

# Reflections of Olde Swain

## Capturing the Disappearing History of an Appalachian mountain community Part 1

A Goldmine Branch Childhood (A story of the Cole Hyatt Family)

Lawrence Hyatt, a cousin to Christine Cole Proctor and Leonard Cole is one of those individuals who has contributed immeasurably to my study of the former families and communities of the North Shore of Fontana Lake. I have spent countless hours with him, in person, on the phone and through email, learning something every time we speak. When I originally set out to write about Lawrence and his family, I had intended to do it as a single article. However, he has plied me with far too many good stories to limit his family to a single entry. Therefore, I am publishing the story of the Cole Hyatt family's life until around 1940.



*The Zach Beasley home place, modern-day. Note the front porch steps within the fence.*

For me, there is something truly sacred about the area surrounding the OLD NC 288 Boat Ramp just west of Bryson City. I love to sit in the pavilion built on the foundation of the former Zach Beasley home place, look down at its stone steps and drink from the spring just beyond it. I enjoy sitting in the quiet contemplation of the lives lived at this place, and of the lives of all the people who once called the land to the west of here, 'Home'. I look down on 'Old 288' below and think of the travelers who once hastened along this byway...to town, to home, to work, to church and to other pastimes. I also think of the last trips people made along this road...some filled with eager anticipation of a new life ahead, and others filled with sadness and longing for the homes they would never see again.



*Nathan Columbus and Effie Brendle  
(Photograph from Lawrence Hyatt)*



*(Photograph from David Monteith)*

Nathan Columbus Brendle built this home in the early 1900's on land which had been in his family for decades. Together, he and his wife, Harriet Effie Sitton, raised 12 children here.

One of these children was a daughter by the name of Fannie Olive, who was born in 1895. She was a striking young woman, with olive skin and dark hair reflective of her family's Cherokee ancestry. On a day sometime around 1911 or thereabouts, a tall, dark and handsome young man from Goldmine Branch happened to pass by on his way to town and spied the raven-locked beauty. Hereafter, he decided that walking or riding his horse to town was far preferable to taking the train, and he began to make frequent trips to Bryson City to court the comely Fannie. Abraham Cole Hyatt and Fannie Olive Brendle were married at the Brendle homeplace on September 16, 1912.



*Cole and Fannie Hyatt Family, circa 1917/18*  
*Photo provided by Lawrence Hyatt*

They moved to Goldmine Branch, where they resided near Cole's parents, Elias David Brendle and Polly (Buchanan) Hyatt. Their first home was a tiny cabin, but as soon as he could, Cole set to building a new home for his wife and the children they began welcoming to the family in 1914. Hand-planing every board, and hand-riving every shingle while working full-time for the Norwood Lumber Company, he steadily, he built a four-room home for his growing family...a true labor of love. On a visit to his old home place in 2011, I must admit to having a tear in my eye as I watched Lawrence holding one of those boards left behind when the home was torn down for its lumber in the late 1940's. The board had been preserved in the water of the branch near the home, almost as if waiting for his return. In this home, Cole and Fannie raised 7 children: Walter (1913), Dillard (1916), Wade (1919), Gertrude (1923), Oliver (1925), Lawrence (1934), and Lucille (1936).



*Cole Hyatt home on Goldmine Branch (NARA)*



*Lawrence Hyatt holding a board from the home.*

*(Photos by Don Casada)*

During the week, Cole went to work and the children went to school once they were old enough. They attended the Forney Creek School until it was closed in 1940; subsequently, the children attended school at Bushnell. On Sundays, the family went to the Forney Creek Baptist Church, where Cole was a deacon and trustee. Afterward, they would frequently join the family of John and Emeline Cole for Sunday dinner. John and Cole were second cousins and their families were (and remain) exceptionally close.

Life during that time was one of hard work for all members of the family, children included. It was very much a subsistence lifestyle, with very little money to pay for even the most basic of necessities. This became even more pronounced after Norwood burned in 1925 and Cole's occupation became primarily that of a farmer. He hewed oak crossties off the property and sold them to the Southern Railway, worked as a local man with the CCC, and picked up odd jobs with local businesses and individuals to supplement the family's income when he could. Lawrence recalls that even during these times, there was never any shortage of his mother's excellent food but does point out with a laugh that, even with little money to go around, Fannie still had her scruples about what would and would not be served at her table. Possum was strictly forbidden, and she only cooked a raccoon once. Frog legs were similarly verboten, as she claimed that on the one occasion she'd tried to fry them, the legs had started jumping around in the hot grease!

