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MOUNTAIN LIFE & WORK

MAGAZINE OF THE SOUTHERN MOUNTAINS

Uplands: See pp 16-26

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THE COMING TO

PLEASANT HILL

EDWIN E. WHITE

The Rev. Mr. White, who is familiar to our readers as the author of Religious Ideals in the Highlands, M L & W Nos. 4/51 and 1/52, is pastor of the Grace Presbyterian Church, Kingsport, Tennessee.

FOR SOME REASON, or various reasons, a number of Northern families moved to the Cumberland Plateau shortly after the end of the Civil War. In 1868, Mr. and Mrs. Amos Wightman and their family of young children moved from Illinois to the neighborhood of what is now Pleasant Hill, Tennessee. They found three log houses there, but numerous families were scattered throughout the surrounding country. By 1883 Mr. Wightman, concerned about the meagre educational opportunities available for his own and other children, began to seek missionary aid. He knew about the American Missionary Association, a home missionary agency of the Congregational Churches, and started writing them for help. On a visit to Boston Mrs. Wightman was able to appeal in person.

The Association, familiarly known as the A. M. A., sent its field superintendent, Dr. Joseph E. Roy, to look over the situation. He must have been impressed by the need, for the A. M. A. sent Miss Mary Santley to Pleasant Hill in the spring of 1884. She was an able woman, long in the Association's service. She taught a three months' school, and she so impressed on the Association her conviction that school work was not enough that they sent a minister. Benjamin Dodge and his party arrived in Pleasant Hill that fall.

At the age when most men would be retiring from work, Benjamin Dodge was setting out on a new and difficult venture in a part of the country far from his native region and even further from it in manner of life. But this "down East" Yankee had resources.

He had taught school and farmed and had some business experience, as well as holding a number of pastorates, and the A. M. A. soon knew that they were sending a live wire to this distant field; sometimes he proved almost too much alive for them.

Almost immediately Mr. Dodge saw that there must be a better and larger school building than the tiny one-room affair the people had erected some years before. He got the promise of Dr. Roy that the A. M. A. would stand behind him in building such a house as circumstances called for. A former resident gave five acres of land and \$50. Mr. Dodge added \$50 and the work was under way. A neighbor who wanted his children to have an education quarried the stone and laid the foundation for \$60. Men went into the woods, cut timber, and hauled it to the site, where each piece was hewed by hand to fit into its place. A day was set and invitations sent out for an old-fashioned "raising." By wagon, by horse and mule back, and on foot a great crowd converged on the place that day—men, women, children, and babies.

It was a dangerous undertaking, for the building was to be large. Earnest prayer was offered before the work began. The school children sang a song written for the occasion by their teacher, Mrs. Lord. At noon there was, of course, a big "dinner on the grounds!" And by nightfall the framework of the building was all up, including the tower—a skeleton waiting to be clothed.

But how clothe it? The A. M. A. had given its blessing, but no money. Mrs. Lord raised a little from friends. And Mr. Dodge wrote many letters to people "back home." Money came in slowly, in small amounts. And Mr. Dodge had to hunt far and wide to find the necessary lumber. Seventeen miles away, down off the Plateau, he found a sawmill at Lost Creek and purchased \$15 worth of lumber, the proprietor adding 1000 feet as a contribution. Mr. Dodge then found a courageous young man to haul the lumber up the rough mountainside. It took two days to bring a wagonload; the driver had to camp out overnight. Load after load he dragged up the terrible mountain road until he had it all at Pleasant Hill. An entry in Mr. Dodge's journal reveals a vivid picture of what things were like:

"When the building was about half completed I came to the dead line. Money failed for three weeks. We sent the one carpenter home because we could not pay him. Some said it will take seven years to build, others said, 'It is too large,' and as Job felt, so felt I, 'Miserable comforters are ye all.' The heavens were brass, the earth powder, and the stream of benevolence seemed dried up. But three weeks of thick darkness were enough. At the end of the third, I resolved to try one week myself and recalled the carpenter

at \$1 a day. Monday morning he came, and the eleven o'clock mail brought \$6 from the church in Edgecomb, Maine. Saturday evening I paid the carpenter and told him to come another week. He came again and on that Monday too, the eleven o'clock mail the second time brought \$7 from the church in Orrington, Maine.

