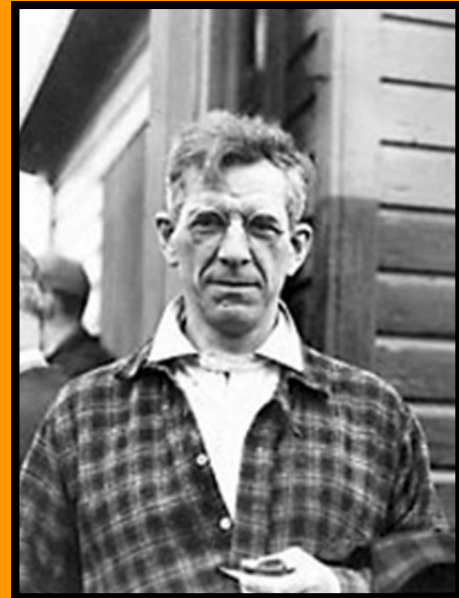


## A Little Closer Than You Think...Benton MacKaye

I recently received information from Dick Evans, the president of our association, that he had discovered his family had ties to our founder Benton MacKaye. As I read further, I became amazed and intrigued with the information Dick had shared with me. Since becoming involved in the association two years ago, I have often read and found incredibly interesting, any information I could find about this great environmentalist. Who would have thought, Dick would have ties to this man.....first hand ties. Family friends who not only knew Benton MacKaye, but lived with, worked with, had conversations with, and at times, helped take care of this man until his death.



Dick has shared some unbelievable relics of the past which contain information concerning this man, Benton MacKaye, the founder of the Appalachian Trail and the man our trail and organization is named after. In this article I would like to share with our membership some insight into who this man was.

Dick has given me permission to publish these relics' and it is with great pleasure I do so. ***As you view these documents, my suggestion is to use your Zoom function and Zoom in on the documents. Many of the "hard to read" areas will be much easier to read if they are Enlarged.***

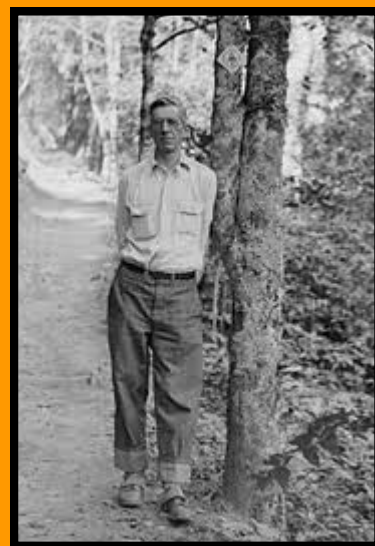
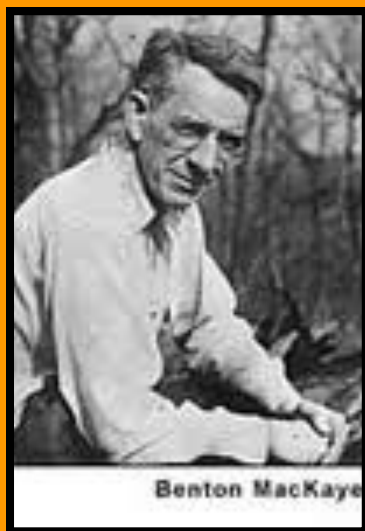
Benton MacKaye; March 6, 1879 – Dec. 11, 1975 was an American forester, planner and conservationist. He was born in Stamford, Connecticut. He studied forestry at Harvard University and later taught there for several years. He was also involved in a number of Federal bureaus and agencies. MacKaye helped pioneer the idea of land preservation for recreation and conservation purposes, and was a strong advocate of balancing human needs and those of nature. In addition to writing the first argument against urban sprawl, MacKaye also authored two books, The New Exploration: A Philosophy of Regional Planning and Expedition Nine: A Return to a Region. A co-founder of The Wilderness Society, he is best known as the originator of the Appalachian Trail (AT), an idea he presented in his 1921 article titled An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning. The Benton MacKaye Trail, some portions of which coincide with the Appalachian Trail, is named after him.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia

