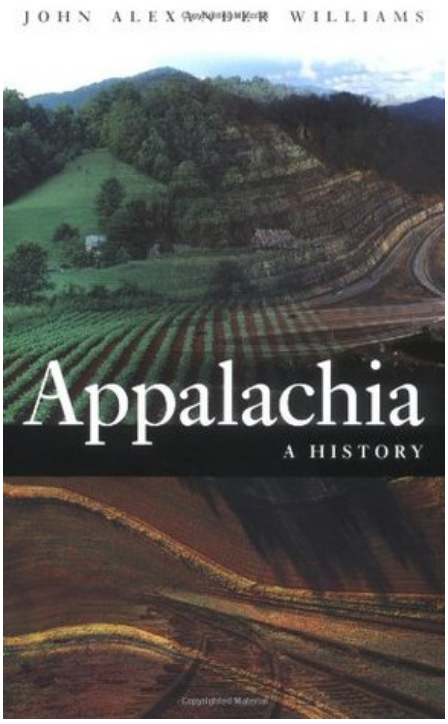

Appalachia

John Alexander Williams

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Interweaving social, political, environmental, economic, and popular history, John Alexander Williams chronicles four and a half centuries of the Appalachian past. Along the way, he explores Appalachia's long-contested boundaries and the numerous, often contradictory images that have shaped perceptions of the region as both the essence of America and a place apart.

Williams begins his story in the colonial era and describes the half-century of bloody warfare as migrants from Europe and their American-born offspring fought and eventually displaced Appalachia's Native American inhabitants. He depicts the evolution of a backwoods farm-and-forest society, its divided and unhappy fate during the Civil War, and the emergence of a new industrial order as railroads, towns, and extractive industries penetrated deeper and deeper into the mountains. Finally, he considers Appalachia's fate in the twentieth century, when it became the first American region to suffer widespread deindustrialization, and examines the partial renewal created by federal intervention and a small but significant wave of in-migration.

Throughout the book, a wide range of Appalachian voices enlivens the analysis and reminds us of the importance of storytelling in the ways the people of Appalachia define themselves and their region.

Appalachia Details

Date	:	Published April 29th 2002 by University of North Carolina Press
ISBN	:	9780807853689
Author	:	John Alexander Williams
Format	:	Paperback 480 pages
Genre	:	History, Nonfiction, North American Hi..., American History, Science, Geography

From Reader Review Appalachia for online ebook

Jim Parker says

I learned a great deal and enjoyed this book. Parts of the book which were less relevant to my personal experience of growing up in northwest North Carolina were less interesting to me as were some of the time periods. I would recommend this book to anyone who wants a through understanding of the region.

The book is well researched and written a very accessible manner. One aspect of the book I found very interesting was the how the sociological models of the early 20th century had been applied to the people of the region. In some cases these models tried to apply a context of the United States in general without taking in consideration the unique nature of the region's people.

Elizabeth Bradley says

dry but necessary... a few interesting stories here. Certainly doesn't romanticize or stereotype!

John Paul says

Scattered at times, and I argue with his definitions of Appalachia, but not bad.

Burney Huff says

A fantastic history of Appalachia! A "must read" for anyone sincerely interested in the history of Appalachia or the United States. Not an "easy read" because it's chock full of too much real and relevant information; but, a very rewarding book.

Carolyn Hembree says

I dug this history. It's thoughtful and never condescending to the people of the region. My favorite aspects of this particular book -- the narratives about female settlers in the area, Over Mountain Men, bushwhackers, and the Cherokee. He does a great job of distinguishing different states and cultures in the region. Also some very good maps here to show shifts in boundaries of Appalachia.

Kate Lawrence says

Although basically a textbook, this presented enough interesting facts and accounts of colorful local personalities to keep me reading to the end. I find Appalachia to be fascinating for its actual, as well as

mythical, history and culture. For many generations, the region has grappled with basic survival issues along with environmental and labor exploitation; its residents have been admired as self-sufficient small farmers and ridiculed as hillbillies. The poignant out-migration and involuntary displacement of so many still resonates in the region's music. Overlaid on all this is the spectacular physical beauty of the land itself, which I had a recent opportunity to experience when I visited Kentucky and Tennessee this past October at the peak of autumn color. Having spent years playing old-time banjo and singing Sacred Harp, and having married someone who grew up in the region, Appalachia feels like a second home.

Robin says

The first chapter of this book spends time discussing the difficulty of even finding a consistent definition of the land boundaries of Appalachia, though as the book progresses, one wonders if there is an equal difficulty in grasping Appalachia as a conceptual entity. Early chapters feel a bit like incarnations of the elephant metaphor of religion, where each chapter grasps at a different part of the whole, yet understanding of the whole feels elusive. In later chapters, as larger themes emerge, and as documentary evidence becomes more available, a bigger picture starts to form, though by that point it starts to feel too little, too late. While I was reading this book, a friend asked me to summarize what I had learned about Appalachia. Though I had learned a lot of interesting anecdotes, the best summary I could come up with was, "Appalachia has had a rough go of it." This isn't necessarily the fault of the author - he clearly is very knowledgeable, well-read, and passionate about the topic of Appalachia. It just may be that the task was too large.

Side note: for a book that is so much about a given geographical area, this book contained far too few maps. Perhaps part of my difficulty in seeing the big picture was due to my inability to follow the stories geographically.