"The third time I told him to come and again the third time the eleven o'clock mail brought deliverance with \$25 from J. J. H. Gregory of Marblehead, Mass. Reproved for lack of faith, I resolved not to stop work again which I did not until the building was finished, furnished and paid for to the last dime. This was a work that made a strong demand on faith and muscle. The finished lumber must be purchased in Sparta and hauled seventeen miles. Three miles of the way was to climb the jagged side of the Plateau. From the foot to the top a good team must stop forty times in making the ascent with a load in order to 'get breath.' "

Early in 1887, twenty-two months after the laying of the cornerstone, the building was occupied as a schoolhouse. It had two big schoolrooms, a cloakroom, and a big porch. With many additions and changes it remained in constant use for years and was known as "the Academy." There was much disappointment on that dedication day in 1887 that no one had come from the A. M. A. office for the occasion, so Mr. Dodge dedicated the building himself, dedicating it for use as a church as well as a school.

There were other needs that all were aware of. For instance, the lack of boarding accommodations was a serious handicap. The situation is described by Mr. Dodge in the following fashion:

"After making a plan and starting the foundation I wrote to the New York office and told them what I had done. In a few days I received a scorching response of condemnation for attempting to do such a thing without authority from New York. . . It was even intimated that for such a rash and headlong act I might not be wanted in the service. I had given the land for the location, decided in my own mind that the dormitory hall by God's help would be built. I had no time to lose or fool away. . . . After eighteen months of struggle and hard work and poverty, the building was occupied, but in view of the great need of it, we finished it with a debt of \$500. I went to Boston, raised the \$500. . . not a dollar of the expense of the building coming out of the treasury at New York."

Thus the young school had a three-story dormitory, 30 by 56 feet, containing 24 big rooms. It was occupied in the fall of 1889 and came later to be called Pioneer Hall. But before this it had become clear that a girls' dormitory was imperative. Again the A. M. A. recognized the need but had no funds.

The struggle to erect a girls' dormitory is succinctly summarized by Mr. Dodge:

"Have finished the girls' hall. It cost \$6690.52. I begged the money and built it in one year and it is paid for. It is a year's work, the year that I am 70 years old."

In 1892 the A. M. A. sent the Rev. Warren E. Wheeler to Pleasant Hill to be principal of the Academy. A secretary of the A. M. A. let it be known years later that, in the words of Miss Emma Dodge, "The Association felt that in appointing Mr. Wheeler for principal they might help to put a restraint on Mr. Dodge and that Mr. Wheeler would be more conservative. The plan did not work out as they hoped."

It wasn't long before Mr. Wheeler and Mr. Dodge had their heads together on plans for an additional boys' dormitory; for Pioneer Hall was much too small. There was all the old business of securing money in dribbles from distant friends. Students and fathers of students worked out expenses by helping to build. This time it was to be a brick structure, a temporary brickyard having been set up for the purpose. With \$2500 in contributions from northern friends, the Academy dedicated in the spring of 1896 a brick dormitory, 40 by 80 feet and three stories high. It was fittingly named Dodge Hall.

At Pleasant Hill for many years the A. M. A. maintained a secondary school of very high standing. No one could possibly calculate its influence through a slowly developing countryside. For a long time most of the teachers of the region received their training at Pleasant Hill Academy; from the unusually able and dedicated faculty, most of them received far more than formal training; inspiration and vision were shared with multitudes of pupils.

And when at last the public school program of the region developed to a par with that of the rest of the state, the A. M. A. turned over the school work and a good deal of property to the public school authorities. A county high school and a consolidated grade school are now maintained where the Academy labored so long.

But the long-continued work has worked out into many interesting developments. A community organization actively works for the good of the region, with committees of local residents carrying out many phases of community work. For years a credit union has helped residents finance many productive projects. The Academy farm is used for helpful demonstration purposes. A beautiful craft shop is the center for an active handicraft industry employing some people full-time, encouraging the development of handicrafts in the region. Here also the men of the community can use power tools

for making things for household or farm needs. The community church maintains beautiful worship and church activities for many groups and is actively interested in all phases of life for all the people.

A little rural hospital, developed by Dr. May Wharton and friends, for years was a godsend to many sufferers and carried on a health program throughout a wide area. It was the cause of the the building of a splendid modern hospital in the county seat. Uplands then specialized in the patient and tender care of chronic and difficult cases. And it is now developing a big project of a home for retired persons and many cottages for the same purpose.

