Part One: Introduction

Laurie Kay Sommers, Project Director

"Faces" in the Piney Woods: Traditions of Turpentining in South Georgia is an oral history project of the South Georgia Folklife Project at Valdosta State University. It reflects the perspective of the field of folklore and focuses on the occupational folklife of South Georgia turpentine workers. For much of the past century, Georgia was the nation's leading producer of gum naval stores, or the industry of extracting products such as turpentine and rosin from living slash and longleaf pine trees. The last bucket of gum for commercial turpentine was dipped by Major Phillips on August 9, 2001, outside Soperton in Treutlen County, Georgia. The end of domestic turpentining in the United States inspired the project team to interview former turpentiners about their lives and traditions. The work of gathering and processing the raw gum was done chiefly by African American men, although countless European American small gum farmers turpentined on their own land or on land leased from others. These workers developed specialized knowledge, terminology, customs, and lore which folklorists call "occupational folklife." This site contains information gathered from 1998-2004 through background research, photographs, video, and oral interviews. It includes information on work in the woods and life in the turpentine camps as told by those who lived it.

This project had its genesis in 1998 during background research for a turpentining segment on the Wiregrass Ways radio series, previously aired on Georgia Public Radio. The program featured Alton Carter of Racepond and his employee, Elliott West, of Folkston. At that time there were still some two dozen active turpentiners in southeast Georgia, working in an area from Soperton south to the Okefenokee. The nation's sole

surviving processing plant, run by the Netherlands-based Akzo Nobel company in Baxley, Georgia, was within an hour's drive, yet competition from overseas markets was forcing domestic turpentiners out of business. Within four years commercial gum naval stores would be gone. Here in South Georgia, where the land and climate are ideal for growing pine trees, gum naval stores had fallen victim to high timber prices, labor costs, foreign competition, and alternative industrial turpentine sources. As I walked the piney woods with these two aging turpentiners, Alton Carter was philosophical. "He's the only one working for me right now," Carter said of West. "We dropped back. If I knew we'd have another year besides this--but they told me last year that this was the last year, and I didn't put any virgins up. It takes at least three years to get your money and get any profit. Two years you can't do it. It cost too much. I didn't put any up. If I knew I had another year I would have."

For nearly four hundred years, laborers and field hands worked the southern pine forests in the gum naval stores industry, so named for the rosin which sealed the hulls of ships and made them watertight. Slave labor was the backbone of the industry prior to Emancipation. After Emancipation, black workers merely shifted into a debt peonage system which did little to change their social status, economic circumstances, or power relations with whites. In South Georgia, gum naval stores, or turpentining as it came to be called, was especially important from the late 1800s through the mid-1900s. The industry had moved south from its colonial roots in Virginia and the Carolinas into Georgia and Florida. The latter two states were the last to engage in commercial turpentining. Florida briefly took over as the leading producer in the early 1900s, and then Georgia went ahead for good.

South Georgia has long been a lodestar in the turpentine industry. Indicative of this, the American Turpentine Farmers Association was founded in Valdosta during the midst of the Depression, a period when Valdosta became the naval stores capitol of the world. For much of the early twentieth century, the ports of Brunswick and Savannah had rosin yards overflowing with barrels waiting to be shipped around the world. Practically every small town in South Georgia employed workers in the production of turpentine. Beginning in the 1960s and 70s all that began to change.

For years, turpentining had been the dominant force in the timber industry. On that morning in 1998, Carter and West visited a stand of catfaces at the entrance to Okefenokee Swamp Park south of Waycross, on land leased from the state. Since their last visit, timber crews had knocked off some of the cups which were tacked to the tree face collecting gum. Timber companies were increasingly antagonistic toward turpentiners, according to these men. The chipped faces reduced the quality of the tree, and sawmillers didn't like the risk of hitting nails with their equipment.

At the twilight of the industry, the American Turpentine Farmers Association had worked with Alan W. Hodges, of the University of Florida's Food & Resource Economics Department, to develop new technologies to revitalize the industry.[1] Called the borehole oleoresin production system, it was designed to solve some of the deterrents to domestic gum naval stores. As Alton Carter described it, "Now you can use a plastic bag or a bottle and drill a hole in the tree, produce pretty good gum and less labor." But it was too little too late. "The foreign market came in so cheap and processors got word

[1] Hodges, A.W. and J. Johnson. A Borehole Oleoresin Production System in Slash Pine, Southern Journal of Applied Forestry, 21(3):1-8, 1997.

of buying it. They don't try to market our gum like they do the foreign gum. They substitute it."

Turpentining was a defining occupation of not only South Georgia, but also of much of the American South. When domestic turpentining ended in 2001, *Georgia Forestry Magazine* marked the moment with an article entitled "End of an Era."[2] It was more than that: for countless individuals whose lives and livelihoods had been tied to turpentining, it was the end of a culture rich with traditions, customs, and powerful ties to the land and environment.

This project focuses on the perspectives of turpentine workers. It touches on the technicalities of the work itself, but is more concerned with the ways in which these laborers lived their lives – their unique terms for certain people and places in the woods, the games and competitions they held with one another while working, skills in making or adapting the tools of their trade, stories and jokes, home remedies using turpentine, music and entertainments, and local knowledge about their environment.

The culture of turpentining was one sharply divided by race and gender. This is an industry with a checkered past, tainted by violence, racism, and an exploitative debt peonage system. It was also an industry shaped by ingenuity and resilience, skill and strength. It grew out of a time when knowledge of hand skills rather than machines was the measure of a person. As Alton Carter commented, "Got so much modern equipment doing the other work. Like pulpwood--got the machinery, saws and push saws, wages got so high to operate this machine, they took the work out of it. Nobody wanted to do

[2] Georgia Forestry Magazine. 2003. "End of an Era, Georgia Turpentine Industry Fades into History." Spring: 4-7.

the work. Turpentine's a skill. Everybody can't turpentine. There's an art to it just like anything."

The story of turpentining from the worker's perspective is, for the most part, a story seldom heard. The annotated bibliography included in this site compiles some of the best historical and ethnographic work on turpentining, especially as it pertains to Georgia and Florida. The best fieldwork on the folklife of turpentining from the heyday of the industry is from Stetson Kennedy's and Zora Neale Hurston's collections in Florida as part of the WPA Federal Writers Project, especially the material gathered in Cross City turpentine camps. Hurston and Kennedy both included this material in later publications (see bibliography). In addition, the original field data is available at the Library of Congress and the Florida State Archives, as well as in two excellent websites: American Memory: Florida Folklife from the WPA Collection, 1937-1942. http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/flwpabibquery.html (search turpentine) and Florida Memory online classroom, Zora Neale Hurston, the WPA, and the Cross City Turpentine Camp, http://www.floridamemory.com/OnlineClassroom/zora_hurston/. Nearly 40 years later, the Bureau of Florida Folklife surveyed forest industries for the 1987 Florida Folk Festival program book and related documentation, but by this time turpentining was dying out in North Florida. In Georgia, Al Ike's and Ernest Melvin's 1978 documentary *Spirits of the Pines*, shot at the Powell camp outside Homerville, is perhaps the best visual record of actual work in the woods, showing the process of harvesting gum. Working with them on research for the project was Gay Goodman Wright, whose 1979 Master's Thesis, Turpentining: An Ethnohistorical Study of a Southern Industry and Way of Life (Department of Anthropology, University of Georgia),

contains rich ethnographic material on turpentine workers life and culture.

"Faces" of the Piney Woods: Traditions of Turpentining in South Georgia seeks to add to the previous body of work. Project researchers were Timothy Prizer, LeRoy Henderson, and Laurie Sommers. The majority of the final project report was written by Tim Prizer and edited by Laurie Sommers. It presents preliminary project findings, with an emphasis on Prizer's interviewees. The project title plays on dual definitions of the term "faces:" first, faces as in catfaces, or the v-shaped wounds cut in the bark of the tree by turpentiners; and second, the human faces of the men and women who worked the trees and harvested the gum. We dedicate this project to them.

Part Two: Meet the Interviewees

Laurie Sommers and Timothy Prizer

- *Gillis Carter*

Born May 1, 1941 in Coffee County, Georgia, Gillis Carter spent the earliest years of his life as young boy whose father, Era Carter, was on the verge of becoming successful in the turpentine business. By the time Gillis was five years old, he lived in a house just a short walk from his current home on the outskirts of Willacoochee, and his father had begun hiring a fair number of African American turpentine hands to work the timber on land he leased from others. Under their father, Carter and his four brothers grew up working turpentine, and the only break Gillis would take from that line of work was the four years he spent acquiring his B. S. in Chemistry at the University of Georgia. He worked turpentine and hired countless others to work for him until 1978, when his father recognized that turpentine would no longer turn the profits it once had. Though the turpentine industry has vanished from the country, and though his primary human link to it – his father – has passed away, Carter remains more actively involved in the memory of the work than perhaps anyone in the United States. He continues to work four trees and six faces in his front yard, and one of his barns houses an elaborate collection of turpentine tools and artifacts. His goal is to remind those who may have forgotten about the industry and to educate the younger generation that may not otherwise ever learn to appreciate the livelihood of its forebears. Carter lives now with his wife and his mother-in-law in Willacoochee, and his children and "grandbabies" live on the property adjacent to his.

- *Anthrom Green, Jr.*

Anthrom Green Jr. was born in Soperton, Georgia on October 27, 1918 on the Gillis Plantation. He came to Jacksonville, Florida in 1938 and has lived there since that time. Although he grew up around turpentine camps, young Green was introduced to the business of turpentining at age 17 by his father, Anthrom Green Sr.; he and his father worked side by side. Anthrom, Sr. also hired out his son to work on various farms. The Green family lived across the street from a still in superior housing for African Americans of the time, due to the fact that Green's mother carried the Gillis name via slavery. As a young man Green worked various jobs in the turpentine woods, and he has vivid recollections of camp conditions, camp diets, entertainment, schooling and church, share-cropping and payment, the house that he grew up in, and the treatment of workers in different camps. Green left turpentining in 1938 and never returned.

- *Wilburt Johnson*

Wilburt Johnson was born on June 26, 1921 in the small Atkinson County community of Kirkland, Georgia. By 1932, at the young age of eleven, Johnson had literally followed his father into the woods and demanded to begin chipping boxes alongside his old man. He caught on quickly, and he worked in the forest industries for the remainder of his working life. In turpentine, he worked under a man for a number of years in Middleton, Georgia before working for Era and Gillis Carter in Willacoochee. Outside of turpentine, Johnson long-logged and worked in the pulpwood industry for several years. He only quit the turpentine business when it became necessary for him to

do so. The industry crossed the ocean and he crossed into old age. He spends most of his days now with his wife, his children, his grandchildren, and his great-grandchildren. Warm weather finds him in a rocking chair in his carport in Willacoochee, and he is remembered by all in the area for his memorable holler in the woods: "Can I Go?"

- *George Music, Jr.*

The only living member of his family that worked in the turpentine woods, Music was born in 1960 on the same piece of land where he currently resides on the rural outskirts of Waycross, Georgia. Music began working turpentine in 1967, when he chipped his first tree at the young age of seven. He used to follow his father, George Music, Sr., and grandfather around in the woods before he was old enough to do any real labor, and he would pretend to be working. Music says that he always wanted to be "just like daddy" when he was a boy. However, by the time he was 17 years old, he thought he had had enough of the hot and arduous labor involved in turpentine production. He headed off to get married, residing and working as an auto mechanic in Jamestown, Georgia. But "something always brings you back home," he says. "You just get to missing it." He returned to the massive expanse of timber at his home in Waycross after divorcing his first wife, and he is passionate about never leaving home again.

Music has only worked in turpentine on his own land and has never experienced life in a turpentine camp, a typical situation for many white, working class South Georgians. There are approximately three thousand trees on Music's land that were used for turpentine production. His grandfather Louis worked and lived on the same

property even before the current Music home was built in the very early years of the 1900s. At any given time that he and his father were working in the woods, they kept in between 1,800-2,500 faces in production. George Music, Sr., however, supposedly once worked five thousand boxes at one time. Today, Music works as a locomotive mechanic and is a talented fiddle player and harmony vocalist in a local bluegrass band Tri-County.

- *Major Phillips*

Major Phillips was born in 1945 in Treutlen County, Georgia, and has worked in the woods for most of his life. He dipped the last barrel of commercial turpentine in August, 2001, while in the employ of Jim Gillis, Jr. of Soperton Naval Stores. At the time of the industry's demise, Phillips had worked for the Gillis family for over 20 years and is still in their employ as of this writing. Phillips' father had worked the pine woods for over 40 years, and young Major began working beside him at age 12. His first job was dipping tar, and he states that he and his father could dip as many as 2000 trees per day. Phillips worked for a number of employers in the Soperton vicinity and beyond, including the Claxtons, the Phillips, and the Kennedys of Cobbtown, the latter an African American family that had its own farm, still and turpentine farm. Along with turpentine, he sharecropped cotton, worked in a sawmill, and also worked cotton and tobacco on his family farm.

- *L.A. "Stick" Nelson*

L.A. Nelson was born in Spring Hill, Georgia on February 26, 1903. Spring Hill was a settlement outside Thomasville, Georgia, started by African American migrants from South Carolina. They cleared a wooded area and established homestead farms on the cleared site. Nelson's biological father left the family while he was still quite young, but he and his younger sister were reared by his mother who worked several domestic jobs to provide for them. Nelson was introduced to the turpentine business by his stepfather, Mr. Will Brown, sometime between his twelfth and thirteenth birthday (1915-1916). His first experience in the woods was raking pine. Nelson's family moved from community to community in north Florida and South Georgia over a fifty year period, as Nelson worked in farming and in the woods. He held a variety of jobs in turpentining, including that of woods rider which was unusual for a black man at the time. His experience also put him in the employ of many different South Georgia turpentiners, among them Poole and Langdale, three generations of the Wetherington family, and S. W. Paul (sic). He met his wife, Bertha, when she was living on a neighboring turpentine camp. Nelson was interviewed for the project several months before his death at age 99 in January, 2004. He describes in great detail--sometimes humorous and sometimes painful-- his experiences over several decades as a turpentiner, including camp conditions, bosses, entertainment, sports, money, self employment, food, education, religion, women and children.