Jason says

My family is an Appalachian family, especially on my Dad's side (mostly eastern Kentucky folks), with some Ohioans from my Mom's. Therefore this book was very interesting in seeing how European-Americans settled into this area, and how Appalachia developed into what it is today. A well-written book that I'd recommend if you have interest in Appalachia or if you're interested from a geneological perspective.

Tim says

There is a lot here. This is more of an academic-style piece (think textbook) than a popular history. There is a lot here about the history of the region, but you have to come to it with quite a bit of knowledge as well. There is a crying need for maps in this book (many of the illustrations that are included seemed to be especially odd choices) especially for those of us who do not live in the region, but wish to learn more about the conditions for ancestors who did.

Amy says

Okay it took FOREVER to finish due to the whole...being distracted by an infant..but it was very interesting and overall an easy read. John Williams was one of my history professors at Appalachian State and I didn't make the connection of that same John Williams being the author until after I started reading the book. I particularly enjoyed it because of my family history research. If you have ancestors who were living in Appalachia (or who still do) it's a great insight to the culture and history of the region (or place...depending on which theory you subscribe to).

April says

A fabulous writer of history. His love for the region and its people comes through on every page.

Brook says

2.5 stars.

Deeeeeeeeeennnnnnssse. This book is dense. Dense. This is not prose, it is a master's thesis spread over 400 pages of very small, narrow-margin text. I'm not one to bitch about length - I'm a masochist who enjoys reading Dostoevsky - but there is no fat in this book. This means that even an interested reader can get through 20-40 pages before they have to close the book and digest. Understand that this is a warning, not a complaint. Ken Burns will paint a picture with sweeps over still photographs and Ashokan Farewell [sp], with letters home, etc. This is an A, B, C, D, E book:

"In 1780, the [] family moved from Tidewater to Pigeon Forge, taking with them their three children, ages 5, 7, and 9, but leaving behind their 16-year-old, who remained to work on the docks and later became captain of his own ship. Once in Pigeon Forge, the wife passed away and the father remarried Anne [], whose family originally had come from Pittsburgh, of the same [] family that had earlier started the First Pittsburgh Baptist Church. By 1785, the church had expanded to include 120 members, 20 of whom had moved into Pigeon Forge county, starting a new congregation there, under the leadership of John [], brother to Anne, himself a landowner with 400 acres, and who occasionally rented slaves from coastal Virginia as laborers in his salt mining operations, which represented 40% of the family income until 1809, when John died and the family sold the farm to..."

That's a made up passage, but it gives you an idea of the density of the book. Now make that 400 pages long in 6-point type, and you get an idea of what a challenge this book is. The notes and bibliography alone are as long as a medium-length novel (80 pages, 6-pt narrow-margin text). This is a reference book masquerading as historical reading.

When Mr. Williams referred to this as "A History," he meant from the ancient geological activity that formed the area (this is honestly where the book starts), through the flora and fauna that came into be, through the native peoples that inhabited the area, on through to mid-20th century.

The most interesting parts of the book to this reader were the interactions between native and European populations, and learning about how the land in WV was given out as payment to soldiers and to settle war

debts, ultimately leaving a very large portion of the state in the hands of people who didn't live there, making squatters out of an entire state's population, and ensuring timber and mining interests would easily be able to lease or purchase said land and kick people off. It also explained why house trailers are so common there and go along with the "hillbilly" or "redneck" stereotypes (hint: if you don't own the land, you can't built a house or get traditional financing, and you have little tie to the land).

Interesting, but dense.

Jody says

This is a dense textbook style book, but very informative and useful as I try to understand the culture and area

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Gnewton33 says

Interesting (although somewhat dry) read. Good coverage of the movement into the 'region' from the north and coastal areas. Much said on the (continuing) impact of the extractive industries. Was prompted to read after finishing "Night Comes to the Cumberlands" by Harry Caudill (another worthwhile read).

Art says

Appalachia: A History

An expansive work that contains many insightful views into one of the most studied, but misunderstood American regions. While the book is titled "A history", it is as much a history of "how" Appalachia is studied as it is a straight history of the area.

The author's central theory is that Appalachia was, and is, an internal colony of the United States, with its natural resources of coal and timber shipped out, and almost all finished goods shipped in. Few of the factories and industry that use Appalachia's coal and timber are within its borders. As a result its economic system closely resembles a colony, with northern interests reaping the benefits of Appalachia's riches.

The author claims that Appalachia's identity was largely constructed by outsiders who wanted to either exploit or save its people. While the book is extensively researched, most of the analysis and history are the author's thoughts or those of other academics. The voice of the Appalachian people is strangely absent. In addition, the history of the area post-1970 is pretty thin and is more about the people who study Appalachia, than the regions itself. The 1980s-present is barely covered at all.

Be aware, the author has little good to say about private corporations, free markets, or the wealthy. The U.S. Government, the TVA, and the Park Service are also painted in a poor light. Everything that is wrong with Appalachia appears to be somebody else's fault. Once I realized his views, I was able to dive into the books theories and constructs, which were well worth the effort.

Despite a few quirks, I learned much about a region of America that I realized I knew little about, and what I

knew was wrong and invented by outsiders. The author's love for the region is evident.
