The People's College:
Folk Education and the Pedagogy of the Interwar Adult Education Movement

Paper Presented to the Paradise Historical Society

Franklin Eccher
PhD Student in the History of Education
University of Pennsylvania
May 29, 2024

ABSTRACT

This history documents the rise, fall, and afterlife of the Pocono Peoples College, a folk school established in Henryville, Pennsylvania in 1924 and a precursor to the broader adult education movement during the Great Depression. In this study, I draw attention to the ways the Progressive Era folk revival shored up white supremacy in the American South, and highlight the influence of the Danish folk high schools on many prominent progressive intellectuals and educators of the early twentieth century. By comparing adaptations of the "people's college" concept during and after the Pocono Peoples College, I argue that folk education, so long as it concerned the authentic interests and challenges of the adults it served, offered a portable tool for more liberatory educational and social projects in the 1930s and beyond.

The research for this paper was supported by the Lillian Hamblin Nelson Grant from the Paradise Historical Society in Henryville, PA.

I. Remembering "The Old College": Adult Education's Gradualists and Radicals

In the early morning on Monday, June 24, 1991, a fire broke out at Hunter's Farm above the small Poconos town of Henryville, Pennsylvania. Perched atop a high bluff overlooking Paradise Valley, a cluster of resorts and fishing clubs in the heart of the Pocono Mountains, the property included an impressive barn, an array of family cottages, and a curious building of ornate gray stone situated on the property's northern ridge. William T. Hunter, the former president and general manager of a Connecticut manufacturing firm called Schrader's, bought the property in 1926 where he moved with his wife Alice and their children to escape the polio and influenza epidemics. William and Alice raised generations of Hunters on the family farm, many of whom lived and raised families in the surrounding cottages. The Hunters and their neighbors knew the cathedral-like stone building on the ridge simply as the "Old College."[1]

One of the Hunters' grandchildren, Mary "Stowie" Hunter Lachi, then in her 50s and living in the old director's cottage closest to the Old College, awoke on the morning of June 24 to loud banging sounds, like gunfire. She bolted upright, thinking bears had gotten into the garbage cans. When she saw the flames, she woke everyone in the house, called the fire department, and drove from neighbor to neighbor, shouting the news: "The Old College is on fire!" Stowie gathered her cousin, Ann Stevenson Berman, and a small crowd of Hunter relations and neighbors watched as flames engulfed the stone building.[2]

---

[1] Barbara Beckwith and Bobby Beckwith, "William T. Hunter: A Man with a Family Vision in Henryville," n.d. (Family history.); Robert Lenihan, "One-Time Small College Destroyed by Fire," *Pocono Record*, June 25, 1991.
[2] Ann Stevenson Berman, "Some Thoughts on the Old College," p. 19-21, and Mary "Stowie" Hunter Lachi, (no title), p. 25 in *Old College Memory Book*, ed. Jennifer R. Salmon (Henryville, PA: Upstream! Publishing, 1997). *Old College Memory Book* is a collection of news clippings, transcribed oral histories, and family histories gathered by Jennifer R. Salmon six years after the college burned down.

The fire — an accident, started probably in the kitchen — brought an end to what had been known seventy years earlier as the Pocono Peoples College.[3] From 1924 to 1929, the Pocono Peoples College operated in Henryville as a folk school for adult learners regardless of their prior academic record. Folk education — a term which accretes a multitude of meanings in the Progressive Era — I take here to mean the specific set of progressive projects which aimed to propagate non-traditional adult education programs predominantly for the white, rural communities of Appalachia and the Midwest. Broadly speaking, these programs mixed the liberal arts with vocational training, cultural expression with communal labor, and individual growth with community responsibility. By mixing pragmatism and idealism in the context of a familial college community, faculty and staff sought to engage students in authentic situations that would prompt them to live lives of dignity and meaning.[4]

Founded and directed by Soren A. Mathiasen, an Oberlin graduate who returned to the U.S. after serving in the First World War and teaching at the International People's College of Elsinore, Pocono claimed to be the first folk school of its kind in the U.S.[5] This claim was not entirely true — Pocono instead represented one institution among many in a broader effort to import the Scandinavian "folk high school" or "people's college" to America's rural hinterlands. These efforts took root in the upper Midwest at the end of the nineteenth century, following a flood of Danish and Finnish immigration to the area, but largely failed to approximate the success of the

[3] The college's own literature omits an apostrophe in the word "Peoples," unlike most other peer institutions and literature of the time. When describing the "people's colleges" as a category, I include the apostrophe both because it seems to be the term of art and because it more closely approximates the Danish term *folkehøjskole* — a school of and for the people. I also draw a distinction between "people's college" and the popular term "folk school," which I address later in this paper.

[4] Chester A. Graham, "What Is Pocono Like?" April 7, 1926, Pocono Peoples College folder, Monroe County Historical Association, Stroudsburg, PA.

[5] "Lincoln High Graduate Is Head of American College in Europe," *The Nebraska State Journal*, March 13, 1932; Eunice Fuller Barnard, "Adults Go Eagerly to School: Millions Study in New Special Courses—Learn Faster Than Children," *The New York Times*, August 28, 1927; "The First Peoples College in America," *American-Scandinavian Review*, 1925. Both online at ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

folk institutions in Scandinavia.[6] Nevertheless, folk education was soon appropriated by two distinct strands of Progressive Era social reformers: the social gospel gradualists who sought to ameliorate the immediate social ills of the urban and rural poor through vocational education and craft skills, and the radical social reconstructionists who understood schools as the terrain for imagining different ways of structuring society entirely.[7] Temporally and philosophically, the Pocono Peoples College sits between these divergent streams of the folk education movement, a model of adult education with grander visions than the dominant vocational-craft paradigm, but which certainly stopped short of a more radical social program.

The gradualist approach represents a larger Progressive Era effort to uplift — and in many cases, violently assimilate — "exceptional" communities like the white mountaineers of rural Appalachia, freed Black people in the South, or Indigenous communities in the West. Much scholarly attention has been paid to the role of education in this process, from Horace Mann's common schools in the early nineteenth century to the panoply of settlement schools and boarding schools associated with the social gospel.[8] The historian Daniel T. Rodgers refers to the rhetoric of this strand of progressivism as "socialized Protestantism," reconstructed in the U.S. from

---

[6] These early attempts were sparsely attended and closed or reopened as churches within a handful of years of their founding. They failed in large part because many Danish immigrants actively sought to assimilate to American culture, seeing little use for a school primarily intended to preserve their "Danishness." One notable exception was the Finnish Work People's College, which opened in Duluth, Minnesota in 1903 as a religious and cultural institution and later became a conduit for the labor radicals the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or "Wobblies"). Richard J. Altenbaugh, *Education for Struggle: The American Labor Colleges of the 1920s and 1930s* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990), 60-70.

[7] I adopt the term "gradualist" here from David E. Whisnant, *All That Is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 174. On social reconstruction and education, see Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum: 1893–1958* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 151–174.

[8] On the common school movement, see Johann N. Neem, *Democracy's Schools: The Rise of Public Education in America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017); Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1983). On public school reform during the Progressive Era, particularly rural schools, see Tracy L. Steffes, *School, Society, and State: A New Education to Govern America, 1890–1940* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 47–82. On American Indian boarding schools, see, for example, David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928*, 2nd ed. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2020).

German religious and academic traditions. But, as Rodgers writes, "how that transatlantic reconstruction of Protestantism took place remains at the moment a very large and very open question."[9] One underexplored part of the answer to that question lies in the folk high schools of rural Scandinavia. The first third of this paper addresses the Scandinavian origins of folk education in the U.S. and compares its adaptation at the Pocono Peoples College to the John C. Campbell Folk School, its closest analogue in the southern mountains.[10]

A cohort of more idealistic thinkers and reformers also found ample reason to start schools in the interwar period, and the Pocono Peoples College at various moments reflects and rejects their radical interpretations of folk education. Their programs included some that were radical in their pedagogical approach — like Black Mountain College or the Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin-Madison — as well as programs that were radical in their vision for a restructuring of society — like Commonwealth College or the Highlander Folk School.[11] While only Highlander would espouse a direct tie to the Danish folk high schools, this study of folk

---

[9] Daniel T Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History*, The Promise of American History: Progress and Prospects, 10, no. 4 (December 1982): 113–32.

[10] There is an extensive literature on the Campbells and their work in Appalachia. In this paper I have relied mostly on Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978) and Whisnant, *All That Is Native and Fine*. For histories of the early years of the John C. Campbell Folk School, see Frederick Leslie Brownlee, *The John C. Campbell Folk School, 1925–1952* (Brasstown, NC: John C. Campbell Folk School, 1952) or Pat McNelley (ed.) *The First 40 Years: John C. Campbell Folk School* (Brasstown, NC: John C. Campbell Folk School, 1966). For examples of Olive Dame Campbell's writing writing on the folk schools, see Elizabeth M. Williams (ed.), *Appalachian Travels: The Diary of Olive Dame Campbell* (University Press of Kentucky, 2012); Olive Dame Campbell, "I Sing Behind the Plough," *Journal of Adult Education* 2, no. 3 (1930).

[11] On the labor colleges, see Altenbaugh, *Education for Struggle*. There is an extensive literature on Black Mountain College, but the most comprehensive history remains Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1972). On the Experimental College at UW-Madison, see Adam R. Nelson, *Education and Democracy: The Meaning of Alexander Meiklejohn, 1872–1964* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001). There is an extensive literature on Highlander Folk School, authored largely by Highlander's staff or supporters. A notable exception is John M. Glen, *Highlander: No Ordinary School 1932–1962* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), which I rely on most heavily in this paper. Other prominent accounts of Highlander include Myles Horton with Judith Kohl and Herbert Kohl, *The Long Haul: An Autobiography* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998); Thomas Bledsoe, *Or We'll All Hang Separately: The Highlander Idea* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969); Aimee Isgrig Horton, *The Highlander Folk School: A History of Its Major Programs, 1932-1961* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1989).

education reveals a widespread spirit of experimentation in college and adult education even before the cataclysm of the Great Depression. The second third of this paper addresses the specific pedagogies and people associated with the Pocono Peoples College, and the final third traces them as they appear in other progressive projects during and after the college's tenure.

Common between these two strands was the belief that education should uplift, rather than impose itself upon, the cultures of the communities in which it is situated. The extent to which the folk schools successfully identified and uplifted some core, authentic cultural fiber was uneven, and, as many critics have lodged, the cultural fiber totally imagined.[12] As scholars have shown, the construction of the white Appalachian mountaineer as America's "indigenous" ancestor served as a convenient and powerful justification for excluding freed Black people from the white philanthropic movement for southern uplift.[13] Further, each program in its own way alighted from its initially localist mission, be it in service of a regional craft guild or a powerful cadre of urban progressive philanthropists. And yet, to totally dismiss folk education as missionizing at worst or utopian at best is to miss the ubiquity of its appeal. Nearly everyone under the wide tent of "Progressivism" found something meaningful in the folk school idea, from the settlement school founder Jane Addams to the social reconstructionist George S. Counts; from the famously conservative Booker T. Washington to the leading Black intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois.[14] It also

---

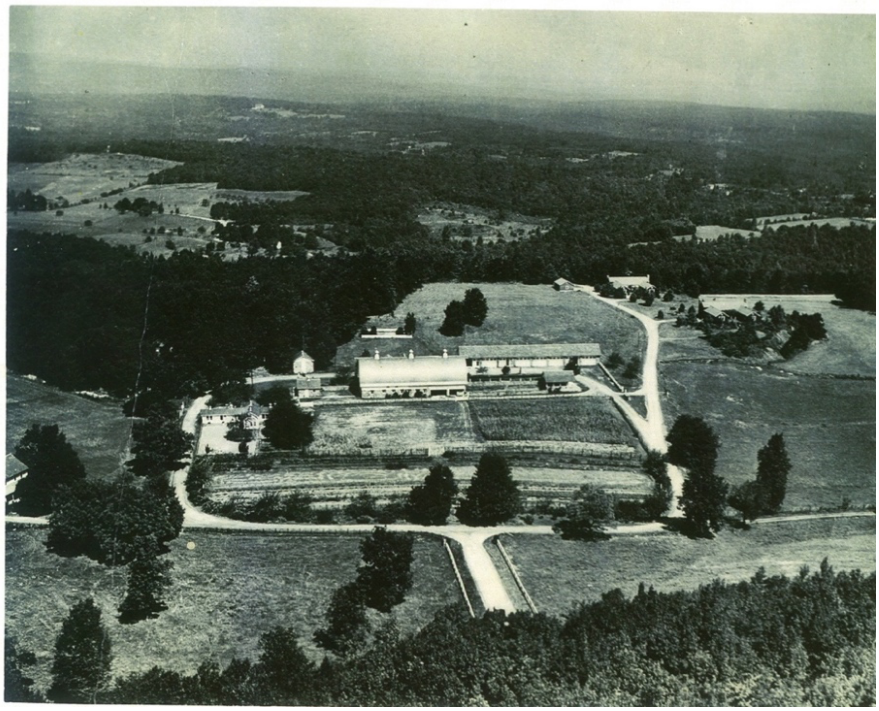
[12] Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine*, 168.

[13] John Frederick Bell, *Degrees of Equality: Abolitionist Colleges and the Politics of Race* (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, LA, 2022), 171–199; Tina A. Irvine, "Reclaiming Appalachia: Mountain Reform and the Preservation of White Citizenship, 1890-1929" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2019); Ethan W. Ris, *Other People's Colleges: The Origins of American Higher Education Reform* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2022).

[14] Jane Addams served on the "Pocono Peoples College Committee," and George S. Counts served as an advisor for the school's later incarnation, the American Peoples School. Addams is listed in "Colleges – Pocono People's College, Pennsylvania" in Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller Records, Educational Interests, Series G, Colleges. Counts is listed in Susan E. Wilson Collection on the American Peoples School, TAM 808, Box 1, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University. For Washington's views on folk schools, see Erik Overgaard Pedersen, "Booker T. Washington and the Danish Folk High School," in *The Racial Politics of Booker T. Washington*, vol. 13, Research in Race and Ethnic Relations (Elsevier Ltd., 2006), 183–92. For Mathiasen's exchange with Du Bois, see Letter from Pocono People's College to W. E. B. Du Bois, January 6, 1931, W. E. B.

stands to miss the folk pedagogy at the heart of more racially inclusive and politically effective efforts to uplift southern laborers, as Highlander Folk School did in the following decades.

