Narr: Hello, and welcome to "Tennessee's Mountain Heritage." This program is the first in a series dealing with the history and cultural heritage of Tennessee's mountain people. In this series, we will be listening to the memories and recollections of men and women who have spent their lives in the Tennessee mountains and seen the region grow and change. Instead of drawing upon books and written records, for the most part we will be listening to taped interviews recorded in the homes of mountain people and deposited in the Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State University. These firsthand accounts are as important to us as written records because of their personal flavor and the insights they give us into the affairs of everyday life of people who, like most of us, will never be included in history books.

Older people expecially are repositories of this sort of personal and local history, and there is much we can learn from them. One of these people was Mr. George Payne, who was born in 1889 and passed away in 1981, having spent nearly all of his life in the mountain counties of upper East Tennessee. Born and raised in the Paint Creek community in Greene County, Tennessee, on a farm literally only a stone's throw from the North Carolina line, Mr. Payne was a farmer, banjo picker, and talented story-teller who could vividly recall a way of life not much different than his pioneer ancestors. Let's join Mr. Payne now as he talks about "Living on the Tennessee Line."

GP: Yeah, I was born in Tennessee, right at the state line. Yeah,

I was born right at the state line on the Tennessee side. Well it was just a little old field there where I was born. My daddy built a log house in there and he set out a cherry tree at each corner of the house and I was out there a few years ago and them two cherry trees [were] there and no houses nor nothing--there where I was born. Then he bought 250 acres joining there, going down the creek--and it lay up and down the creek. And he give us children all forty acres a piece-- six of us. I built my new house and a barn, where I lived. All of my ground-- I had about 7 acres of level ground, where I lived, and the rest of it was in timber and woods.

Narr: Like many other mountaineers at that time, Mr. Payne's father worked in the woods and ran a sawmill in addition to farming. Aside from tobacco, which is still a major cash crop for many Tennessee mountain farmers, most of what the Paynes produced was for family consumption. Indeed, practically everything the Paynes owned and used--house, furniture, playthings--was hand-made and home-built.

GP: I was going to tell you about the little old log house I was born in...Well, the beds--the beds was home-made--made out of lumber, and a lot of them was just nailed up to the side of the house...in the corner of the house. Most of them was just nailed up, you know, to the house and had a couple of legs on either side out here. That's the way it looked in there and they had a fireplace. All of them had a fire-place, they had to have one of them-- they done their cooking on it. They'd

get the lid off an oven and get a big lot of coals and lay on top of the lid and put the bread in the oven and lay that lid back on the top of the oven-- then and bake it-- it'd bake pretty bread.

My daddy made a kiln on the outside of the house in the summer time and cooked on it. My mother, she'd cook on that kiln in the summer time; in the winter time she cooked on the fireplace. Never got no cookstove till, well let's see...Oh, I was about grown. And they come out with a little old stove with four legs on it-- a man could just pick it up and tate it anywhere. My daddy, he got one of 'em when they fust come out, and made a bench and set it up on it; and my mother, she cooked on it then-- had them iron kettles. That took a lot of work off the women.

RB: What kind of food do you remember from that time when you were real young?

GP: Well, we had beans--we dried the beans, we dried beans to eat-- and cabbage, kraut, and fruit. And cornbread--we didn't have no wheat bread, they didn't raise no wheat back then--we just had to eat cornbread all the time. We had milk and butter, and we'd dry them there beans--and they'd pick 'em green in the summer, dry 'em and then cook 'em in the winter time and they called 'em "shuck beans"— "Leather Britches"-- called 'em Leather Britches--they's good though. Take and put a piece of meat in 'em and cook 'em, get 'em good and done and they's just awful good.

RB: What did your father and mother buy from the store? What kind of things did they get?

GP: Well they wouldn't get nothing but coffee, a little sugar--coffee and sugar and, let's see, lamp oil. That's about all they had to buy. We had chickens and eggs. We had plenty to eat, the way it was. It was altogether different though to what it is now.

Narr: There were no paved roads for one thing, and automobiles didn't make their way into the Paint Creek community until the nineteen-twenties. The Paynes traveled on horseback, by wagon team, or on foot. Shopping trips were major expeditions and only undertaken on rare occasions.

GP: You'd start out early in the morning and go to the store, it'd take till one or two o'clock to get back--ride a horse. The store's way far apart.

The first time I ever went to Greeneville--it was sixteen miles--ever went to Greeneville. I went with my daddy, took the wagon and team, and we started before daylight one morning, and we got to Greeneville about eleven o'clock.

Narr: While the roads were rough and travel difficult, the Paynes weren't completely isolated. The Old Drover's Trail, which stretched from Kentucky down into South Carolina, ran through the Paynes' property, and occasionally during his boyhood, Mr. Payne could see large herds of horses, cattle, and mules, and

sometimes even huge flocks of turkeys and geese being driven on foot to market.

