**Squire Dean Campbell**
**Moonshine and Nascar**
**February 24, 1919**

The Dark Corner is the northeastern corner of Greenville County and is called Glassy Mountain township. In that township is one long range of mountains that has Glassy Mountain on the western side and the tallest peak on the eastern end is Hogback Mountain. There is a backside range that is up in the north Saluda valley where the Poinsett Reservoir is now.

Even though people in Charleston say that there are no mountains in South Carolina (because they want people to go up to North Carolina where they had summer homes), there are over one-hundred mountains, more than two thousand feet or higher, in the upper part of South Carolina in Greenville, Pickens and Oconee Counties. Believe it or not Greenville County has forty-nine of them. Most people think that because Sassafras is the tallest over in Pickens and Oconee area they think they have the tallest mountains, but they don't. The Glassy Mountain Township is one of twenty townships in Greenville County and is the nucleus of what we call the Dark Corner.

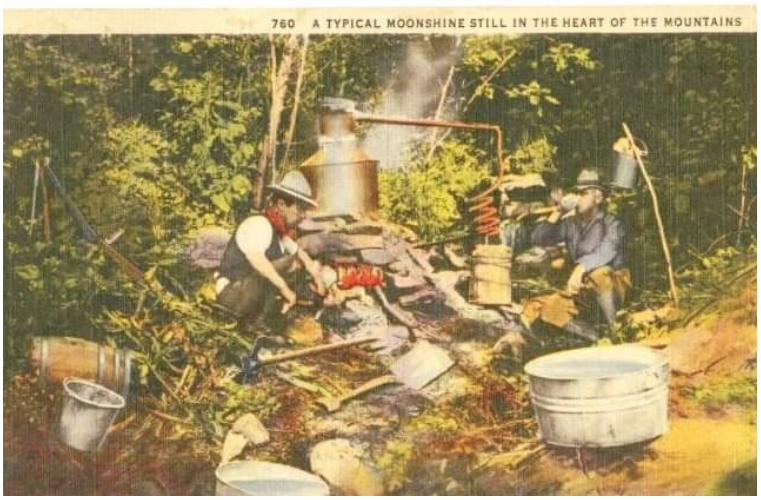
A country road in the Dark Corner area of Greenville County. *(Photo courtesy of the Greenville County Historical Society.)*

The Greenville Spartanburg County line is the old Indian boundary line set in 1777 by a treaty made at Dewitt's Corner. Everything west of that line was the lower nation Cherokee territory until they were defeated and ceded all that property to the newly formed state of South Carolina. It was after that the state set up Greenville, Oconee, Pickens, and Anderson counties. Consequently, Glassy Mountain township did not have early settlers in it until after 1777 and it really didn't have a lot of people settle until 1784. That's when unpaid Revolutionary War soldiers who were still unpaid were paid back in land grants in the Glassy area. People say, "Why didn't they give land grants up on Hogback?" Well, it was a bit further to get to the top of Hogback in those days…so land grants began in Glassy Mountain. So that is the reason why we now when we talk about the Dark Corner we have to talk about the people who lived in the upper portion of the old Spartanburg District (now county) as well as people who were across the line in North Carolina.

Today, we do allow people in townships to the west of us (that is Saluda, part of Cleveland, and a portion of Highland township) to claim to be apart to be part of the Dark Corner. So that is where you are geographically when we refer to the Dark Corner. That part of South Carolina was never a part of the plantation economy of this state. We were in a barter society with, primarily, Western North Carolina, Eastern Kentucky and Tennessee. As a result, because we had our own economic situation, we were never included as part of South Carolina. A man named Beau Blackwell wrote a book several years ago (published 2009) that was entitled Used To Be A Rough Place In Them Hills **that covers this subject purely from a cultural standpoint.** People are more familiar with its name by its subtitle, *Moonshine, the Dark Corner and the New South.*

A woman from Glassy Mountain doing everyday chores. *(Photo courtesy of the Greenville County Historical Society.)*

I will read you his words because he tells about how the states of North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee have simply assimilated all of their Appalachian culture into the mainstream part of their state. South Carolina never has and probably never will. It is something that is a cultural anomaly and stands apart, for good or for evil. The reason that it stood apart, primarily, was the word: *moonshine*. The entire economy of that area (including over into Oconee and Pickens counties) was conditioned on the production of moonshine whiskey whether it was legal (made for the government) or illegal (made for home distillation).