More than economic privation, the one shadow that loomed over the family for many years began in 1940, when 3 year-old Lucille began to stumble about the house and was subsequently diagnosed with infantile paralysis: polio, as we now call it. Fortunately for the Hyatt family, the local doctor sent Lucille to a polio specialist in Asheville who was able to bring the progression of her disease to a rapid halt. Compared to other children afflicted with the condition who often died or became paralyzed, Lucille was fortunate. Her disease created weakness in the left arm and leg and a left foot that turned inward, forcing her to limp. Despite a series of corrective surgeries, Lucille never experienced a full recovery and today, at the age of 76, continues to experience sequelae from her disease.



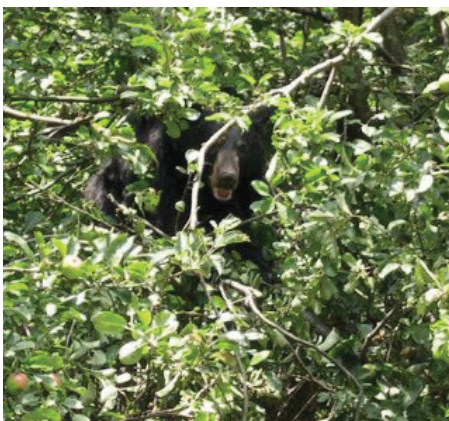
## *A poster from the 40's / 50's, spreading awareness of polio.*



In spite of difficult times, life was one of happy and of-amusing memories for a young Lawrence. He recalls panning for gold with his father on Hyatt Branch after the fields had been tended. He is also reminded of taking corn for grinding at the mill of his neighbor and local schoolteacher, Evion Hall, and seeing what new invention or plaything the inventive Evion had created. However, many of his stories tend to center around memorable interactions with animals. He can remember many a day that a truck would pass by the home on the way to Will Jenkin's home, loaded with some new form of livestock. Due to Will's extensive livestock hobby, this was a constant and entertaining show. Lawrence also had his own share of entertainment with the family's animals.

Aside from battles with domestic animals, the Hyatt family often encountered problems with wild animals, bears being one of the most difficult to deal with. Near the present-day tunnel at the end of the Road to Nowhere, Cole Hyatt had a large apple orchard in which he also planted corn. Despite the presence of a

nine-rail fence about 5 feet in height, a particularly troublesome bear was laying waste to the apple trees. Cole was forced to set a large bear trap there, which he hid in some bramble to catch the unsuspecting beast. Every morning, he would walk a mile and a half from home to cover the trap with a large chestnut board so that passers-by would not be seriously injured by inadvertently springing of the trap. Every evening, he would walk back to uncover it. This continued on for quite some time, with the bear continually evading the trap. On a July morning in 1940, Cole and Fannie had to take young Lucille to Asheville for the first of several corrective surgeries on her foot. As Oliver was not the oldest boy in the home, care of the trap fell to him for the day while Cole was gone. Feeling certain that this day would be equally uneventful as recent ones had been, an unarmed and unsuspecting Oliver came through the gate into the orchard and headed toward the trap. Suddenly the bramble in which the trap lay began to shake violently and something large began to put up a terrible commotion.



### *Black bear in an apple tree*

Strongly motivated by fear and a desire for self-preservation, Oliver made it back to the house in record time to get his father's shotgun and pistol. The level-headed Gertie directed Oliver to go and fetch Will Jenkins so that he would not be alone in dealing with the bruin. Oliver did, and passed the pistol to Will. Upon reaching the orchard and hearing the ruckus the bear was putting up, a nervous and excited will began shooting wildly into the air, creating quite a commotion but not managing to land a single shot where it counted. Despite some weakness in his knees, 15 year-old Oliver dispatched the bear, and he and Will managed to bring it back to the Hyatt barn. That evening, when Cole returned home and heard the news, he

asked Oliver, "Son, how did you make it over the fence? Oliver's reply?? "Dad, he said, "I jumped it!" the next morning, Cole went up to the orchard to assess the prior day's events and found that Oliver's footprints could only be found in every other corn row – seven feet apart!

1940 would be marked not only by Lucille's polio and Oliver's adventures with bears, but would prove to be a turning point in the life of the Hyatt family. A wealthy Delaware businessman, an estate on Noland Creek, a World War, and a dam named Fontana would converge during the following six years to create a period in their lives punctuated by intense happiness and economic prosperity, but which would end in an agonizing loss that they would carry with them for the rest of their lives.