In 2005, while Dick was preparing for the Trail Completion Ceremony held on July 16<sup>th</sup> of that year, he learned that his family had a close connection to Benton MacKaye. Dick's paternal grandfather, Ralph Evans, had moved to Shirley, MA, early in the 1900's, where the MacKaye Family lived and where Benton always regarded as home, even when working in other locations. Ida Arnold, Dick's Aunt, had introduced him to Natalie Johnson Fry Hunt. Her family had maintained the MacKaye Cottage when Benton was away, and Benton had spent his later years in their home. Natalie very kindly sent Dick a part of an essay she had written in 1930 about MacKaye, and also included copies of some correspondence. Dick's Aunt Ida had often gone "trekking" with MacKaye in the Shirley area, and one of Dick's prized possessions is a copy of his book, "Expedition Nine" which MacKaye endorsed to Dick's Aunt in 1969 (copy of the front page is included in this article.)

Dick's grandfather, who is the "businessman" mentioned on Page 16 of the paper written by Natalie Johnson Fry Hunt, did not have a favorable opinion of MacKaye. He referred to MacKaye as "the Great Outdoorsman" in a not particularly positive way. <sup>2</sup>

*Many of the documents contained in this edition are scanned copies from papers prepared in the 1930's. All documents can be read and enjoyed by ZOOMING in on the document. You will be viewing this Special Edition using Adobe Reader which has a - sign and a + sign at the top of the document. By clicking on the + sign, you will be able to enlarge the page being viewed and clicking the - sign will reduce the page. I hope you enjoy reading this intriguing first hand glimpse into the life of Benton*



<sup>2</sup> Dick Evans

Benton

**Subject:** Benton  
**From:** @comcast.net  
**Date:** Sat, 19 Mar 2005 16:10:15 +0000  
**To:** @main.nc.us

This letter is from Mr. Doug Fry. He is the son of Natalie Johnson Fry Hunt. She is the author of many of the relics contained in this article and knew Benton MacKaye personally.

Dear Dick-

Thank you for your letter. I am very interested in the BMTA and your opening ceremony. Please include me in future mailings regarding the event.

My mother can provide much fuller recollections of Ben. I was very young when he was still active and vigorous. As you perhaps know, he lived next door to my grandmother in Shirley, where we visited every summer. My grandmother always had a couple of extra people rooming or boarding in Shirley (Years earlier she had run a Tea Room for the public in the Shirley home.) Ben would reside next door during the summer and come over for meals. In the winter he would eat and sleep at the Johnson's (no central heat in his house). Later as his vision failed and he became more frail he moved in permanently. We knew him as "Uncle Ben". My grandmother (who had cared for my grandfather at home during his terminal illness of emphysema) cared for him until he died at her home, as was his wish. He was a man of considerable dignity and reserve. While his vision lasted he was constantly at work on his "Opus" and one heard the pounding of the typewriter. (It would be a great project to search out these unpublished manuscripts which have no doubt been bequeathed to Harvard or somewhere.) He liked his toast burnt. ("A little charcoal never hurt anyone".) He took Brewer's yeast regularly long before the onslaught of alternative medicine. He was the only Socialist in Shirley, though I never once heard him discuss politics. When I applied (unsuccessfully) to Harvard, Ben (who graduated Harvard in 1911 or thereabouts) wrote an unsolicited recommendation -which I unfortunately did not save- but I recall he said something to the effect that I would be "a breath of fresh air in a world of mega-institutions". I was startled by the warmth of his support.

I am sure you are aware there is now a biography published. I understand (though I have not read it in full) that Ben's vision of the trail clashed with that of Avery, who was the hard headed practical politician in conflict with the visionary idealist dreamer. (Ben apparently imagined a string of rural camps for rejuvenation of the spirit linked by the trail). In particular, I think Ben was upset about the congruence of the trail with the Blue Ridge Parkway road, diminishing its wilderness nature. I am impressed that the BMTA has succeeded in blazing a new trail in this day of rampant bureaucracy, and I am curious about the role you may have played. Perhaps we can get together and talk over some strong coffee (another fondness of Ben's) Also I have always hoped to have a shelter or some other memorial to Lucy Johnson incorporated into Ben's legacy- perhaps we can discuss that someday

Thanks. Doug Fry      [@comcast.net](mailto:@comcast.net)



**A Letter From Natalie Johnson Fry  
Hunt To Dick Evans**

March 17, 2005

Dear Richard Evans,

The typed pages are from a paper entitled "MacLages of the Past and Present" which I wrote in the fall of 1935 when I was a freshman at Wheaton College in Massachusetts. These are first hand observations made when I was seventeen.