The rise, fall, and afterlife of the Pocono Peoples College in the 1920s and early 1930s provides a snapshot of folk education and the progressive movement at a turning point, from its dominant vision for a socialized Protestantism towards more radical forms of study, activism, and social reconstruction. This paper, by filling in a detailed account of one folk institution situated at that turning point, illustrates the potency and portability of folk education in America's turbulent interwar period.



Aerial Photo of Hunter's Farm, 1945[15]
The college building, obscured by the trees behind the farm to the left, was accessible from the road which loops behind the farm to the right. William T. Hunter bought the former college grounds from the East Stroudsburg bank the following year.

Du Bois Papers (MS312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

[15] Accession # 2013.3, "Hunter Farm aerial photo," Paradise Historical Society, Barrett-Paradise Friendly Library, Cresco, PA.

II. "American Highlanders": Folk Education from Appalachia to the Poconos

Late one Saturday night at the end of March 1925, a car carrying visiting faculty member Ada Peirce McCormick came chugging up the hill to the Pocono Peoples College. Looking out for the "native stone" building from the brochure, her husband Fred McCormick said dryly, "If you don't see any car still sticking in the mud, you'll know that you can still go on." Ada, Fred, their secretary Mrs. Neeld, and their housekeeper Catherine had traveled 140 miles to the college on an invitation from Soren Mathiasen to teach two short courses towards the end of the college's three-month spring session. Ada had earned a reputation as a prominent writer and teacher on issues of marriage and family life after publishing a widely read article in *Harper's Magazine* about her time spent babysitting the young Richard Derby, grandson of former president Theodore Roosevelt.[16] For her first course, she adapted the curricula she had taught for Camp Fire, a recreational camp for girls which sought to teach and dignify household work, an outgrowth of the new science of home economics which emerged in the early twentieth century. Her second course, called simply "Human Relations," took up similar themes, aiming to prepare students to "go through the ordinary acts of living without being terrified." Ada wondered in her journal, "Could an adult who had to leave school young actually get the elements of an education, get the zeal of intellectual adventure in three months[?] I doubted it very much indeed."[17]

As Ada and her family entered the big stone house, noting the new electric lights, they were greeted by Mrs. Moise, a "handsome white haired woman" who Ada, ever attentive to the

[16] Ada Peirce McCormick Papers Finding Aid, Drexel University: College of Medicine Legacy Center (https://archivalcollections.drexel.edu/repositories/5/resources/2125#).
[17] Handwritten journal account of Ada's arrival at the college, Folder 12 "Pocono Peoples College (Camp Fire courses), 1925-1926," Box 106, Ada Peirce McCormick papers, 1881-1978 (bulk 1920-1974), University of Arizona.

nuances of household efficiency, adored. "Mrs. Moise is a born mother, diplomatist, and housekeeper" she wrote. Inside, they found a cavernous hall which served as communal kitchen and dining room, the living room off to the right and a staircase leading up to the student dormitories. Dozens of people of all ages moved about the house, some students and staff and a large contingent of local neighbors who would come to dance or play games or otherwise pass the evening. After dinner, Ada joined the neighbors, students, and staff in the living room, where they gathered around the college's most prominent fixture and pedagogical tool: the fireplace. Soon enough, the square dance was on.[18]

Everyone pushed their benches against the walls, and local caller Jim Besecker took up his post by the fireplace to lead the dance. Ada caught her first glimpse of the director, Soren: a big blond man with dark tortoiseshell glasses, prancing about the room while Lucile, his wife, played the piano. Ada wrote, perhaps with an eye to a future article on the school, "City students and country neighbors spun round and round in the American folk dances. Jimmy the 'caller out' was a treat. My husband watched him all the evening and learned the words:

> 'Birdie in the cage,
> Crow flies in, birdie flies out.'
> 'Hurry up and take your time'
> 'Swing old Adam, then your Eve and
> Don't forget old Adam before you leave.'"[19]

As Ada settled in, she grew accustomed to the conviviality of communal life at the college: cheerful household labor, lecture and discussion around the fire, walks to Paradise Creek, and more dancing. In that stone building on the hill, Appalachia's folk revival had made its way to the

[18] My sense of the layout of the Pocono Peoples College draws primarily from Ada's journal, from the oral histories in *Old College Memory Book*, and from conversations with neighbors who remember the building.
[19] *Ibid*. This account of Ada's visit appears first in her own journal, and later in a more fully developed form in a letter to Ella and Richard Cabot dated March 3, 1925, who she had been imploring to visit the college.

Poconos. In its early sessions, folk education at Pocono resembled its cultural antecedents, both in rural Scandinavia and in America's own southern hinterlands.

The Mathiasen Family ca. 1927[20]
This photo of Lucile Mathiasen, Soren Mathiasen, and their three children was likely taken by Soren's college friend and later assistant director of the Pocono Peoples College, Chester A. Graham.

[20] "Pocono Peoples College," Box 11, Chester A. Graham Papers, 1921-1980, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

Folk education as a cultural project took root in the southern mountains of Appalachia at the turn of the twentieth century, where social reformers considered the viability of integrating southern white mountaineers into an increasingly plural American society. While the industrial coal and timber economy enclosed and denuded the majority of southern Appalachia by the 1890s, the hollows of the southern mountains provided an isolated refuge for the scattered remnants of an agrarian, subsistence-based mountaineer society. Though the removal of multiple Cherokee groups from the southern mountains in the 1830s was in many ways a direct result of earlier Scots Irish settlement during the first scramble for Appalachia, the rhetoric wielded to displace the white mountaineers echoed similar sentiments. As historian Steven Stoll writes, "In both instances, a privileged commercial class depicted the members of a target group as a despised race before taking their land."[21] While some individuals and institutions of the Progressive Era social gospel defended a vision of authentic country life that could be integrated into a pluralistic American whole, others attacked country life as a degraded culture in need of either assimilative industrial education or complete removal.[22]

Indeed, the concept of Appalachia itself as a cultural region emerges not from white mountaineers themselves, but instead through the distorted gaze of urban philanthropists who saw in the region an Elizabethan culture which was preserved "like bubbles trapped in Arctic ice."[23] Historian Henry D. Shapiro historicizes the inception of Appalachia as an idea and demonstrates the ways in which outsiders' conception of Appalachia shaped their philanthropic aims, particularly through schooling, popular culture, and surveys. Whereas the local-color authors of

[21] Steven Stoll, *Ramp Hollow: The Ordeal of Appalachia* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2017), 24. The Eastern Band of Cherokee resisted the colonization of Appalachia and remain in the Qualla Boundary in the Great Smoky Mountains of western North Carolina to this day.
[22] Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 238.
[23] *Ibid*., 18.

the late nineteenth century imagined Appalachia as a quaint "other," or a "strange land and peculiar people," by the early twentieth century the perceived backwardness of Appalachia presented a problem for a homogenizing vision of American progress. The uplift of the white mountaineers returned as a viable philanthropic project in large part because of the abandonment of Reconstruction-era efforts at social equality among white and Black southerners, particularly in educational institutions. The return of the color line at Berea College is particularly indicative of this turn in the social gospel.[24]

Berea College played a crucial role in the effort to open opportunities to higher education for Black people after the Civil War. In the early years of Reconstruction, Berea enrolled a majority-Black student body (many of whom received scholarships from the Freedmen's Bureau). John G. Fee, Berea's abolitionist founder, believed in a "practice" of social equality that was considered radical for the time, even though the specter of interracial dating at Berea would eventually mark the boundaries of that idealism.[25] Nevertheless, like so many institutions at the dawn of the Jim Crow South, Berea made a hard retreat from its vision of racial equality. Though the color line had already reappeared at Berea throughout the late 1880s, including a widely publicized incident in 1889 in which white students re-segregated their dining room, President William Goodell Frost completed the turn. Upon his rise to the presidency in 1892, Frost shifted Berea's mission significantly (though not entirely) to serve white mountaineers, who he believed to have a "superior lineage and eminence." The broader educative project of mountaineer uplift was driven in large part by Frost's writing in his time at Berea.[26] Fearing backlash from white

[24] Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 32–58 discusses this philanthropic move within the Protestant Home Missions; Bell, *Degrees of Equality*, 111–138 and 171–199 profiles the return of the color line at Berea.
[25] Bell, *Degrees of Equality,* 118.
[26] *Ibid.,* 195. In *Other People's Colleges,* p. 185, Ris notes that from 1892 to 1908, Berea's proportion of Black students fell from 52% to 16%.

southerners, Berea, along with other educational institutions and missionary associations, shifted their focus from freed Black people towards white mountaineers, who they imagined as churchless, educable repositories of an authentic American-ness.[27]

Frost's Berea reflected — and accelerated — a broader trend in higher education in the South in which Black young adults were diverted away from baccalaureate programs and into the vocational and industrial schools which would become many of the southern historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Frost himself was an admirer of the country's most prominent conservative Black social reformer, Booker T. Washington, who Frost courted for Berea's board of trustees. Frost, as described by the historian Ethan W. Ris, imagined Berea as "a Tuskegee-style normal and industrial school for white mountaineers."[28] Under the direction of academic engineers like Frost and Washington, higher education institutions for poor southerners would look increasingly segregated and vocational. Further, while the possibility of attending a baccalaureate program remained accessible to white students, Washington and others pressed to consolidate HBCUs like Atlanta University, Morehouse College, and Spelman College, in an effort to create a pyramid of Black higher education which would be, as Ris writes, "even pointier at its top."[29]

Folk school advocates, then, sought to counter this vocational turn in education in the South, at least for white mountaineers. Indeed, the justification for a viable Appalachian community relied in large part on the "discovery" of an authentic "folk" culture in the southern mountains worthy of this philanthropic interest. There was no greater champion of Appalachian

---

[27] Irvine, "Reclaiming Appalachia."
[28] Ris, *Other People's Colleges*, 188. This process of diversion or "cooling out" as higher education expanded its reach is also addressed in Steven Brint and Jerome Karabel, *The Diverted Dream: Community Colleges and the Promise of Educational Opportunity in America, 1900–1985* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1989).
[29] Ris, *Other People's Colleges,* 167.Washington served on the boards of both Howard and Fisk universities, which also began offering industrial courses during this time period. After touring the Danish folk schools in 1910, Washington concluded positively that they "have steadily sought to stimulate the ambitions and the intellectual life of the peasant people." Pedersen, "Booker T. Washington and the Danish Folk High School," 186.

folk culture than the famous ballad collector and social reformer Olive Dame Campbell, who, after the death of her husband John C. Campbell, published (and wrote significant portions of) *Southern Highlander and his Homeland* and opened the John C. Campbell Folk School in his name.[30] As early as 1908, having read some of the burgeoning literature on the Danish folk high schools, Olive spoke with then University of Tennessee Professor of Education Philander Claxton about an idea to "adapt school[ ] curriculum to the life of people" and to "establish schools for grown-ups." As U.S. Commissioner of Education in 1911 and a champion of rural education, Claxton promptly sent bureau researcher H. W. Foght to Scandinavia to report on the system of education in Denmark.[31]

In the 1915 report, titled "Rural Denmark and its Schools," Foght posited a conception of the folk school as democratic, practical, and nationalistic, a rhetoric which reflected a growing nativist sentiment in the U.S. in the early twentieth century. He wrote,

> It is self-evident that an educational process which can reach clear down to the roots of things, strengthening character, and teaching rights of fellowmen, loyalty to the State, and fear of God, even while it supplies the youth and old men, which distinction, with practical training for bread-winning, may be made of inestimable value in hurrying the Americanization of the alien.[32]

Folkehøjskole, a Danish word which translates more closely to "people's college" or "folk high school," refers to a movement in education across Scandinavia in the second half of the nineteenth century rooted in the concept of German *bildung*, or self-cultivation. An idea first popularized by Danish philosopher N. F. S. Grundtvig and first put into practice in Denmark by educator Christian

---

[30] John C. Campbell himself was formerly president of Piedmont College before applying to perform a systematic study of the social conditions of the Appalachian region. His proposal resulted in the establishment of the Southern Highland Division, established formally in Asheville, North Carolina in 1913. In 1913, as a supplement to his survey work, Campbell began organizing a Conference of Southern Mountain Workers consisting of leaders from across the field of "mountain benevolence," which by 1915 began publishing public articles and referring to Appalachia as a discrete cultural geography. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 198. Also see John C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and his Homeland* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1921).

[31] Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine*, 127–8.

[32] Harold W. Foght, *Rural Denmark and Its Schools* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1915), 304.

Kold, the folk schools, or "schools for life," sought to equip rural communities in Scandinavia with both the practical skills and ways of making meaning that would allow them to navigate modernization without losing their histories and cultures. These schools were free and open to all adults, conferred no grades or credentials, were taught in students' native languages, and balanced craft skills with place-specific variations on the liberal arts and local cultural traditions. The result, in theory, was a kind of dialectic between the development of the individual and the development of the nation. Through the folk school, these identities could be mutually reinforcing. Inspired by the Danish model, Foght translated the idea into a call for American folk schools which could catalyze the individual and national development of America's rural poor. The apparent success of the folk schools, their contribution to Scandinavia's consistently high quality of life and social trust, and the apparent similarities between the social conditions of Appalachia and rural Scandinavia drove many American education reformers before and after Foght to Scandinavia to study them in the hopes of building schools of their own.[33]

In the translation of *folkehøjskole* to "people's college," then "folk high school," and ultimately "folk school," the meaning of the term already begins to slip, with significant implications for the kinds of schools that would follow. Alongside her interest in the education of rural Scandinavia, as early as 1907 Olive Dame Campbell had been collecting transcriptions and recordings of some seventy folksongs from the mountaineers she would visit in her travels with her husband. This work attracted the interest of prominent English anthropologist Cecil J. Sharp, who published with Campbell the famous work *English Folk Songs from the Southern*

[33] Scandinavia's school systems and America's rural schools were consistent subjects for researchers and education reformers in the early twentieth century. Other reports include Olive Dame Campbell, *The Danish Folk School: Its Influence in the Life of Denmark and the North* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1928); Harold W. Foght, *The American Rural School: Its Characteristics, Its Future and Its Problems* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1918); and Joseph K. Hart, *Educational Resources of Village and Rural Communities* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1913). They remain an area of interest for contemporary education reformers, e.g. Lene Rachel Andersen and Tomas Björkman, *The Nordic Secret: A European Story of Beauty and Freedom* (Fri Tanke, 2017).

