Mapping Appalachia's Boundaries: Historiographic Overview and Digital Collection

By Stewart Scales, Emily Satterwhite, and Abigail August

In this article, we offer a historiographical overview of major scholarly and political delineations of Appalachia from 1895 to the present alongside an online component that allows for an extensive virtual collection of historical maps as well as greater dynamism for user exploration.

The processes of defining the boundaries of Appalachia have been ongoing since at least 1895. As David Whisnant observes, "Appalachian boundaries have been drawn so many times by so many different hands that it is futile to look for a correct definition of the region" (Whisnant 1980, 134; Ulack and Raitz 1981, 40). Eugene McCann notes that maps are "socially produced texts" and as such "always arbitrary, selective, and incomplete" and therefore contestable (McCann 1998, 87).

While mapping Appalachia "correctly" is a futile proposition, digital technologies at least allow us to access historical mappings of Appalachia's boundaries in ways that facilitate our ability to compare and contrast definitions. In this article, we offer a historiographical overview of major scholarly and political delineations of Appalachia from 1895 to the present alongside a web-based digital collection hosted by Virginia Tech (see table 1).¹ The online components, including ArcGIS reconstructions of key maps, allow for a more extensive compilation of historical maps than is practical in print, and a more dynamic format than is possible in print. We do not claim to provide an exhaustive catalog of all historical mappings of the region but instead offer a selection of the constructions of Appalachia that we find essential to our teaching.

Historically, individuals and institutions have mapped the Appalachian region using physiographic, topographic, cultural, sociological, economic, and political definitions. As Phillip Obermiller observes, "bright-line boundaries depend on the purpose and perspective of those drawing them"; for contemporary Appalachian studies scholars, "our regional definitions are

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Table 1: Definitions of Appalachia mapped with ArcGIS. Maps and descriptions available via "Mapping Appalachia's Boundaries," www.mapappalachia .geography.vt.edu

- 1) Berea region by Frost and Hayes, 1895–1901. 194 county version (Frost 1896a, 1896b; Ambrose 1940)
- 2) Physiographic Provinces by Fenneman, 1914. Northern Alabama to Newfoundland (Fenneman 1914)
- 3) Berea Catalog region, 1918. 265 county version (Berea College Catalog 1918)
- 4) John C. Campbell region, 1921 (Campbell 1921)
- 5) United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Bureau of Agricultural Economics (BAE) region, 1935 (USDA 1935)
 - a. Small region. 206 counties in six states
 - b. Full region
- 6) Work Projects Administration regions (Mangus 1940)
 - a. Rural Farm Cultural regions
 - i. Allegheny
 - ii. Appalachia
 - b. Rural Cultural regions
 - i. Allegheny
 - ii. Appalachia
- 7) Ford Survey region, 1962 (Ford 1962)
- 8) President's Appalachian Regional Commission (PARC) proposed region, 1964. 340 counties (PARC 1964)
- 9) Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) region, 1965-present*
 - a. Initial ARC region, 1965. 360 counties.
 - ARC region, 1965. 13 additional counties to extend into New York. 373 counties (ARC 2017a and ARC 2017b)
 - ARC region, 1967. 24 additional counties, mostly in Mississippi but also in Alabama, New York, and Tennessee. 397 counties
 - d. ARC region, 1990. 1 additional county in Ohio. 398 counties
 - e. ARC region, 1991. 1 additional county in Mississippi. 399 counties
 - f. ARC region, 1998. 7 additional counties at the far southwestern portion of the region plus, in Virginia, Montgomery County, the city of Radford, and Rockbridge County, and the cities of Buena Vista and Lexington. 406 counties
 - g. ARC region, 2002. 4 additional counties in Kentucky and Mississippi. 410 counties
 - h. ARC region, 2008. 10 additional counties in Kentucky, Ohio, Tennessee, and Virginia (Henry County and the city of Martinsville, Patrick County). 420 counties
- 10) Anne DeWitt Watts regions, 1978 (Watts 1978)
 - a. Mountain Terrain
 - b. Socioeconomic
 - c. Homogeneous
- 11) Raitz and Ulack region, 1984 (Raitz and Ulack 1984)
- 12) Paul Salstrom regions, 1994 (Salstrom 1994)
 - a. Older Appalachia
 - b. Intermediate Appalachia
 - c. Newer Appalachia
- 13) John Alexander Williams regions, 1996, 2002
 - a. Consensus region, 1996. 211 counties (Williams 1996)
 - b. Loosely Constructed region, 1996. 236 counties (Williams 1996)
 - c. Core region, 2002. 166 counties (Williams 2002)