- *Junior Taylor*

Junior Taylor was part of an extensive family of turpentiners. Nearly every relative in Taylor's memory, dead or alive, was involved in the production of turpentine

in one fashion or another at some point in their lives. In fact, Taylor, his father, and all eight of his brothers were employed in turpentine. Junior was perhaps the most well-known worker in this long line of turpentiners, however, and he was a household name in the area of Blackshear, Georgia right up to his recent death on January 21, 2004. Taylor made his living on approximately twenty turpentine camps throughout South Georgia and Florida, the first of which was in Mayday, Georgia, in Echols County. Shortly after Taylor's birth on a farm in Alabama, his mother and father moved to Mayday, where he would live the first 25 years of his life, starting his work in turpentine as a shirtless, shoeless eight-year-old. Taylor worked turpentine for about sixty consecutive years and racked up his high tally of camps due to both his and his father's escaping commissary debt, harsh woods riders, and crooked producers. The largest camp Taylor remembered living in had about forty or fifty other workers residing within it. The Taylor name is locally famous, due largely to the family's gospel singing group. The Taylor Brothers, with which Junior sung occasionally but was never an active member, was popular among certain clusters of gospel fans throughout Georgia, Alabama, and Florida and had a regional hit in the late 1960s, "Mother's Advice." Singing kept the Taylor family together during some difficult circumstances. Now the Taylor's nephews and brother have their own group, the New Taylor Singers.

- *C. J. Taylor*

C. J. Taylor, born approximately three years after Junior on the Mayday, Georgia, turpentine camp, began working turpentine as a barefooted ten-year-old, much like his brother. As they ventured together from camp to camp, Taylor worked in the woods

alongside Junior for about forty years. Though Taylor enjoyed the work like most turpentiners, he did not have the willpower to stay in it as long as Junior did. C. J. did spend most of his life working turpentine, but he was also more prone to fleeing the camp to find a different line of work altogether. While most turpentiners avoided being drafted to war and found little threat of actually having to go, C. J. volunteered for the Korean War. The war lives on vividly in his memory, both as a rewarding and haunting recollection. It is clear from speaking with him that he considers his stint in the war the most significant event in his life. After working together for so long and surviving the turpentine industry's demise, C. J. and Junior remained extremely close until Junior's death. Their homes sat side-by-side in Blackshear, and they remained the closest of fishing buddies even in old age.

- *W. C. "Dub" Tomlinson*

The life of W.C. "Dub" Tomlinson (born 1931), recounted in his self-published memoir *A Lad in the Piney Woods* (2002), typifies the old-time Wiregrass lifestyle of farmer, rancher, and turpentiner during the period of the open range in South Georgia. A life-long resident of Echols County--with the exception of a stint in military service--Tomlinson has worked timber all his life, first in turpentine, then a heavy equipment operator and harvesting supervisor. He also has been a cattle foreman; as he explains, even the cattle ranches had timber on them. Throughout it all he moonlighted on weekends with his band The Suwannee Troubadours, a traditional country group for which he was lead vocalist, and lead and rhythm guitar player. A gifted storyteller, Dub is particularly animated when talking about his experiences as a cowman, but his

memoir includes many anecdotes about turpentine men. He started out as a youngster working 532 acres of family land with his father. The best use of the piney woods was to work the trees for naval stores, graze cattle and hogs in the woods, and raise livestock feed and fruits and vegetables on small subsistence farms. Tomlinson's father only worked turpentine steadily for a year and a half, but Dub went on to work in turpentine for other employers in the region, including the Langdales and Wetheringtons, rising to the rank of woods rider.

- *Elliott West*

Elliott West, born August 27, 1920 in Darien, Georgia, has lived on countless turpentine camps since he was six years old. His father was employed on a camp in Brantley County when West was very small, and much of West's childhood was spent playing games with other children in South Georgia's and northern Florida's turpentine quarters. Having worked for over sixty years to harvest gum from pine trees, West knows little else when it comes to work. He remained active in the woods until economic factors ("They can buy it cheaper across the water," he says) removed turpentine from the area entirely just a few short years ago. His experience spans the era of turpentine quarters to the last years of turpentining in South Georgia, where he worked for Alton Carter until sidelined for health reasons. Carter and West were featured in the 1998 radio series, Wiregrass Ways, speaking about turpentine. West lives alone today in Folkston, Georgia, where he does landscaping for friends and neighbors. He remains friends with some former turpentiners in the area, especially Mr. Eddie Lee Scipp, whose name and comments appear in this report.

- *Patricia Wetherington Brockinton*

Born in 1935 in rural Clinch County, Pat Brockinton still lives on the site of Dayton Turpentine Camp outside Fargo which she and her first husband, Robert Wetherington, took over from her father-in-law in 1955. The property has its original commissary, woods rider's home, and turpentine quarters, disintegrating reminders of the business which the Wetherington's closed in 1975. Although this project did not emphasize the experiences of turpentine owners and operators, Brockinton's story provides an interesting perspective on the role of a wife in a family turpentine operation. In addition to the traditional woman's role of child rearing, cooking, and keeping house, Pat worked in a variety of ways in the Wetherington turpentine operation. Much of this revolved around the commissary, which she would open for the hands when they needed something, and in care of the workers. The latter included driving them to doctors' appointments, fixing plates of food dispensed at Christmas and New Year's, and providing medical care and advice. In the medical arena she was perhaps atypical: Pat had skill in both traditional medicine and through a nurse's aid certificate. She also assisted her husband in the yearly wintertime burn, and, for three years, in driving the truck to deliver barrels of gum to the Langdale still in Valdosta. Pat's first husband died in 1992. She married Ray Brockinton in 1996.

- *Willie "Coon" White, Jr.*

Willie "Coon" White, Jr. was born on March 21, 1948 in Hoboken, Georgia. White first entered the woods as a turpentine hand when still just a boy. His father

taught him how to chip his first box, and before long, he was a member of what his first boss man (Frank Dukes) called the “Little Boys’ Squad.” The group consisted of seven or eight boys supervised by a woods rider who drove the boys around on a tractor while the youngsters dipped gum. When White was 16 years old, he graduated out of the “Little Boys’ Squad,” quit school, and began working turpentine fulltime. He remained in the woods for several years before getting hired by George Varn to work at the Varn Turpentine Still in Hoboken. After several years of work at the still, turpentine began to dry up as an industry in the United States. The pines, however, remained as much a part of the occupational framework as ever, and Willie White fell into his current job in the sawmill at Varn Wood Products, also in Hoboken. Today, White lives with his wife in Hoboken, where he is a preacher at a local Holiness church and a talented gospel singer and guitarist.

- *Ralph Wilkerson*

Born March 11, 1949 in Hoboken, Georgia, Ralph Wilkerson was raised on a turpentine camp owned and operated by Frank Dukes. A childhood friend of Willie White, Wilkerson was also a member of the “Little Boys’ Squad.” By the time he was 12 years old, he had learned the ways of the woods while dipping gum with his peers and watching his father and other elders. The first seventeen years of Wilkerson’s life were spent in the turpentine quarters. At seventeen, he left the woods and entered the job corps before working in a machine shop, on the railroad, and finally for an asphalt plant in Florida. He returned to Georgia as a 25-year-old eager to go back into the turpentine business. He was hired at the Varn Turpentine Still in Hoboken, where it was his job to

unload the heavy barrels of gum from the trucks and roll them to the kettle for cooking. When the still closed, Wilkerson was hired on to work in the sawmill at Varn Wood Products in Hoboken where he works yet today. Wilkerson lives with his wife in Waycross.

- *J. F. and Bernice Wilcox*

Married in the Ludowici, Georgia turpentine quarters in 1940 at the respective ages of nineteen and fourteen, J. F. and Bernice Wilcox were each also born on turpentine camps. J. F. was born on a camp in Tattnall County, Georgia on January 4, 1921, while Bernice entered the world on November 17, 1925 on the Jasper County, South Carolina turpentine camp where her father was employed. Though J.F. spent his early years in the confines of the camp, he moved to Ludowici as a six-year-old and would never live on a camp again. At age ten he began work in the woods as a turpentiner alongside his father He learned to chip boxes the old way, cutting a cavity into the tree itself rather than tacking cups to the bark for the collection of pine gum. Mr. Wilcox would remain a turpentine hand until he turned seventeen and became a truck driver. He would eventually return to turpentine, but only for a brief period of time before leaving the industry once and for all.

Bernice Wilcox moved to Ludowici before she was old enough to recall having lived elsewhere. Her father moved the family to the Ludowici turpentine quarters in 1927 when Bernice was two years old. When she became old enough, she spent her time watching after her seven younger siblings, cooking and cleaning while her mother

worked in the woods weeding boxes. She only left the turpentine quarters when J. F. took her hand in marriage in 1940.

Today, J. F. and Bernice continue to live in Ludowici and have recently celebrated their sixty-fourth wedding anniversary.

Part Three: In the Woods

Timothy Prizer

"Them Jokers Could Work"

Turpentine work cycled according to the season of the year, the flow of the gum, and the age of the tree. Like any occupational group, turpentiners had specialized terms for the work processes and techniques. A group of 10,000 trees was called a crop, and when a tree was first worked, it was called a virgin. After the worked face was raised up three or four feet, then the tree became a yearling. Anthrom Green, who began working turpentine during the Depression as a teenager around Soperton, Georgia, describes starting a new crop as follows:

> New crops was done in the winter of the year, and the first crew that they had to go in--these were pine trees. I don't know exactly what size, but they were good size. They had a crew called the blazers. They made a blaze on the right at the bottom of the tree. And in that blaze, another crew came with a broad axe, to cut a slot to put a tin in that the gum would run on, and then there was a cup nailed and put under that tin. And this crop, this tree, then was called a virgin crop. And they made a streak with a hack: a hack was, was a stock, oh, about 2 feet with a weight on the bottom of it, and the hack was a cutter that would cut. You had to chip with it, so the weight was to help him chip. And he would make a mark like a "V." The first mark like so, and there, the gum would run right into the cup.
>
> Now, they had to cut a streak like this every week. And see, it become a face after it keep going, so everything you chip, it made what you call a cat face. Keep going up, keep going up, keep going up. And the tar would keep running down.
>
> This virgin was used until it would get at least 3 or 4 feet; you chipping boxes then….Then they would raise the cup and call it a yearling. It begin to be 3 or 4 feet and they'd raise the cup up. Pulling boxes was the same

as chipping boxes. Because when it got up high, where you pulled, and you pulling boxes, you did that more or less by the weight of your body anyway.

Work in the turpentine woods varied according to the season of the year. Although Green hadn't turpentined since 1938, he vividly recalled the cyclical nature of the work year:

> In the winter they done what they call raking pines. You had to rake about and circle around each tree. Rake the pine needles away from the tree, and each one, you got paid for so many that you raked per day. You had yourself assigned a number or you had some word. Some of them, some of them would have a word like Topline, some of them had a word like Four, some of them might have a word like Fifteen. Somebody had to keep tab of this to know how many you had raked. That was in order when seasons come, when fire hit the woods, that if you had raked around, it wouldn't ruin that tree.
>
> There was another process when winter time came. As it get colder, the gum would stick on the face. So in the winter they had to do what they call scraping. Now this was hard. You had to scrape that off the face, and those cups would be full, and they'd dip them out into the barrels: that also made turpentine, and they would scrape that. Now the face is clean now and the tar can run down easier, and they loose a lot of it sticking on the face. So that's why they had to scrape it in the winter. And then, springtime come. That's when your turpentine business really started to work.
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> Now I forget exactly how long it took for those cups to fill. And when those cups were full, then a crew that we called the dippers, they would come in and dip the tar. And they done it by the barrel. Back in those days it was a very little bit they were getting per barrel to dip the gum. And whenever the barrels were full, each one would do so many barrels per day. If he was a good strong man he could do a lot of barrels a day. A mule and a wagon went all down in the rough, pick up the barrels and put them out to where the truck could get to them. The wagons would go down into places where trucks couldn't go. Then, them barrels was loaded on that wagon and brought out up higher, higher ground, that the truck could pick it up. They had to use skids to roll the barrels up on the truck. Turpentining was a hard job.

> To dip a man had to use a big can, but some call it a bucket. It was made from nail kegs. Finally as things progressed, they started really making them in factories. They made them out of metal, but the first ones were made out of nail kegs, and they put a handle on it so you could carry it, and your leg helped you carry that heavy bucket.
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> Yes, it was a hard job, ah; they had what you would call a woods rider. Usually, he was white--he ride a horse. Now, he would ride the route just like you worked it, and he'd ride to see if you missed putting your streak on. If you missed any he would let you know about it.

The final stage of the process was stilling, initially done by fire. As with the work in the woods, much of the labor at turpentine stills was done by African American men. Although Green didn't work as a stiller himself, he knew "about the still because the house that my father and I lived in was right across the street from the still."

> And the still, the process was the same as the way they make moonshine. The still, they would load this big kettle. It was like a two story outfit; down below is where, oh, it was like copper tubing all the way around in a great big tub, and that was for it to run down through. But they had to cook it until the turpentine came all around through this big tub, and come out down below where your stiller took care of filling the barrels with turpentine. Ah, it be done cooked and cooked and cooked, until when they do turn it out to run it, to run the tar out, its rosin then. It's been cooked, it's not gum anymore its rosin. It's real hot. They had open barrels to put that in.
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> So they would keep stilling the gum to make turpentine, and they also was making rosin that came out of it: rosin, they could make glass, they could make ah, rubber, oh I don't know how many products they could make out of the rosin that came from the turpentine.

Though turpentining was hard physical labor, turpentine workers often claimed they were "born to work. The pride with which turpentiners relate their stories about the past stem from the life lessons they have learned about the value of work. Lore

surrounding George Music, Jr.'s great-grandfather's prowess and work ethic has been a source of familial pride since the latter part of the 19th century. Music family folklore has it that the man worked on the railroads with an eight and one-half pound axe at the end of a four foot handle; that he ate grits, ham, and a dozen eggs for breakfast every morning; that he once ate all of an 18-pound ham by himself in one sitting. In the woods, Music's great-grandfather could allegedly cut around the bases of trees all morning without any of them falling. Come midday, he would saw through one to make it topple and, by domino effect, all the trees he had been working throughout the morning hours would give way around him. To top it all off, he was a prizefighter and could topple men much like he toppled pines.