This postcard of Dark Corner moonshiners shows a typical scene hidden within the trees of places like Glassy and Hogback Mountains. *(Photo courtesy of the Greenville County Historical Society.)*

That was the only thing you had that you could bank on to make cash money because even timbering didn't pay that much in those days. You didn't have farmland that was big enough that you could produce enough to make money. Even the corn you grew upon the bottom lands of the river wasn't enough. A fellow could only make 50 to 60 cents a bushel for his harvested corn, but if he bartered for other ingredients like yeast, sugar, and put a little elbow grease into it, then he could produce moonshine and sell it in cities like Greenville, Spartanburg and Greer. I remember very well, being a young boy of 7-10 years old and having a professional man come into my father's home to buy his *chartered* whiskey for medicinal purposes. Now you get *chartered* whiskey when you take your white lightning and burn the inside of barrels so that it is like charcoal. You put your white lightning into these charred barrels and bury them underground for a length of time so that it ages, and when it does, it changes into a light-colored bourbon. It makes it much smoother to taste and much smoother to mix herbs and spices for medicinal purposes.

One time after telling the story of my father and the professional man coming by for whiskey, an older white-haired lady came up to me and patted me on the arm, and said, "Mr Campbell, I can attest to the fact that your father made excellent whiskey for medicinal purposes. I'll have you know I've had many a spring tonic made with your father's good, chartered whiskey." And then she added, "You see my husband was Judge Charles Cecil Wyche." At that point I patted her on the arm and smiled, saying, "Yes, Mrs. Wyche – and it was your husband who put my father on probation for making it!"

And so, while the whiskey is underground, how do you test it? In the fall of the year along county roads you see some 7-10 ft long Sweet Joe Pye weeds. They have leaves that grow out of the same spot up and down the stalk and have a large purple cluster of flowers. Most people think that it grows like bamboo because of the places where the leaves grow, but it does not. It is hollow all the way through, and some people refer to it as *nature's straw.* So, you take a three-foot section of the Joe Pye weed and knock off the leaves. Where you have buried the kegs under the ground over the stopper, you don't put dirt – you make an area diameter of 12" of moss and loose leaves that you can remove every so often. So, you remove this mossy covering, brush away the leaves and dirt – you make an area diameter of 12" of moss and loose leaves that you can remove every so often. So, you remove this mossy covering, brush away the leaves and dirt that have fallen, open the stopper and take the long quill, as they call it, and lower it down into the barrel and sip to use it as a siphon. Now if it is a hot August afternoon you might need to take 3-4 sips to get a very good reading! When I wrote my tale on how to do this, I added a paragraph at the end that said, "If more than one member of the family is testing while it is underground, you can guarantee that when it is ready to come out of the ground there is a lot less in the barrel than there was when it went into the ground!"

So, in those days when you got caught making whiskey and it was captured for a court case, not all that evidence was poured out. It was kept if it was good stuff. Speaking of "the good stuff," some fellas were making whiskey in the 1950-60s and used all-terrain vehicles to go to the still sites. When they produced whiskey, when it first comes off after the mash (corn and yeast mixture) is cooked, steam comes off this and the impurities come off with the steam. Some of those impurities drop down as its going from the cooker over to your coil. That is called a thump keg because as it hits the bottom of the keg it goes *thump, thump*. But anyway, steam goes into a copper coil in a clockwise direction. That coil is in a flake stand (it's like a barrel) of water and the the water is going in a counterclockwise direction. So, the cold water running around the hot steam is condensed back into a liquid—and that is the moonshine that comes out of the bottom.