^{*}Appalachian Regional Commission definitions are derived from Appalachian Regional Commission Staff (ARC), "ARC County History" (ARC 2017a) and "Counties" (ARC 2017b).

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usually pragmatic, most often emerging from a specific research interest" (2017, 56). The authors' hope is that the maps highlight the variable, contingent, and often conflicting definitions of the region that have shaped understandings of Appalachia over time. In other words, we hope that the online availability of these scholarly and federal definitions will serve to promote rather than end conversation regarding the meanings of places. As McCann (1998) and others note, maps function as tools of power most commonly wielded by those with institutional power, but can, when constructed from the perspectives of local residents, promote political projects by, for example, "showing sites where community feeling, sense of place, or spiritual well-being are considered to be the strongest," by "representing flows in the economies of reciprocity," or by mapping environmental degradation (McCann 1998, 107–08). Like Brian Harley, we believe "maps

Figure 1: Core Appalachia as defined by John Alexander Williams (2002).

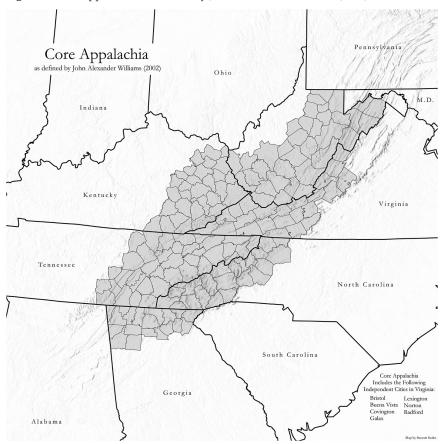


Table 2: "Classic" definitions of Appalachia

Williams proposes that six "classic" definitions of Appalachia have "individually and collectively shaped most general accounts of the region" (Williams 1996, 6).

- 1) Berea region, circa 1895–1901, by William G. Frost, president of Berea College, and geologist C. Willard Hayes. According to Frost, the Berea definition "embraces 194 counties" but it is delineated only in a hand-drawn map (Frost 1896b, 4; Ambrose 1940). In his attempt to replicate the Berea region based on the 1896 illustration, Williams identifies 218 counties (Williams 1996).a
- 2) John C. Campbell region, published in 1921 as an insert to The Southern Highlander and His Homeland and, in later editions, reproduced in the front matter. 254 counties in nine
- 3) United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Bureau of Agricultural Economics (BAE) region, 1935, including 206 counties in six states plus a discussion that included counties in three additional states.c
- 4) Ford Survey region, 1962, named for Thomas R. Ford, who coordinated and funded the study (Williams 1996), included counties in those "state economic areas" with "low socioeconomic indicators" (Ulack and Raitz 1981, 41). Ford "constructed the smallest region" of the classic six: 190 counties in seven states (Williams 1996, 8).d
- 5) Appalachian Regional Commission region, initially established by the US Congress by the Appalachian Regional Development Act (ARDA) of 1965. Since the original 1965 Act, the number of counties has increased from 360 in eleven states to the current 420 in fifteen states (spanning from southern New York to northeastern Mississippi), with the most recent county additions occurring in 2008.e
- 6) Karl B. Raitz and Richard Ulack region, 1984, constructed by geographers at the University of Kentucky based on physiography, political boundaries, and cultural and socioeconomic indicators. It is the most expansive definition, embracing 445 counties in thirteen states (Raitz and Ulack 1984).