The Musics are a family in which a promotion to turpentine boss was seen as a detriment, for such a position would remove much of the physical labor from the job. Indeed, George Music, Jr.'s grandfather worked up to the position of woodsrider on one South Georgia camp in early 20th century, only to long for his days as a turpentine hand. George Music, Sr. also believed himself born to work turpentine. He toiled from dusk to dawn among his cherished pines, and he demanded no less of his son. Working alongside his father, Music, Jr. recalls how he had few days off during his adolescence. Only on one occasion was work called off for anything other than a bad storm; on a sweltering summer day of 106-degree heat, Music's father postponed work until the next morning, hoping for cooler weather.

For George Music, Sr., a life's work in turpentine literally meant the difference between life and death. As he grew older, he developed heart trouble that would eventually take his life in September of 2001, but he would not go without a fight.

According to the doctor in Waycross who treated Music throughout his battle with cardiovascular illness, the old-timer's lungs had been enlarged as a result of his lifelong devotion to working turpentine. In fact, the doctor had to take two x-rays of Music's lungs, for one screen simply was not large enough to hold them. The doctor said the only cases in which this had ever been seen were in athletes and in a few elderly citizens that had worked exceptionally hard throughout their lives.

When the time finally came for Music, Sr. to have heart surgery, the doctor insisted that the chances of successful surgery were slim. But the doctor was clueless to the fact that his workhorse patient had been in the woods chipping turpentine boxes the entire day before. "I don't think you know who you're dealing with here," Music, Jr. told him. "He'll be walking in three days." The surgery was performed on Friday; on Saturday, Music, Sr. was off of life support; by the following Wednesday, the old man was plowing corn on the only piece of land he had ever called home. Music's fierce individualism, strict self-discipline, and innate devotion to hard work had enabled him to at least postpone the inevitable. His passion for working turpentine kept him going. Music Jr. thought his father literally born to work turpentine; every year, he looked forward to chipping and pulling in the thick of his treasured pines. But as work in turpentine declined, so too did his health. When the demand for the work disappeared, his father's passion for living had also vanished. He died at the age of 67.

Turpentiners, like other workers, tell stories, boasts, and jokes about either their own or another worker's performance on the job. "A black man, I'm going to tell you," C. J. Taylor begins, "He wasn't no educated man back then. There was mighty few, but them jokers could work, that's right." Junior Taylor recalls how he would come upon

workers sleeping against pine trees with a bottle of moonshine after a night of heavy boozing rather than return home and risk not making it to work the next morning. Some stories deal with pranks which serve as rites of initiation, as experienced workers break in a newcomer or otherwise put him in his place. Willie White recalls a boastful new employee named Nathaniel. When Nathaniel entered the Hoboken piney woods in the company of Willie White and friends, the boss man had already hyped Nathaniel to be one of the best dippers he had ever come across. The boss swore that Nathaniel could dip three barrels of gum a day and be home by noon. Skeptical, the workers watched Nathaniel closely throughout his first day in the woods. Though he didn't have three barrels full of gum until 1:30 in the afternoon, this was still an astonishing feat. Sensing his co-workers amazement, Nathaniel began to brag. It became clear that established members of the group needed to put him in his place. When White arrived in the woods the next morning, the men had devised a plan to trick Nathaniel into modesty. As would be expected, Nathaniel offered a cocky, "Y'all with me today?" to the workers when they began the day's chores. "Oh yeah," the workers laughed to themselves, "We with you, man." Nathaniel went to working as usual, dipping gum at a record pace. But as he worked, another worker stealthily poured a shot of 66 brand laxative in Nate's glass bottle of Coca-Cola. Thirsty from his record-breaking pace, he took a swig of the Coke and 15 minutes later had disappeared in the woods. The crew's prank put an end to Nate's bragging. "He come out there and try to show off," White remembers. "We didn't like that now. He can come out there and be like we do."

Although "showing off" was not appreciated in the newcomer, turpentiners did appreciate a veteran worker of exceptional skill. Turpentiners only became legendary in

their trade, according to Junior Taylor, by working harder than anyone else on the camp. Wilburt Johnson, known to his boss (Gillis Carter) as the "ringleader" of the other workers in the woods, explains that only the worker who had the most to show for his work – whether it was boxes chipped, cups tacked, or barrels dipped – was able to gain a title like "ringleader."

Workers who were considered legendary in the piney woods were not afraid to let others know about it. While C. J. Taylor is not shy about recounting his own expertise ("I can *naturally* drive a nail, you can believe that," he says of his ability to tack cups on trees with only one hammer's blow to the head of each nail), he is unabashed in bragging of his brother's legendary work ethic. Junior tacked more tin, chipped more boxes, and rosined more trees than any man C. J. has ever seen in the turpentine woods. "Everything he started doing, he would beat you doing it," C. J. says of Junior. "He wouldn't let *no* man beat him in the woods. They called him the little 'Iron Man.' I ain't joking. You ask anybody where you go about Junior Taylor… ask any white guy, I don't care who you ask… Everybody around this place here, they'll know Junior. He was a lead man in work. That joker's a *natural* worker."

Everywhere he went, Junior Taylor received verbal and physical challenges of one-upmanship from workers who only seemed to get younger as Taylor grew older. Taylor would have none of it, however, and he repeatedly sent baby-faced workers home red-faced and angry. Junior's trash talking is as passionate today as if he were still laboring among the South Georgia pines.

> I beat them jokers doing everything, chipping and everything. I chipped more trees than any man on the job. I be dipping more gum too… Another thing, when you're rosining them trees down off that bark, I was the onliest one that could stand it. All the rest of them that wasn't dead

> gave up. Because that's all I do in the wintertime, rosin that bark off the tree… I'd rosin every tree we put up; I'd rosin it down myself. Them jokers went to calling me "Iron Man."

Junior Taylor claims to have chipped 4,500 trees in one day and dipped 75 barrels of gum in one month. "I toted [C. J.] about 40 years," he guffaws. "I done all the work, and he'd just be out there most of the time… He couldn't take that work like I could. None of them could… Old Man Dukes[3] told them, say 'Ain't none of y'all can stick with old Junior.' That's what the boss man told them." Taylor's local fame clearly expanded to areas outside of the camp, and to this day, some members of the community know him only as "Iron Man."

The "Boss Men"

On our turpentine farm
On our turpentine farm
Where the work ain't hard
And the weather is warm

- *On Our Turpentine Farm*, Pigmeat Pete and Catjuice Charlie (Document Records, 1997)

The work of gathering and processing the raw gum was done chiefly by black men, and with a few exceptions, the boss men and overseers—known as woodsriders--were white. Not surprisingly, then, a masked irony pervades "On Our Turpentine Farm," as is the case with many of African American lyrics of the period. Working turpentine in the early-to-mid 1900s was one of the most economically and physically taxing occupations one could undertake. Labor lasted from sunup to sundown six days a week in many cases, and the pay was so low that climbing out of debt to the

[3] One of Taylor's many turpentine bosses

commissary was nearly impossible. Woodsriders and bosses freely disciplined as they saw fit, as reflected in another lyric from the workers' perspective: "Boss man's a' ridin by/Look out, boy, look out" (Waldorf 1996:14).

During the era when most workers were living in company quarters under the commissary system, the labor differed little from slavery. The pioneering folklorist, Stetson Kennedy, who did fieldwork in Cross City, Florida Turpentine Camp during the late 1930s, wrote of his findings, "More than any other occupational group, these Negroes are denied the rights for which the Civil War was supposedly fought. As one who knows told me, 'A Negro who is foolish enough to go to work in a turpentine camp is simply signing away his birthright'" (Kennedy 1989[1942]:261). Former turpentiner C.J. Taylor of Blackshear recalled, "Things was so bad back then, you was just *like* a slave….You was under pressure all the time. You don't tell nobody what you *wouldn't* do."

Former turpentiners tell various stories, called personal experience narratives by folklorists, about their work in the woods. Many deal with treatment by woodsriders, both good and bad. The purpose of the woodsrider was to keep a tally of the work's progression and to make certain that each worker was doing his job. If the woodsrider noticed that cups on a tree were tacked improperly, or if a tree had been skipped all together, he often demanded that the worker return to the tree. Both Junior and C. J. Taylor cite the same occurrence as the harshest treatment of a worker they have ever witnessed. It was late one afternoon. The woodsrider trotted his horse up to the tree where a black worker was chipping the bark off of a face. The woodsrider demanded that the worker return to a patch of three trees that had been missed along the way.

When the worker did not respond immediately, he suddenly received a blow to the back from the woodsrider's bush knife – a sword-like instrument of about three feet in length and used for cutting sugar cane. "He was bleeding like a hog," C. J. said, "and that man just rode right on off with that horse." The worker somehow dragged himself to a nearby highway where he was seen and helped to a doctor in Hoboken, Georgia. Such abuse also occurred outside of the woods. J. F. Wilcox recalls seeing "nasty" woodsriders beat their turpentine hands in the commissary and other areas of the camp. "They had you kind of in bondage like in prison," C. J. recalls. "You break the rank, [the woodsrider] will go upside your head with a puller handle or a hack or anything."

According to the Taylors, there were few tactics workers could employ to show resistance to the woodsriders and bosses. On breaks and when away from authority figures, whether in their homes or partying at the jooks[4], workers would frequently fantasize about harming the woodsriders in some way. Out of earshot of the bosses, workers would share stories about the cruelties of woodsriders from camps on which they had previously lived. They talked among one another about current woodsriders, often deriding them for the way they looked or the way they talked. In a few instances, an especially intrepid worker would yell back at a woodsrider when they were being demanded to do something they felt unnecessary. This could be dangerous, however, as seen in the story above. Typically, the main form of worker defiance would be to purposefully leave trees un-worked after the woodsrider had gone home in the evening, thinking he had accounted for all of the completed work for the day.

[4] "Shanty in quarters which served as the camp communal recreational center." [Butler 1998:207]

Accounts of woodsriders' benevolence to their workers are less common, though workers and their families were rarely left hungry. Woodsriders were usually took their hands to town or to see a doctor for injuries or illnesses. Junior Taylor does recall one boss that was never anything but kind to Taylor's father. This boss gave Taylor's father two hogs to kill and bicycles for the children one Christmas on the camp.

Diversions in the Woods

The culture of wood's work included activities such as lunch breaks, nicknaming, jokes, or other things done for entertainment and enjoyment. Over the years, workers developed routines which defined them as a group. Customs regarding foods, entertainment, natural surroundings and the terms turpentiners give to these surroundings are all a part of the unique culture of the turpentiner.

When turpentiners arose in the morning at or before the sound of the shack rouser's horn, they normally had a large breakfast that would hold them over until lunchtime. Common for breakfast were grits, eggs, bacon and sausage. When living in the camps of South Georgia and Florida, the Taylors normally carried their lunches with them into the woods in one-gallon lunch pails, metal buckets with a lid and a hinging handle. Typically, sardines were a staple in the camp diet, and workers usually brought pork and beans with them as well. Some called the lunch pails "syrup buckets," for often they would soak the bottom of the bucket in syrup and dip biscuits in it for a post-lunch dessert of sorts (Butler 1998:130).

Workers supplemented their diets with what was available in the woods. George Music recalls that, on his property, blackberries and huckleberries grew in the wild and

were enjoyed daily while working. On one Florida camp, Junior Taylor recalls workers eating fruit from orange groves adjacent to the woods. Additionally, both Music and the Taylors occasionally used the groundwater that gathered after a rain as a thirst-quencher. The water had a slight turpentine taste to it but was not thought to be dangerous to drink. Similarly, the water that accumulated in aluminum turpentine cups during and after rains was also a source of drinking water. Elliott West recalls that the top layer of the liquid was a thick film of pure pine gum that tasted pleasant. Ralph Wilkerson disagrees, though he drank turpentine water when necessary. "When it comes to needing some water," as compared with being "dry all the way from your stomach to your throat…,you gotta find some kind to get in ya," Wilkerson says. Music always preferred to bring a milk jug of frozen water out into the woods with him to drink as it thawed throughout the day. Similarly, Junior Taylor recalls workers bringing stone jugs of water with them in the woods and burying them underground to keep them somewhat cool, hidden from the afternoon sun.

The workers took advantage of resources in the woods for both food and recreation. Junior and C. J. Taylor used to participate in all night hunts with other camp workers a couple nights a week. George Music's land is so abundant with wild game that Music's father used to stand with a shotgun on the front porch of his home, all the while joking about how far he had to travel to hunt. A large part of Music's diet came from his father's front-porch hunting expeditions, consisting mainly of squirrel, rabbit and quail.

Fishing was also a popular pastime. George Music, Jr. used to fish every weekend on the Satilla River in Waycross, and he would gather his bait from the woods

surrounding his home. Gathering worms was sometimes as easy as just turning over a log in the woods or extracting them from tree bark, but other times Music would have to grunt earthworms out of the ground. The traditional practice of grunting worms out of the ground was sometimes called worm fiddling because of the reverberating sound that would result from vibrating a stake in the ground (Bureau of Florida Folklife 1987:16). Music would forcefully rub a brick over the stake in the ground to cause underground vibrations, driving the worms to the surface.

On nearly every camp that the Taylors lived, the workers had specific names for certain areas in the woods. These names are passed on orally; all of the workers know the names of the areas from hearing them discussed so frequently but few know where the names originated. Only workers like George Music, who worked family land, know where some of the names began. Terms like “The Knob,” “The Hill,” and “The Pond” have been handed down through the Music family. “The Pond,” for example, is a patch of low land that tends to gather pools of water after a rain. When Junior Taylor worked on a camp nearby the Okefenokee Swamp, the workers had places called “Turn Around” and “Gator Roads.” Both of these are cautionary terms, the former a warning that one has gone too far into the swamp, and the latter achieving its name from the frequent sighting of alligators there. Elliott West’s longtime coworker and friend Eddie Lee Scipp likewise recalls an area nicknamed “Bear Hollow” on a North Florida turpentine operation. Yet another cautionary folk name for a dangerous segment of the woods was “Knee-Knocker,” a portion of a Nahunta turpentine farm on which Willie White worked for several years. White recalls that in “Knee-Knocker,” there are large natural fissures hidden under pine straw that men fell into unknowingly. Some of the

roads in Junior Taylor's camps had posted actual road signs displaying the names that turpentiners had created over the years.