So, we have good and bad moonshine. Some of the fellas back in the 50's and 60's had learned that they didn't use that type of coil/flake stand operation—they used a car radiator as a condenser. So, if I were you and someone said, "I have moonshine whiskey," I would ask, "Who made it and *how* did you make it," because you could get lead poising. Those were the type of people that were doing it for the make money they could make. But in the earlier days, because it was used so much by families for medicinal purposes and was the economic thing that carried the economy in the area, that is why it was kept and not thrown out (by law enforcement) Recently, I was asked if people are still making whiskey in Dark Corner today. Some people are for nostalgic reasons. Anne McCuen states that even some of the preachers still had their own copper pot stills for 20-25 gallons of moonshine because they used it for medicinal purposes. So we have all of this that says, "This is what you had to do to survive."

Once the textile mills started to come in, some people moved into City View here in Greenville, or Lyman, Duncan, Greer and places like that. They worked in mills, but they always wanted to go back to live in the Dark Corner because it is pretty good living up there. There is a whole difference in the Dark Corner today. Through the years the excise tax was a federal tax, not a state tax. That is why a federal officer had to go with a local officer whenever a distillery was destroyed, because they were the ones who brought the tax lien to your property. Also, so much of the property in the upper part of the Greenville County was in names of women, mothers, and wives because if you were caught making illicit whiskey and assessed a tax, they couldn't put it against the property of your mother or your wife. That is why so many women owned the property up there.

Some families in the Dark Corner chose the risks of getting caught with illegal moonshine to make more money from their corn crops and "get ahead." *(Photo courtesy of the Greenville County Historical Society.)*

Bootleggers eventually had the idea that they must outrun the federal people. Back in early part of the century, Henry Ford invented the Model-T, and that made a big difference as far as the revenuers are concerned. I got permission from author Beau Blackwell to quote liberally from the conclusion of his book, Pristine Mountain Living: the Death of the Dark Corner. I certainly won't read it all, but I want to read certain parts. He said, "the Dark Corner's history was tumultuous. Dangerous settlement in the Appalachian frontier, the hazards of the American Revolution, political isolation during the antebellum period, dissent during the Civil War, and a protracted struggle with revenue enforcement had a lasting effect on the area's mentality. Coupled with a strong and dominant current of Appalachian culture in the area, Dark Corner brought to South Carolina a cultural anomaly that is often associated more with Western North Carolina and Eastern Kentucky than with South Carolina itself. The Appalachian culture that developed in the area clearly differentiated it from other portions of the state. The culture, with its reliance on distillation and the mistrust about ciders, created an environment that was hostile to development. The reliance on an alcohol economy kept it ostracized by those who attempted to better the Upstate, and left the Dark Corner largely out of the New South. According to outsiders, illicit liquor related that lawlessness was a negative trait found in the Dark Corner. While many factors contributed to the development of lawlessness, nothing did more to exacerbate it than mishandling of the revenue act in the Dark Corner. The federal government's continued efforts to suppress illicit distillation in the area and the implementation of harsh tactics ultimately made matters much worse.

For over 100 years, the agencies evolved into the Internal Revenue Service, and spent a lot of resources trying to quell the illicit activity in the Dark Corner. In the end, none of those charged with combating resistance to the excise taxes correctly identified the root of the problem. While the various agencies in Washington continued to relegate the problem as mere tax delinquency, and viewed the resistance as desperate acts of outlaws, they were oblivious to the cultural and economic context of the struggle.

Essentially, the failure of the United States to acknowledge the cultural and economic factors behind home distillation was the root cause of the most violent resistance. After outlawing the practice, the federal government failed to present the whiskey producing population with a viable economic alternative. In the minds of the inhabitants, the illegalization of a cultural activity older than its enforcing government was on par with outright persecution. Thus, the issue went beyond liquor. The government's error in viewing the illicit activity of the Dark Corner as a legal issue, and not a cultural conflict, and pursuing it accordingly exacerbated the struggle.