Appalachians in 1917. This work solidified to many the idea that mountaineer culture was exceptional not in its otherness, but instead as a strain of truly "indigenous," native-born, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon culture which had been preserved in the southern mountains.[34]

In this way the "folk" in "folk school," while carrying over some of the basic forms and pedagogies of the *folkehøjskole*, came to emphasize in Appalachia a school of and for folk *culture* rather than a school of and for the *people*. By 1917, driven by Olive Dame Campbell and Cecil J. Sharp's "discovery" of a submerged English folk culture and systematized by John C. Campbell's survey work, the romantic invention of the American "Highlander" as white America's imagined indigenous ancestor was complete. Shapiro defines the Highlander as a "folk-society manqué," "both primitive (incomplete) and legitimately discrete, distinct from American culture and quintessentially American, a symptom and a symbol."[35]

The Highlander manqué as symptom and symbol served as the lodestar of outsider efforts to establish schools for poor white mountaineers. Historian David Whisnant divides these efforts into two categories: the settlement schools typified by the Hindman Settlement School, and the folk schools typified by John C. Campbell Folk School. Founded in eastern Kentucky by Katherine Pettit and May Stone, two progressive educators active in the concurrent women's suffrage and temperance movements, Hindman was the first of many efforts to bring the model of urban settlement schools to rural Appalachia. Culture stood at the center of the Hindman model, as Pettit and Stone emphasized traditional craftwork, dance, and music as vocations for cultural production and eventual economic self-determination. While these schools professed to educate students "back to their homes, rather than away from them," Whisnant accuses them of following a "blind alley of romantic cultural revivalism," touting folk culture while industry rapidly descended on the

[34] Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 244–265.
[35] *Ibid*., 246.

surrounding coalfields.[36] To Olive Dame Campbell, Denmark's folk schools represented a response to the insidious commercialism of the rural settlement school, a way of integrating tradition and change through folk culture. But Whisnant is no less critical of Campbell's shortcomings when he depicts the John C. Campbell Folk School's slow slide into romanticism, eschewing politics for a "meliorist approach to social change, directing her work at the folk school toward the small-scale economics of family farms and cooperatives."[37] This romanticism would come to typify the gradualist folk education approach, emphasizing general equality and dignity for the mountaineers over class-consciousness or political organization.

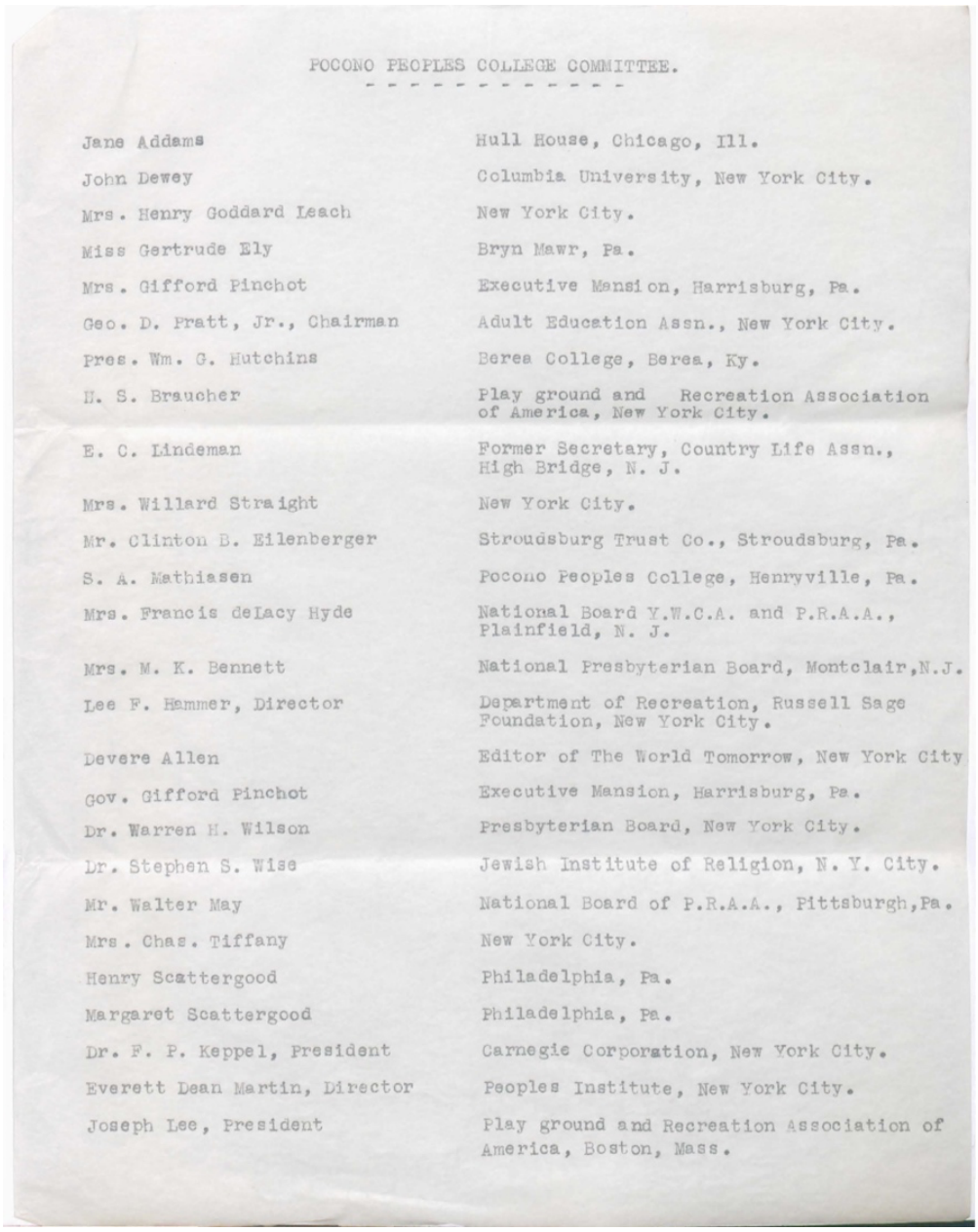
The Pocono Peoples College, whose founding in 1924 predates the John C. Campbell folk school by a year, initially reflected the gradualist progressive approach to education and social reform. It did so quite proudly: in a fundraising appeal to the East Stroudsburg Board of Trade during the college's first session in 1924, prominent local booster Harry Hulbert announced that the primary aim of the institution was "to stem the tide of Bolshevism in the United States by educating the adults to think for themselves" and that "the Pocono College stands as a bulwark for Americanism."[38] Beginning in January 1924, the Pocono Peoples College began offering three-month residential programs, taught by Soren Mathiasen alongside a small faculty and a rotating cast of visiting lecturers, with short courses in history, community life, science, literature, and biography, along with recreational courses in gymnastics and folk dance.[39]

---

[36] Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine*, 32, 72. Among the unfortunate contradictions of the settlement school model, as Whisnant notes, is that the culture cultivated in the curriculum often was not indigenous to Appalachian culture or was highly curated by an outside market for crafts represented by the growing power of the craft guilds. See, for example, Whisnant's discussion of morris dancing, p. 81.
[37] *Ibid*., 174
[38] "Pocono College Aims Explained to Trade Board," *Morning Press*, February 6, 1924. Located in "Pocono Peoples College" folder, Monroe County Historical Association, Stroudsburg, PA.
[39] "The First Peoples College in America"; "Pocono College Will Close Term Saturday Night" *Morning Press*, March 29, 1924. "Pocono People's College" folder, Monroe County Historical Association, Stroudsburg, PA

It was largely the persuasive force of Soren Mathiasen that gave the Pocono Peoples College its initial liftoff. Mathiasen spent much of his time as director on prolific speaking tours at institutions like the National Recreation Congress, and helped found the American Association of Adult Education alongside prominent advocates for adult education including Morse Cartwright and Eduard C. Lindemann.[40] For that reason, it managed to attract the attention of a range of philanthropic support and intellectual interest — from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation to the pragmatist philosopher and educator John Dewey, to the leading Black intellectual and polymath W. E. B. Du Bois, to Hull House founder Jane Addams, and even to social reconstructionists like George S. Counts and Joseph K. Hart. At the apogee of his influence, Mathiasen attempted to launch a chain of people's colleges which he hoped could serve "the great mass of young men and women who are barred from the advantages of culture and higher education by academic formality or lack of time and money."[41]

[40] See, for example, Morse Cartwright, *Ten Years of Adult Education: A Decade of Progress in the American Movement* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1935); Eduard C. Lindemann, *The Meaning of Adult Education* (New York: New Republic, 1926).
[41] Pocono Peoples College, "The Poconian Propeller (Advertisement)," *The Poconian Propeller*, vol. 1, no. 2 May 18, 1927, Boston Public Library.



POCONO PEOPLES COLLEGE COMMITTEE.

Jane Addams	Hull House, Chicago, Ill.
John Dewey	Columbia University, New York City.
Mrs. Henry Goddard Leach	New York City.
Miss Gertrude Ely	Bryn Mawr, Pa.
Mrs. Gifford Pinchot	Executive Mansion, Harrisburg, Pa.
Geo. D. Pratt, Jr., Chairman	Adult Education Assn., New York City.
Pres. Wm. G. Hutchins	Berea College, Berea, Ky.
H. S. Braucher	Play ground and Recreation Association of America, New York City.
E. C. Lindeman	Former Secretary, Country Life Assn., High Bridge, N. J.
Mrs. Willard Straight	New York City.
Mr. Clinton B. Eilenberger	Stroudsburg Trust Co., Stroudsburg, Pa.
S. A. Mathiasen	Pocono Peoples College, Henryville, Pa.
Mrs. Francis deLacy Hyde	National Board Y.W.C.A. and P.R.A.A., Plainfield, N. J.
Mrs. M. K. Bennett	National Presbyterian Board, Montclair,N.J.
Lee F. Hammer, Director	Department of Recreation, Russell Sage Foundation, New York City.
Devere Allen	Editor of The World Tomorrow, New York City
Gov. Gifford Pinchot	Executive Mansion, Harrisburg, Pa.
Dr. Warren H. Wilson	Presbyterian Board, New York City.
Dr. Stephen S. Wise	Jewish Institute of Religion, N. Y. City.
Mr. Walter May	National Board of P.R.A.A., Pittsburgh,Pa.
Mrs. Chas. Tiffany	New York City.
Henry Scattergood	Philadelphia, Pa.
Margaret Scattergood	Philadelphia, Pa.
Dr. F. P. Keppel, President	Carnegie Corporation, New York City.
Everett Dean Martin, Director	Peoples Institute, New York City.
Joseph Lee, President	Play ground and Recreation Association of America, Boston, Mass.

Pocono Peoples College Committee, 1924[42]

The archival record is inconsistent in describing the structure and function of the college's different oversight committees. They appear variously as the "Pocono Peoples College Committee," the "advisory committee," and the "board of directors," but usually involve the same set of people. As with many non-profit boards and university trustees, they appear to have served mostly to signal legitimacy and raise funds.

[42] This committee is listed in a 1924 appeal to the Rockefeller Foundation, which funded the school from 1924–1928. "Colleges – Pocono People's College, Pennsylvania" in Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller Records, Educational Interests, Series G, Colleges.

Still, by opening a people's college in the Poconos as opposed to the southern mountains, it isn't entirely clear who the Pocono Peoples College set out to serve. Unlike the southern mountains, Paradise Valley in the 1920s was composed largely of locally owned and operated resorts catering to an upper-class urban elite who lived only a short train ride away from New York City. The Delaware Water Gap, billed as "The Gateway to the Poconos," built its first rail station in 1903, and soon was second only to Saratoga Springs as the most popular resort destination in the country. The Borough of Mount Pocono, immediately adjacent to Henryville, was one of the most popular tourist destinations in Pennsylvania, second only the Delaware Water Gap itself.[43] The Paradise River had earned a reputation as the birthplace of American fly fishing as elite traditions of English sporting became more popular among upper-class recreationalists.[44] It is likely that Mathiasen was drawn to Henryville in part because of a vacation property owned there by his mother, Johanna Mathiasen, as well as Harry Hulbert's commercial interest in having a college in town.[45] Though geographically proximate to the local working-class rural adults that Mathiasen aimed to serve, scant local attendance suggests that the school was much more culturally proximate to the wealthy urban populations on the other side other Delaware Water Gap.

Ada's reflections upon her return to Pocono in May of 1925 illuminate the school's initially conservative aims — and its struggle to keep them intact. In a series of panicked letters from January 1926, Ada considered writing to Jane Addams, the famous settlement school activist and

---

[43] Amy Leiser, "Delaware Water Gap and Mount Pocono Born from Tourism," *Monroe County Historical Association* (blog), October 12, 2011.

[44] Paradise Historical Society, *Life in Paradise: A History of Paradise Township* (Monroe County, PA: Paradise Historical Society, 2023).