^aWe have been unable to ascertain exactly which 218 counties Williams (1996) labeled as Berea counties for the sake of his Core, Consensus, and Loose definitions of Appalachia.

bAccording to McCann (1998, 89), Campbell's definition was influenced by local color writers' interpretation of Appalachia "in racial terms—as the last bastion of the unsullied white race." See also Couto (1994). Ulack and Raitz explain it this way: John C. Campbell's definition largely corresponded to Fenneman's, but Campbell "chose to exclude Appalachia north of the Maryland-Pennsylvania border (Mason-Dixon Line), apparently because he believed that the relationship between the southern highland people and their environmental situation was critical to understanding their way of life, a relationship that did not necessarily obtain in the northern Appalachian states" (Ulack and Raitz 1981, 41). 'The USDA (1935) defined two regions but used the smaller of the two for reporting most data. Williams (1996, 2002) uses the smaller of the two USDA definitions of Appalachia.

dAccording to McCann (1998, 89), the Ford definition was influenced by "the Keynesian welfare state's need to define the territorial extent of the region as an underdeveloped 'problem area' requiring federal

eThe Appalachian Regional Development Act (the ARDA, which established the ARC in 1965) provided for the addition of counties in New York "should that state be interested in the program," if the counties were "contiguous to the existing region and of comparable socio-economic characteristics." Thirteen counties were added in this manner. In 1967, amendments to the bill added eighteen counties in Mississippi, two in Alabama and one each in Tennessee and New York for a total of 397 counties in thirteen states (Watts 1978, 19). The ARC counties represented an expansion from the 1964 PARC report, which labeled 340 counties as Appalachian (PARC 1964, 66). As of 2008, the ARC region included 420 counties and eight independent cities (ARC 2017a; ARC 2017b). In 1996, Williams appears to have used the ARC definition as of 1991, which included 399 counties (following the addition of one Ohio county in 1990 and one Mississippi county in 1991) (Williams 1996).

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are too important to be left to cartographers alone" (quoted in McCann 1998, 111) and hope that our efforts provide resources that will be deployed not only by teachers but also in the service of grassroots political projects.

Recent Interventions: John Alexander Williams

The most recent major intervention in definitions of Appalachia is the delineation of "Core Appalachia" (see figure 1) by historian John Alexander Williams, initially proposed in a 1996 article in the Journal of Appalachian Studies and introduced to a wider audience in his 2002 book Appalachia: A History.² The most restrictive scholarly definition of Appalachia, Core Appalachia, includes only those counties that were incorporated into all six of the definitions that Williams identifies as having "individually and collectively shaped most general accounts of the region" (Williams 2002, 6). See table 2 for the six "classic" definitions of Appalachia according to Williams. Far less sprawling than the Appalachian Regional Commission's definition, Core Appalachia may come closer to approximating a version of the region that matches Appalachia in the national and international geographic imagination. In addition to Core Appalachia, Williams's 1996 article delineated two additional definitions of the region that—to our knowledge—have not been published since: "consensus" Appalachia and "loosely-constructed" Appalachia (9) (see figure 2 and table 3 for descriptions).

Table 3: Core, Consensus, and Loose Appalachia according to John Alexander Williams (Williams 1996, 9)

- The "Core" region consists of counties found in all six of the six classic definitions (see table 2).^a
- The "Consensus" region consists of the counties found in any five of the six classic definitions.^b
- 3) The "Loose" region includes the counties included in any three of the four "most influential definitions of Appalachia," which Williams names as Campbell, Ford, ARC, and Raitz and Ulack.^c

^{*}Note that Williams says he uses county counts from 1920, when "all county boundaries finally reached their current configuration" (Williams 1996, 9).

^bFor his definition of Consensus Appalachia in North Carolina, Williams made an adjustment for the sake of consistency among the neighboring cities of Winston-Salem, Greensboro, and High Point. Because Greensboro (Guilford County) and High Point (parts of four counties: Davidson, Forsyth, Guilford and Randolph) had not been included in the ARC region and therefore did not qualify for the Consensus region, Williams omitted Forsyth County (Winston-Salem) from the Consensus region as well (Williams 1996).