A great new super-highway, cutting right through this little community, will bring many more visitors to its doors, perhaps draw many more of its young people away to distant places. "Father Dodge" would not recognize Pleasant Hill if he saw it now. But he surely started something. One reads with amazed wonder his simple recital of the struggle and privations he went through gladly to carry out his purposes. #####



Tom Brown commemorates the coming to Pleasant Hill of Father Dodge and his family in this striking wood sculpture.

TOM BROWN

EDWIN E. WHITE

THE TENNESSEE highway department had graded and graveled its first cross-state highway right through the tiny community of Pleasant Hill on the Cumberland Plateau some time before I went there late in the fall of a year too long ago to be lightly mentioned. I was to be pastor of the Community Church. That winter the rain descended in torrents and, it seemed to me; almost continually. So it was good to have the highway to walk on, even though the wet, crushed rock wore out shoes almost like an emery wheel.

I was walking up the highway after morning church service on one of my early Sundays in Pleasant Hill. Uplands, our little rural hospital, had kindly offered to board me. Approaching the nearer of the two gates that opened from the spacious hospital grounds onto the highway, I became aware that Dr. May Wharton, Uplands' founder, superintendent, and physician, was rushing with agitation toward me. And then I made out what she was saying: "Mr. White, hurry. George Seegraves has had a terrible time with a drunken man. He's got him down now and is sitting on him. Come and help!"

I dashed to the scene of excitement a little way up the road. Sure enough, in the midst of a circle of excited women and children there was the drunken man with George sitting on him. What was desired of me was that I should change seats with George! I did, though he was heavy and I was skinny. It didn't matter; the drunk was thoroughly subdued now. All I had to do was to sit until the sheriff arrived.

When at last the official car drove up and the sheriff stepped out, I saw a great bulky man, with a huge western hat, big mus-

taches, and a big star, and a big gun. He took the drunk off to jail in the county seat, ten or eleven miles away, and we went in to dinner.

As I got acquainted with the region, I learned that the sheriff was generally supposed to be pretty well in agreement with the bootleggers and not at all zealous about enforcing the liquor laws. As I recall, he was re-elected when voting time came, but by the time another election came around, an aroused citizenry retired him in favor of a candidate named Brown. Sheriff Brown had the finest kind of reputation, and he vowed that he would enforce the laws without fear or favor. He went about his duties in such fashion as to demonstrate that he meant this; soon conditions were better.

But a story went around—such stories get around in a rural county—that the former officer had threatened that if Sheriff Brown ever tried to take whisky out of his car, he would kill him. And then one day someone reported that the ex-sheriff did have a lot of liquor in his car. Brown promptly drove to the place and searched the car. The former sheriff came out of the house, and true to his threat, shot him dead. The county was aroused. Yet people pessimistically prophesied that the culprit would never be sentenced. And certainly Tennessee "justice" was tenderhearted. The former sheriff was sentenced to only thirty years in the penitentiary for the cold-blooded, pre-meditated murder of a very fine citizen and officer. And in something like half his prison term he was back in town, even talking about running for office.

Some time after all this, a boy named Tom Brown entered Pleasant Hill Academy. He was a friendly and very likeable boy who did well in school. He was a gentleman in all his relations. The more I saw of Tom the more I respected him, but I was slow to realize that he was the son of Pleasant Hill's martyred sheriff.

At Pleasant Hill Academy, as at most of the church-sponsored secondary schools, the boarding students worked at many different occupations to help pay their way and to keep the institution operating. The art department, under Miss Margaret Campbell, had been developing handicrafts as a means of bringing in some income and offering work opportunities to students, as well as developing latent talents in the region. In particular, there was a special kind of wood carving of little figures of animals for which the Academy became known. Tom Brown was set to carving and soon became most adept at it. But before long he was carving something special of his own, little figures of Southern Mountain people engaged in their homey occupations. There was life in these carvings and

understanding of the feelings and activities of the people. They were not caricatures, for they expressed appreciation of the life Tom Brown saw around him.

At first the carvings were quite simple—a single figure like a woman churning, a mountain preacher preaching. Soon they became more elaborate and might consist of two or more figures in a group—a woman milking her cow, three or four people caught in the midst of a folk-dance figure. Tom's carvings became very popular and it was hard for him to keep up with the demand.