[45] Though possibly a coincidence, "Johanna Mathiasen" is listed as Soren Mathiasen's mother on his and Lucile's marriage certificate and appears as a non-resident property taxpayer in Paradise Township before Soren and Lucile arrive to start the Pocono Peoples College. These tax records are available at the Paradise Historical Society archive in the Barrett-Paradise Friendly Library in Cresco, PA. A decade previously, Harry Hulbert had served as the contractor for the Mountain Crest Colony, a religious community which his brother. Dr. Gustavus Adolphus Hulbert brought to Paradise Valley from Baltimore. The Pocono Peoples College was built on top of the same hill, known colloquially as "Hulbert Hill." Richard Dempewolff, "Early History of Henryville," ed. Judy Dempewolff, July 6, 2017. (Personal correspondence.)

most prominent member of the college's pro forma board of advisors, imploring her to rescind her name from the college's published materials. "I've been a good deal worried because both Miss Addams name and mine have been on the literature of a school which I no longer believe in," Ada wrote furiously to Dr. Alice Hamilton, a friend in Philadelphia, as well as Ella and Richard Cabot, her godparents who she had been courting to visit and contribute funds to the school. In each correspondence, she recounted the stark contrast between her visits.[46]

The most disastrous shift in the early sessions, perhaps, was the departure of Mrs. Moise. It seemed that, without the older housekeeper's poise and discipline, the college's center of gravity quickly began to deteriorate. The college's unpaid secretary Mildred Pack soon left, and the Smiths, two faculty who had particularly impressed Ada on her first visit, were soon to follow. Lucile Mathiasen had taken over the bulk of the housekeeping responsibilities (a "shocking joke" as a housekeeper, by Ada's estimation) and the economy and community of the school's facilities seemed to have crumbled. Two factions quickly developed among the students and staff: the more conservative contingent of housekeepers, represented by Mrs. Moise and Mrs. Mathiasen, and a more radical cadre of students, represented by the promiscuous 25-year-old "pupil teacher" Elizabeth Lowes. In fact, in the absence of the Smiths, the college's only full-time faculty in May 1925 included the Mathiasens themselves, the untrained Elizabeth Lowes, and a new gymnastics teacher named Hans Baasch who Ada alleges once initiated a game of "spin the bottle" during a dull moment after Sunday dinner. Ada wrote that Soren "would easily drift into unfortunate intimacy with the students," and that he was spotted on multiple occasions holding hands with local girls (including Elizabeth Lowes), and who insisted that Ada "trust youth" when she expressed concern about young men and women spending time in each other's rooms. In one of

[46] Letter to Alice Hamilton dated January 4, 1926; letter from Richard Cabot to Ada Peirce McCormick dated January 1926, Folder 12, Box 106 in Ada Peirce McCormick papers.

the more dramatic incidents of the spring, Lowes hopped a train to New York to attend the theater with a visiting lecturer, "all in her knickerbockers," and returned at 3:00 am on the milk train. Mathiasen, in keeping Lowes on as a pupil teacher, insisted that "she needs more educating than anyone here." Over the misgivings of Dr. Hamilton and the Cabots, Ada composed a letter to Mrs. Addams in January 1926, in which she writes "If I had a dog I'd paid fifty cents for, I'd be afraid to send him there."[47]

Contained in these early scuffles is a litany of tensions and contradictions in the school's founding principles and in progressive education more broadly. The initial aspiration of the Pocono Peoples College might be best described as a culturally conservative container for uplifting the rural white communities of the Poconos. Even so, that container was soon populated by a curious mix of constituencies, including, among others: a high school teacher preparing to attend the normal school at Berea College, a young woman from nearby Wilkes-Barre there on a scholarship from her employer, the local Verna Heydt Mortimer who started at the college as a cook, two avowedly pacifist faculty who had fled England after the first World War, the guest lecturer and Socialist writer Devere Allen (whose visit prompted Lucile Mathiasen's father to threaten foreclosure of the property which he had helped the Mathiasens to mortgage for the school), and a former member of the Industrial Workers of the World named "Marxist Charlie" who Ada describes amicably as a "hoboe, poet, etc, still a Socialist (which no one else is here,) a loveable and generous creature."[48]

---

[47] As she did in her initial impressions of the college in her earlier writing, Ada hones her account over multiple drafts and correspondences, the synthesis of which appear in her final letter to Jane Addams, January 29, 1926, Folder 12, Box 106 in Ada Peirce McCormick papers. It's unclear if Ada ultimately sent her letter to Addams, but if she did, no response from Addams exists in the archive.

[48] Ada's descriptions of the students and faculty appear in a letter to Ella and Richard Cabot dated March 3, 1925, Folder 12, Box 106 in Ada Peirce McCormick papers. Also see Verna Heydt Mortimer oral history interview with Rita and Dick Dempewolff, July 9, 1991, in *Old College Memory Book*, 14.

As the college approached a breaking point at the end of its third session in the spring of 1925, it was forced to contend with its pedagogical stance on rural uplift and radical social reform. Indeed, built into the school's nascent community were the students, staff, and faculty who would disrupt its aspiration to bucolic isolation. Neither the benevolent crafts-centered conservatism of the settlement schools, nor the class-conscious activism of organized labor, the Pocono Peoples College remained in a convoluted and ultimately untenable middle ground.

III. "The Dramatic Career of All Mankind": Folk Education Takes the Stage

Despite its sunnier public-facing overtures, the college's troubles had been mounting as early as Ada's initial visit in March 1925. Its student body hovered around 10 students, half of whom had returned from the winter session and most of whom seemed to have landed there only because they had nowhere else to go. Its coursework was stretched thin across a paltry faculty, and some particularly troublesome students posed a challenge to its record of glowing student testimonials.[49] The college remained under consistent financial threat from the ideological misgivings of Lucile Mathiasen's father, as well as from the now-rancorous Ada Peirce McCormick, who had helped the Mathiasens to take out a second mortgage on their property after her first visit in 1925 and fully expected to be bought out of the mortgage.[50] On March 28, 1925, Soren Mathiasen wrote to Carnegie Corporation President Dr. F. P. Keppel requesting an emergency appropriation of funds, citing "our struggle of last year over educational principles" as the reason for his inability to muster a proper fundraising campaign. Mathiasen wrote, "I am sure you will realize that I have tried to carry on as long as possible, absolutely exhausting my own resources and accepting more sacrifices and help from people closely associated with the work than I should have done."[51]

In this first nadir for the Mathiasens, two significant developments ushered the college into its second life: the requested support from the Carnegie Corporation for $6000, and the arrival of Soren Mathiasen's college friend Chester A. Graham, then a graduate student at the University of

[49]In a letter from Soren Mathiasen dated October 22, 1925, Soren assuages her about a situation involving a troublesome student named Carolyn, who Ada also corresponded with. Nevertheless, Carolyn shared a positive testimonial of the college in May 1925. Both appear in Folder 18, Box 54, Ada Peirce McCormick papers.
[50] Letter from Soren Mathiasen dated March 19, 1928, Folder 18, Box 54, Ada Peirce McCormick papers. According to the Paradise Historical Society property tax records, Ada would continue to pay taxes on a property on Hulbert Hill through 1946.
[51] "Pocono Peoples College, 1925–1930," Carnegie Corporation of New York, Series III: Grant Records, 1911–1994. Box III.A 294, Folder 2. Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Illinois.[52] Graham was commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation to conduct a survey on adult education in Monroe County, as both a justification of the corporation's investment and a primer on the potential of what would become a vibrant movement for adult education in the throes of the Great Depression.[53] Graham, first an avowed skeptic of the college, went on to become its most vocal and competent advocate.[54]

Under the influence of Graham, the Pocono Peoples College redoubled its faith and honed its pedagogical principles. It shifted into a more radical ideological stance, adopting elements of the cooperative labor movement, and embracing the academic holism and communal expression of the nascent experimental college movement. At its core was a conception of folk pedagogy with only vague connections either to its Danish or its Appalachian roots, but one which would prove effective both for Pocono in its second iteration and for the adult education movement that would follow.

The first and most dramatic distinction that the college drew from its cultural or vocational contemporaries was its commitment to a coherent liberal arts program. No longer a hodge-podge of subjects of general interest to adult learners, the college committed in 1926 to the full transformation of students in a mere three months, through a vast program including biography, history, psychology, literature, composition, physical education, community singing (required for the first month, optional thereafter), home economics (optional), natural science, agriculture (optional), art, drama, social science, and a number of other special subjects. The curriculum took

---

[52] "Carnegie Body Aids Pocono College," *Morning Press*, July 22, 1925. Located in "Pocono People's College" folder, Monroe County Historical Association, Stroudsburg, PA; list of funders as of 1927 in *The Poconian Propeller* vol. 1, no.2, May 18, 1927, Boston Public Library; Chester A. Graham Papers Finding Aid, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (https://findingaids.lib.umich.edu/catalog/umich-bhl-85183).

[53] "Adult Education Survey," Box 11, Chester A. Graham Papers. Chester A. Graham Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

[54] In 1926, Graham wrote the most comprehensive surviving account of the college, called *What is Pocono Like?* It's subtitle reads "A sceptical [*sic*] critic came to Pocono, and then wrote an account for some young people he knew who were thinking of coming. This is what he wrote them." Monroe County Historical Association.

a particular interest in storytelling: the biographies of great men, the "story of the human race," the "romance of the U.S.A.," and various other forms of artistic expression. The college also committed to a set schedule and labor responsibilities: a rising bell at 6:30 am, 7:00 am breakfast, morning meeting around the fireplace or on the mountain ledge at 8:00 am, two hours of morning class followed by mid-morning gymnastics, lunch and announcements at noon, an afternoon "Question Hour" followed by more class, an afternoon tea, and a free period followed by dinner at 6:00 pm. The evenings included folk dancing, gymnastics, a weekly non-sectarian "devotional meeting," and a Sunday Evening Program around the fireplace in the Mathiasens' house. Curfew was 10:00 pm on weekdays, 11:00 pm on Saturdays. The most consistent holdover of the college from its first two years was the Saturday evening open house, which was open to anyone in the local community and included games, singing, and square dancing. Though it's unclear to what extent the college succeeded in staffing its impressive breadth of coursework or fulfilling its packed daily schedule, a flurry of student productions and local media coverage suggest that a renewed academic focus animated a new culture of student expression and community engagement.[55]

In committing to a coherent curricular vision, the college also distinguished itself from the many Deweyan reformers who emphasized experience and learner agency over the more idealistic and classical versions of progressive education espoused in some reform-minded colleges and universities.[56] In this sense, its closest analogue may have been Alexander Meiklejohn's

[55] Chester A. Graham, *What is Pocono Like?* Monroe County Historical Association.
[56] While Dewey's philosophy was not totally opposed to a unified curriculum, he was notably critical of the neoconservative Great Books movement appearing at places like the University of Chicago under Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler. Adam Nelson deftly tries to reincorporate Meiklejohn and Dewey's in his analysis of Meiklejohn's "A Reply to John Dewey," which Nelson finds to be more of an "embarrassing personal tiff" than an intractable philosophical debate. See Nelson, *Education and Democracy*, 255. Dewey's followers often took his pragmatism to mean a kind of "unschooling" which he refuted in his short work *Experience and Education* in 1938. Also see Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum,* 51–76.

Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which operated from 1927–1932. Like Mathiasen, Meiklejohn believed that "A college is a group of people, all of whom are reading the same books," and crafted a program at the Experimental College which included a year-long classical study of ancient Athens, a summer spent conducting a regional study of one's hometown, followed by a sophomore year on "the emergence of Modern America in particular and of the Modern World in general."[57] Like Mathiasen, Meiklejohn was particularly interested in autobiography, narrative, and performance, and assigned the autobiographical *The Education of Henry Adams* as the culmination of the second-year curriculum. *The Education of Henry Adams*, like Meiklejohn's curriculum as a whole, sought to order and unify a body of knowledge that was rapidly disintegrating at the turn of the twentieth century, and to serve as a model to students who were themselves trying to weather those same disintegrations.[58] Following the collapse of the Experimental College, Meiklejohn moved to Berkeley where, riding the rising tide of adult education, he helped to found a community-based liberal arts program for adults called the San Francisco School of Social Studies.[59]

Among the pedagogical tools that the Pocono Peoples College held in common with the Experimental College, as well as the burgeoning cooperative and labor college movements, was stage drama. Like the Experimental College Players, the Pocono Players put on regular performances at the college and in the surrounding communities, usually a series of one-act plays self-organized by students for the Saturday open houses.[60] In Mathiasen's view, drama allowed students to inhabit the history they read about and discussed — to see themselves, as Mathiasen

[57] Nelson, *Education and Democracy*, 154, 159.
[58] *Ibid*., 159.
[59] *Ibid*., 199–232.
[60] "Pocono Players Have Successful Season," *The Poconian Propeller*, vol. 1, no.2, May 18, 1927, Boston Public Library; "Plays and Dances at Pocono College," *Morning Press*, July 31, 1926, in *Old College Memory Book*, 4

describes, as part of "the great continuous story, the dramatic career of all mankind."[61] This method was common among many radical labor activists, who saw proletarian drama as a way of both raising the consciousness of audiences and training workers for their activist work through performance.[62] Nevertheless, if the short description of the Pocono Players' performances in the local press is any indication, the college's pedagogical interest in drama had much less to do with class conflict than in human achievement broadly construed. An account of the Players' performance of Wilfred Wilson Gibson's *The Operation* at Buck Hill Falls in February 1927 describes "a story of poor, brave folk facing a crisis in their lives with that splendid courage found so often in the poor."[63] John C. Campbell Folk School students performed plays in a similar key: charmingly backwards one-room cabin scenes like *Get Up and Bar the Door* (1935) which satirized the aesthetic of mountaineer poverty.[64]

[61] Grace Farrington Gray, "Pocono Peoples College," *The Farmer's Wife*, January 1926. Article online at ProQuest Historical Newspapers.
[62] Altenbaugh, *Education for Struggle*, 102–116, Mary McAvoy, *Rehearsing Revolutions: The Labor Drama Experiment and Radical Activism in the Early Twentieth Century* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2019).
[63] "Pocono Players at Buck Hill Falls," *Morning Press*, February 16, 1927, in *Old College Memory Book*, 6.
[64] Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine*, 177. The students and teachers at Commonwealth College also emphasized drama, but, as Whisnant comments, they learned the limits of raising "folk consciousness" when they tried to teach the Socialist anthem "The Internationale" to locals in the same way as that Campbell taught English folk ballads.

The Poconian Propeller

Poconian Fellowship — Adult Education — Pocono

Vol. 1 — Pocono Peoples College, Henryville, Pa., May 18, 1927. — No. 2

THE POCONO PLAYERS HAVE SUCCESSFUL SEASON

Drama is an important part of life at Pocono. Each student, regardless of former experience, interprets in his own way a character in a good One Act Play.

Plays are given at the college and in nearby cities, villages, and vacation hotels. Persons interested in community drama have an opportunity here to develop real originality, initiative and artistic expression in learning to make stage setting with paint brush, kalsomine, and slabs of beaver board; to make draperies and curtains by use of Batik; and to make floodlights with water buckets and strips of gelatine.

The students of the Winter Session presented three One Act Plas at Buckhill Inn, a very beautiful resort hotel in the Pocono Mountains, on Lincoln's Birthday and were so well received that the Inn has requested a return engagement. When Pocono students present plays for the public they are known as "The Pocono Players."

Charlie (center in picture), an electrician when off stage, plans to build a completely equipped switchboard for the Pocono Players.