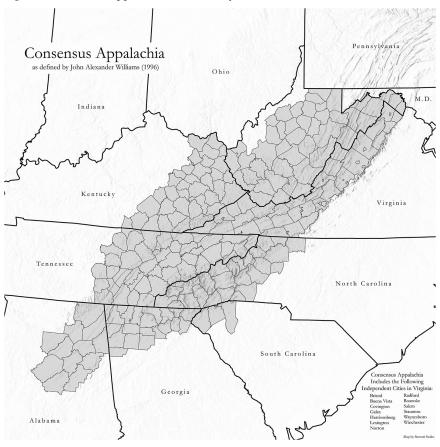
For the sake of simplifying his own historical and demographic analysis, Williams chose to omit South Carolina counties from the Consensus definition and to omit Maryland, Ohio, and South Carolina counties from the Loose definition (1996, 9). Our maps rectify those omissions by including the three South Carolina counties in the Consensus definition—Greenville, Oconee, and Picken—and by including four counties in South Carolina and three counties in Maryland in the Loose definition. Williams (1996, 9) writes that Loose would also include "a slice of Ohio along the Ohio river," but Ohio counties appear only in two of the six classic definitions: ARC and Raitz and Ulack.

One limitation of Williams' definitions is that their heavy reliance on early twentieth-century understandings of the region led to their omission of Northern Appalachia. In 1965, residents of Pennsylvania and New York may have been "surprised to learn that the government in Washington considered them Appalachians" or even may have been "opposed to the very idea" (Abramson and Haskell 2006), but recent decades have seen greater regional identification on the part of Northern Appalachians, accompanied by research and scholarship.

Consensus Appalachia

We would like to promote consideration of the utility of Williams's "Consensus Appalachia" (see fig. 2), comprised of those counties found

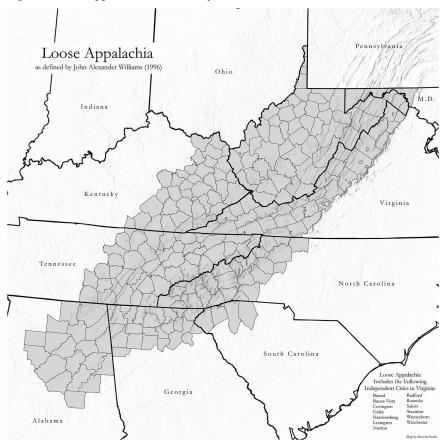
Figure 2: Consensus Appalachia as defined by John Alexander Williams (1996).



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in any five of the six most influential definitions, for several reasons. First, as Williams himself notes, the Core region "whitens" Appalachia, even compared to the only slightly larger Consensus definition (Williams 1996, 17). Second, Consensus Appalachia allows for the inclusion of counties that were excluded from the highly politicized federal definition. Perhaps the best-known and certainly the most-utilized demarcation of the region, the federal definition was first designated in 1965 by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) as a means to identify counties that would benefit from federally funded regional economic development programs. As the only definition of the region codified into law, the federal ARC definition has been particularly important for data-driven research and comparisons and has been a mandatory definition for federally funded analysis (Williams

Figure 3: Loose Appalachia as defined by John Alexander Williams (1996).



1996). In some ways, however, the ARC definition is also the most flawed, given that it is as much the product of political horse-trading as it is of any intellectual rationale.

The Consensus definition of Appalachia may be particularly useful for delineating a more inclusive Appalachian Virginia. Core Appalachia includes fewer Virginia counties than any of the prior definitions of Appalachia due to the ARC's inclusion of only twenty-one Virginia counties. The ARC fails to incorporate Virginia's seven northwestern tier counties—Augusta, Rockingham, Shenandoah, Page, Frederick, Clarke, and Warren—despite the fact that they had previously been included in Campbell (1921), USDA (1935), and Ford (1962) definitions, and fall in the same Valley and Ridge physiographic province as included counties (see fig. 4).⁵ The Consensus definition, because it requires a county's inclusion in only five of the six classic definitions, restores to its definition of Appalachia seven of Virginia's northwestern tier counties as well as Roanoke County (and the cities of Roanoke and Salem), despite the ARC's exclusion of them on political and economic grounds.