GP: They had a cow went mad and they had her chained to an apple tree right below the house. She got loose--she broke loose. There was two men started to South Carolina with a drove of mules and she got into them mules and got 'em scattered. One of the men said--hollered at my granddaddy--he said, "Get that there cow out of my mules or we'll kill her." Granddaddy said, "Go ahead and kill her, that cow's mad." (Laughs) They jumped off of their horses and climbed up the apple tree. They scattered them there--she did--all over the place. She went up the road a piece and turned around, and come back, just as hard as she could run, right where she was borned and raised at. The road went around a hill. And [there was a] place there where it was right straight down, about fifty yards, and she run off there and fell off in there and killed herself. Fell about as far as from here to the barn before she hit the ground. So that, that scared them there people to death when they found out that cow was mad. She had horns. She'd run into them there mules--with them horns. She didn't try to hook 'em, she just run against 'em. Tickled me to death.

Narr: Visitors were scarce, though, and most of the time, the Paynes were occupied with the endless cycles of chores and tasks which were the lot of subsistence farmers like themselves. There were no farm machines, power tools or appliances to lighten the load, and as soon as they were able, the children were put to work to

help provide for the needs of the family.

GP: The first work that I can remember doing was cutting weeds out of corn--when you planted corn, you know, and it'd come up and my daddy'd plow it. And then me and my mother'd take a hoe and go out there and chop the weeds out of it. That's the fust work I remember. Is about, let's see, I was about eight--seven or eight years old.

Back then, just as quick as a kid got big enough till he could take a hoe and cut a weed, why they had to do it, you know, to live. Everybody raised a family--soon as they got big enough that they could handle a hoe, or just any little old thing--carry wood in the house, something like that. That there's what they had to do--they'd put the children to work, back them days. When they got big enough to tote a stick of wood, they'd have him--I've seen 'em just take one stick at a time in the house--little bitsy fellers.

Narr: Cash was hard to come by, and the Paynes put considerable time and effort into raising tobacco, which enabled them to pay for the few small luxuries and manufactured goods which they were unable to produce themselves. Mr. Payne remembers that even as a small child he helped his father with the tobacco.

GP: They raised that steam-cured tobacco. They had to cut it and put it in the barn--where the barn was tight--and take fire and

fire it; for it took about--it took about two weeks to cure a barn full.

He had him a little old house built there to sleep in. I'd go there and stay all night with him and I'd get in that little old house and sleep. (Laughs) Every morning about four o'clock he'd crow like a rooster and every rooster in the settlement would go to crowing. (Laughs) You never heard the like of roosters crowing...cure that old tobacco out, and then they'd have to hand it off. Boy it was a job, too, back then to raise that stuff. You had to get wood and have it dry, you know, to burn, to cure it out with, and it was--it was a job, there was a lot of work in that.

(tune "Cacklin' Hen")

Narr: The Paynes were self-sufficient in play as well as work. George and his brothers and sisters were accomplished musicians and dancers long before they reached adulthood. George began playing the banjo at the age of six. His first banjo was a fretless, hand-carved instrument with a sheepskin hide which his father had purchased from a prisoner in the Greeneville jail for 25¢; his brother Loyd's first fiddle was made from a cigar-box. Their father John Payne fiddled at many dances in their community, and he in turn had learned to play from his father Laws Payne, who was still a well-thought-of fiddler during his grandson George's childhood.

GP: My granddaddy--he had, he had seven boys and four girls. They all lived over there in North Carolina. And he--he was a fiddler. He played the fiddle. And he let his beard grow out and it was just as white as it could be--long. He'd play that fiddle--he'd, he could play it, too. He'd get in a big way with that fiddle, and that long white beard--he looked funny. Just had a lot of people that would come there just to get to see him play that fiddle, you know.

(tune "Hodge's Dream")

RB: I remember you were telling me one time about how your grandfather used to have corn shuckings?

GP: Yeah. Yeah, he had a corn shucking every year. He raised a lot of corn--he had to with a big family. And uh, he'd put a gallon of moonshine in the middle of the corn, you know. The fust one that got to the--to the jug got the first drink. And they'd get in there, they'd think they was getting pretty close to it, you never seen such a shucking of corn in your life. They was just a-grabbing that corn, shucking it. Every red ear they found was an extra cup of coffee. And, well, there wasn't much red corn back in them days--once in a while they'd find one; so they'd go for that, too.

Us boys would make an old rail pen and we'd keep the shucks they took away from 'em. We'd walk up a plank on top of that pen and just fall in there on 'em, you know-- fun for us.

(tune "Short'nin' Bread")

RB: You were going to tell me about how they got the dance floor ready after they had the corn shucking?

GP: Well, they'd take meal. The floor was made out of puncheon, you know--they'd just split chestnuts--big chestnuts and take and broadaxe and hew it, and make it just look like a plank on top of it, you know, and that was their flooring they had. Well, when they went to dance and play--they'd play a game they called the "Twist:" About eight boys on one side and eight girls on another side; and they'd play music and they'd dance till they went plumb through the whole bunch. They they'd run away and go back and start anew again. And they'd sprinkle meal on the floor where they danced that-a way and run over it and when it was over with, they'd sweep that off--that was the prettiest floor you ever looked at--it'd just--the floor just shined.