Workers were also given nicknames. Willie White received his, "Coon," from Arthur Dukes, a relative of White's long time boss, Frank Dukes. Arthur Dukes delegated the name "Coon" to White when White was just a boy, and he assigned the name "Possum" to White's late brother. Dukes used to take Willie and his brother fishing when they were small children. "He would call me the coon," White says, "because I catched so many fish. He called my brother 'Possum' 'cause he always be trying to take 'em," he laughs. White's friends and neighbors to this day rarely refer to him as anything other than "Coon." Junior Taylor remembers nicknames such as "Gator," "Slim," "Spiderman," and of course his own, "Iron Man."

"It just sounded like a song, all day long"

With work in turpentine came the calls and hollers that resounded in the woods throughout the workday, the rhythms of the coopers' task of hammering together gum barrels, and other songs created and passed on by generations of turpentiners. "It just sounded like a song, all day long," C. J. Taylor reminisces.

Calls and hollers among workers alerted the woodsriders that a tree had been boxed. When each worker finished boxing a tree (i.e. hanging cups or tacking tin), he shouted out a call of his choice to tell the woodsrider that a tree had been completed. The woodsrider stood or sat on horseback with a tally sheet, marking off the number of trees each worker had completed. Workers could choose any call they liked, as long as it could be distinguished from others. Most chose either numbers or nicknames. Junior

Taylor's two main calls throughout his life were "Poor Boy" and "One," while C. J. held true to hollering "Thirty-eight" most of his life. Wilburt Johnson used the call "Can I Go?" His longtime boss Gillis Carter refers to him today as "Can I Go" when the two elderly men pass on streets of Willacoochee or meet in Johnson's carport for an afternoon chat.

A skillful worker could tack between four hundred and six hundred cups in a single day. Because some workers hollered all day long whether they had truthfully finished with a tree or not, other more honest workers became frustrated. "Someone would say, 'Hey man, stop hollering at the same time I do,'" C. J. Taylor laughs. "You know that man can't get all them trees!" Junior Taylor remembers another man who hollered "Automobile" throughout the day, whether he had completed a job or not. He recalls one worker who would shout "One More" all day long, eventually turning his call into a full-fledged song that drove the other workers crazy. Sometimes this sort of activity would get even the woodsrider all riled up. Taylor remembers woodsriders saying things like, "Shut up your damn mouth and let *me* holler! Y'all out there got a damn song going on!"

One of the favorite pastimes of workers on many of Taylor's camps was watching and listening to the sounds of other workers, both inside and outside the realm of turpentine. The sounds of cooper's hammering barrels fascinated the entire camp community. "It sounds like a song," Junior Taylor said. The cooper would hammer the staves around the barrel's rim, playing a steady rhythm that echoed throughout the camp. Some coopers would sing songs while they worked, the majority of which Junior says were spirituals from the days of slavery. The widespread African American

tradition of hambone was also practiced by African Americans. Gillis Carter recalls that blacks in his father's employ from "knee babies" on up would entertain themselves with what he called "beating the bones."

On one of the camps where the Taylors resided, the work songs of gandy dancers (or railroad workers) provided listening enjoyment. The turpentiners used to love to watch them drive steel spikes and crossties into the tracks and listen to the songs they sang in the process. C. J. recalls seeing convict railroad workers walk along the dirt road that ran through the turpentine woods. He remembers them carrying picks and shovels and the sound of the chains that held their legs and arms together. "They was like a slave out there in that hot sun," he says. "They called that hard labor, and they meant *hard* labor back then." In most instances, according to Taylor, even the turpentiner made better money than did the railroad worker.

Music was also a source of entertainment, motivation, and inspiration to turpentiners as they worked. Many of the songs were those heard in jooks or in the church. Perhaps the best collection of turpentiner repertoire comes from the fieldwork of Zora Neale Hurston and Stetson Kennedy (1937-1942), now available on-line in American Memory: Florida Folklife from the WPA Collection, housed at American Folklife Center, Library of Congress. (http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/flwpabibquery.html) Although African American workers culture of the period is most associated with secular repertoire like blues, religious songs also were common. The Taylor family is known for their singing of gospel, a family tradition that started in the pinewoods on southern turpentine camps. Junior and C.J.'s father kept the family together by forming a gospel group with his sons, known as

the Taylor Brothers. They had a regional hit in the 1960s called “Mother’s Advice.” One of the Taylor’s brothers who worked all of his short life in turpentine was especially adept at singing. Jack Taylor, who drowned at the age of just twenty-two while wrestling an alligator in the Okefenokee Swamp, used to sing so well on the bed of the truck while traveling to and from the woods that all thirty-five workers riding along would be in tears at the sound. One of these songs is now on a CD sung by Clarence Taylor, former turpentiner, pastor, and gospel singer.

> O, when He calls me
> I will answer
> When God calls me
> Yes, I will answer
> I will be somewhere when He calls my name
> O yes, I want to be somewhere
> O Lord, when you call my name

Another song Jack Taylor sang that caused the workers to “go to crying,” as C. J. remembers, is entitled “You Fight On.” The song is meant to inspire listeners to keep fighting for a better life even in the face of hardship.

> You fight on
> You fight on
> Keep your sword in your hand
> You fight on (*Spirits of the Pines* 1978)

When Jack Taylor passed away, the Taylor family had trouble singing for a long while. Eventually, the urge to sing would return in full force, and the Taylors are as passionate as ever about it today. The New Taylor Singers, comprised of two generations of the family who have worked turpentine, perform standards like “Never Heard a Man Speak like This Man” and Thomas Dorsey’s “Precious Lord, Take My Hand” as well as original material.

To hear Willie White's demonstration of his former hollers in the woods, there is no doubt of the significant role song played in his life as a turpentiner. From the time he was a small child in the woods of Hoboken, Georgia, White both wowed and soothed his fellow workers with his voice. Raspy yet powerful, his vocals rang out through the woods not only in his calls and hollers, but also in the form of traditional blues tunes, spirituals, and popular religious hymns. The secular – or "devil" – music in White's catalog eventually gave way to strictly religious music, and he now sings and plays guitar at his church near his home in Hoboken, where he is also a Holiness preacher. Having not sung the blues since becoming saved, he cites his mother and father as his greatest musical and vocal inspiration. He remembers hearing his mother singing spirituals as she did her housework each day, and it took him years to realize the power contained in these songs and in his mother's voice. When he began singing them himself while working his daily routine in the turpentine woods, others' reactions to his singing alerted him to the power of the songs. "When I go to singing in the woods, like when us little boys were together and I'd go to singing," he says, "a lot of 'em go to standing up and listening, you know." White and black men were equally moved by White's singing, and they were especially fond of his self-accompaniment on harmonica, a talent he learned from his father.

Back in Waycross, George Music, Jr. and his father used to do their own fair share of crooning in the woods. More than anything, Music remembers regularly hearing his father whistle tunes like "Wildwood Flower," "Down Yonder," and "Red Wing" from well across the woods. Many of the songs were learned over the radio. Songs by Hank Snow, Hank Williams ("Senior, of course," he stresses), and Ernest Tubb were

always favorites of the Musics. His family did not have television until 1977, and the major form of entertainment on Saturday nights was listening to the Grand Ole Opry via radio. He says that people used to joke him that his family lived so far back in the country that the Grand Ole Opry they heard on Saturday nights had actually been performed the Saturday night before.

For turpentiners, song was a powerful emotional release. It provided an outlet, an escape, from the stress of supervised and difficult labor. Most of all, it made them happy in a job that often made happiness difficult to achieve. Singing, J. F. Wilcox believes, was a "consolation thing." This significance is not lost to Ralph Wilkerson either. "Sometimes, you know," he says, "you get to singing, it makes you feel good, you know. Makes you feel like doing something. That means you lift up, your spirit lifts up. It makes you feel like working." Gillis Carter's father, Era, always judged his workers' morale by their singing, even to the point of sensing the social and economic changes that marked the slow death of the turpentine industry:

> Daddy's saying was this: "People aren't happy anymore." And you'd say, "Why is that, Daddy?" "Well," Daddy says, "I remember when the colored men down around Wilsonville would be in the woods a' dipping." Daddy says, "You could hear him for a mile or two when he'd dip a barrel. He'd take his dip paddle and hit on the side of the barrel and holler out a tune. Just letting everybody know everywhere that he had got a barrel of gum." You know, he had accomplished a feat, you know. But Daddy says, "People's not happy anymore." And really… you don't see people out singing much anymore. It's not that their voice has changed; they just don't have the prodding.

The Turpentine Mule and the Pickup Truck

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, barrels of turpentine gum, many times weighing as much as six hundred pounds, were transported from the worksites in

the woods to the still by mule-drawn wagons. A worker would sit on the wagon bench and direct the mules using a variety of verbal commands. Also used for numerous other tasks in the woods, the mules were a crucial aspect of everyday operations. Turpentine mules are still remembered as some of the hardest workers and thus an essential character in the turpentine woods, even though pickup trucks largely replaced them.

Most workers on turpentine camps, according to Junior Taylor's recollection, had their own mules. A mule was usually selected for its reputation of intelligence and good behavior, and it did not take long before some workers had developed strong emotional and work-related bonds with the animal. The first mule Wilburt Johnson ever employed in the turpentine woods carried with him the name "Pet," perhaps a testimony to the fact that many of the animals were treated more as companions than merely working animals. Mules often became as attached to their owners, opting only to obey commands delivered from the worker with the most familiar face, voice, or touch. Willie White remembers that a mule named "Dan" would only follow his owner's commands:

> You'd try to get him to do it, and he wouldn't do it. But [Dan's owner] could get up under that mule. He'd get up under that mule and tell that mule, say, "Now, lay in my hand." And that mule would lay his head down in his hands. He had that mule just that trained. And he could take that mule a' loose, and tell that mule to go off. He'd send that mule off. And he'd tell him, say, "Now, come here! Come here, Dan!" And all he'd have to do is say the word, and he'd be right there, turn around and come right back.

Turpentine mules were also taught commands for "stop," "go," "come," "turn left," and "turn right," among others.

Another example of workers' companionship with their mules is clear in the memories of George Music, Jr., who used his mule "Diner" to farm his entire property by

himself for two years beginning in 1972. At just 12 years old, Music quickly grew to love this mule as any child does a special pet, and Music speaks fondly of “Diner” to this day. The Musics used to carry logs out of the woods to be used as firewood or sold to timber companies, and “Diner” would move back and forth between trees all day long to transport them as she heard her name called from various locations in the woods. “Diner” stood patiently while Music or his father loaded the wagon with timber, and then she waited to be called to another tree. Music says turpentine mules were smarter than a lot of people, in that most would at least listen when they were told to do something.

Aside from being one of the best workers in turpentine that Music has ever known, “Diner” had personality. She took a liking to stealing food right out of people’s hands the moment they had diverted their attention elsewhere. “Diner” cared little about food that was lying around; she only wanted it if she knew someone else did too. The more he worked with her and the more time he spent with her, Music developed a wonderful friendship with “Diner,” and he says that she really became “part of” him over the years that she was alive.

Gillis Carter and family handled their mules with special care. In Willacoochee, Carter’s mules were kept in barbed-wire pens built in the woods, and Carter carried corn and hay to them frequently. Gillis’ father, Era, required that each mule have fifteen ears of corn, and he expected his sons to shuck it for them. In addition, the boys were expected to chop each ear in half to prevent the mules from choking. Each was given a large block of hay and a barrel full of water. In order to satisfy Era Carter, Gillis had to be sure that the mules were well-kempt as well, their manes trimmed and their fur clean.

If a mule became ill or injured, the Carters always called a veterinarian out to the property to care for it.

Turpentine mules exhibited their worth in the woods the same way all who worked in turpentine did – by demonstrating their work ethic. One of Gillis Carter's workers, a black man named J. W., had an exceptionally strong mule named "Doc." When Carter bogged his truck down in a stream of water known as Mill Creek one day, he had six men wade into the water and push until red in the face to try to dislodge the truck from the muddy creek floor. J. W. recommended "Doc" for the job. Though doubtful of the mule's ability to tote such weight, Carter took his chain and hooked it from the back of the mule's wagon to the front of the truck. J. W. stepped from the wagon with his reins and clucked "Doc" firmly. "Doc" tightened up and felt the load. When he realized the magnitude of the task at hand, his tail stuck straight out and his body became tense. With Carter giving it the slightest bit of gas, "Doc" pulled the truck from the creek and onto dry land. So many years later, Carter remains astounded by the mule's demonstration of brute strength.

Though most turpentine mules were not only hard workers but also tame and personable, there were a good number that epitomized the "stubborn" stereotype. Junior Taylor recalls some mules getting a sudden wild hair and tearing away in full gallop, scattering splinters of wagons throughout the woods. Other mules were prone to kicking, and Taylor remembers a mule busting the seat off of a wagon with a sudden forceful kick. Some mules so misbehaved that, as recalled by J.F. Wilcox, workers placed "jaw-bone breakers on them because they're so unruly you couldn't stop 'em

unless you had put something on them to near 'bout break their jaw. They'd be bleeding around the mouth to keep 'em under control."

Some turpentine mules became fatigued in the sweltering afternoon sun, laying down and refusing to budge. As goes the traditional joke heard often on turpentine camps:

> Being told to write an essay on the mule, a small boy turned into his teacher the following effort: "The mule is a hairier bird than the goose or the turkey. It has two legs to walk with, two more to kick with and wears its wings on the side of its head. It is stubbornly backwards about coming forward." [Gerrell 1997:67]

Elliott West's longtime friend and fellow woodsman, Eddie Lee Scipp, remembers workers telling this joke of the mule and the ox, paraphrased as follows: A mule and an ox are standing around the camp one morning just before time to go to work in the turpentine woods. The mule, bending to the stubborn stereotype, refuses to go to work. Frustrated, the ox demands, "You got to work today." The mule quips back, "One day, they're gonna butcher you." The ox replies, "And after they butcher me, they'll use my hide to whip you for the rest of your life."

Mules have a nearly four-hundred-year history in working turpentine, dating back to the beginnings of the naval stores industry in America. By the mid-1900s, they were increasingly replaced by pickup trucks; eventually most barrels of turpentine gum were hauled to the still on truck beds rather than wagons. Many turpentiners resisted this technological transition for both practical and sentimental reasons. For some woodsriders, the southern Georgia and northern Florida scrub was much too thick to even consider using trucks in place of mules when navigating the woods. More importantly, many workers protested the change in an attempt to keep their valued

mules in the woods. Though trucks did become more commonplace than mules in the woods by the end of turpentine production in the U.S., mules never disappeared completely from the southern turpentine forests (Butler 1998:153-8).