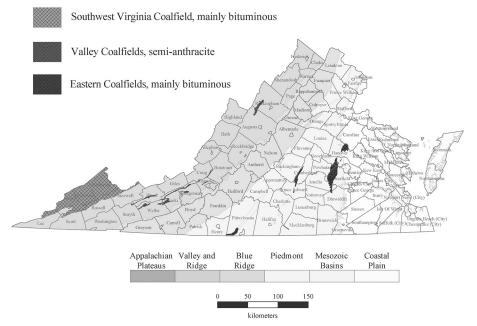
Other Mapping Efforts

This mapping project joins a number of important existing collections. Berea College's Mappalachia (2011; see http://www.mappalachia.org) displays eight hundred of the seven thousand archived maps hand-drawn by Berea students since World War II. "Maps in the Appalachian Collection" (the W. L. Eury Appalachian Collection; http://www.collections.library. appstate.edu/appalachian/maps) at Appalachian State University has long served as an important web-based resource for accessing historical maps of the region. And, of course, the Appalachian Regional Commission's website hosts numerous socioeconomic maps (see https://www.arc.gov/research/MapsofAppalachia.asp). We look forward to future mapping projects that draw from historical maps but go beyond boundary-defining projects, such as hydrological or air current maps that may illuminate potential downstream effects of toxic activities within the region, and additional maps—like Berea's Mappalachia collection—that illuminate the ways in which people make meaning of place.

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Figure 4: Physiographic provinces of Virginia. On this map of Virginia, note that most of the westernmost counties are in the Valley and Ridge physiographic province while the next band of counties to the east are in the Blue Ridge province. The original Appalachian Region Commission (ARC) definition included the counties in both provinces in the far southwest, but omitted Blue Ridge counties north of Floyd County. North of Highland County, the ARC included no counties from either Valley and Ridge or Blue Ridge. (Since the original ARC definition, the ARC has added two Valley and Ridge counties—Montgomery and Rockbridge in 1998—and two Blue Ridge/Piedmont counties—Patrick and Henry in 2008). Because earlier definitions (including USDA and Ford definitions that measured socioeconomic status) included Virginia's northernmost Valley and Ridge counties, the Consensus definition of Appalachia incorporates them. This map is reprinted with permission from the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy—Division of Geology and Mineral Resources, and is available in color online at https://www.dmme.virginia.gov/dgmr/images/Fig_1_COALFIELDS.jpg.



Notes

- 1. The title of our web page, "Mapping Appalachia," is also the title of Eugene McCann's important 1998 *Journal of Appalachian Studies* article, "Mapping Appalachia: Toward a Critical Understanding" (McCann 1998).
- 2. Williams's 1996 article stated that the Core was 164 counties. In 1998, the Appalachian Regional Commission added Montgomery and Rockbridge counties in Virginia; these counties are included in the Core publicized by *Appalachia: A History* in 2002 (Williams 2002).
- 3. In the process of constructing Core Appalachia, Williams corrected one anomaly he found "unacceptable," replacing Jefferson County, West Virginia (at the easternmost tip of

the panhandle and an island not contiguous with other Core counties), with Lincoln County, West Virginia (in the coalfields just south of Huntington and Charleston). Lincoln County had been excluded from the Ford survey due to its being grouped into a "state economic area" with rural counties north of Charleston and Huntington. Compared to the Consensus region, the Core region eliminates Alabama and South Carolina, plus nine counties in West Virginia, nine counties and eight cities in Virginia, six counties in Kentucky, five in Tennessee, two in Georgia, and four in North Carolina (Williams 1996, 11–12).

