the historic lexicon of a region that has long fascinated much of the country—Appalachia. Building upon the award-winning *Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English* (Montgomery and Hall 2004), this greatly expanded volume documents the words from a much larger region. The work has, in my view, two major parts that each make contributions—the front matter with several interesting essays and overviews and the dictionary, which is the main attraction and showstopper.

The front matter contains much of what a reader of any dictionary might expect but also some very intriguing additions. It begins with a foreword by Joan Houston Hall, whose insights into dictionary-making are keen (she worked on the *Dictionary of American Regional English* [1985–2013]). It is followed by acknowledgments from Heinmiller. Next, a brief authors’ note to give readers a warning that some terms that are no longer accepted (mainly from source example sentences) will not appear in the

work. Following this note, we read the first somewhat novel section, an immensely interesting and valuable section that outlines the history and development of the dictionary itself. The story of the genesis of the volume is fascinating: a young scholar, Joseph Hall, trekking to what will be the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and recording the locals who were able to stay on their ancestral land until they pass away. Using quite modern methods but with antiquated gear (he used a car battery to power his recording devices!), he captured the voices of this region. Through forging connections with locals and recording their speech, all with an eye initially toward phonetics and phonology that culminated in his dissertation (Hall 1942), he collected reams and reams of data. Only later did he turn toward lexicography.

Many years later, Montgomery read and listened to some of the Hall tapes at the Great Smoky Mountains National Park archive (currently available online at the Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State University, <https://archives.etsu.edu/repositories/2/resources/436>), and a very fruitful partnership was formed. This duo published the *Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English*. Basically upon the release of that 2004 book, Montgomery wanted to expand to Southern Appalachia as a whole and update the dictionary. He set out to do so. As Montgomery's health necessitated changes, Heinmiller entered the scene, and the present book we hold is the fruit of that second partnership! I tarry slightly here just to underscore and reiterate that this work is the end result of monumental efforts by three individuals spanning nearly 80 years.

Next, the authors include a "User's Guide to the Dictionary" (xix), a pronunciation key (xxiii), and a list of abbreviations (xxv). All necessary and expected from any dictionary worth its salt. Additionally, the front matter contains several more interesting sections, including "Background and Context of the Dictionary" (xxvii), which outlines how this volume builds upon its predecessor. Next, we are presented with the "Scope and Sources of the Dictionary" (xxix), which elaborates on how the authors defined the region, what was included, and what sources they consulted to build their definitions and examples. Next is an "Index of Joseph Hall Speakers from the Smoky Mountains" (xxxv), a list of all the speakers that Joseph Hall interviewed and recorded from 1937 to 1972. These speakers were the original source of many of the terms found within the *DSAE*. We get demographic snapshots of each speaker—age at interview, year interviewed, education level, community where they resided, and their occupations. Following this index, we arrive at one of the most useful parts of the front matter, what the authors call "Grammar and Syntax of Southern Appalachian and Smoky Mountain English" (xliii). This invaluable resource traces and exemplifies much of the structure of these varieties, setting the table for the lexical smorgasbord to follow.

After the expansive but crucial front matter, we come to the heart of the book—the dictionary itself. Each entry, akin to practically all dictionaries, provides a part of speech description, a definition with all the various senses of a word (if applicable),

and actual usages from sources. The usages derive from many sources and source types. Some come from the interviews that Hall or Montgomery (or others) conducted. Others come from consultations with informants and/or other dictionaries or reference works. Many come from various letters that folks from the region wrote and that were deposited in archives around the region. Many, and some of the most fun, come from literature from across the Southern Appalachian region. Some of these usages were captured in sources that are centuries old, emerging from letters penned in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. Others come from more recent sources and literature.

As the beating heart of the volume, it truly represents a series of snapshots of cultures across the region. Perhaps better said, it represents a series of snapshots of cultures across the history of a region. Given the historical nature of much of the volume and many of the primary source materials, it is obvious that this is the POINT of the dictionary. Montgomery and Heinmiller's goal was to document and capture the lexicon of an area undergoing immense change and evolution. From terms related to bear hunting to home remedies and tinctures, the reader easily grasps how many of these lexical entries reflect a way of life that has faded, or is rapidly fading, away.

And yet, the dictionary still feels vibrant and relevant. Each entry lists so many interesting and intriguing usages. Take *backlog* with its variant *backstick*. We might know one of the senses of the former with its meaning of an overabundance of orders or tasks that has created a delay. However, in some parts of Southern Appalachia, the *backlog* was a literal log placed at the back of a fireplace to project the heat forward and to maintain heating and burning overnight. For many, we have never had to rely on a woodstove or fireplace for heating; thus, we have never had the need for such a word. Nevertheless, our understanding of a traditional—and still relatively widespread worldwide—heat source is enriched by knowing this usage and seeing the authors' meticulous documentation.

Further, the dictionary underscores and highlights the creativity of language, especially the linguistic dexterity of mountain people. For example, some of my favorite entries are related to that most famous of Appalachian items, moonshine. There are numerous entries that are related to moonshine, from terms associated with its production (*still*, *mash*, *worm*) to its consumption. Evocative terms like *O Be Joyful* 'white corn whiskey, moonshine' place on full display the playful nature of Southern mountain speech. I am particularly fascinated by this term, as the phrase denotes the drink and, rather directly, connotes happy and uplifting sensations (one presumes from consumption!). There are many, many terms like this in the dictionary, imbued with meticulous detail and rich connotations, and Montgomery and Heinmiller have done a masterful job of capturing and cataloging these details.

The dictionary concludes with a list of sources, catalogued both chronologically and also in the more typical alphabetical order. Here, the reader sees the full breadth and depth of the sources consulted. Further, one can see that many hands

were involved in bringing this work to fruition. From church meeting minutes to Civil War letters to notes provided by informants, the sources lay out the backbone of the dictionary.

I do not have many criticisms of the work. One missing aspect is an online or more interactive component, which would have been a welcome addition. I am aware that this would have undoubtedly increased the price, which is an understandable reason for not including it. Also, it did take me a bit of time to get used to the ordering of the components of the usage examples for the entries, which are styled like those in historical dictionaries—year, source, page of source (if applicable), and then the example sentence. I think having the source and page number after the sentence would have flowed slightly better, but this is a very persnickety (and perhaps idiosyncratic) criticism.

The *Dictionary of Southern Appalachian English* is a valuable addition to any library, and I would say it is a must for anyone interested in Appalachia, Appalachian Englishes, Appalachian studies, or Southern studies more broadly. This book makes an enormous contribution to several disciplines and captures the linguistic spirit of folks from a region that is oft derided and forgotten. Here, we see the language on display, and I commend the authors for this achievement.



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