Knowledge, Innovation and Coping with Danger

The thick woods of the Southeast was full of hazards related to dangerous wildlife, occupational techniques, and weather. One of the biggest threats in southern Georgia and northern Florida is rattlesnakes; in most of the literature on turpentine, the role of these reptiles is emphasized. However, according to the Taylors and George Music, Jr., rattlesnakes posed little real danger to the workers even though many feared them above all other animals. The old adage regarding the dangers of wildlife, “They are just as afraid of you as you are of them,” goes a long way in the woods. As Music explains, all forms of wildlife, rattlesnakes included, learn the patterns and cycles that both humans and other animals take in the woods, making it easier for them to avoid each other. Turpentiners worked in a regular cycle throughout most of the year and would rarely see rattlesnakes at all. The only time workers had trouble with snakes is when it came time for dipping, during which workers backtracked and reversed their cycle. It was while dipping that Junior Taylor remembers the only two workers in his sixty years in turpentine being bitten, one of them his brother C. J. The majority of serious injury or death from rattlesnakes in the turpentine woods came only to those who handled them for entertainment. Working in the woods with Willie White and Ralph Wilkerson was one such man who caught snakes, kept them in cages, and sent the

shed skin to his son in prison for the crafting of belts and billfolds. The hobby finally caught up to the man when he was struck on the hand and died of a heart attack before reaching the hospital.

More common than snakes in the woods were hornets and yellow jackets. Hornets' nests were highly respected by workers, and at the first sight of such a nest workers "made tracks" in another direction. The most prevalent danger of hornets and yellow jackets, and one that was largely unavoidable, was when they gathered underneath workers' cups on the trees. Junior Taylor and George Music, Jr. both remember being stung under these circumstances. Music was stung seven times at once; "My mouth wasn't big enough to let all the racket out," he remembers.

Mosquitoes were also a problem. Taylor remembers two or three different kinds of mosquitoes preying on the workers, and one 57-year-old friend and coworker of Taylor's returned to his camp shack one night to die suddenly from their bites. After this happened, paranoia swept through the camp and workers added protective nets to cover their heads and faces.

Occasionally, workers would see a bear or two in the woods of South Georgia while working turpentine. Junior Taylor remembers seeing bears and feeling the hair stand up on the back of his head. Likewise, George Music's biggest fear of all was encountering a group of cubs in the company of their mother. Music's fear was realized on one occasion, and he was quick to "[leave] her some tracks to look at." Junior Taylor remembers one man who used to tranquilize the bears around the camp, placing them in cages for residents to come see. After a few days, he would release the bears back

into the wild, and Taylor says that he refused to be anywhere nearby when they were released.

Several times, panther tracks were seen along the sandy roads around George Music Rd., and occasionally the jet-black animal would be seen crossing the street. Within a few days of first spotting the tracks, one of Music's cows or hogs would nearly always disappear, and it was usually assumed that the panther had carried it off as a meal.

Former turpentiners relate various anecdotes and pranks related to workers' fears of wildlife. Before Willie White's and Ralph Wilkerson's friend died from a snake bite, White also made a hobby out of snake handling. "They used to call me 'Snake Man,'" White says, "because I used to mess with so many snakes. You know, I catch 'em, scare peoples with 'em." White says he used to catch harmless king snakes and put them down the front of his shirt and let them sliver out to give his former woodsmen the creeps. But these pranks also served to demonstrate the harmlessness of some of the creatures that the workers most feared. Willie White also once used his hands to make what looked like bear tracks in the sandy soil of the woods and then called everyone over to look at them. He had everyone convinced. One man brought his shotgun. Others ran in the opposite direction. White did all he could to keep from laughing, but he eventually confessed to the prank. Gillis Carter's uncle, Cecil, pulled similar pranks. He strategically placed a stuffed bobcat in the woods on occasion to scare the workers into respect for the animals:

> He'd put him right where [a worker] could see him, right in the edge of the bushes. And Uncle Cecil would get over there behind him and he'd wait 'til the man would start to chip the tree. And Uncle Cecil would growl like a tiger or a bobcat, and automatically, the guy would stop and he'd go to

> looking around. And about that time, he'd see that thing… and he'd "part the bushes," as the saying was.

By far the most unusual form of "wild" life workers had to deal with in the woods was "Wild Men." According to C. J. Taylor, these "beasts" were believed to be barbaric and savage, rough, wild and hairy. In truth, "Wild Men" were runaway prisoners, taking to a life of solitude and hiding from the law. They would roam the woods, at night mostly, wandering down to the train depot to hitch a ride with the rest of the hobo culture. "That's when he'd make his moves was at night," C. J. Taylor says. "But that man was dangerous, I believe." One night while hunting gopher with Junior near the camp commissary, C. J. looked down the stretch of railroad tracks and spotted a "Wild Man" in the glow of a light beneath the train trestle. C. J. whispered to Junior, "Hey man, there's a man out there. He's got hair all over him, Junior." Junior whispered in response, "I bet that's the same man that was running in them woods this morning." The brothers started walking toward him, and the hobo prisoner ran away, disappearing into the darkness. Supposedly, one of the "Wild Men" would come by a house in the camp on occasion to beg for some water and a piece of bread.

During most of the turpentine era, workers used traditional methods for predicting weather. George Music learned from his late father how to predict rain by watching the smoke come out of a chimney. If the smoke rolled out of the chimney and drifted upwards to the sky as is expected, rain would almost certainly bypass the area, no matter how threatening the skies may appear. However, if the smoke commenced floating upward and suddenly veered back toward the ground, rain was sure to come. Likewise, Willie White and his coworkers oftentimes stabbed a stick or a fallen limb into the ground and believed that the rain would come from the direction indicated by the

shadow of the limb. White recalls that these and other such traditional methods were part of the teachings of an old Native American friend of his named Charlie Hodges. These methods, which proved true on countless occasions, testify to turpentiners' acute knowledge of their environment.

After spending countless hours working the same acreage, turpentiners developed finely tuned navigational skills. George Music knows precisely where he stands at all times simply by looking up at the canopies of the pines. Junior Taylor needs only to look at the treetops as well to know his location at any time. Likewise, C. J. Taylor claims, "You put me in the woods out there, I guarantee you I can go anywhere in them woods in the *night* and I'll come back." This skill became very useful when workers from the camp would gather at night to hunt in the woods. Taylor also implemented the use of familiar sounds to orient himself with his specific location. Sounds of roosters crowing and trains moaning in the distance provided C. J. with directional clues to his own whereabouts. Turpentiners also determined their positions by using the stars and by examining their shadow at a particular time of day.

C. J. Taylor's remarkable navigational knowledge of the piney woods of South Georgia and northern Florida helped him immensely in during his military service in Korea. Taylor recalls with much pride that though he lacked formal much education, his life in turpentine had prepared him for battle better than the college-educated men in his unit. "I knew how to train. I knew how to use a compass. I'd go in places the other ones couldn't go," Taylor recalls. "And every time they wanted someone to go [somewhere others could not or were afraid to go], they would call 'Taylor, C. J.'… I can go through a swamp or anything," he continues. "See, the Okefenokee Swamp, that

was my home. [Other soldiers] would say, 'Man, how'd you do that?!' And I'd say, 'Well, I was raised like that.'"

Turpentiners also employed more practical methods to assist them in their navigation of the woods. Elliott West kept from becoming lost in the woods with a technique he called "joining your work." This method involved moving from tree to tree in a circular or horseshoe pattern that brought a worker back to his starting place and reoriented him with his surroundings. Willie White practiced a somewhat similar method. "The best thing to do," White recalls, "is mark your way in and mark your way back out." Though this occasionally involved skinning trees with a bark hack while moving through the woods, there were other systems as well. Rather than scarring the trees, White and others used to cut palmetto bushes and tie the leaves around the trees as indicators of their path through the woods. With this method, when a worker was ready to depart the woods for the day, it was simply a matter of following the line of palmetto leaves back to the point of origin. J. F. Wilcox uses a simple but accurate analogy describe turpentiners' ability to navigate the thick of the woods:

> That's just like you go in town. You know that town. You know every street. You can go anywhere you want and you know where you at… It's just knowledge. Wisdom, knowledge come from the woods, I guess. You grow up in it. Sometimes we might go in them woods six or seven or eight or ten miles back in them woods, but we'd know our way around in there… Just like you know the town, you knowed the woods the same way. There were signs and everything…

Not all dangers of working turpentine involve nature. The work itself can prove extremely dangerous on occasion, as can be seen with a technological advancement that took effect in the early 1940s – the use of sulfuric acid to increase the trees' gum yields. While this chemical solution did work to increase gum flow, it also made

turpentiners' work more hazardous. One of the dangers of acid was its lack of viscosity, which caused it to splash back on workers as they applied it to the catface. The wind could cause the same danger. "Sometimes, you'd be out there and it'd be blowing," Wilburt Johnson recalls, "and you'd look like somebody done shot you with buckshot where that acid done eat through your clothes." In the words of one worker, "Anything that will eat the pants off a man will surely kill a tree or cow. And I'll bet it will give you cancer too" (Wright 1979, 103). Sulfuric acid also made it extremely dangerous for workers to chew on old rosin as they so often enjoyed before, and it reduced greatly the use of turpentine in medicines (a topic to be discussed in the next section).

After turpentiners were introduced to sulfuric acid and began to learn the dangers of it, they began using a substance they called, simply, "paste." The paste, which served the same function as the acid, was thick, gummy, and immune to splash and wind. Though in this way it was a safer alternative to acid, it was stickier and the method of its application required more direct contact with it. It was thus commonly transferred from hands to eyes. Elliott West remembers thinking that he would rather have the acid in his eyes than the paste that burned and irritated his on several occasions. West considers himself lucky to still have his vision after the times the paste got in his eyes.

George Music and his father, as they did not reside on a camp or have overseers, were able to make their own decisions regarding their techniques in the woods. The Musics never used sulfuric acid on their trees, mainly because they were resistant to any type of change in the woods. Music always felt that the acid only became necessary if (1) the streak made was not deep enough into the vein of the tree,

and (2) if workers were really so lazy that they refused to chip the trees on a weekly basis. Music and his father firmly believed that facing[5] the entire tree, even at its base, made for higher gum yields without having to use the acid solution.

Gillis Carter recalls another innovative method that his workers employed in order to assure a more productive yield. By gazing at the tops of the trees and noting which side of the tree had the thickest branches and limbs, workers believed they could determine the best location on the tree in which to cut a face. The side with the thickest branches was healthiest and would produce the most gum. "I don't know if that was of any value or not," Carter says, "but the old-timers always said it'd run better with the cup on that side of the tree."

Nature's Best Medicine: Pure Turpentine

"For a crick in the neck, wrap Spanish moss around it. The chiggers will soon make you forget the stiff neck. Rub turpentine on the chigger bites for relief."

- *The Illustrated History of the Naval Stores (Turpentine) Industry*
  Gerrell 1997:129

Over the generations, people who lived near the piney woods used turpentine for a variety of home remedies. As the sign reads at the Carter Turpentine Still in Portal, Georgia: "Nature's Best Medicine: Pure Turpentine." George Music, Jr. was treated with turpentine so regularly that he was taken to the doctor no more than twice before he was ten years old. Music recalls that when people from "in town" saw cuts on his hands or arms, they would tell him to go to the doctor and get stitches. But what's the point in

[5] The act of cutting V-shaped streaks into the lower area of a tree to prepare it for the installation of cups and gutters

going to a doctor, Music asks, when the world's best natural healer – raw turpentine – is so readily available in the area?

If a worker cut himself in the woods, rarely would he stop working to secure medical assistance. Instead, he would soak a rag or handkerchief in turpentine and then wrap it tightly around the wound to restrict the bleeding. The wound took just a few days, in most cases, to completely heal. Music says that putting turpentine in an open wound does sting a little but nowhere near as bad as the more common rubbing alcohol. Ralph Wilkerson's mother used to apply turpentine to an open wound and wrap it in spider webs to expedite healing.

Turpentine's application as medicine was commonly used in association with colds and fevers as well. Music's father used to smear a dab of turpentine on his upper lip, just below his nose, to clear head and nose congestion. One of the few benefits of working turpentine in a camp, according to the Taylor brothers, is the proximity of the still and the pleasant aroma that blanketed the camp community after the "charging" of the still. Junior Taylor explains, "It smells good, that steam do. All that steam would be coming off that gum, and I'd go get right in that smoke. It'd get up your nose and everything… It'd open you up." Junior Taylor also applied a few drops of turpentine to a spoonful of sugar to cure a cough. The same concoction was often used to break fevers. Music has heard of turpentine working wonders on bee stings and even stomachaches, though he has never personally used it for either. Eddie Lee Scipp's mother used to tell him that the sap from a pine tree would cure nearly anything, even heartburn.

Though younger generations of people in South Georgia know little or nothing about turpentine-as-medicine, Junior Taylor is often visited by elderly members of his Blackshear community who want to purchase some. Wilkerson says that he also received numerous visits and requests for turpentine by the barrel from members of the local community while working at the turpentine still in Hoboken, Georgia. The old folks that desire turpentine for these purposes today use it for aching joints associated with arthritis. According to Taylor, turpentine will work to assuage pain anywhere that hurts.

Turpentine was also used as a type of veterinary folk medicine. If a turpentine mule was injured or if a farm animal was wounded, turpentine was applied to the gash in the same manner that it was used on people. Junior Taylor used turpentine to kill off screwworms when they infested the heads of dogs and pigs on turpentine camps. If the worms were not destroyed quickly, the parasite would drill a hole directly through the animal's brain, killing it slowly and painfully. Turpentine, sometimes mixed with kerosene, was poured directly into the head wound, killing the worms and leaving the animal unharmed.

Turpentine as a medical supplement declined after the introduction of sulfuric acid in the woods. To ingest raw gum was a safe practice, but when the gum yields had been enhanced with acid, it became dangerous to consume. But workers continued other traditional medicinal practices. One of these was the ingestion what workers called "trumpet root" to relieve stomach aches. Workers uprooted the plant, which looked like a miniature potato, and took it home to clean it and store it. J. F. and Bernice Wilcox continue to swear by a product known as "Hog Hoof Tea," which was supposedly common on turpentine camps throughout the country. When a hog was

slaughtered, its hooves were placed in a pot of boiling water. The cooled water was later consumed. Though the taste left much to be desired, the Wilcoxes recall that "Hog Hoof Tea" was a reliable cure for colds and similar sicknesses.