When Tom Brown left Pleasant Hill, I hoped to keep in touch with him, but I didn't have any luck. I knew that Tom went off somewhere to study art. But I finally lost track of him completely. What a very pleasant surprise it was, then, to learn recently that the great new Rich's store in Knoxville was displaying a big and very detailed piece of Tom's work, depicting the coming of the Dodge family to Pleasant Hill and that Tom had been awarded a scholarship at the Ecole Nationale Superiore Des Beaux Arts, Paris.

I have not seen the new carving, though I have seen two pictures of it. It seems a splendid consummation of Tom's early promise as a craftsman. The carving shows the Dodge family and some of their assorted belongings on the last and undoubtedly hardest stage of the long journey from their native New England, the seventeen rough miles from Sparta. The figures represent the Rev. Benjamin Dodge, his wife Phoebe, their daughter Emma, an old family friend and retainer, Fred Williams, and Mr. Amos Wightman, who had driven down to Sparta in his wagon to bring the Dodges to Pleasant Hill. It is a worthy memorial to "Father Dodge" and his family.

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FATHER DODGE came by oxcart into Pleasant Hill. For his school building he hauled lumber over the mountain road; it took the wagon two days to cover seventeen miles.

The most recent news from Pleasant Hill, a letter from the Rev. Paul Reynolds, director of the Community Center, has this to say of the roads: "... our 'mountain' is being bisected by one of these new, modern, four-lane highways.

We are not sure whether we are going to like it or nor, especially since it cuts our dairy farm squarely in two. . . . we are very skeptical as to whether a night and day stream of modern traffic will make our cows more contented.

Uplands

Nursing Home Plans

Dr. May C. Wharton, about whose new dream Miss Galbreath tells us here, was honored in April by the Tennessee Medical Association when she was named Outstanding General Practitioner of the year.

HELEN E. GALBREATH

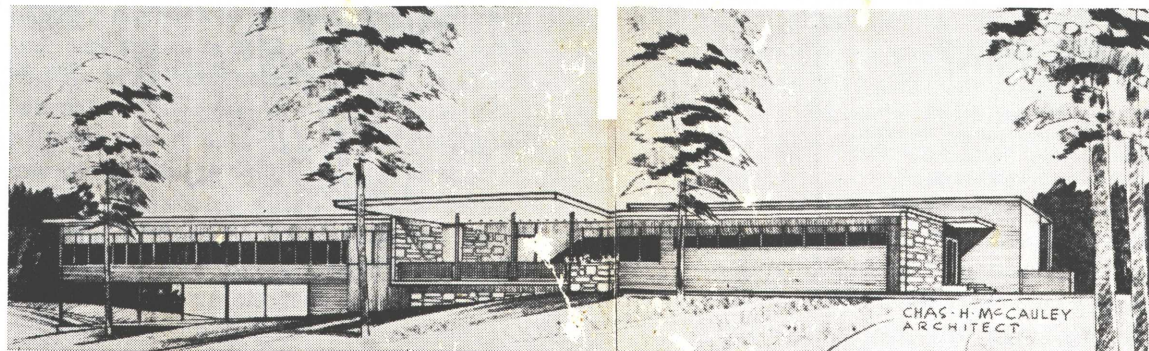
ONE DAY IN JULY of this year, earth was broken on a wooded knoll at Uplands in Pleasant Hill, Tennessee, for one of the most modern nursing homes in the state. It will take a year to complete the beautiful, fire-proof structure, but when it is opened in 1957, it will mark the fulfillment of another dream of Dr. May Wharton, the "Doctor Woman of the Cumberlands." It was in 1917 that she first came to Pleasant Hill with her husband who was principal of the Pleasant Hill Academy, a mission school for mountain boys and girls. From that time on she gave herself without stint to care for the medical needs of the people of the Cumberland Plateau. It was through her efforts and the co-operation of the community and friends in many states that she first opened Uplands Cumberland General Hospital, then Van Dyck Hospital for tuberculous patients, and in 1950 the fifty-bed modern hospital in Crossville.

Although she retired from medical practice several years ago, her vision of human needs has never dimmed. In line with

the thinking of many church and civic groups, she began to realize that the increasing number of men and women over 65 presented a problem that must be solved. Many were still active and wanted to continue lives of useful and interesting occupations. Others wished to lay aside the responsibilities of a home and live in a place where they might have good fellowship, lighter activities, and nursing care when needed.