## Capturing the Disappearing History of an Appalachian mountain community Part II



***Phillip Goodnow Rust***  
*(Photo posted to Ancestry.com by user cayrton.)*

In the early 1930's a young and wealthy MIT graduate and businessman named Phillip Goodnow Rust moved to Nolan Creek, where he proceeded to create a mountain estate unlike anything seen to that point in Swain County. Wealthy not only by birth but also by virtues of hard work, Rust was a successful businessman who had recently married Eleanor Francis Dupont, and heir to the Dupont Chemical family fortune. He bought up over 4,300 acres of heavily logged land in the Nolan Creek watershed, upon which he undertook a massive reforestation project, built a summer cottage for his family, cottages for friends and family who wished to come and vacation, a nurse's cottage, sheep and equestrian barns, a trout farm, and a kiln for Eleanor, who was an avid potter. To power all of this, Rust built a waterwheel-powered turbine, the remains of which are still visible just off the Nolan Creek Trail. To manage the estate, Rust hired a number of local individuals, one of whom was Cole Hyatt.

### ***Rust Electric Plant on Nolan Creek (Courtesy of NARA)***



Starting out for Mr. Rust by running fencing and other miscellaneous duties, Cole quickly gained his trust and admiration for his work ethic. Around 1940, Mr. Rust approached Cole about full-time work as a warden for his estate for payment of \$1,000 a year, a home provided rent-free, and sufficient land to plant a crop and graze a few cattle and some hogs. In 1941, Cole moved his family to the Solola area of Nolan Creek. The remains of the home that the Hyatt's lived in on Nolan Creek lie 2.6 miles upstream from the Nolan Creek parking lot on the Road to Nowhere, about 100 yards before reaching the third bridge on the trail. In the 1940's, this home was considered relatively luxurious for the area, having seven rooms, running water, a shower and best of all—electricity! Today, over 70 years later, the front walk is overgrown by massive boxwoods but still leads to the front steps which yet remain. The foundation of the home, the concrete shower pan, and the piping are still there as well, as is the front yard's cedar tree in which the chickens would roost at night.

*Hyatt family at their home on Noland Creek  
(Courtesy Lawrence Hyatt)*



Life was happy there for young Lawrence. He walked to Bearpen (the site of one of Noland Creek's former schools) every day to catch the bus to school at Bushnell, helped with the household and farm chores, remembers dinners at the home, where Mr. Rust would come to enjoy Fannie's delicious cooking while business was discussed. He also recalls helping his father out a bit with the running of the estate one chore he remembers with some degree of trepidation was the annual sheep-shearing. Lawrence had to turn a crank which would, in turn, provide power to the sheep shearers. With some 250-head of sheep to de-fleece, he recounts with a chuckle that he would turn the crank until he thought

his arm would fall off. However, the bears in the area would wreak havoc on Rust's sheep until eventually all were killed off but one. Mr. Rust had Cole bring the sheep on Noland Creek home with him, as a present for Lawrence. Lawrence dearly loved the sheep and would tether it in the yard to mow the lawn. But a bear would eventually come for it as well, carrying it off one evening.

On December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, Lawrence and his father were standing near their hog lot across the creek from their home, when the radio announced the onset of World War II. Cole's thoughts instantly turned to his boys as several were of age to be drafted into the military. From that time, until the day Lawrence would come running up the road to what is now the Mill Creek campground in 1945 to tell his father and Mr. Rust that the war was over, the safety of his sons were daily on his mind. Also on his mind, though, was the impending loss of his home and lands on Goldmine Branch. Like many of the other individuals and families on the north shore of Fontana Lake whose homes and lands would not be inundated by lake's waters but to which access would be cut off, Cole Hyatt did not feel that he should have to give up his property. Unlike others, however, he refused to sell his land and in October 1944, TVA issued a declaration of taking, condemning the property. In response, and in partnership with Phillip Rust and other area landowners Arnold Bradshaw, John Burns, Fred Lollis and Columbus Welch, Cole Hyatt sued TVA, asserting that the government entity had exceeded its authority condemning lands that were 'above pool.'



*Lawrence Hyatt on the steps of his old Noland Creek home  
(Courtesy Don Casada)*



While the battle for their property raged, however, the dam effort proceeded on. Once the waters of Fontana Lake overtook NC 288 at the mouth of Noland Creek, the Hyatt family was forced into a painful separation. Since neither the Hyatt lands nor the Rust estate were as yet in the possession of TVA, Cole stated on at the estate as warden and was also able to oversee his own land, on whom he had placed a tenant. But the children had to go to school, so Fannie moved out with Lawrence and Lucille to a home on Deep Creek. Lawrence attended the Bryson City Elementary School and the family attended church at the old wood-sided Deep Creek church, which once stood where a tubing center now plies its trade to tourists. On Saturdays, or other days as needed, Cole would take a boat which Mr. Rust had provided him, to Round Hill,

where Walter would pick him up, take him to see the family and to run any necessary errands, and return him to Round Hill make the long teak back to his Noland Creek home. As Mr. Rust was ever mindful of the safety and well-being of his employees, he hired the other local men such as Dock Gibby to stay with Cole, but the separation from his family was difficult to bare. Once can only imagine what life there must have been like for him, with only one other person on the creek and his only other connection to the outside world being a park radio on which he would 'report in' every hour. Holidays and summers brought a joyful reprieve from this loneliness, though, as his family would always join him on Noland Creek.....the home of their hearts.