Despite the financial and geographic limitations that hampered turpentiners, they were able to remain surprisingly healthy through the use of traditional methods of treatment and healing. Wilburt Johnson explains:

> They tell me – people who worked turpentine, you know – they live a long time. They say that smelling that there rosin and that water and stuff, you know. And said it was good for you, healthy for you. And you know, you take a lot of them old turpentiners, they lived until they got way on up in age… My daddy used to turpentine all his life, and he was around a hundred years old when he died.

Part Four: The Camp, The Community

Timothy Prizer

"Georgia can boast the world's largest collection of one highly specialized type of company town – the turpentining village."

– "McCrainie's Turpentine Still" Thomas 1976:H-3

What will you get for your labor
But a dollar in the company store?
A tumbledown shack to live in
Snow and rain pouring through the top
And you have to pay the company rent
Your payments will never stop

- *Coalminers,* Uncle Tupelo (Rockville Records 1992)

Living Quarters in the Camp

Turpentine quarters, or company housing for the largely African American workforce, lasted in South Georgia through the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Lloyd Powell camp outside Homerville, one of the last of its kind, is featured in the video documentary *Spirits of the Pines* (1978). The quality of housing varied from camp to camp; throughout much of the twentieth century, however, many homes were little more than ramshackle shanties. [for Depression-era photos of South Georgia camp quarters, see, for example, Dorothea Lange's Farm Security Administration photos http://lcweb2.loc.gov/pp/fsaSubjects14.html]. As workers moved into homes outside the quarters, housing improved as did the socio-economic status of the worker.

Camp house doors were known as "shutters" to the members of the camp community, for there were often no latches on them. Walls often had open cracks between poorly fitted boards. To rid houses of mosquitoes, families filled cans with old rags which were then set ablaze. The smoke from the rags drove the mosquitoes out of

the home. Cold winds whipped through the homes with a force so strong that Junior Taylor remembers his 1930s home on the Mayday, GA turpentine camp nearly coming off the ground. The rickety shack slid from the cinder blocks on which it was raised, causing Taylor's father to believe his family would be safer outdoors. Many homes had fireplaces in them, and these provided families with their only source of heat in the wintertime. On the opposite extreme, there was little protection from the heat and humidity of South Georgia summers.

Company housing provided only the bare necessities. Junior Taylor has lived in camp conditions in which his family was forced to rely on one of Taylor's siblings to furnish the home by hand. Using dead timber from the turpentine woods that surrounded the living quarters, Taylor's brother crafted tables, dressers, picture frames, rocking chairs, swings, stools, desks and bed stands for his family. The family used moss-stuffed mattresses and pillows. As electricity was not available until the 1950s, families relied mainly on natural light. Gas lanterns were used at night on occasion. Camp housing lacked indoor plumbing for most of the twentieth century. Anthrom Green, who lived in camps during the 1930s, recalls,

> The conditions were very bad. You might have heard statements that those were the good old days. But see, we lived in these little shacks, and a lot of times they would situate a well, they used to dig big wells, and it wasn't a well at every house. Ah, people had to gather round to get their water, or do their washing from that well. Now if it was a big quarters, there may be two wells but everybody had to get their water from that well.

J. F. Wilcox knows firsthand of life in the turpentine quarters. "We lived alright," he maintains, "but we never did have a whole lot like people do now. But we lived. And we didn't have no heat back then. We had fireplaces. And we didn't have no glass windows… We had wooden windows." Though he adds proudly that despite the

conditions, turpentiners and their families “had a pretty good life,” he is sure to include that, “Back then, you didn’t have no government helping you… Then, you had to do the best you could.”

“From the Womb to the Tomb”: The Commissary & Camp Life

Turpentiners who resided in a camp rarely left the confines of his or her community except to work, for trips to the doctor, or perhaps weekend trips to town provided by the boss man or woodsrider. Turpentine camps often were in isolated locations. Many times, “town” was ten miles or more away. Workers had to be in the woods throughout the day, and very few if any had automobiles of their own. The camp grounds housed most services workers needed for survival. Central among these was the company store, otherwise referred to as the commissary – a general store offering workers various provisions and other household needs.

The commissary system bound the workers to the company both contractually and physically much like sharecropping. Anthrom Green recalls,

> Sharecropping was something similar, very similar. You take a sharecrop and you bring it up to where you lay it by. That’s getting close to where you gonna harvest. And many times the owner would find a reason to fall out with you. And many times he would run you off his place, and you would wind up losers, and he would get the spoils. Well, turpentining was that. You was working for just about nothing, because you was always in debt to the man. If you wanted to leave, then another man had a turpentine farm. If you went to see him, then he would pay off what you owe this man, and you would work for him. You go in in debt, and you come out in debt.

The commissary credit system forced workers in debt to their bosses from “womb to tomb” (Thomas 1976:34). This lifelong form debt peonage was the harshest reality of a turpentining life. For most of the nineteenth century, camp workers typically made

between only $1.50 and $2 per barrel of pine gum. “It’s a long story,” C. J. Taylor says of his life of indebtedness to the commissary. “They’ll charge you so much for your groceries, and then you borrow so much. From anytime of the month, you wouldn’t have nothing coming in. Then you wanted to borrow four or five dollars and they wouldn’t let you have it.” “…You did a lot of work for nothing,” he continues. “You couldn’t get no money nowhere else. There wasn’t no loan companies. That boss man – he was just like your daddy.”

The debt peonage system, combined with cruel treatment and poor pay, caused many workers to seek a way out. Gathering up their families and fleeing, usually with commissary debts unpaid, workers took the risk of being caught in hopes of starting over fresh in another camp. Workers and their families were nearly always welcomed into the new camp, as there was really no such thing as too many laborers in a turpentine workforce. Producers so desired new hands that they would occasionally assist workers in escaping. Junior Taylor remembers being awoken in the middle of the night one Sunday by his father telling him to pack his few belongings, as they would soon attempt to escape. A Florida turpentine producer had driven to the Taylor’s quarters in Georgia to pick them up and carry them to his camp. The law prohibited owners from crossing the Georgia-Florida line to recapture escaped workers, so the Taylors jumped the border several times in hopes of starting over. This law was rarely enforced, however, and the workers put themselves in serious jeopardy regardless of how or to where they escaped. The Taylor Brothers tell another story of a family escape attempt. On one occasion they left the Langdale turpentine camp in Mayday, GA and headed for another in Aaron, FL. After a short time spent in the new location,

the Taylors were cornered by a lawyer for the Langdale family and returned to Mayday. C. J. – only a small child at the time – remembers seeing his father slapped to the ground by his white bosses upon his capture.

Escapees' greatest fear was the thought of capture and the brutal punishment to follow, as revealed in the following interview excerpt from the WPA Federal Writer's Project: "The onliest way out is to die out. If you tries to leave, they will kill you, and you will have to die, because they got peoples to bury you out in them woods" (Wimster 1939 {2001}). In Stetson Kennedy's article, "Forced Labour in the United States," he exposes the cruel system that combined peonage and racism, escape and capture. Referencing slavery with terms like slaves, the Big House, and plantation, Kennedy compares the turpentine industry up until the 1950s with slavery.

> To escape from a forced labour camp it is almost always necessary to slip away in the night, leaving behind one's personal possessions, and oft-times one's family. The overseers travel far and wide, and even from State to State, tracking down and bringing back their runaway slaves. Some industries, notably turpentine, maintain a sort of information service whereby camp overseers co-operate with one another in recapturing runaways. Where co-operation with law officers is close, operators do not hesitate to call upon them to "arrest" the runaways. While sitting in the parlor of the "Big House" of a turpentine camp at Shamrock, Florida, we listened while the operator telephoned the sheriff a description of a runaway, ordering that deputies be posted on all roads leading out of the area. The usual punishment for running away is a severe flogging, but sometimes the penalty is death. As a forced labourer named Robert Graves told us, in describing the Babcock Lindsey plantation, "If you left owing the Bossman even $5 and he caught you he would kill you, and you would have to die, because they would bury you. He would make other workers dig the graves out in the woods." Symbolic of this form of terrorism is the toe of a lynched Negro which reposes in a jar of alcohol on a commissary counter in North Carolina. Asked whether he would personally lynch a Negro, the proprietor replied, "No, no I wouldn't – not unless he owed me money." [Kennedy 1953:5-6]

Such cruel treatment triggered coping mechanisms among black workers. Trains, cars, and busses were a common symbol of escape and the subject of conversation in the woods. "The Greyhound bus," Junior Taylor says, "would come by where they're working at, and they'd be talking, 'Yeah you're going my way, but this ain't my day'." Perhaps one of the most powerful forms of psychological release was the creation of "Negro mythical places" – a term donated by Zora Neale Hurston in her writings for the Federal Writers' Project. The most famous of these was "Diddy-Wah-Diddy" (Bordelon 1999:107). This dreamland resembled other imagined destinations such as the "Big Rock Candy Mountain" in that it was a place entirely free from worry or woe.

> [In "Diddy-Wah-Diddy,"] …even the curbstones are good sitting-chairs… If a traveler gets hungry all he needs to do is sit down on the curbstone and wait and soon he will hear something hollering "Eat me!" "Eat me!" "Eat me!" and a big baked chicken will come along with a knife and fork stuck in its sides. He can eat all he wants and let the chicken go and it will go on to the next one that needs something to eat… Even the dogs can stand flat-footed and lick crumbs off heaven's tables. [Bordelon 1999:107)

Eddie Lee Scipp remembers that workers frequently drifted off into the land they called "Diddy-Wah-Diddy," where they could simply walk into the woods with a croker sack, open it up, and watch the birds eagerly fly into the sack, knowing the men were hungry. Scipp found the idea of "Diddy-Wah-Diddy" so appealing that he once hunted for it on a map. Wilburt Johnson remembers nothing more about "Diddy-Wah-Diddy" than that it was supposedly unreachable. Johnson's father used to say, "I'm gonna do such and such a thing if I have to go to Diddy-Wah-Diddy."

Ralph Wilkerson and Willie White, two relatively young (compared to most former turpentiners) African American woodsmen, had never heard of "Diddy-Wah-Diddy." According to Wilkerson, this most likely has to do with their age and the point in history

in which they became part of the industry. In the late stages of turpentining, hands were given the opportunity to work in a system colloquially called “working on half.” Generally speaking, working on half was comparable to self-employment, with the exception that the money earned in the woods was divided equally between the hand and the producer or landowner. Workers that had the privilege to work on half were free of authoritarian supervision, set hours in the woods, and other demands. Under such conditions, which were a far cry from the debt peonage system, the mention of a distant dreamland was far less relevant. As Ralph Wilkerson implies, only those workers who had to cope with boss men, woodsriders, rigid work schedules, and life in the quarters would have dreamt of such a place as “Diddy-Wah-Diddy.”

Although a symbol of debt , the camp commissary was also a gathering place for workers and the site for what Junior Taylor calls telling “lies.” These gatherings occurred most frequently at dusk, just after the workers had left the woods and were making a stop at the commissary to pick up groceries. Gillis Carter laughs at the memory of this commissary joke:

> Times was so hard back then that one of the hands had caught a big gopher [tortoise] and carried him to the commissary… He throwed him up on the counter and the man says, ‘What do you want for this gopher?’ He says, ‘I’d just like to have a sack of flour.’ The man who owned the commissary just set the gopher behind the counter and throwed him a sack of flour up there and gave him two little bitty gophers for change.

Wilburt Johnson recalls a rhyme he used to hear turpentiners tell the smallest of their children. Functioning as a lullaby, the rhyme was most commonly told by turpentiners at the commissary, child bestride father’s bouncing knee:

> Onion in the middle and the pickle on top
> Make your lip go to flippity flop

Go Stamey go
Hog in the biscuit
Don't come to get it, I'll eat it myself
Who is dat?
Dat I.

Jookin', Drinkin' and No Blue Lights Flashin'

The jook represented a place where could relax and release tensions. Jook activities often bypassed the rules of local authorities, producers or woodsriders, giving workers a level of autonomy. On nearly a nightly basis, workers assembled in jooks to unwind after a demanding day of work. Turpentiners' idea of "cooling out," as some of them referred to it, included drinking homemade moonshine, gambling games like Georgia Skins and Poker, and dancing to either jukebox or live music.

Junior Taylor's fondest memory of the "Jitterbug" dance era is that of his brother's "Jitterbug pants." One of Taylor's brothers could be seen dancing the "Jitterbug" nearly every night in the jooks, and it became customary for him to sport a large top hat and big baggy pants for the occasion. The pants were so loose fitting, Junior Taylor remembers, "You don't even got to take your shoes off to take [the pants] off." Guitar music, "like B. B. King," C. J. Taylor says, accompanied a dance the community called "Slow Drag." This dance, according to Taylor, spurred jealousy when men would dance suggestively with others' wives.

Hard liquor was common in the jooks and throughout the camp. "Liquor. That's the only thing they [the workers] had to look forward to – and whiskey….Everywhere you'd go, it was like drugs," C. J. Taylor recalls. "So much liquor was in the quarters,

my older brother, he had a jug on every corner." Moonshine was so common in J. F. Wilcox's neck of the woods that he was once arrested by a law officer who charged that Wilcox's bark hack was a ploy to conceal his running of whiskey. Wilcox claims to have never been involved in the moonshine trade, though his boss man was, he says. Elliott West laughs with his recollection that his father used to make moonshine in his mother's wash bucket, much to her disapproval. Junior Taylor remembers paying only 75 cents for a pint of moonshine, and one could purchase a whole five-gallon jug for a $16. On one occasion, Junior Taylor and a group of his coworkers were caught selling moonshine, and the boss threatened to take them to jail. Fully aware that such action would result in a loss of workers and decreasing production rates in the turpentine woods, the boss acquitted them with only a reprimand and their pledge not to sell it anymore.