- 4. Ulack and Raitz created the best-known academic effort to map Appalachia in the geographic imagination ("cognitive Appalachia"); their cognitive map is expansive, perhaps due to their reliance on "students who attend colleges and universities in or near" the region as defined by Nevin Fenneman (Ulack and Raitz 1981, 40).
- 5. According to Michael Bradshaw's history of the Appalachian Regional Commission, "each state nominated a group of counties" (Bradshaw 1992, 44). We have not been able to verify the origin of the twenty-one Virginia counties proposed for inclusion. At a hearing before the House Public Works Committee, Mr. Joseph G. Hamrick, Executive Assistant to the Governor of Virginia and Director of Industrial Development and Planning for the Commonwealth of Virginia, testified on behalf of Governor Albertis S. Harrison, Jr., that, of the twenty-one Virginia counties included in the bill, only six or seven, all in the extreme southwestern part of Virginia needed aid: Lee, Scott, Wise, Dickenson, Russell, Buchanan, and Tazewell, plus Grayson and Carroll. Following Mr. Hamrick's testimony, he conferred with the governor and on June 22, 1964, submitted for the record that Virginia nonetheless would like "to retain all 21 counties in the Appalachian program." But even these twenty-one were shy of the thirty-one Virginia counties in the Consensus definition (or even the 2002 core, which includes twenty-four Virginia counties after post-1965 additions). Williams (1996, 8) reports Bradshaw's explanation for the exclusion of most of Virginia's District 7 counties as "the local congressman's objection to the philosophy of regional redevelopment (Bradshaw 1992)." This is a somewhat incomplete explanation, as two of the twelve District 7 counties were included in the ARC definition: Bath and Highland. (Rockbridge was added to the ARC definition in 1998). Richard Poff represented Virginia's congressional District 7, which included twelve counties, including those in the northwest tier; in 1963 he was replaced by John O. Marsh, Jr. (see https:// www.dailykos.com/stories/2016/10/27/1580086/-Virginia-Congressional-District-Results -1964-an-Election-Retrospective-Part-1). This explanation has been repeated in other places including by former political journalist Rudy Abramson. The introduction to the Encyclopedia of Appalachia notes that "a number of Virginia mountain counties that were Appalachian by any standard except political were left out because their representative, Richard H. Poff, was opposed to the 1965 bill" (Abramson and Haskell 2006). Williams (2002) says that excluded Virginia counties "had the misfortune of being represented by Congressman Poff" (14) and also reports that "Congressman Richard Poff of Virginia, a Shenandoah Valley Republican" chose to have "his district cut out of official Appalachia as a protest against government activism" (341).

Two additional Valley and Ridge counties, Montgomery and Roanoke in District 6, were also excluded from the original ARC definition of Appalachia, creating a "conspicuous embayment in the eastern ARC boundary" (Bradshaw 1992, 45), though Montgomery was added later, in 1998. Bradshaw (1992, 45) attributes these omissions to the counties' "strong pleas to be left out, largely on the grounds that their political leaders disagreed with the philosophy behind the ARDA" (Appalachian Regional Development Act), whereas Williams (2002, 341) attributes the "objections" to "civic officials and boosters in Roanoke and Knoxville who resented being lumped with poor rural folks in an Appalachia defined as a national problem." We speculate that the participation of two Virginia Tech faculty members in the PARC study, Harold N. Young and A. J. Walrath, may also have contributed to insistence that Montgomery County not be considered Appalachian.

The independent cities within the northwestern tier counties were, importantly, also included in prior definitions of Appalachia but omitted from the ARC definition: Harrisonburg,

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Roanoke, Salem, Staunton, Waynesboro, and Winchester. (The independent city of Lexington was added to the ARC and therefore Core Appalachia in 1998, between Williams's 1996 development of the Core definition and his 2002 popularization of it.)

6. See "Maps in the Appalachian Collection," W. L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Special Collections at Belk Library, Appalachian State University, http://www.collections.library. appstate.edu/appalachian/maps. This collection features maps contributed by David Whisnant that designate boundaries defined by Campbell (1921); USDA (1935); Ford (1962); PARC (1964); and ARC (1967).

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