So Dr. Wharton began to dream of a new service that Uplands might offer. She planned an up-to-date nursing home on the high ground that overlooks the lake. The rooms were to be light and airy, with shelves beneath the windows for the books and other treasures to which older people cling. There was to be a recreational hall and stage for friendly gatherings and vesper services; a library of current books; a covered terrace overlooking the lake and the hills; space for gardens; medical and nursing quarters; a large central dining hall. It would be near the craft shop and community church, and in the center of a friendly community. Yet it would be a place of quiet, with the clean, fresh air of the mountains and the beauty of the changing seasons. For those who wanted an occasional trip to the city, there would be buses or friends with cars going to Knoxville, Nashville, or Chattanooga, only two hours' drive away. The climate was ideal, with pleasant summers and moderate winters.

Uplands had 500 acres of rolling wooded land, and a part of this would be divided into lots and give free to those who wished to build retirement cottages close to the nursing home. Lots on the hospital grounds would be leased to the occupants for life, but would revert to the hospital at their death. But the acres owned by Uplands outside the hospital grounds would be laid off in lots that would be deed outright to friends who wanted to build their homes there. They would then have the right to sell or otherwise dispose



of the property after their death.

What a wonderful vision this was! The only drawback was the fact that there were no funds even for drawing plans. But Dr. Wharton and the little band of friends who believed in her dream began to pray that a way would be found. Today, through state and federal aid and a special grant from the Ford Foundation, over \$211,000 has been made available for the purpose; the plans are drawn, and work has been started.

In addition to the nursing home, the first retirement cottage has been built—a two-bedroom, electrically heated dwelling near Dr. Wharton's home—and others are planned. Every mail brings letters of inquiry about either the nursing home or the retirement cottages. Scarcely a week passes that friends do not drop in to look at the lots, and many have been taken. Pleasant Hill is a busy place this summer. Cumberland General Hospital is being used as a guest house for those who wish to live here while they are building. Friends interested are asked to write in advance, for accommodations are limited. Letters should be addressed to Supt. J. F. Meisamer, Sr., Uplands Sanatorium, Pleasant Hill, Tenn.

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PENLAND SCHOOL OF HANDICRAFTS

Penland, North Carolina

Tabor Family Noted as Stout Chair Makers Over 150 Years

By HELEN BULLARD KRECHNIAK

Reprinted from

THE TENNESSEE CONSERVATIONIST. JULY. 1956

CUMBERLAND COUNTY, Tennessee, which this year is observing its centennial, boasts within its boundaries a sesquicentennial of a rare sort. The Tabor family, which in 1806 settled near Black Drowning Creek north of Crossville, is rounding out 150 years of woodcrafting, principally chair making.

Eli and William ("Sizzlebum Bill") Tabor, who drove their sloping-bed wagons and oxcarts over from Tabor City, North Carolina, came of a family of woodcrafters. They chose their land in the newly-opened Plateau because of the fine stands of hickory, maple, and chestnut which grew on it. These were the woods best suited for the chairs, looms, wagons and other implements for farm and home which they produced.

Early settlers in the area needed these things, and so did some of the throngs of pioneers who for the next fifty years moved across the Plateau to the new lands to the west. Through good times and bad, the Tabors turned out their wood products and when cash money was scarce they would hitch up and do some peddling.

Usually the young Tabors helped in the shop, and even when they grew up and set up for themselves they were likely to choose a job in the timber, or blacksmithing, or some such thing which was only a step away from the woodcrafting.

Uncle Demus, the last of the wagon makers of the family, made his last wagon about 1918, but the chair business on which the Tabors have since specialized, remains as brisk as ever.

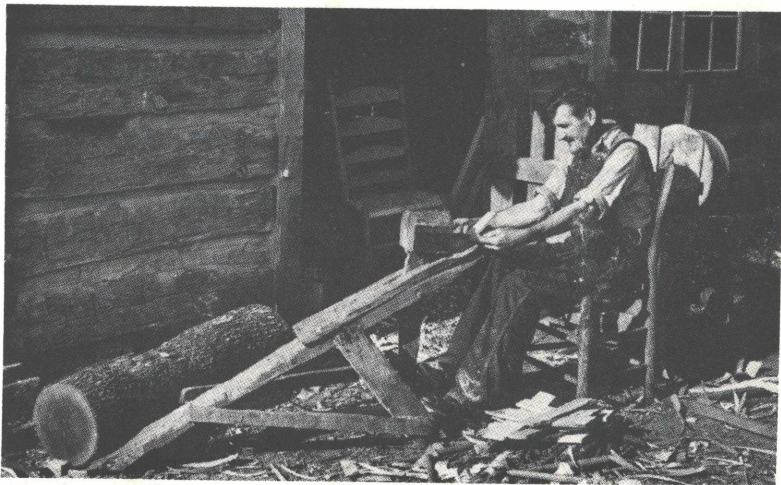
The present chairmaker of the family is Frank Tabor, known far beyond the Plateau for his handmade chairs. He deserves to be, for he is a craftsman who for some 50 years has made a good chair in preference to getting rich.