While the 1878 offer of clemency temporarily bridged the cultural gap by demonstrating some form of understanding, ultimately the United States never effectively addressed the question of tradition. The ultimate death knell for the Appalachian distillation culture, however, had its roots in the economy. Following the reduction of the excise tax in the 1960s, home distillation became unprofitable. With many of the home distillers impoverished clientele making the switch to bonded liquor, the distillers were forced into other lines of work. Accelerating this trend was an inflationary rise in prices and a reduction in the profit margins being garnered by illicit distillation. This resulted in the functional death of home distillation as an industry. The practice of home distillation became a fascinating novelty that was relegated to those who wished to produce for private consumption. The attempts of the New South boosters to paint the Dark Corner of a bastion of backwardness only maintained the rift between the modernized sections of South Carolina and the Dark Corner. The projection of negative stereotypes on the Dark Corner continued its isolation as it became largely associated with lawlessness to the outside world through the New South editors. In the end the New South campaigners heard the Dark Corner. They did not bring about the sobriety that they so desperately sought. Instead, they permanently branded the Dark Corner as a negative anomaly that was to be looked at with wonder and to be largely segmented from regional modernization. As the Upstate continued to modernize in the latter part of the 20th-century and the need for labor grew even further, the Dark Corner became open to the idea of employment outside the region. In the end, no matter how hard the inhabitants of the Dark Corner tried to resist modernization, their attempts were futile. As Greenville grew, the borderlands between the Dark Corner and the modernized South Carolina shrank. As Greenville emerged as an economic leader in the state in the 1980s, the Dark Corner was vicariously opened through proximity. However, it was only a matter of time before the isolation came to an end. By the late 1980s, the distinct Appalachian distillation culture of the Dark Corner was all but a recent memory."

The title of the class that I teach is, "The Dark Corner: an elusive to exclusive odyssey." We've gone from being a place that you couldn't find it, because it was "a little further up the road." Now, we have three exclusives for the state of South Carolina. We have the state's oldest bridge…Poinsett's Bridge from 1820. We have the state's sole extant covered bridge…Campbell's Covered Bridge built in 1909. And we have the state's only mountaintop golf course. And you have some of the state's most highly touted real estate in South Carolina located there now.

Alright, what happened now was that the federals were hell-bent on quelling all the home distillation, so we had a situation happen that whenever you create something, somebody who is a little bit smarter will create something that changes that. And that's sort of the story of what led to Nascar. When Henry Ford manufactured his model-T back in 1908 (and made other changes in 1910, 1921 and 1925), he put the automobile into the reach of average Americans. Prohibition (the 18th amendment in 1919) during its heyday throughout the country intended to restrict the consumption of alcoholic beverages, actually, instead, created an insatiable taste and mushrooming market for the illegal booze. So, by the time that the Model-A Ford was introduced in 1927 (actually, it was really a re-introduction…he built the first one back in 1903 but he didn't market it first, he marketed the Model-T first), the American public had already accepted his brand of sturdy construction and reliable operation. The 1930 touring car was a highly touted one that was a favorite of the bootleggers that hauled the moonshine to the cities away from the Dark Corner. They were able to do a lot with that car.

This is one such operation that I happened to know a lot about. Some folks I knew were involved in running moonshine...Elmer Hawkins was the mechanic, Big Alec Campbell, my granduncle, Grady Plumbley, who was my mother's younger brother, Brooks Suddeth, and Bell Turner. They were part of a very successful operation for quite a long time. Five million of the "As" (Model-A Fords) were sold before the flat-head V-8 engine was sold back in 1932. Speed, of course, was the most prized attribute of all of these Fords and law enforcement agencies throughout the country wanted these new speed demons so that they could outrun the criminal groups. But it didn't take long for some mechanically minded individuals to become modifiers of Ford's engine so that they'd get greater efficiency in speed. Some of those modifications were added carburetors, boring out cylinders to get bigger pistons, stroking the crankshaft to get better horsepower, or adding higher-performance cam shafts, cylinder heads, manifolds…in other words, they, "souped them up." And I must tell you, about 10 years ago I held a senior brunch in February and gave a talk about the Dark Corner, and just mentioned something about "souping up" cars to outrun revenuers. And as I was packing up my materials to leave, two old fellows in their mid-90s came up to me quietly and said, "Did you ever know Slim Clayton?" And I said, "yeah, Slim Clayton was a mechanic." And they said, "Well, we used to help him soup up those cars! We don't want people to know about it though!" Some people even came up with hot-rod things that they added to the cars. Not only that, they added extra springs to the cars and so forth. So, what happened is that in Georgia, you had Raymond Parks in Dawsonville and he owned a lot of cars and had racetracks nearby.