On the stage constructed by the students at the college, using the well remembered fireplace, the center for lively discussion classes.

The Poconian Propeller, 1927[65]

Among the few surviving photographs of the college, this feature on the front page of the school newspaper is the only one to include an image of the college's famous fireplace during the college years.

Folk song and dance, similarly, served as the Pocono Peoples College's primary social function and one of its only tangible links to the surrounding community. As pedagogy and performance, folk song and dance run through the settlement schools to the folk schools and even featured at the labor colleges. In this respect, schools like the radical Commonwealth College in Mena, Arkansas functioned like folk schools, inviting local musicians and ballad singers to lead performances and dances. Elsewhere, a much more apolitical form of folk dancing was taking hold

[65] *The Poconian Propeller* vol. 1, no.2, May 18, 1927, Boston Public Library.

in schools and public spaces across the country, driven by the work of the new Folk Dance Committee of the Playground Association of America.[66]

The Pocono Peoples College's clarified definition of folk education in 1926 resulted in a fruitful series of winter and summer sessions. Chester A. Graham took on a full-time faculty role and began serving as acting director during Soren's many speaking tours.[67] Mrs. Moise returned as the house mother, always the oil on troubled waters for the college's internal strife. The college earned a feature-length profile in the national magazine *The Farmer's Wife*, and enrollments grew.[68] While local enrollment was always modest, the square dances remained popular and glimmers of the school's potential benefit to local students began to show through. In a first-year English composition at Wellesley, Marian Lucinda Hunter wrote (presumably about square dance caller Jim Besecker):

> I know one farmer's son who came to the college every Saturday night for the singing and square dancing the first year it was opened. He called off the dances all that winter with such verve that the weariest farmhand was turned into the liveliest partner. He was sincerely respected for his ability, and made to feel that he was a vital part of the college and community. The next winter he added tending the furnace to his connections with the college and now he calls off the dances, tends the furnace[,] and lives at the college as a student. I have known him during all these advancements, and seen a head-strong dare-devil with something tough enough at last to dig his teeth into. He has not been plucked out of the farmer class and placed in a loftier intellectual environment, but he is being taught that his life as a farmer can be enriched and made more efficient and is being inspired to pursue by himself the necessary technical knowledge for this end. He is just one example of what colleges like Pocono People's College are doing and can do.[69]

---

[66] Folk dance and playgrounds also served as important tools for the integration of the massive influx of European immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Leaders in the recreation movement like Elizabeth Burchenal, Chair of the Folk Dance Committee of the Playground Association of America, promoted folk dance as a more wholesome "antidote" to the dance hall and a mechanism for preserving the cultural "gifts" brought by European immigrants. See Patricia Mooney Melvin, "Building Muscles and Civics: Folk Dancing, Ethnic Diversity and the Playground Association of America," *American Studies* vol. 24, no. 1 (1983): 89–99.
[67] Graham signs off as "Acting Director," in a letter dated February 14, 1927, Box 11, Chester A. Graham Papers.
[68] Gray, "Pocono People's College." Mrs. Moise reappears in this article dated January 1926.
[69] Marian Lucinda Hunter Shutt, Wellesley English Composition, January 25, 1927, *Old College Memory Book*, 11.

Equipped with a decidedly more collegiate vision of the people's college and a growing national reputation as experts on addressing the problems of rural life, the Mathiasens received an invitation from Nat T. Frame, Director of West Virginia University Extension Services, to conduct a winter camp for community leaders at Jackson's Mill, West Virginia in January and February of 1927. The Mathiasens led a program to demonstrate the feasibility of folk education to West Virginians, presenting alongside other such workshops as "Bean Beetles and Potato Bugs" and "Better Eggs and Milk."[70] This invitation brought the Mathiasens into closer contact with southern mountain work than ever before. Soren was invited to speak at the Fifteenth Annual Conference of Southern Mountain Workers in March 1927, where, despite Pocono's classical foundations, he argued that "it seems to me that what is wrong with our rural life is the teaching of Plato… Plato was against democracy. He was an aristocrat. He did not believe in folks."[71]

Contradictions and all, the success of the workshop at Jackson's Mill accelerated the Mathiasens' aspiration to cultivate the people's college more broadly. Alongside its usual summer session offerings, the college ran a summer course specifically for leaders interested in starting people's colleges of their own. Incredibly, the Mathiasens managed to convince most of their staff, including Mrs. Moise, to accompany them to Jackson's Mill at the end of 1927 to conduct a full session of the new Waddington Peoples College in early 1928. A local paper recorded 26 full-time students, 250 part-time students, and over 1500 guest attendees. The Jackson's Mill session also spawned the first iteration of an idea for a Pocono-sponsored study abroad program, another

[70] "Winter Camp for Community Leaders," *Mountain Life and Work* vol. 3, no. 1 (April 1927): 10. Article online at HathiTrust Digital Library.
[71] Soren A. Mathiasen, "A New Educational Development in the West Virginia Division of Extension," *Mountain Life and Work* vol. 3, no. 2 (July 1927): 18–19. Article online at HathiTrust Digital Library.

curious tension within the Mathiasens' philosophy of rural education, which would take place over three months in the fall of 1928.[72]

The college returned triumphantly for its 1928 summer session, the last to appear in the archival record.[73] Multiple local news articles noted the larger student body, which now included at least three West Virginians who followed the Mathiasens back to the Poconos from the Jackson's Mill session, alongside two local students: Louis Mate of East Stroudsburg and Ethel Henry of Henryville.[74] In August, the college launched a renewed fundraising campaign which summarized its recent progress, including renting an additional building, building a road up to the school, and raising money from traveling performances of the Pocono Players. Like the Pocono Players — who now referred to themselves as a traveling "theatrical troupe" — more Pocono students took on greater responsibility for the governance of the school than ever before. Students organized a Student Council to administer the schedule and other programmatic affairs with rotating officers, which included Fanny McConkey and Sarah Hazel Kelley, both of the West Virginia contingent. The college even chose an insignia, two pyramids inverted and superimposed, a convoluted nod to the school's classical origins which Soren Mathiasen had recently disparaged.[75]

[72] "Peoples College Opens June First," *Morning Press*, March 13, 1928, in *Old College Memory Book*, 6–7.
[73] If there was a 1929 session of the college in Henryville, it does not appear anywhere in the local press.
[74] "Peoples College to Open Ninth Term Tomorrow," *Morning Sun*, May 31, 1928; "People's College is Opened With Many Students," *Morning Sun*, June 2, 1928, both in "Pocono People's College" folder, Monroe County Historical Association, Stroudsburg, PA.
[75] *The Poconian* Propeller vol. 2, no. 3, August 11, 1928, Box 11, Chester A. Graham Papers.

The Poconian Propeller

POCONIAN FELLOWSHIP CREATIVE ADULT EDUCATION

Vol. 2 Pocono Peoples College, Henryville, Pa., August 11, 1928 No. 3

Greater Pocono Campaign Opens Enthusiastically

The Poconian Propeller with College Insignia, 1928[76]

The full description of the college insignia reads: "The insignia is made up of a pyramid of gray blocks, representing the more formal idea, evolved by Plato, that education should be an exclusive process. This pyramid shows the ordinary education beginning with the many and finally coming to a head with one block, representing the exclusively educated person. Over this pyramid is super-imposed an inverted pyramid of black blocks, beginning at the bottom with one block, and carrying into others, giving the idea of education for the many, education that is inclusive, humanized, and outward reaching."

After four years of operating in some amount of obscurity to the residents of Paradise Valley, the college also saw renewed interest from the local community. An "informal committee of local boys," including the famed square dance caller Jim Besecker, organized what they called the Pocono Pioneers Fellowship Club, "a movement to promote the best interests of Monroe County and fellowship among the young people." In one remarkable quote, perhaps the culmination of the people's college idea as imagined by Soren Mathiasen, club president Edgar C. Kean wrote that "many of the young people in Monroe County are leaving their native soil because of the long dreary winters and the supposed lack of opportunity here except in the tourist months. We expect to work for the county and develop education among its members so that we can prepare a new generation of sturdy young men eager to create opportunities here."[77]

[76] *The Poconian* Propeller vol. 2, no. 3, August 11, 1928, Box 11, Chester A. Graham Papers.
[77] "Pocono Pioneers Fellowship Club," *Morning Press*, August 29, 1928, in *Old College Memory Book*, 8.

Other impressions of the college in 1928 were more reserved, particularly on issues of the college's capacity for social reform. The Black poet, essayist, activist, and poet of the Harlem Renaissance Alice Dunbar Nelson paid a visit to the college that summer and reported back to *Afro-American* in an article subtitled "Alice Dunbar Nelson Thinks Race Hasn't Time for Educational Experimentation." After a serene visit spent in classes, in the craft room, with tea and sandwiches around the fireplace, Nelson wrote, "And all the while I was wondering if in its ideal of perfect democracy and sex equality the school would welcome one of our race in its delightful atmosphere of freedom and beauty. But since ours is such an unequal battle in the body politic[,] I felt glad that we have no money to expend on educational experiments, but must needs travel the beaten paths which lead to economic independence."[78]

At the apogee of its national attention in 1928, the people's college earned mention in the *New York Times*, which cited Pocono as the cutting edge of a burgeoning movement of people's college including Waddington Peoples College in Jackson's Mill, West Virginia; Chester A. Graham's new Ashland College in Grant, Michigan; the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina; and similar projects in Nystead, Nebraska and Berea, Kentucky.[79] When the Mathiasens and their first cohort of study abroad students set out on the New Amsterdam steamship from the Holland-America dock at Hoboken, New Jersey in September 1928, the college appeared poised to manifest its lofty ideals. In August 1929, the front page of the local *Morning Sun* announced a "huge expansion" and a plan to raise $250,000 for the "parent college," citing

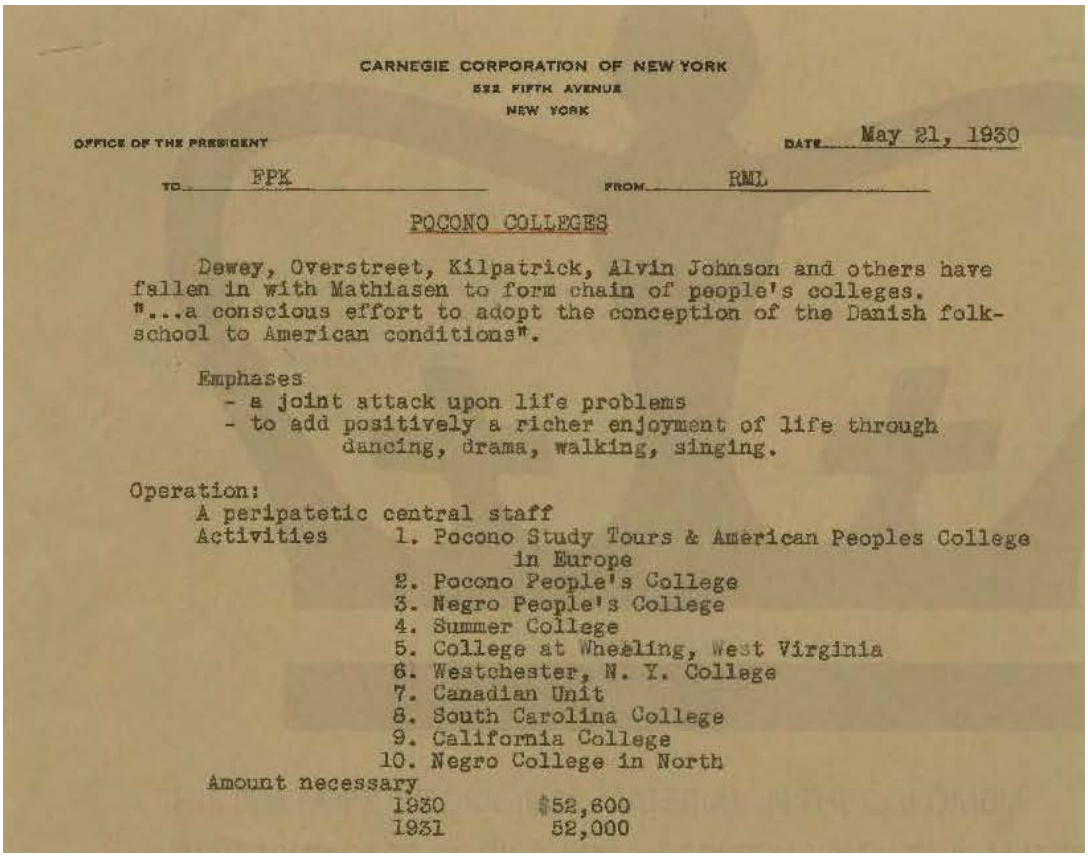
[78] Alice Dunbar Nelson, "No Diplomas, Text Books at Pocono, Only Tuition," *Afro-American,* July 7, 1928. Article online at ProQuest Historical Newspapers. There is no evidence of a Black student at the Pocono Peoples College until its later iteration as the American Peoples School in the Bronx in the 1930s, though the later proposal for a chain of people's colleges includes a "Negro People's College."
[79] "A Number of Schools Open on 'People's College' Plan," *New York Times*, August 5, 1928. Article online at ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

the Pocono Peoples College's potential as both inspiration and financier for its growing network of peer institutions.[80]

Two concurrent developments likely precipitated the college's rapid decline. First, the market collapse of October 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression surely contributed to the severance of support from the Carnegie Corporation, an important fount of the college's meager funds.[81] But perhaps more importantly, Soren Mathiasen's interest in a "chain" of people's college grew to eclipse his particular interest in Pocono. After a successful fall semester in Europe in 1928, and after becoming romantically involved with Geneva Gregory, the college's secretary, sometime between the summer of 1928 and the summer of 1930, Soren and Geneva set their sights on Oetz, a hamlet in the Tyrolean Alps, to continue the international "study tour" iteration of the Pocono Peoples College. Amidst what must have been a particularly turbulent period for Lucile Mathiasen and the Mathiasens' three children in the spring of 1930, the Pocono Peoples College board of directors met to consider a proposal for a chain of people's colleges of which the leadership at Pocono would facilitate their governance and philanthropic efforts. In April, Chester A. Graham, then director at Ashland College, wrote to the psychologist and board member Jay B. Nash to voice his concern about the idea. Referencing a letter to the prominent historian and critic of higher education J. E. Kirkpatrick, Graham wrote, "I have to frankly say that I am opposed in principle to the plan that has been outlined. In my judgment this plan is in direct opposition to a real 'folkelige' [*sic*] awakening such as took place in Denmark."[82] Graham was in the minority. In a letter to the college's bondholders on June 3, 1930, Geneva Gregory announced "a plan to form

[80] "Pocono Peoples College Starts Huge Expansion," *Morning Sun*, August 21, 1929, 1929-08-21,"Pocono People's College" folder, Monroe County Historical Association, Stroudsburg, PA.
[81] The Rockefellers, after funding the college since 1924, cut off their funding in May 1928. Letter from Thomas B. Appleget to Soren A. Mathiasen dated May 4, 1928, Folder 557, Box 78, Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records, Educational Interests, Series G (FA316).
[82] Letter to Jay B. Nash dated April 2, 1930, Box 11, Chester A. Graham Papers.

one unit in a chain of peoples colleges under one management," and to arrange a committee to work on the plan which included John Dewey (chair); William E. Kirkpatrick and LeRoy E. Bowman, Columbia University; Harry A. Overstreet, City College of New York; Jay B. Nash, New York University; Alvin Johnson, Dean of the New School for Social Research; and Hans Froelicher, editor of the magazine *Progressive Education*.[83]



CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK
522 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT DATE May 21, 1930

TO FPK FROM RML

POCONO COLLEGES

Dewey, Overstreet, Kilpatrick, Alvin Johnson and others have fallen in with Mathiasen to form chain of people's colleges. "...a conscious effort to adopt the conception of the Danish folk-school to American conditions".