Narr: Many mountain families did not dance to instrumental music for religious reasons, but would, as they put it, "play games" to singing calls. It is interesting that the Paynes, who <u>did</u> dance to the accompaniment of fiddle and banjo music, nonetheless described what they were doing as "playing games" rather than dancing. When the family got together on Sunday afternoons, playing games like "Twist," "Snap," and "Thimble" was one of their major pastimes.

GP: Ah, we'd get out there and play that "Thimble" every Sunday, you know--just something like that. Maybe play a little game of "Snap."

RB: "Snap?"

GP: Yeah, ring up, you know, and somebody snap somebody and they run him till they catched him and kiss him. (Laughs) If you couldn't catch him, quick as they got back in the place, why, [if] you couldn't get them, you had to snap another one. That was a pretty--pretty funny game. Yeah they'd play that all Sunday--every Sunday. Such things as that was about all they had to go by.

Narr: Just as the Payne children learned to play music on home-made instruments, most of their toys and playthings were improvised from materials close at hand. Indeed, many of these toys were made by the children themselves, and making them provided at least as much pleasure as playing with them. Nowadays, many of these toys would be museum pieces or tourist shop items, but back then, the children were simply having fun the best way they knew. George Payne enjoyed making wooden dancing dolls.

GP: When I was a boy out there one day, I got to whittling it out and making little old things like that, you know, and I just happened to someway or another--I don't know how come me to do it--think about a man could make something that'd dance--I said, "It'd be fun." I sat right in and I made that thing--just a little old thing about that long. Put a string in it's head and

beat it and it danced. Then I kept making 'em a little bigger. That's just the way I done it. I just had a idea that something could be done that-a way. And I made his joints all limber, you know.

RB: Didn't you tell me a story about one time you made a real big one and hung it on your porch?

GP: Yeah, Yeah, I fixed one-a great old big one. It was about that big. He had, I made big heavy legs and shoes--he'd make a racket when it'd hit the floor, you know, with his feet. I fixed a string up in the porch and run it in the house. I'd see somebody coming, and I'd get in the house and have that thing a-dancing to beat the band. (Laughs) There was a woman come along one day by herself--she seen it. She stood there in the road and she laughed till she cried. (Laughs) I thought she was going to laugh herself to death.

RB: Did yourparents make toys for the children?

GP: Yeah, they'd make 'em some kind of little old something. Made me a little old wooden pistol--my daddy did. Put a little old cartridge on the end of it and wired it down. He'd put powder in there and put a little old fuse in it; set it a-fire and it'd go off and shoot, you know. (Laughs) That's about all the kind of things we got a hold of. But you know, I thought a lot of that there thing. He'd load it up, and I'd hold it out, you know, and let it shoot. Sometimes it'd bounce out of my hand. (Laughs) Tickled me.

Narr: Not all of George Payne's childhood memories were so innocent and peaceful. The grown-ups had real guns and did not hesitate to use them. There were bushwhackers, moonshiners, and bad men just like those in the Old West, and along with the corn-shuckings and play-parties, Mr. Payne also recalled shoot-outs and running gun-fights. Finally, the violence and lack of law and order in the neighborhood prompted the Paynes to leave Paint Creek in search of a more peaceful, settled way of life.

GP: They got so mean out there--couldn't see no peace and we took a notion to sell out. Sold our land and left. Come out there to 'Chucky River and rented a farm and stayed there a year or two, and just kept a-moving on up toward Johnson City. Finally moved up to Elizabethton, then moved back down on the river, on the farm, and I've been on a farm ever since.

Narr: You have been listening to "Living on the Tennessee Line," recollections of life in the Tennessee mountains by Mr. George Payne, a native of Greene County, Tennessee, who was born in 1889 and passed away in 1981. This program is part of the "Tennessee's Mountain Heritage" series, a joint production of the Archives of Appalachia and WETS-FM. This project is funded in part by a grant from the Tennessee Committee for the Humanities, Incorporated, a not-for-profit corporation with primary support from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The contents and conclusions of this program do not necessarily represent the views of the National Endowment for the Humanities nor those of the

Tennessee Committee for the Humanities, Incorporated. Additional funding has been provided by East Tennessee State University, Powell Construction Company, Ray Hillman, Jr., the Sullivan County Historical Society, and anonymous donors.

The interviews with George Payne and the music performed by Mr. Payne and his brothers Loyd and Sid Payne were recorded in 1977 by Richard Blaustein. This program was directed by Margaret Counts, written by Richard Blaustein and Margaret Counts, and produced by them with the assistance of Sam Wheelock of Sounds Good Recording Studio. Your comments on this series of programs will be greatly appreciated. If you are interested in this and other activities of the Archives of Appalachia, we urge you to contact the Director, Dr. Ellen Garrison, at the Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, zip code 37614, or call area code 615-929-5339. This program has been narrated by