The old mountain settin' chair which he sells by the dozen over a wide area is now as it has always been a nailless, screwless, glueless creation. He still makes it in the same design his great grandfather followed. His great great-grandfather, "Sizzlebum Bill,"

who is listed in the census of 1860 as a chairmaker, probably used the same design.

Hickory rounds, maple posts and oak splits—cut, turned, treated, and put together in the old-timey way—produce a chair so comfortable, so light in weight, and so inexpensive that its popularity goes on and on.

It isn't a complex undertaking to make a chair, but to make one quickly, cheaply, and so well that it will give good service for 25 years—and some have been known to have been in use for over 70 years—takes an expert craftsman. In the old feuding days they used to say, "Always club your antagonist with a Tabor chair 'cause it won't shatter when you flail him."



Frank Tabor, noted chair maker of the Cumberland

When I went out to see what Frank Tabor had to say about this "Tabors chairs in Cumberland County" Sesquicentennial, I noticed several six-foot logs of cherry, walnut, hickory, and maple lying behind his crowded little shop. Nearby was an old Model A engine hooked up to a saw.

"I saw them up myself," he told me. "That way I can watch the grain. The grain's the main thing when you aim to make a good stout chair. And never drill your rung holes parallel with the grain—they will bust."

A chair is only as good as its joints, and the secret for making perfect joints lies in the careful fitting of the seasoned hickory rounds into the green maple posts. When the green posts shrink over the already dry rounds, the joint will hold till the cows come

home. There's a trick, too, to the handling of the posts. They have to be boiled in water to remove the sap. After boiling, the backs are bent in a "weave brace." This is nothing but three slender, tough sticks.

Favorite materials for seats are hickory and white oak splits and hand-twisted and woven cornshucks. A walnut or cherry ladder-back chair with a shuck seat is as handsome a piece of seating as you could ask for. Specialities like this, and rockers, children's chairs and rockers, doll chairs and stools are made to order in various woods.

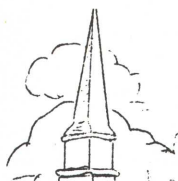
I tried to get Frank Tabor to make a guess as to how many thousands of chairs he had made and sold, but he wouldn't even try.

"The only figure I can recall," he said, "is the stock Bilbrey's (the furniture store in Crossville which for many years handled Tabor chairs) had back about 1932. I kept making chairs and they kept buying 'em till one day I asked them how many chairs they had on hand. They said 1,500. But they told me to keep right on bringing them in because some day folks were sure to have money and they'd begin buying chairs again. But I went on home and figured that next time I had me a load of chairs I'd hit out for Rockwood or Cookeville and peddle 'em or trade 'em for meat and flour. And I did.

"My grandpap hauled chairs as far as McMinnville in his wagon and traded 'em for salt and sugar and coffee. Yes—Bilbrey's sold the 1,500 and it wasn't but a couple years afterward that they had sold them all out and started giving me rush orders again."

The oldest Tabor chair still in the possession of the family was made about 75 years ago by W. S. S. Tabor, Frank's father. It belongs to Mrs. Ethel Tabor Cox, sister of Crossville's postmaster, Laverne Tabor.

Will the Tabor family ever round out 200 years of chairmaking in Cumberland County? They may, even in this fast-moving, ever-changing world of ours, for Frank's son, Lloyd, who is now in the Navy, is a fine chairmaker and has been talking about taking over the family business when his father gets ready to retire. If he takes over, he can be on hand for the bi-centennial. #####



Mrs. Marie G. Noss of Berea College has compiled a bibliography concerned with religion of the Southern Mountain region which covers references between 1947-1955. Mrs. Noss intends to bring the work up to date; however the list in its present form would be of value to one doing research in that period. Anyone interested may have a copy by sending 10¢ to the Council office to cover the cost of handling.