Emphases
- a joint attack upon life problems
- to add positively a richer enjoyment of life through dancing, drama, walking, singing.

Operation:
A peripatetic central staff
Activities
1. Pocono Study Tours & American Peoples College in Europe
2. Pocono People's College
3. Negro People's College
4. Summer College
5. College at Wheeling, West Virginia
6. Westchester, N. Y. College
7. Canadian Unit
8. South Carolina College
9. California College
10. Negro College in North

Amount necessary
1930 $52,600
1931 52,000

Carnegie Proposal for a Chain of People's Colleges, 1930[84]

Though the original proposal does not appear in the archive, this memo from the Carnegie Corporation lists the names of the institutions in the proposed chain of people's colleges. The Carnegie would discontinue its support for the Pocono People's College in the same year.

[83] Notice to bondholders dated June 3, 1930, Box 11, Chester A. Graham Papers. It's possible that Geneva mistakes J. E. Kirkpatrick for "William." Despite appearing consistently among the college's advisors, little mention of the college appears in Dewey's Correspondences. In a letter to Ada Peirce McCormick dated July 21, 1930, which describes the events of this same meeting, Geneva only mentions Overstreet and Nash by name. Folder 18, Box 54, Ada Peirce McCormick Papers.

[84] Carnegie Corporation of New York, Series III: Grant Records, 1911–1994. Box III.A 294, Folder 2. Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Given Soren Mathiasen's looming departure for the Tyrolean Alps with Geneva and the lack of a legible program in Henryville since the summer of 1928, it is particularly odd to find him presenting with Olive Dame Campbell and Nat T. Frame at the University of Virginia's Institute of Public Affairs in August of 1930.[85] Soren had just spent the summer in Europe preparing for the establishment of Pocono Study Tours, and the business affairs of the college had just been handed over to a committee of East Stroudsburg business leaders.[86] Ada Peirce McCormick continued to pay taxes on her mortgage of the property, along with a smattering of former staff and students who still held small allotments on the hill. Lucile Mathiasen, notably, is crossed out from the property tax records for the college beginning midway through 1930, and Soren is listed as a "nonresident."[87] Soren and Geneva (now a Mathiasen) would marry and establish themselves in Oetz by the end of 1930, leaving behind Lucile, the three children, and the vacant cottage which had been the epicenter of the people's college movement just a year prior.[88] Despite a promising foray into Appalachian extension work, Soren Mathiasen would ultimately recommit the people's college to its wealthier northeastern clientele as he brought Pocono Study Tours to the Alps.

Nevertheless, determined to maintain a connection to the nascent chain of American people's colleges, Soren returned to New York in 1931. That January, he met with W. E. B. Du Bois to explore the people's college's potential application to Black adult learners. Du Bois, who was also aware of the Danish folk schools, wrote "I am convinced that there is light and a way here for the American Negro and I am not sure but what I want to start an experiment of the sort

[85] "Explains Folk Schools," *Daily News Leader*, August 4, 1930. Article online at ProQuest Historical Newsletters.
[86] Letter to Ada from Geneva, July 21, 1930. Folder 18, Box 54, Ada Peirce McCormick Papers.
[87] Property Tax Records, Paradise Historical Society.
[88] "Former Geneva Gregory Now on Way to Decatur," *Decatur Daily Review*, November 20, 1932, dates the Mathiasen's wedding in Europe "nearly two years ago," which aligns with with a run of other local Decatur press articles anticipating Geneva's return, e.g. "Geneva Gregory Mathiasen Tells Friends of Experiences Abroad Where She and Husband Now Live," *Decatur Herald*, December 18, 1932. Articles online at Newspapers.com.

myself."[89] Doubtful of their viability in the South, Du Bois suggested starting people's colleges in the northern cities, but would ultimately go on to found the People's College at Atlanta University in 1942. Mathiasen referenced the recent decision to form a chain of people's colleges, citing John Dewey's role in a plan "to form a group of peoples colleges which united would be strong enough to withstand the opposition."[90]

And yet, the Pocono Peoples College would never hold another session in what would soon become the derelict "Old College." Neither would Mathiasen's proposed chain of people's colleges ever come to fruition — 1930 was the last year that the college received financial support from the Carnegie Corporation. The barren Pocono campus became a dark, damp palace of hiding places for the Hunter grandchildren, where they would bang the old boiler, play the out-of-tune piano, or gather around the massive fireplace. Barbara Shutt Beckwith, another Hunter relation, remembered "a rim of glass around the building, like a sharp and dangerous coral reef."[91]

It is tempting here to adopt Whisnant's post-mortem of the folk schools, to say that the college failed because of an irreconcilable tension between an alien ideology and social program with the local ideas, customs, mores, and institutions of the Poconos.[92] Certainly Henryville proved to be a means to an end for the Mathiasens as Soren leapt to scale a program which had only begun to show promise in its infancy. Nevertheless, the Mathiasens' efforts in the Poconos and the southern mountains *had* started to generate authentic interest and momentum at precisely the moment when the bottom fell out of both the stock market and Soren and Lucile's first marriage.

---

[89] Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Pocono People's College, January 2, 1931. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
[90] Letter from Pocono People's College to W. E. B. Du Bois, January 6, 1931; A narrative of this exchange appears in Keith Gilyard, "John Dewey, W. E. B. Du Bois, and a Rhetoric of Education," in *Trained Capacities: John Dewey, Rhetoric, and Democratic Practice*, eds. Brian Jackson, Gregory Clark (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2014).
[91] Barbara Shutt Beckwith, "The Old College," in *Old College Memory Book*, 22-24.
[92] Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine*, 177.

On the other hand, Soren Mathiasen's often contradictory efforts to build a people's college movement represent an inability to craft an institution that could be responsive to the authentic interests of the rural, working-class communities it sought to serve. The Mathiasens, like so many progressive educational reformers, found themselves caught between two opposed conceptions of the people's college: as a tool for assimilating "exceptional" populations into an increasingly national culture and economic system, or as a nexus for individual and community self-determination *despite* an increasingly national culture and economic system. The Mathiasens' people's college never fully committed to either view. By moving their operations to the Tyrolean Alps in the 1932, it was unclear to what extent it sought to serve the rural working class at all.

After the dramatic dissolution of Soren's personal life and the Pocono Peoples College, elements of folk pedagogy were reconstituted throughout the 1930s. Accelerated by an unprecedented number of unemployed adults during the Great Depression, a new desire for inexpensive leisure activity, and the possibility of more radical social reconstruction, adult education surged in the 1930s.[93] Though the Mathiasens' chain of people's colleges would never come to fruition as proposed, Soren and Geneva would eventually return to the U.S. in 1934 to start a cooperative residential center in the Bronx known as the American Peoples. School. In its texts, dances, songs, gardens, and vision for communal life, folk education continued to shape the art and activism of the New Deal era and beyond.[94]

---

[93] Nelson, *Education and Democracy*, 204. The council of the American Association for Adult Education in 1927 included Olive Dame Campbell, Soren Mathiasen, and many other members of the Pocono Peoples College and American Peoples School boards. "Council of the A.A.A.E.," *Journal of the American Association for Adult Education* 1, no. 2 (January 31, 1927): 3–4.

[94] A history of the American Peoples School appears in the Susan E. Wilson Collection on the American Peoples School, TAM 808, Box 1, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

IV. "Dare Progressive Education Be Progressive?": Folk Education Reconstituted

At the heart of the tensions that marked progressive education — tensions between stability and change, between town and gown, between urban and rural — was a question about what John Dewey really meant in his conception of a community-based school. Should it have a set curriculum? Should it be open to all people? Should it be primarily vocational or liberal? Should it aim to sharpen or smooth class-consciousness? Should it educate students back to their homes (in the words of the Hindman Settlement School) or away from them? It didn't help that nearly any style of education construed as "experiential" could be associated with Dewey, regardless of its pedagogical approach or political vision.

The Pocono Peoples College sought, for a time, to address and resolve these tensions. Ironically, it was only after the college's closing and the Mathiasens' departure that the more radical, cooperative, and community-based strain of folk education took hold in Appalachia and elsewhere. This final section follows Soren and Geneva Mathiasen across the Atlantic and back again as they reinvented the Pocono Peoples College first as Pocono Study Tours and then as the American Peoples School in the first half of the 1930s. Then, by placing the Mathiasens' efforts in comparison with the myriad other incarnations of folk education that flourished during the Great Depression, this work reveals the aspirations and contradictions inherent in the persistent progressive effort to develop a folk pedagogy of and for "the people."

If any aspect of the Pocono Peoples College survived the move to the Tyrolean Alps, it was certainly the theater. In an article for the American Association of University Women in 1933, student Lucille H. Charles recounted "brilliant professional performances in world capitals," "humble folk plays," "hot discussions comparing theaters of different countries," and "the freedom

to wander in this rich cultured field at will, not bound by a set curriculum, or by a stifling system of credits, grades, examinations, degrees, nor barred from the adventure by lack of former schooling." Charles remembers a performance of the Čapeks' *The Life of the Insects*, performed in a large outdoor community theater, to a "peasant audience" who only ascertained the meaning of the play through translation and pantomime.[95] Soren and Geneva spent their time not working on the school writing travel articles for *The Nation*, skiing, and hosting friends in their mountain villa.[96] From 1932 to 1934, any commitment to cultivating authentic local engagement or addressing the problems of rural life seemed mostly absent from the people's college vision in Oetz — a kind of placeless container for adventuresome and well-to-do young adults not unlike the Mathiasens themselves.

Nevertheless, the Mathiasen's return to the U.S. in 1934 also represented a return to the original people's college idea — this time as an urban cooperative residential center in the Bronx known as the American Peoples School.[97] Located at the former Denishawn House in Van Cortlandt Village, the former home of the famous Denishawn Dancers, the school's greatest asset was that it retained the look and feel of a large, airy dance studio, removed from the cramped din of city life. After a period of furious renovation over the summer of 1934, the school opened its doors that October to a cohort of five students, all of whom were on some kind of work scholarship with the school. One student wrote:

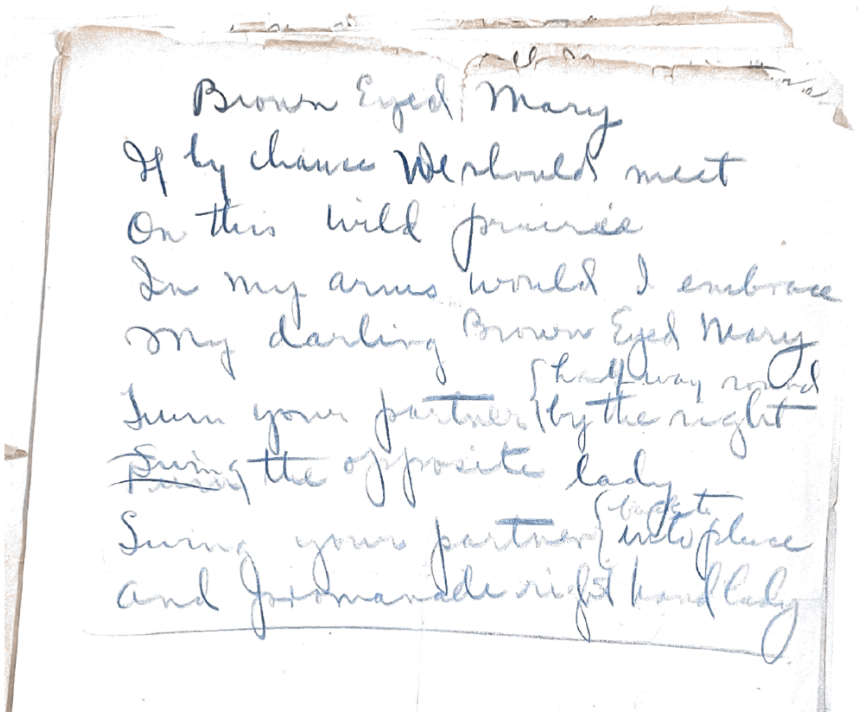
> My first impression came when, on the day I was to be interviewed for admission, I sat in the enormous, beautiful dance studio and looked out tall, majestic windows at a charming vista of trees, just growing green, and sky of an indescrible [*sic*] blue color. It seems I knew

[95] Lucile H. Charles, "Drama Study on an International Scale: The Theater Group of the American People's College," *Journal of the American Association of University Women* vol. 27 no. 1, October 1933, 226–227.
[96] "Geneva Gregory Returning Soon From Oetz, Austria," *Decatur Daily Review* (Decatur, IL), July 3, 1932.
[97] The archival record lacks any writing from Soren or Geneva after the move to Oetz, which makes it particularly difficult to say what the rationale was for starting either the Pocono Study Tours or the American Peoples School. While the Pocono Study Tours may look like an aberration from the original aims of the people's college, it must have retained some sort of internal logic to Soren and Geneva.