Considering that the jook was practically a center for unlawful activity (i.e. everything from liquor and the prostitution of "jook women" to shootings over women and gambling games gone bad), camp authority figures did a remarkable job in keeping officers from in town off the camp (Bordelon 1999:43). A jail sentence for any worker would mean less labor, so producers and woodsriders tried to prevent law officers from entering the camp. As the Taylors recall, this often included literally chasing them away. Police rarely ventured out to the camp, but when they did, they were certainly not welcome. Even after a frightening incident involving shotgun blasts one night at the jook, police were not called and remained unaware of the situation.

Workers commonly had off the day after paydays, called "Blue Monday." On "Blue Mondays" woodsriders often hauled a large truckload of the workers into town for

a night of drinking and partying. Eventually, the woodsrider would decide that it was time to head back to the camp, and it was then that his job became the most difficult. As Junior Taylor recalls, the workers were usually scattered about the place, and gathering them for the trip back was nearly impossible. The woodsrider would spot one of the workers and would call them over to the truck to tell them to assemble the rest for the drive home. The worker would agree, and upon returning inside, would either inadvertently or purposefully become sidetracked. "I'd be there [at the truck]," Taylor laughs, "and they'd send me to go hunt the workers and I'd go back, then I might not come back [to the truck]." The woodsrider then had to start over, and this game of cat-and-mouse could go on for close to an hour. It would often be one or two o'clock in the morning before the crew had gathered for the trip back to the camp.

Each weekend full of drinking and gambling provided topics for joking and discussion that would carry on throughout the following week in the woods. Conversation among work crews focused principally upon topics of drinking, fighting, gambling, and sex. Gillis Carter recalls,

> They liked to talk about their booze. And they liked to talk about who they whipped last Saturday night in a fight. That was pretty interesting discussion amongst 'em, you know. But they liked to talk about their girlfriends. Which one stayed the longest with their girlfriend the night before, you know. You know, "I've been out all night with so-and-so."

Willie White remembers that workers often pried into the lives of their coworkers. "Hey man," a worker would ask, "where you going tonight?" "I got a date with so-and-so," the other would reply. The questioner would then suggest, "Hey, man! We ought to team up on it! We gonna team it tonight, ain't we?" "Yeah, but if so," the worker with the date would make clear, "I get to go first!" White also recalls several traditional jokes workers

told in the woods about their sexual escapades. On some occasions, a worker would approach another with the question, “You ever been with a woman?” “Yeah” was the response. “Yeah, I tell you what,” the jokester would begin. “Last night, I was with one on the railroad track, and *man*, that stuff was so stank it made the train back back.” A variant of the above concludes with the punch line, “Me and this girl was messing around and I went in between the root. Man, all she could do was wiggle and poot.”

Women and Domestic Life

As is the case in most rural farming communities, turpentiner families adhered to rigidly defined gender roles both in camps and in privately owned turpentine operations. The following information comes primarily from men discussing female roles, since few women were interviewed for the project. Though some girls were encouraged by their fathers to work turpentine, the majority kept to domestic chores of cooking, cleaning, and childcare. Additionally, workers’ wives were frequently assigned the tasks of priming and stringing tobacco on the camp farm.

Most mornings both on and off camps, women would rise before men. This often meant waking up at 4:00 a.m. or earlier. Long before the break of day, women were scrambling eggs, frying sausage, baking biscuits, and mixing grits or meal for their families. George Music explains that breakfast needed to be substantial so the men could last until lunchtime rolled around. Music’s mother understood this fact as well as anyone; whatever it happened to be on the family’s breakfast table each morning, it was sure to “stick to your ribs,” Music recalls.

The Taylor's mother, as was the case with many black women in the camps, spent her days ironing and washing clothes for the families of the white woodsriders and producers. As a girl, Bernice Wilcox filled her days cooking, washing clothes, cleaning house, and taking care of her seven younger siblings as her mother and father both worked in the woods. She prepared lima beans, black-eyed peas, pork, and other foods that were readily available on the camp quarters. To wash clothes, Wilcox draped them over a large block and literally beat the dirt out with a club before using a tin tub full of soapy water and scrubbing the clothes by hand. They were then placed in a pot of boiling water atop a fire. The next step, Bernice remembers, was to "rinse 'em and hang 'em up on the line – just a long old clothesline – and put 'em out there in the good old sunshine."

Turpentiners' wives gave their men folk a lot of flack for not being home enough, and perhaps rightfully so. Workers frequently stayed out partying at the jooks or hunting in the woods until the wee hours of morning, leaving the wives alone to attend to the children and other tasks around the house. "I didn't stay home either," Junior Taylor confesses. A large body of jokes surfaced in the camp vernacular regarding this domestic conflict. Pete Gerrell's 1997 collection, *The Illustrated History of the Naval Stores (Turpentine) Industry*, includes the following:

> Three boys were bragging about how rich their fathers were. The first boy said, "My daddy owns a hundred acres of turpentine trees." The next boy said, "That's nothing. My daddy owns two hundred acres of turpentine trees." The third boy said, "My daddy owns more than both of yours, when he came in at 3:00 am, mamma gave him hell." [1997:75]
>
> "Papa, what's a monologue?" "A monologue is a conversation between a husband and a wife." "I thought that was a dialog." "Naw, a dialog is where two people are speaking." [1997:50]

> Old hand: “What did your wife say when you got in so late last night?” Young hand: “She never said a word. I was going to have them front teeth pulled out anyhow.” [1997:50]
>
> Wife: Dear, tomorrow is our tenth anniversary. Shall I kill a turkey? Husband: Naw, let him live. He didn’t have anything to do with it. [1997:73]

A few women, like Bernice Wilcox’s mother, worked in the woods. She would “weed boxes” in the woods, i.e. clearing boxes and weeding around the trees in order to keep fires – set both intentionally and unintentionally – from catching the forest ablaze. Other women performed tasks traditionally thought to occupy a male-only domain. Wilburt Johnson recalls a woman named Eva who used to dip gum with the men. A well-respected worker, Johnson says, “Ol’ Eva would get out there and swing a dip bucket just like a man.” Similarly, Ralph Wilkerson’s Aunt Reesa chipped and dipped gum alongside men in the woods, and many times, she outperformed them. A very tall and muscular woman, Aunt Reesa was one-of-a-kind when it came to women on the camp. Wilkerson explains:

> Reesa used to chip and dip, my auntie out there. She used to be a big ol’ Jeff Davis healthy woman. A man couldn’t do nothing with her, they tell me. She used to grab ‘em in them jook joints by the collar and beat ‘em down with the other fist. She is a *big* woman. She’s got big ol’ hands. You can look at her and tell.

Beneath the Steeple

Many turpentine camps had small one-room church houses in which the camp community would gather to worship through prayer and song. A highly respected turpentiner serving as preacher normally led church services, though at times preachers from outside the camp would come on Sunday mornings to serve the congregation.

The churches, which often served as community centers as well, were the sites of camp weddings, funerals, and celebrations. At daybreak on Sunday mornings, sounds of worship drifted through the pines. "Them people, you could hear them singing for miles and miles," Junior Taylor reminisces. "We used to sing one song about 'You Fight On:'"

> My grandmamma used to sing me that song. Some guy'd be walking by and they'd be about drunk, she'd be singing so in that church until they'd come in that church and give some money to sing that song. That's the truth. You know it be sounding good if it's sounding good to a drunk.

Most couples on the Taylors' camps married between the ages of 18 and 22 years old. The worker either told the woodsrider or the person in charge of running the commissary that he wished to marry, after which it was arranged for the couple to reside together in camp housing. The couple was then free to arrange with the preacher a wedding in the church or in the home of either the bride or the groom. Weddings were very small, and by necessity, inexpensive. Junior Taylor was married in front of just four relatives at the Valdosta courthouse, an event that cost him a total of $60. "Cote-house weddings," as Pete Gerrell writes of them using African American pronunciation, were especially common between two residents of a turpentine camp (Gerrell 1997:134).

Funerals were also a part of camp life. At the death of a member in the camp, the community gathered outside the church house to pay their respects to the deceased. Bodies were placed in a casket, usually made of a simple wooden box crafted from timber in the woods by fellow turpentiners – and buried in the camp graveyard beside the church. Most turpentine camp graveyards had no tombstones, and the graves were adorned with flowers and two sticks tied in a

cross. Because workers were expected to stay up all night after a death to honor the departed, they were also given the following day off of work.

Children and Schooling

Before male children were old enough to work in the woods with their fathers, and before female children were expected to contribute to the duties of the home, children were at liberty to do as they pleased for the most part. Generally, little boys and little girls had separate spheres of playtime activities. Growing up on the turpentine camps of South Georgia and North Florida, C. J. and Junior Taylor spent most of their early years shooting marbles with their peers in the camps. On Christmas mornings, little boys stood outside their homes for hours, shooting off gifts like fireworks, cap guns and B.B. guns. As the boys in the camp grew more mature and began working turpentine, they were sometimes given .22 rifles, flashlights, and pocketknives for Christmas.

Whereas such activities were strictly for boys, the girls also had their closed domain of pastimes. Female children could often be seen standing in circles, locked at the arm, spinning and twirling while singing rhymes – an activity called “Ring Play” or “ring games.” In the late 1930s, Zora Neale Hurston offered an abbreviated explanation of this activity in her writing for the Florida Writers’ Project.

> This is African rhythm with European borrowings. Group in ring… One dancer in center begins to sing and circle ring seeking a partner as the verse is being sung. At the very first beat of the refrain, the partner must join the seeker in the center and they do a duet… The hand-clapping is

> marvelous stop-time rhythm and the better the dancers the wilder the enthusiasm. [Bordelon 1999:155]

Interestingly, C. J. Taylor still hears one of the songs among elementary school children in the area today:

> ‘Round and ‘round the sunshine
> ‘Round and ‘round the moon
> ‘Round and ‘round the sunshine
> In the afternoon

Both boys and girls played games like “Hop Scotch” and “Hide-n-Go Seek.” Ralph Wilkerson and childhood friends like Willie White invented toys, one of which was known as “The Packer.” Wilkerson explains that he and his friends gathered several syrup cans, filled them with dirt and sand to make them heavy, and attached them in a chain with wire. Holding onto the wire, they dragged the cans along the ground, producing rattling sounds as they clanked along. Like most children in rural areas, those in turpentine camps crafted wagons, slingshots, pop guns, and other toys out of fallen timber in the woods. Wagons were especially common. “We didn’t know what toys was,” Elliott West says of his youth during “Hoover days.” “Makes us own wagon.” J. F. Wilcox remembers children using timber from the dip woods to create marionettes that danced when their strings were manipulated from above.

The award for the most dangerous childhood game goes to Ralph Wilkerson. Gathering in the woods, the boys spent hours slinging each other across the woods using nothing but a pine tree pulled taut. Wilkerson and friends would find a newly-planted slender pine tree that would bend all the way to the ground without breaking. One child hugged the tree while three or four others held it down to the ground. Those

holding the tree released it on a count of three, sending the child clinging to the tree soaring across the woods as if from an arboreal cannon. Other children used safer, more traditional methods of "travel" to find entertainment. The Taylors recall that both boys and girls in the camp loved to catch the Georgia Southern train to Valdosta to see a "picture show" some weekends.

Most boys were anxious to join their fathers in the woods; they were eager to become turpentiners. "It come to you by your parents, you know," Ralph Wilkerson says. "You wanted to go out there 'cause you knew it was in you to start with by your daddy. That's how it got in the children." George Music, for instance, was working turpentine by the time he was seven years old and had already endured five years of his father's refusing to let him work. When Music was much too young to work turpentine with his father, he displayed his impatience to begin chipping by lugging around a hatchet – almost as big as he was – in the woods to make believe he was "just like daddy." As long as he hacked only at bushes during these early years, his father was fine with him tagging along. If he ever slashed into one of his father's cherished pine trees, however, he was severely scolded. Music says that he also must have rolled some sort of old barrel lid "three million miles" across his entire property when he was little.

Wilburt Johnson and Willie White share similar stories of their first experience with work in the woods and their decisions to join their fathers. Wilburt Johnson practiced swinging the hack on small black gum trees when he was too small to follow his father into the dip woods. Eventually, he had had enough. One day, after pretending to work turpentine on the small trees near his home, he abruptly stopped

with the make-believe. "I'm going to the woods where Papa at," he told himself with conviction.

> I got my hack, and I went out there. He was down there in a little old round pond chipping. And he was *bad* to talk to hisself, you know. But he was down there talking to hisself and I said, "Well, I wonder who he's talking with." So I was standing up out there on a log… where he could see me. He said, "Boy what you doing over here?" I said, "I come to help you chip some." "Well, chip one out there and let me see how it is." I chipped one and waited 'til he got there. He looked at it. "Let me see your hack." Got my hack and cut it out you know and sharpened it up. And I chipped on with it all that evening. And the old hack wasn't very much. So, he told me, he said, "Well, son, bring your old hack in and I'll get a good 'un and fix it up and let you come back and help me."

The following Saturday, his father went to town and bought his young son a better hack. From that point forward, Wilburt was a turpentiner. "From then on, on up to right now – chipping, dipping, pulling, pulpwooding, long logging, and all that ever since, right on up to now," he says.

Willie White's memory of his first step into the world of turpentining is similar:

> I'd get out there with him and I'd see my daddy just going out there just whistling and chipping them boxes, whistling and chipping. So I got into it and I said, "I wanna do that. Boy, I sure wanna do that." And so I kept on at my daddy, and my daddy said, "I'm gonna show ya. I'm gonna teach you how to do it." And he kept on, he went to showing me how to doing it. And I got to where I got to loving it. And I used to come home and my mamma used to tell me say, at my daddy, "What wrong with his clothes?" Have holes all in it where I'd be standing… too close to the tree, spraying the acid on it. You spray acid on the tree and you hold it too close, it'll bounce back on your clothes and eat it up. Daddy would say, "He been chipping." And mamma would say, "You ain't got - your boy's out there supposed to be picking berries and you got him out there chipping." So I told mamma, I said, "No, it wasn't nothing about daddy." I *told* my daddy to teach me how to do it. And, you know, I fell in love with chipping. And then I came on from chipping and went to dipping. And so I just loved it all.

As boys, Junior and C. J. Taylor also showed their desire to enter the woods with their father and the rest of the men in the camp. Both brothers started working around

the ages of seven or eight, and both were turned down for several years when they begged to start working like the adults. The Taylors' nephew's son, a boy presently of about ten or eleven years old, wants more than anything else to be a turpentiner when he grows up. Sadly, C. J. tells him, "No more turpentine… Now, there ain't no turpentine." The boy saw all the leftover turpentine tools the Taylors have in their backyard and asked, "'Uncle, What y'all do with this? What y'all do with that?' He said, 'Uncle, I want to go out there and dip some gum'. I said, 'There ain't no more gum, son'… That's a working little joker… He loves to work. Anything we tell him to do, he's going to try."