He worked with Red Vogt down in Atlanta. And up in North Carolina you had Glen Johnson and Junior, his son, who worked with Gray Staley up in Virginia. You had the Bondurant brothers. But here in South Carolina, we had two fellas who worked in Spartanburg and Greenville right where they come together…we had Otis "Slim" Clayton and Mass Atkins and a number of lesser-known mechanics that souped up cars to outrun the revenuers. Those two guys didn't worry too much about souping up their cars because they had other ways of delivering theirs. And Slim is the one that flew the ole biplane (the one of the left top photo) and as a matter of fact, if you go to his tombstone over in Wood Memorial Park between Greer and Duncan, you will see a relief image of that biplane on his tombstone. Here is a photo of an early Ford competitor…a 1933 Plymouth sedan that had the front suicide doors that opened from the front. This one was never used to be souped up, but it did haul a few jars of moonshine whiskey. You see, it was my first car as a young man. It was a hand-me-down from my dad, who had delivered his chartered moonshine which was greatly desired for medicinal purposes.

We began to have places and pastures or open spaces where they would scrape down and the fellas that weren't hauling the whiskey on Saturdays and Sundays, they had things they needed to occupy their time, so they have these souped up cars. Well, they have some idle time, so they decided, "let's just see who has the fastest car!" So they got out to some of these places, and then they got out onto the secondary highways. And before WWII began, the very first dirt race car track in South Carolina was Greenville-Pickens Speedway.

The Greenville-Pickens Speedway played a crucial role in the early days of car racing and Nascar. *(Photo courtesy of the Greenville County Historical Society.)*

There were also some horse racing tracks that the fellas would get out and race on, but that didn't make the horse owners and riders very happy. Greenville-Pickens Speedway had a number of races, but after the war came in December of 1941, it was closed for the duration of the war. Down in Daytona, a number of speed records had been set on the sands there for quite a number of years back in 1927. Bill France Sr. was in Washington DC and he was going bankrupt and he wanted to get out of the bad depression up there. So, he came down to Florida and worked at a filling station and then set himself up in a car repair shop. A year later, Sig Haugdahl, who was one of the local racers there, and they held a race on the course 3.2 miles long and thousands of fans came for it. But the sandy turns became impassible and caused numerous scoring disputes, and technical protests.

An aerial view of the Greenville-Pickens Speedway in 1982. *(Photo courtesy of the Greenville County Historical Society.)*

Matter of fact, they had to stop the race at lap 75 out of 78 laps and Milt Marion was declared the winner by AAA (the sanctioning body at the time). There were more protests. The race lost the reported $22,000, so Haugdahl and Bill French teamed up with the local Elks Club to do another event for the next year, 1937. Though more successful, it too lost money. And so for several years after that, Bill French himself was the one who sponsored them…three races a year in 1939, 1940, and 1941. He himself raced in these and he usually drove some of Raymond Parks's cars down in Dawsonville. The raceway was dormant down there, but Bill French always wanted to have an organization that would have more stringent rules that what these races had been having. Because in these local races what would happen after the race begins the promoter would leave with the money, so when the races were over, the drivers didn't collect anything. So, Bill was convinced that he wanted to work up a new organization that would sponsor races that would operate under a set of rules that everyone would adhere to. So, he began to talk to Raymond Parks and other owners and other mechanics and drivers. Well, he couldn't work with the speedway down in Atlanta because Atlanta had a prohibition on their track that any man that was caught hauling moonshine and convicted, could not race on the racetrack. So, that took a lot of race drivers out of the picture. So, Bill and his wife decided to come up to South Carolina and they remembered the Greenville-Pickens Speedway. So, they just announced that they were going to hold on July 4, 1946, a race under a new set of rules. They arrived in Greenville and found out that nobody had been racing on the track since the war was over. It had only been used for horse racing and there was a horse race scheduled for about 10 o'clock that morning when they had planned the car race. Consequently, he wanted to pack up and go back to Florida, but his wife said, "honey, we already spent all the money on the flyers and everything else, so let's at least stay and maybe a few people will come, and we'll break even. If we pack up and go now, we've lost everything." Reluctantly, Bill said, "ok." They had the race and guess what? 20,000 fans showed up. The biggest race he had in a long time. And so, he made some profit and a year later he started all the talks to discuss creating a new Nascar organization.