> then that A.P.S. would be my future home, a congenial place where ideals of cooperation and complete understanding of the problems and lives of the individual in relation to the group are emphasized to the greatest possible degree.[98]

Other students reiterated the kind of familial, bucolic, communal, expressive life of the cooperative, reminiscent in some ways of the Mathiasens' fireplace in the Poconos. Especially for out-of-work adults trying to make ends meet through the Great Depression, the school had the air of a kind of other-worldly sanctuary. Another student, echoing Ada Peirce McCormick's first impression of Pocono in 1925, remembered being met by a housekeeper named Mrs. Ena Bowers, and walking downstairs to find a brightly lit room full of "dusty people, male and female, in smocks around a big table, patting folling, and decorating pottery." Apparently convinced, "I became a student and made a flower pot." Of particular interest to this student was the "fireplace with a real fire," Soren Mathiasen's "friendly, droll" style of speech, and Geneva Mathiasen reading Finnish folklore in a large chair. There was more folk dancing, "merrily whirled through the roster of nations. The house filled with people." The author continues, "The American Peoples School in New York is two years old. Generously flow wisdom and hot water, and long may they continue."[99]

[98] Account of the American Peoples School, Susan E. Wilson Collection, 5. The author of this narrative is unclear, but is likely one-time resident Vivian Glenn Wilson.
[99] *Ibid*., 5–6


Brown Eyed Mary
If by chance we should meet
On this wild prairie
In my arms would I embrace
My darling Brown Eyed Mary
Turn your partner {half way round / by the right
Swing the opposite lady
Swing your partner {back to / into place
and allemande right hand lady

Folk Dance Caller Notes[100]
A combination of lyrics and instructions, these notes were probably used by American Peoples School resident Vivian Glenn Wilson to lead "Brown Eyed Mary," a traditional folk dance.

What's more, the college retained most of its original advisory committee (John Dewey, LeRoy Bowman, Alvin Johnson, Jay B. Nash, Harry A. Overstreet, and Hans Froelicher), and added some notable others, including Edwin M. Borchard, Yale Law School; George S. Counts, Columbia University; Nat T. Frame, Soren Mathiasen's former colleague at the University of West Virginia Extension Division; Fred C. Howe, Sonset School of Opinion; Robert Morss Lovett, University of Chicago; Clarence Pickett, Friends Service Committee; and Goodwin Watson, Columbia University.[101] In personnel and pedagogy, the American Peoples School fully embraced the cooperative movement of the 1930s, demonstrating that wherever there was large enough fireplace and a dance floor, there could be a school.

[100] Handwritten caller notes, Susan E. Wilson Collection on the American Peoples School, TAM 808, Box 1, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.
[101] *Ibid*., 3–4. This account lists "Francis M. Froelicher," as the former editor of *Progressive Education*, while previous sources list "Hans Froelicher."

At the American Peoples School, like at Meiklejohn's San Francisco School of Social Studies, a view of adult education for social reconstruction began to come into view. For one, the curriculum underwent a significant revision from its prior iteration at Pocono, bridging artistic experimentation with the social consciousness of the San Francisco School, while abandoning Pocono's more classical roots. Students chose from courses in modern and folk dance (taught often by former Denishawn dancers), sculpture, drama, photography, crafts, drawing, painting, and literature, as well as courses on the social sciences and the cooperative movement. Students took on much more responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the school, including committees on finances, housekeeping, groundskeeping, and folk dance. Students helped the directors to refinance the school's mortgage, improve the property, and organize community events. Four students served on the board of directors. When a bill to limit WPA-funded teacher salaries to eighteen consecutive months passed Congress, part of an ongoing effort to chip away at the New Deal by conservative congressman in the late 1930s, students and teachers fundraised their own salaries with increases in non-resident tuition.[102] Enrollment grew, too, including at least 157 students and staff in residence over the course of the 1930s. Only a third of students indicated "New York" as their home state, and only a third listed "student" as their primary occupation. Residents went on to work for other schools as teachers and artists, for other cooperatives, for WPA-era programs like the Federal Theater Project, and some stayed on as staff at the American Peoples School.[103]

As in its former aspiration to serve rural Poconians and mountaineers, the American Peoples School undertook to establish itself as a school for the surrounding Van Cortlandt Village. That mission was strengthened by its association with Amalgamated Apartments and the Jewish

[102] On the effort to erode the WPA, see James E. Sargent, "Woodrum's Economy Bloc: The Attack on Roosevelt's WPA, 1937–1939," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 93, no. 2 (April 1985): 175–207.
[103] Account of the American Peoples School, Susan E. Wilson Collection, 8–11.

Shalom Aleichem Houses, two of the first major housing cooperatives in the country. Neighborhood enrollment ranged from 50–60 adults each year, and like at Pocono, the evening dances drew 250–300 regular attendees. As attendance increased, the folk dances at the Peoples School took on a decidedly more multicultural approach, indicated by course titles like "Folk Dances of All Nations" and "Authentic Dances of Hawaii." In this respect, folk education at the American Peoples School adopted a more palatable view of folk pedagogy, celebrating culture broadly construed as a more digestible version of social reconstruction and a pedagogical playbook for the cooperative movement.[104] As this more culturally heterogenous and recreational form of folk education took root in urban cooperatives, folk education back in Appalachia meanwhile broke in several directions at once.

Some elements of folk education reconstituted themselves during the Great Depression in the context of projects which foreclosed radical reform by design. Such was the case at the Arthurdale homestead, a New Deal resettlement community for displaced coal miners in the Monongahela Valley of West Virginia, founded in 1933 just sixty miles northeast of Jackson's Mill where Soren Mathiasen had worked to establish the Waddington Peoples College in 1927 and 1928. As the centerpiece of Eleanor Roosevelt's social reform agenda, Arthurdale was envisioned as a case study not just for addressing the problem of rural poverty, but further as a way of molding rural people into agrarian republican citizens.[105] The idealism of the Roosevelts' vision for social reform, however, soon proved an awkward fit for a population intractably tied to the industrial economy.

---

[104] *Ibid*., 12–15.
[105] Daniel Perlstein, "Community and Democracy in American Schools: Arthurdale and the Fate of Progressive Education," *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education* 97, no. 4 (February 1996): 625–50.

In one view, Eleanor Roosevelt succeeded in marrying progressive social policy with progressive education — John Dewey and a slate of other experts joined in planning the community, including American Peoples School committee member Clarence Pickett and the celebrated educator Elsie Clapp, who studied under John Dewey and served as director at Arthurdale. Clapp actualized Dewey's vision of the school as the community center, alongside communal gardens, craft clubs, and playgrounds. At the same time, Clapp typified the more conservative aims of the settlement school movement under Jane Addams or the Black industrial schools under Booker T. Washington. In a response to George S. Counts' famous "Dare Progressive Education Be Progressive?" address to the 1932 meeting of the Progressive Education Association, Clapp argued that the school's role as a vocational community precluded its role as an intellectual community. The result was a constrained version of self-determination. While Arthurdale residents did grow much of their own food, they did so on top of backbreaking shifts making vacuum cleaners for General Electric, who could justify lesser pay because their basic dietary needs would be met by their gardens.[106] In a summary of Counts' views on progressive education, by contrast, historian Daniel Perlstein writes, "In a complex society marked by fundamental racial and class relations of domination and subordination, rather than by superficial sectarian divisions, the community school could only incompletely achieve its pedagogical, social, and democratic works."[107]

Other New Deal experiments in rural education did, in some ways, approximate the success of the Danish folk schools as imagined by Soren Mathiasen and other reformers a decade before. U.S. Commissioner of Education John W. Studebaker attempted in 1934 to nationalize his Des Moines Forum Project, a locally successful prototype for an "education for citizenship," or a

[106] Stoll, *Ramp Hollow*, 227–231.
[107] Perlstein, "Community and Democracy in American Schools," 646.

"people's university." Under the Des Moines Forum model, rural farmers and their families would gather for discussion groups or "experiment stations" led by expert discussion leaders and develop their intellectual and democratic capacities through informed discussions on relevant issues. Though Studebaker only served as Commissioner for a year, his effort sparked a later Federal Forum Project, administered through the Department of Agriculture's Cooperative Extension Service in partnership with the land-grant colleges, which was attended by an estimated 2.5 million Americans in 23,000 sessions between 1936 and 1941.[108]

Meanwhile, the labor colleges which had taken up Counts' more radical charge for social transformation since the beginning of the twentieth century began to flounder in the early 1930s. Brookwood and Commonwealth Colleges endured multiple fiscal and political crises as they considered the extent to which they would align themselves ideologically and structurally with Communist party. Work People's College, which had begun as a Finnish folk school in rural Minnesota in 1903, never saw enrollments nearly as high as before World War I, in part because of its continued allegiance to the Industrial Workers of the World, which alienated its core base of Finnish Socialists.[109] Other cooperative movements would soon spring up in their place, but without a program for liberal education at their core.

The experimental college, however, remained a potent vehicle for liberal education in the southern mountains, particularly at Black Mountain College. The design of classics professor John A. Rice, a hugely charismatic and polarizing academic who was dismissed from Rollins College in the spring of 1933, the college opened that same fall on the campus of the Blue Ridge Assembly, a collection of buildings operated as a YMCA summer camp in the foothills east of Asheville,

---

[108] Christopher P. Loss, *Between Citizens and the State: The Politics of American Higher Education in the 20th Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 79–85.
[109] Altenbaugh, *Education for Struggle*, 222–246.

North Carolina. Rice brought along with him a cadre of dissident faculty and students, who set out to create a radically student-governed academic community in which study, labor, and creative work could exist in harmony.[110] In this way, Black Mountain sought to efface the distinction between Meiklejohn's idealism and Dewey's pragmatism and, as Ruth Erickson writes, "conceived of education and life as deeply intertwined, and that placed the arts at the center rather than at the margins of learning."[111] While Black Mountain would become famous for its paradigm-shifting impact in the art world, particularly with the advent of displaced German Bauhaus artists Josef and Anni Albers as the college's core faculty through the 1930s and 1940s, Rice insisted that Black Mountain was a liberal arts college, not an art school. Instead, "the process of making art hones not only observation but also judgment and action, so that students who acquire intelligence through art both notice what is happening around them and develop individual responses to it."[112] Liberal education at Black Mountain, then, involved a marriage of theory and action, in which artistic choice and democratic action were one and the same.

Even so, Black Mountain College as an institution and as a subsequent field of study largely eclipsed the context in which it was situated. Despite sitting in the heart of Appalachian North Carolina, the school remained a mystery to local mountaineers, and certainly didn't see itself as part of any of the concurrent experiments in Appalachian uplift. As Topher Lineberry writes, this tension runs through the relationship between popular memory of Black Mountain College (sustained largely by the elite cosmopolitan art world) and the field of Appalachian Studies. In a reflection on the Black Mountain College Semester at Appalachian State, Sandra L. Ballard writes,

---

[110] Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1972), particularly 19-54.
[111] Ruth Erickson, "A Progressive Education" in Helen Molesworth, ed., *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College, 1933–1957* (Boston, MA and New Haven, CT: Institute for Contemporary Art in association with Yale University Press, 2015), 76–85, 77. As Erickson notes, Dewey made frequent visits to Black Mountain.
[112] *Ibid*., 80.

"some might say Black Mountain College was *in* Appalachia but not *of* it. But that is a road that runs both ways—and deserves exploration."[113] In this way, it is hard to conceive of Black Mountain College as a folk school in the Scandinavian sense, despite its proximity to schools like the Penland School of Craft and the many potters and weavers who crafted and taught at Black Mountain over its tenure.

The Highlander Folk School, by contrast, took up the mantle of addressing fundamental racial and class inequalities and did so in the folk school tradition — at least in name. Highlander was established in 1932 by Myles Horton, a Tennessean and the director of a vacation bible school run by the Presbyterian church, who had grown increasingly dissatisfied with the shortcomings of his social work in the rural South. After studying at Union Theological Seminary in New York, volunteering as a strike organizer, visiting Brookwood Labor College and the remnants of other cooperative movements like the Oneida and New Harmony communities, and returning to study at the University of Chicago's Graduate School of Sociology where he was a frequent visitor of Jane Addams at Hull House, Horton searched for a model of adult education that could serve both for the immediate benefit of mountaineers and for the creation of a new social and economic order. Along the way, he read John Dewey, George S. Counts, Eduard C. Lindeman, and Joseph K. Hart, all members of the Pocono Peoples College Committee at one time or another.[114]

At a square dance in Chicago, Horton met the Danish-born Lutheran minister Aage Møller, who, having been a student at a Danish folk high school, encouraged Horton to see the schools for himself. After spending the fall of 1931 drifting penniless around Denmark, like so many other progressive reformers before him, Horton returned to the U.S. to raise funds for what would

---

[113] Topher Lineberry, "Black Mountain College: Eclipsing the Local in Artworld Memory," *Journal of Black Mountain College Studies* 13 (April 2022), https://www.blackmountaincollege.org/lineberry-eclipsing/.
[114] Glen, *No Ordinary School*, 9–26.

become the Highlander Folk School. But Horton, unlike his predecessors, was notably dissatisfied with the folk schools and adult education experts whose paths he traced that year. Though Horton had read the Campbells' work extensively, he saw it as too romantic and moderate a view of social change to make a real difference in the lives of southern mountaineers.[115] In one interview, Horton explicitly rejects the adult education tradition that had come before him:

> I was thinking, how do you go about doing an educational job in the mountains. There was nothing in adult education in this country that threw any light on it. I had known [Eduard C.] Lindeman and I knew other people who were interested in adult education, but I couldn't relate them back to Ozone [, TN]. They just didn't seem to fit. … I wasn't looking for a technique or a method. … I was looking for a *process* of how to relate to people.[116]

In his search for that process, Horton effectively co-opted the people's college model as a hub for radical organizers from the labor and civil rights movements, all the while training adult learners to participate in these movements themselves. In its first thirty years, Highlander operated primarily as a training center for organized labor in the South, allying itself most prominently with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and the Farmers Union, along with dozens of other unions representing miners, textile mill workers, and other industries. After a period of transition in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the school turned its attention fully to civil rights. Under the leadership of Septima Clark, Esau Jenkins, and Bernice Robinson, Highlander helped to organize a mass literacy program for Black voters called the Citizenship Schools, and Rosa Parks attended a workshop at Highlander shortly before the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955. In 1979, Highlander served as the training center for the Appalachian Land Ownership study, a landmark project in community-based research which sought to expose the ongoing effects of speculation

[115] *Ibid*. Glen makes this comparison explicit on p. 17 and invokes Whisnant's account of Campbell.
[116] Myles Horton and Paulo Freire, *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*, eds. John Gaventa and John Peters (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990), 52–53.

and extraction in Appalachia through absentee land ownership.[117] In eschewing both the formality of a college and the cultural-based social gospel of the earlier folk schools, Horton and the organizers at Highlander demonstrated the radical potential of the people's college. At the same time, in abandoning the liberal arts for organizing workshops and craft for direct action, there seemed to be little folk pedagogy left to speak of, save for communal labor and folk dance.