The work of children was considered a necessity. Gillis Carter's father, Era Carter, understood the importance of his son's labor. As a boy, Gillis prepared land to be worked before laborers came in to begin chipping boxes. He made the woods fire-safe, a process he calls "burning it of a night," and he cut ditches throughout the woods. He learned how to handle the sharp tools and how to locate the trees that promised the highest productivity. He discovered that many of the best trees were in swampy areas in which people had to walk "foot logs" and then wade in water to perform the task at hand. Carter reflects upon his parents' recognition of the contribution he and his siblings made to the family turpentine operation:

> I've got some written letters that my mother wrote back in the 50s. She was writing some relatives out in Arizona… Mother wrote my aunt and says, "Era's bought another farm and paid X number of dollars for it." And she says, "He's dependent on these boys helping him work it out, helping him pay the debt."

As boys and young men, Ralph Wilkerson and Willie White belonged to a summer work crew of their peers known as the "Little Boys' Squad." Receiving its name

from producer Frank Dukes, who suggested that the formation of such a group would benefit the operation financially and quench the boys' thirst to become turpentiners like their elders. It was the boys' charge to dip gum as a group under the supervision of a veteran of the dip woods. Ranging from 11 to 14 years old, they rode along with their dip barrels on a wagon pulled behind a tractor. "Some of us were too small to lift the dip bucket," Willie White smiles. "Some of us, they say that the dip bucket was bigger than some of us. But we still tried it right on." After graduating from the "Little Boys' Squad," the boys, considered young men now, joined the adults as full-fledged turpentiners.

As turpentining families often subsisted from paycheck to paycheck (or from barrel to barrel of turpentine gum in this case), many kept their children working rather than in school. This attitude was widespread in rural South Georgia at least through the mid-1900s. George Music was just one of a number of turpentiners' sons who were permitted to leave school early or not attend at all to help their fathers in the woods. Music's father felt that education was only important in the early years of a child's life, a belief he related frequently by joking that "the only thing you could learn in adult life past sixth grade is adultery." But George Music's father held a grudge against education for personal reasons as well. The school that Music's father attended added a twelfth grade to its requirements for graduation just before he had finished the eleventh grade. The local government forced to him to return to school for the twelfth grade, a demand that Music, Sr. swore throughout his life cost him about one hundred and twenty-five acres of turpentine trees adjoining the family's current property. In this one year, Music's father felt, he could have worked turpentine and paid for the additional land.

In the turpentine camps, churches doubled as one-room schoolhouses during the weekdays. Junior Taylor remembers that many of the camp children went to school three or four days a week and worked turpentine the rest of the days. Taylor himself went to school off and on through the fourth grade, when he quit to work turpentine fulltime. Taylor's father found it so necessary to keep his children out of school and in the woods that he willingly paid the state $1 a day to do so.

In the recollections of surviving turpentiners, this emphasis on work provided children with a respect for authority and a strict moral discipline absent from American culture today. "The children wasn't bad like they is now," Junior Taylor says. "We didn't know nothing about no dope." Liquor and moonshine were the two most dangerous substances known to him as a child. Also, "the girls wasn't having no babies like these little girls now do," C. J. Taylor recalls. In explaining his childhood innocence, George Music says that the highlight of every week for him as a child was the one trip they made into town to buy groceries. The Coca-Cola and Moon Pie he would get on these outings were the most exciting things he knew for a long time. Music also kept himself out of trouble by playing the guitar. In his pre-teens, Music had already begun playing the fiddle, which has remained his musical passion ever since.

A major social influence on children in turpentine camps was the delegation of disciplinary privileges to adults throughout the camp. C. J. Taylor explains: "All mothers was just alike. She could beat your child and another mother could beat your child if you wronged. It was natural training… Everybody trained each other's children." Members of the community were expected to provide necessary assistance to any family in the community when such a situation arose. With families close by, the

turpentine camp operated as a community of reciprocity whereby women were expected to assist other ill or injured women on the camp with cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, and taking care of children. Likewise, former turpentine hand Eddie Lee Scipp remembers, healthy men chopped firewood for other sick or injured turpentiners' families. Such a system made it possible for adults to rely on one other for childrearing and survival.

Part Five: The "Spirits" of Turpentine: A Conclusion

Timothy Prizer

"There's been a lot of hard work, a lot of sweat dropped in these old piney woods around this area. A lot of people that's labored and worked so hard that's done forgotten. But the good Lord knows each and every one of 'em. And they're all counted."

- Gillis Carter

As work among South Georgia's pine forests fades from the collective memory of the American South, many turpentiners express both deep concern and heartfelt sentiment for the only way of life most of them have ever known. Workers' concerns encompass a variety of subjects: foreign production and technology, detrimental effects on communities in the South caused by turpentine's removal, and the survival of the workers' traditional agrarian lifestyles and customs. But this very real fear of cultural loss exists simultaneously with intense pride. For the men who have known little else outside of working turpentine, there exists no stronger source of identity; turpentiners remain turpentiners regardless of other occupations they have been forced to pursue, in spite of how many years removed they are from the work.

Technology, in workers' minds, has threatened to undermine turpentine for an entire century now. Since the turn of the 20th century, when University of Georgia chemist Dr. Charles Herty designed the cup-and-gutter system[6] in the piney woods of Statesboro, GA, workers have resisted change and worried about the direction in which naval stores was headed. "To the great amusement of the local inhabitants, especially the Negroes," Herty wrote of his initial experiments in 1903, "… the sight of the cups on

[6] Method of extraction introduced by Dr. Charles H. Herty, in which clay (and later tin) cups were tacked onto the trees to gather the resin as it flowed through a system of tin gutters which were also tacked onto the trees.

the trees was at once novel and ludicrous." When first proposed, turpentine producers thought the new system "impracticable, on account of the negro labor exclusively used throughout the turpentine belt, which it was thought could not be taught to work in any but the orthodox way" (Herty 1903:16-18). Of course turpentiners did adapt to Herty's initiative, and the cup-and-gutter technique became pervasive across the entire "turpentine belt" for its drastic increase in production and profit. But aside from the introduction of sulfuric acid, more contemporary forms of technological advancement were met with serious opposition.

George Music remembers a congregation of "experts" who gathered at the annual barbecues hosted by the American Turpentine Farmers Association to discuss their research regarding methods for increased productivity and ease in turpentine production. Every year, Music recalls, the researchers would leave having been convinced by the workers that "there ain't no easy way to work turpentine." But the "experts" pushed on, persistently looking for ways to make the work easier and more profitable.

For Music, there is a direct connection between the decline of turpentine in the American South and in the mechanization of current times. The endless quest for an easier way of life is nothing more than a pursuit for laziness, a search for a way to get something for nothing, according to Music. Additionally, Music added, the work becomes less enjoyable, and much less productive, with technology. "There is no way to take the work out of turpentine," Music confirms. "The good Lord and old Mother Nature are the onliest thing that's going to control [the pines]."

Willie White attributes the departure of the industry from the United States to the commercial overexploitation of the woods. As the mills moved in and the trees went down, White says, “turpentine just went to getting slacker and slacker and slacker because peoples didn’t have nowhere to put the timber up at. ‘Cause it was getting scarce… I think if all them mills wouldn’t have never came in, turpentine would be here right on.” In his view, commercial pulp wooding and logging were outside technological players in turpentine’s disappearance.

Just when turpentine became more lucrative to workers, the industry collapsed in America. Following current global trends, turpentine producers, in search of cheaper labor, began looking elsewhere for turpentine production. They struck gold in places like South America, Indonesia, and China, and American turpentine operators continue to prosper from their foreign workforce. When C. J. Taylor hauled his last barrel of turpentine gum to the still only to be turned away, turpentiners in this country were making “good money” – about $150 per barrel of gum. “When things got good,” Taylor remembers, “everything moved out from under us.” Junior Taylor feels that turpentine’s decline “makes for a lot of stealing and robbing and harming one another. Because the middle class people, they depended on turpentining. They didn’t think that would never go out… Ain’t no work for the black man in the farming, ain’t no work in the turpentine.” Technology and urban greed, Taylor insists, has ruined the lives of rural blue-collar Americans. Willie White sees turpentine as a job on which the poor and uneducated could depend. Unlike jobs now, no one was forced to undergo drug screenings or provide proof of sufficient education. “You just go out there and tell the man you wanna work,” White states, “and he’ll put you to work.”

> It's a lot of people around here right now that are wishing turpentine were here 'cause they would have a job. Some of 'em right now is on the streets. Ain't got no work or nothing. They're homeless. They ain't got no home. Ain't got no work they got to do. But if turpentine was here, I guarantee you them peoples would have a job and they would have food to eat.

Willie White, one of the younger turpentiners interviewed, has positive and nostalgic memories of turpentining:

> During my lifetime in turpentine, I come to find out that I loved it and it was many more, many more people loved turpentine. Turpentine was a sort of job that you can always depend on. You didn't have to worry about this and worry about that because you could be your own boss... You go when you wanna, come when you wanna... You didn't have nobody to tell you this and tell you that. You knew what your job was… You wanna go out there and say, "I'm going to make half a day," you go make half a day… You didn't have nobody to tell you that you got to do this, got to do that on time, you got to be on the clock… You didn't half to be on the clock… Rainy days, you didn't half to worry about working if you didn't want to… The weather got too bad, you'd be home. Be too cold, you didn't go to work. You'd be home.

For others, there is little room for nostalgia. J. F. Wilcox says that he would never return to a job like turpentine if it returned to his country. "I wouldn't want to go back through that anyway if I had a chance," he says. "It's nasty. That ol' gum get all in your hands, your clothes be gummy… See, now, you can't get people to work turpentine now. It was just a lot of hard work for no money. To make a long story short, that's what it was."

> It was something I had to do. It wasn't enjoyment. See, you do what you have to do. What you got to do for a living, you do it. Make yourself content at it. Not to say you *enjoy* it. Nobody ever enjoyed going out there and working in grass knee-deep and water and mud and things. There wasn't enjoyment in it….I learned it was a hard way to make a living. And that's what you had to do to make a living. It was just something that had to be done. And back in those days, that's all we knew… Anybody who come up back in them days, they learned you had to work for a living, wasn't no way out. Wasn't no scheme to pull like they do now... Work, there wasn't nothing else. I was glad to get out of it [the

> turpentine industry]. I didn't miss it… I didn't miss it at all. I got out of it quick as possible.

Despite conflicting memories of the industry during its prime, many former turpentiners fear that the loss of the industry will mean that their memories will die with them. Junior Taylor wishes that he had pictures of himself in the woods so that he could "make a movie" in order to educate the youth and future generations on the importance of the work that he and so many others performed. Wilburt Johnson feels youth today have lost the respect for work. "You take these young boys now," Johnson says. "They don't want to do nothing but smoke that ol' crack and stuff. They don't enjoy getting out there and working in the woods, working like we used to." Gillis Carter hopes that, "Maybe someday, somebody will open a little piece of literature and say, 'Here's a guy north of Willacoochee that worked, actually *did* this type of work.'"

Nostalgia and pride both may run deeper in Gillis Carter's bones than they do in those of most former turpentiners. Carter is one of the last people in the United States to continue to use pine trees for the extraction of crude gum and for the production of turpentine. In his front yard, he keeps in operation four trees and a total of six faces:

> I reckon, next to my love for the Lord Jesus, I just love turpentining. Not that I know anymore than anybody else about it, but I was raised up in it, and it was my dad's livelihood all of his life. And I just grown a fondness for it, and I just wanted to cut those trees out there and chip 'em for people that passes this highway out here, that they might stop and show it to their kids… It's something that I would like to see kept alive 50 years down the road… Because the time has done passed since 1978 [the year Carter and his family ceased to work in the woods as their primary source of income]. We've got a generation of children that's 22 or 24 year old that's never seen a face.

Carter says that the trees in his yard are principally to remind people who may forget that the turpentine industry once occupied such a central role in the lives the region's

people. He is a self-proclaimed "advocate of the turpentine industry," and part of his current pride in turpentine stems from the fact that he knows how to do nearly everything involved in turpentine labor. Today, it is something very few people can do. He enjoys when people are interested in his involvement with the turpentine industry. He likes when people say, "They tell me you used to dip tar, or you know how to pull, or you know how to chip, or you know how to tack up a tin." Turpentine, he recognizes, is a "gone art." Carter's barn has a collection of old agricultural tools and pieces of equipment, many of which are specifically from the turpentine industry. Carter hopes to one day get his display in order enough to where he could have the public come look at and learn about the artifacts free of charge. The tools of the trade captivate him as much as the trees and the work itself:

> I don't know what intrigues me so much about shovels and hoes and axes, but I can't go by one without buying it at a antique market or either picking one up in a junk pile and cleaning it up and putting me a handle in it. I know I'm not gonna be able to swing that axe right on, but I like to have several of 'em anyhow. But I've just enjoyed my little collection. I got a lot of my grandmother's stuff there and my grandfather's. And it's just a bygone era if you don't have somebody to tell ya, 'Why did you use, what did they use with this old, these old shucks and this old mop looking thing?' Well, they couldn't go to Wal-Mart and buy a mop. They took that and they used it. They kept the old floors plum slick using that thing.

* * *

George Music, Jr., lives to this day on a vast acreage of pines. Occasionally, he will walk into his woods, puller in hand, and slash into the tree just for "the joy of watching the resin run," and because he knows his father and grandfather would have it no other way. "It's still amazing to watch," he insists, "even though I've done it all my life." Most of the real effort Music expends on his land today is in guaranteeing that it

remains standing in the face of the commercial and residential development. The property, in the Music family since 1922, has never had a mortgage, and, according to Music, it never will. "I just don't need the money bad enough to see the timber cut off of it," he says. "Daddy always wanted it to where his grandkids could walk through and say, 'Well, this is grandpa's natural standing timber.'" Out here, Music can stay in touch with nature. These trees--covered in hardened scrape; rusted gutters; cups filled with congealed resin--are the real "spirits" of turpentine; ghosts of his father's past, of his own past, of the industry's past.

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