But as far as Bill France Sr is concerned, until he died, he said, "As far as I'm concerned, the first unofficial race under Nascar rules was Greenville-Pickens Speedway on July 4, 1946." Now during that race, Bill heard that there was a woman in town, Louise Smith, that was the wife of a parts owner, and she was famous around town because she would outrun the guys out on the highway. So, he decided to invite her to race. Of course, she had never been on a racetrack before and didn't know about race strategy. And so, she just raced flat out. As a matter of fact, when the checkered flag came out, she didn't know what that meant, so she just kept racing round and round. So, they finally

out. As a matter of fact, when the checkered flag came out, she didn't know what that meant, so she just kept racing round and round. So, they finally waved a red flag for her, and she stopped! She ended up racing for twelve years. So, talks began in December 1947 at the Ebony Bar and Streamline hotel in Daytona Beach and ended with the formation of Nascar on February 21, 1948. The Dayton Beach and Road Course hosted the premiere event of the new racing season until the Darlington Speedway was completed in 1950. The first Nascar strictly stock (later called sprint cup) races was held in early 1949 in Charlotte. The second race of the series was held at Daytona Beach in July. They changed the name of it to Grand National in 1950. The race was moved to February and became a tradition that is still held to this day with the modern Daytona 500 held at the 2.5-mile international super speedway in Daytona. Every major automobile manufacturer produced winning models in the intervening years of Nascar's amazing growth as major national sport for both men and women. It all began with daredevil bootlegging drivers on the backroads.

*Dean Campbell, the Squire of the Dark Corner, passed away December 29th 2022. He was 88 years old.*

*Epilogue:* Because I am the last person living that has spent 35-40 years going back to the heritage and history of the Dark Corner, we have lost Anne McCuen, Mann Batson, James W. Lawrence, a publisher in the Landrum area. Up until one week before Easter of this year (2019), I was very unhappy because I found no one younger than me that is interested in carrying on the heritage and history of the Dark Corner. But I made a presentation in the Greer Heritage Museum and when I made that statement that day about having no one to carry on Dark Corner history, I have since spent the last six years creating 150 Twice Told Tales of the Dark Corner, including three dozen old ballads, published in two books. One is called "Twice-Told Tales of the Dark Corner" including the first 72 tales that I wrote and the other 78 is in "The Rest of Dark Corner's Twice-Told Tales." But it wasn't in vain because a lot of people now know at least the basic stories of what was there – it wasn't just moonshine and whiskey. We produced twenty-seven ministers of the Gospel, two foreign missionaries, outstanding doctors, and lawyers. Even though we are known for moonshine, we have an educational legacy that goes back to 1809 to a benefactor school called the Squire Brown School, and from 1858 to 1889 we had the foremost educational institution of the upper part of the Greenville-Spartanburg District called the Gowensville Seminary with Rev. Thomas J. Earle. And so, there are things about the Dark Corner that you never heard of because media doesn't want to cover those kinds of stories. Cut on your news each night and what is the first twenty minutes is who shot who and what. That is the way the world works.

After I left the Heritage Museum that day, I checked my email at about five o'clock and the daughter of one of my cousins – she happens to be the assistant principal at Wade Hampton High School— her name is Ashley Campbell Wardlaw sent me a message. She said, "Dean, Daddy and Uncle Wayne said you said have no one to carry on the history of the Dark Corner. I am vitally interested – what can I do. So, on her spring break I took her and her father on a five-hour tour that I have been giving for thirty years. During the summer when you have time off I will go over some other things you should know. I only had one day with her – I gave her one of five classes that I give at Furman and Wofford. This is how I present it. Here are all my materials, teaching materials, my power points. You take them – you study them – you know a lot already. But you put your own personality to it. It is yours once you are no longer here. I am very happy to say it will go on very long well after me.