Folk Dance at the Highlander Folk School[118]
This photograph was taken by Ed Friend, a photographer for the Georgia Commission on Education who was one of many investigators sent to document the goings-on at Highlander Folk School throughout the 1950s. A stamp on the verso reads "Keep Our School Segregated."

[117] Glen, *No Ordinary School*, particularly 104–128 and 185–207; Shaunna Scott, "The Appalachian Land Ownership Study Revisited," *Appalachian Journal* 35, no. 3 (2008): 236–52.
[118] "Photograph of group dancing at Highlander Folk Center," Friend, Ed, 1912-1991, Highlander Folk School Manuscript Collection, 1932-1966, VI-D-4-6, Box 11, Folder 10, 45445, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Tennessee Virtual Archive.

It is particularly ironic that these projects flourished without the Mathiasens' involvement at all. What had begun as a uniquely rural movement for self-determination, rooted in the Poconos and southern Appalachia became instead for the Mathiasens a pedagogical tool for urban cooperative work. If the Mathiasens remained interested in mountain work after their return from Oetz, it was without the grand vision of a people's college movement they had imagined at the start of the decade. Myriad other reformers and schools would take up the mantle in their place.

Meanwhile, the Mathiasens left the American Peoples School by the start of the Second World War. After Soren's brief stint as Craft Director at a National Youth Administration school in 1938, Geneva accepted a resident director role at a cooperative school in Cuyahoga, Ohio in 1939, and the two moved with their children.[119] Soren Mathiasen's sixteen-year effort to bootstrap a national people's college movement came to a close, leaving behind a smattering of attempted projects and a cadre of academics and leaders with a concerted belief in the transformative potential of education for adults. Like the elusive idea of "Progressivism" more broadly, there seemed to be no clear blueprint for the people's college, only a litany of divergent interpretations.

[119] "Mathiasen Named as Craft Director at New NYA School," *Kingston Daily Freeman*, October 11, 1938. Article online at Newspapers.com. Soren Mathiasen's 1942 draft registration card lists "Northern Ohio Cooperative Association" in Cuyahoga, OH as his employer and the Wilson papers mention Geneva's departure to Ohio in 1939.

V. "Anyone Recall It?": The Legacy of the People's College

In early 1946, William T. Hunter bought the defunct Pocono Peoples College building from the East Stroudsburg Bank, folding the college into the family farm. Barbara Shutt Beckwith, alongside William T. Hunter, Joseph "Uncle Joe" Shutt, and many of the Hunter family and neighbors spent the summer of that year fixing up what would become known colloquially as the "Old College." William celebrated by borrowing a black choir robe and holding a mock graduation complete with diplomas and speeches, "strutting up and down the outside porch — gown flowing."[120] After the renovation, the Old College was better remembered as the site of the town's raucous square dances in the 1940s and 1950s, and later as the summer home of the Hunter, Shutt, and Colby families and their relations.

When the Old College burned in 1991, volunteer fire fighters fought the blaze for two hours, hauling water up from the nearby Swiftwater Reservoir. It wasn't enough — soon only the stone walls remained. As flames shot "some 80 feet up in the air," Ann Stevenson Berman remembered picking blueberries from a bush not far from the collapsing building. Over 40 years since the Hunter family had first restored the derelict former college, Berman wrote, "It's a Hunter trait to find something good in the middle of a tragedy."[121]

Perhaps most surprising is how little is remembered locally about the Pocono Peoples College from before the Hunter renovation.[122] The Allentown Call-Chronicle published a retrospective on the college in 1972 titled "Anyone Recall It? Poconos College Still a Mystery"

---

[120] Elizabeth "Bibsy" Hunter Stevenson Battista, no title, summer 1991, in *Old College Memory Book*, 16.
[121] Ann Stevenson Berman, "Some Thoughts on the Old College," in *Old College Memory Book*, 19–21.
[122] Two notable exceptions include John C. Appel. "The Pocono People's College at Henryville, 1924-1929." *Pocono Shopper*, November 29, 1995. Located in "Pocono People's College" folder, Monroe County Historical Association, Stroudsburg, PA.; Amy Leiser. "Henryville Had Unique Brand of College." *Pocono Record*, August 5, 2013.

which only confirmed the collective amnesia locally about the school's operations.[123] Except for the Saturday square dances, which sometimes attracted as many as 175 people from the surrounding townships,[124] Soren Mathiasen is remembered locally for his wanton idealism and the romantic tryst that ended his first marriage to Lucille. In one account, Soren reappeared at the Henryville post office sometime after the college's last session in Henryville in 1928 only to check the college's mail and disappear, leaving behind a deserted campus and a raft of unpaid debts.[125] Other recent accounts associate the college broadly as a camp for "free love singles" that failed consistently to pay its bills or compensate its staff.[126]

In some respects, this skepticism is warranted. The Mathiasens fled the Poconos in a flurry of personal and financial strain, failing to acknowledge their responsibilities to the Henryville community even while proceeding with a high-minded vision for a chain of community-based peer institutions. Soren Mathiasen arrived in Paradise Valley as an outsider and left as one too. It was a bad look for the folk school movement's aspiration to localism and self-determination.

At the same time, the Pocono Peoples College represented one of the more faithful adaptations of the Scandinavian *folkehøjskole* to the conditions of rural America — espousing neither the conservative folk-culturalism of the settlement schools nor the activist class-consciousness of the labor colleges. It began to attract local interest without pandering to culture and sought to train the leaders of a movement for a more humane, community-based model of higher education. Folks showed up for both the square dances and the extension courses.

---

[123] Richmond Myers, "Anyone Recall It? Poconos College Still a Mystery," *Allentown Call-Chronicle*, October 1972, in *Old College Memory Book*, 9.
[124] Gray, "Pocono Peoples College."
[125] Myers, "Anyone Recall It?"
[126] Richard Dempewolff, "Early History of Henryville," ed. Judy Dempewolff, July 6, 2017. (Personal correspondence.)

Over the first quarter of the twentieth century, progressive educators traversed Scandinavia in search a solution to the social challenges wrought by the rapid industrialization and abstraction of America's cities and countryside. Again and again, they returned to the people's college idea. It served as a compelling synthesis of the myriad contradictions within the movement for social reconstruction through education: a coherent liberal education which attended to authentic local conditions, a project for individual transformation without a mandate for a broader societal transformation.

Though the Mathiasens embraced neither gradualism nor radicalism fully, the projects which abutted and intersected with the people's college idea offer glimpses of afterlives and paths not taken: the cultural revitalization of the John C. Campbell Folk School, the class-consciousness of Commonwealth College, the citizenship education of the Federal Forum, the communal expression of Black Mountain College, or the folk-activism of Highlander. While the folk schools as a coherent movement would not survive the interwar period, folk pedagogy emerged as a transformative tool for community, study, and liberation. On a typical Saturday evening after 1946, the Old College newly renovated and the hearth ablaze, folk education persisted in Paradise Valley much as it had before, so long as there was someone to call the dances.

Bibliography

Archives Consulted

Ada Peirce McCormick Papers, 1881-1978 (bulk 1920-1974), University of Arizona.

Census and Draft Registration Records at Ancestry.com.

Archives & Special Collections, Boston Public Library.

Chester A. Graham Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

Highlander Folk School Manuscript Collection, 1932-1966, VI-D-4-6, Box 11, Folder 10, 45445, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Tennessee Virtual Archive.

Mountain Life & Work, vol. 1–3 (1925–1928), Clintwood, VA: Council of the Southern Mountains. Archive online at Hathitrust Digital Library.

Newspapers.com Historical Newspapers.

Pocono Peoples College Papers, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Series III: Grant Records, 1911–1994. Box III.A 294, Folder 2. Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Pocono Peoples College Papers, Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller Records, Educational Interests, Series G, Colleges.

Pocono Peoples College Papers, Monroe County Historical Association, Stroudsburg, PA.

Paradise Historical Society Archive, Barrett-Paradise Friendly Library, Cresco, PA.

ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Susan E. Wilson Collection on the American Peoples School, TAM 808, Box 1, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Primary Sources

Beckwith, Barbara and Bobby Beckwith, "William T. Hunter: A Man with a Family Vision in Henryville," n.d. (Family history).

Bledsoe, Thomas. *Or We'll All Hang Separately: The Highlander Idea.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969.

Brownlee, Frederick Leslie. *The John C. Campbell Folk School, 1925–1952*. Brasstown, NC: John C. Campbell Folk School, 1952.

Campbell, Olive Dame. "I Sing Behind the Plough," *Journal of Adult Education* 2, no. 3 (1930).

_____. *The Danish Folk School: Its Influence in the Life of Denmark and the North*. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1928.

Charles, Lucile H. "Drama Study on an International Scale: The Theater Group of the American People's College," *Journal of the American Association of University Women* vol. 27 no. 1, October 1933, 226–227.

Dempewolff, Richard. "Early History of Henryville," ed. Judy Dempewolff, July 6, 2017. (Personal correspondence.)

Foght, Harold W. *Rural Denmark and Its Schools*. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1915.

_____. *The American Rural School: Its Characteristics, Its Future, and Its Problems*. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1918.

Hart, Joseph K. *Educational Resources of Village and Rural Communities.* New York: The MacMillan Company, 1918.

Horton, Myles with Judith Kohl and Herbert Kohl. *The Long Haul: An Autobiography*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1998.

Horton, Myles and Paulo Freire, *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*, eds. Brenda Bell, John Gaventa, and John Peters. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990.

Salmon, Jennifer R. (ed.), *Old College Memory Book*. Henryville, PA: Upstream! Publishing, 1997.

Williams, Elizabeth M. (ed.), *Appalachian Travels: The Diary of Olive Dame Campbell*. University Press of Kentucky, 2012.

Secondary Sources

Adams, David Wallace. *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928*, 2nd ed. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2020.

Andersen, Lene Rachel and Tomas Björkman. *The Nordic Secret: A European Story of Beauty and Freedom*. Fri Tanke, 2017.

Altenbaugh, Richard J. *Education for Struggle: The American Labor Colleges of the 1920s and 1930s*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990.

Bell, John Frederick. *Degrees of Equality: Abolitionist Colleges and the Politics of Race*. Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, LA, 2022.

Brint, Steven and Jerome Karabel. *The Diverted Dream: Community Colleges and the Promise of Educational Opportunity in America, 1900–1985*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Campbell, John C. *The Southern Highlander and his Homeland*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1921.

Duberman, Martin. *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1972.

Erickson, Ruth. "A Progressive Education" in Helen Molesworth, ed., *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College, 1933–1957*. Boston, MA and New Haven, CT: Institute for Contemporary Art in association with Yale University Press, 2015.

Gilyard, Keith. "John Dewey, W. E. B. Du Bois, and a Rhetoric of Education," in *Trained Capacities: John Dewey, Rhetoric, and Democratic Practice*, eds. Brian Jackson, Gregory Clark. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2014.

Glen, John M. *Highlander: No Ordinary School 1932–1962*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1996.

Horton, Aimee Isgrig. *The Highlander Folk School: A History of Its Major Programs, 1932-1961*. Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1989.

Irvine, Tina A. "Reclaiming Appalachia: Mountain Reform and the Preservation of White Citizenship, 1890-1929." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2019.

Kaestle, Carl F. *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1983.

Kliebard, Herbert M. *The Struggle for the American Curriculum: 1893–1958*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2004.

Loss, Christopher P. *Between Citizens and the State: The Politics of American Higher Education in the 20th Century.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012.

Lineberry, Topher. "Black Mountain College: Eclipsing the Local in Artworld Memory," *Journal of Black Mountain College Studies* 13 (April 2022), https://www.blackmountaincollege.org/lineberry-eclipsing/.

McAvoy, Mary. *Rehearsing Revolutions: The Labor Drama Experiment and Radical Activism in the Early Twentieth Century*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2019.

McNelley, Pat (ed.) *The First 40 Years: John C. Campbell Folk School*. Brasstown, NC: John C. Campbell Folk School, 1966.

Melvin, Patricia Mooney. "Building Muscles and Civics: Folk Dancing, Ethnic Diversity and the Playground Association of America," *American Studies* vol. 24, no. 1 (1983): 89–99.

Neem, Johann N. *Democracy's Schools: The Rise of Public Education in America* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017.

Nelson, Adam R. *Education and Democracy: The Meaning of Alexander Meiklejohn, 1872–1964*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001.

Pedersen, Erik Overgaard. "Booker T. Washington and the Danish Folk High School," in *The Racial Politics of Booker T. Washington*, vol. 13, Research in Race and Ethnic Relations. Elsevier Ltd., 2006: 183–92.

Perlstein, Daniel. "Community and Democracy in American Schools: Arthurdale and the Fate of Progressive Education," *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education* 97, no. 4 (February 1996): 625–50.

Ris, Ethan W. *Other People's Colleges: The Origins of American Higher Education Reform*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2022.

Rodgers, Daniel T. "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History*, The Promise of American History: Progress and Prospects, 10, no. 4 (December 1982): 113–32.

Sargent, James E. "Woodrum's Economy Bloc: The Attack on Roosevelt's WPA, 1937–1939," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 93, no. 2 (April 1985): 175–207.

Shapiro, Henry D. *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978.

Steffes, Tracy L. *School, Society, and State: A New Education to Govern America, 1890–1940*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Stoll, Steven. *Ramp Hollow: The Ordeal of Appalachia*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2017.

Whisnant David E. *All That Is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983.