Ultimately, the family's happiness and tenure on the North Shore was doomed to come to an end. Despite wins over TVA in both the Federal District Court and the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, the United State Supreme Court would prove to see the case differently. Despite excellent arguments on their behalf by well-respected Bryson City attorney, McKinley Edwards and Asheville attorney George Ward, the petitioners lost their battle on March 25, 1946. In an 8-0 decision, the high court issued a stunning reversal of the findings of the lower courts and announced in their decision that TVA had the constitutionally-mandated authority to condemn all the land at issue. It was a heartbreaking defeat, one which was to haunt the family the rest of their days.

### *Cole and Fannie Hyatt at their new home in Cherokee County (Courtesy Lawrence Hyatt)*



With much sadness, the family moved, driving their livestock overland and taking their belongings out by boat. Unable to locate a farm in Swain County that fit their needs, they instead found a house with 125 acres in the Hanging Dog area of Cherokee County which they were able to purchase with the sale of their Goldmine Branc farm. *(Readers are referred to Don Casada's comment below to note the 'comparability' of the Hyatt's farms in the two counties. It should additionally be noted that the original amount offered by TVA to Cole Hyatt was over \$2,000 less than his final payment after the lawsuit.)* The family moved and settled in, installing electricity and a well in short order. Cole once again became a full-time farmer, and

Lawrence and Lucille finished school in Cherokee County. Though a beautiful place that friends and family often visited, it was never 'HOME'. It time, Lawrence graduated from high school and being unable to find work locally, moved to Kinzua, Oregon, where he quickly worked his way up to a lead position with a lumber company.

### *Cole and Fannie Hyatt, circa 1946 (Courtesy Lawrence Hyatt)*



Sadly, another tragedy was to strike the family in 1953, just six months after Lawrence had moved across the country. In a disastrous haying accident, Cole Hyatt's back was broken and he was left permanently paralyzed on one side. Lawrence returned home in the immediate aftermath and, seeing the dire situation the family was in (his mother now having to care for both Lucille and Cole), decided to bring them to Oregon. He fitted a little bed in the back of his truck for his father and over the course of six days drove the family cross country to live with him. Despite the great comfort and assistance provided to them by Lawrence, Fannie was desperately homesick for the mountains, and returned to their home with Cole a year and a half later. A few years thereafter, Lawrence moved his young family, which now included a wife and two sons, back to the area in order to help his mother. The other siblings also helped as they were able and as they retired; with the family's help, Cole and Fannie were able to stay on their farm. Their oldest son, Walter, was unable to return to aid his parents, having perished in a work accident in 1962.

Due to the exceptional loving care given to him by his devoted wife and family, Cole Hyatt lived for 23 years after his accident, dying in 1976 at the age of 84. Despite her grief, the ever-strong and determined Fannie continued to live her life to the fullest, even plowing and tending her garden into her 90's. In 1996 at the ripe old age of 100, she joined Cole in their eternal home. They now lie interred near other members of the Hyatt family and their good cousins and friends, John and Emeline Cole, at the Lauada Cemetery.

Lawrence has long served on the board of directors for the cemetery's association. An avid genealogist and historian, he also produced several books of family genealogy, using the proceeds to pay for tombstones for members of his family and other North Shore individuals whose lonely graves were once marked only by fieldstones. By virtue of his work, the Hyatt family's legacy will live on not only through their descendants, but also through the stones which now mark the final resting places of those who were once unknown.





*Tombstone of Cole and Fannie Hyatt, Lauada Cemetery*

The family legacy lives on in one final way. Should you get a free hour, drive down old NC 288 to the terminus at the boat ramp and the Beasley place. Walk the trails there, and drink from the fine spring. Look at the picture of the house as it once was, and investigate the front porches which now lead to a grassy patch. Then set within the pavilion, look down upon the old road....and ponder on the remarkable family legacy that was begun at this very place over 100 years ago by a comely lass with raven locks and a lanky farmer from Goldmine Branch.

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*(photographs May 2014 – Kathy Wilson)*