Such an amazing coincidence that I took this paper out of storage the day you called for the first time in 14 years!

My son Douglas Fry is much interested in your July meeting.

See over for a few more comments.

Sincerely,

Natalie Johnson Fry Hunt

P. S. Benton MacKaye spent the last 10 years of his life in our family home when my mother took good care of him. He died there at 96.

In 1975 I reviewed The New Exploration for a book group. These are my introductory comments:

His appearance craggy, Lincolnian  
 Lived part of the time in Shuley  
 deciding his time between government  
 jobs and "catching it" at what  
 he called "the Empire" (our house &  
 his 2 houses next door).  
 First came to Shuley Center to  
 live in 1888.

Worked for TVA in the 30s  
 In old age his mind  
 remained vigorous. Sent a 2  
 page message <sup>to Appal.</sup> Trail Confer  
 last June. Had a constant stream  
 of visitors, old & new friends. Extensive  
 correspondence until blind. Interest in  
 regional history & local conservation efforts.



Second Letter From Natalie Johnson Fry Hunt To Dick Evans

April 20, 2005

Dear Richard and Margaret,

It had a delightful surprise to receive the beautiful afghan! I did not expect any reward for sending you information about Ben.

But I am happy to have the <sup>handsome</sup> warm cover and I thank you for it.

You are welcome to quote any of my comments, just noting that I was then a 17-year-old college freshman. My name then was Natalie Johnson. The Johnson family provided a home for Ben in his later years. My children regarded him as an elderly uncle.



knowing he inspired my son Douglas. Try to take the AT from Georgia through New Hampshire. He is sorry that he will be unable to attend the July 16<sup>th</sup> meeting.

One time I asked Ben what a regional planner did. He replied "Just sit in an office and think." And thinking is what he was always doing. He had many good ideas!

I hope the July meeting goes well. If you travel to Pennsylvania I would be happy to meet you.


Sincerely,  
Yatake Hunt

P.S. I worry about Lda living alone - she and I are now very old.



14.

But he did not always speak in learned phrases. When I was very small I remember sitting on a sofa beside a very large man who told me delightful stories of how Theseus slew the Minotaur, how Cadmus planted the dragon's teeth, and of Sindbad the Sailor. This man was James MacKay, the philosopher.



In strange contrast to James is his brother Benton. Although as a child I thought him a rather queer-looking man and never formed much of an opinion about his personality, he has since become my favorite MacKaye. In appearance he reminds me of Abraham Lincoln. He is, like Lincoln, so very homely that he is good-looking. He is tall and lanky; his hair is greyish black; his eyebrows are black and bushy; his face is covered with lines and wrinkles, and his nose is prominent. His entire expression is one which would not encourage the friendship of a small child as did Jamie's. He says himself that he likes children but not babies. I believe he does not like children either until they are old enough to be very intelligent. But when he smiles over a cup of black coffee accompanied with burnt toast (his favorite delicacy) and says deep down in his throat, "Ahhhhh, this is great!" he has the most pleasant of faces.

"Ben" has many delightful peculiarities which make him dear to his friends. He is a lover of "powwows". A powwow is almost any kind of a get-together of friends. When he comes home from a long trip to spend a few days in the "MacKaye cottage", he is always anxious to have a powwow with

**This is the essay written by Natalie Johnson Fry Hunt in the Fall of 1935 when she was a Freshman at Wheaton College. What you are reading is a first hand observation by Ms Hunt concerning Benton MacKaye.**



15.

this or that old friend. Such a meeting usually takes place in the evening. The only requirements are two or three people in a talkative frame of mind. The conversation frequently takes a political turn, for Benton, like his brother James, is a firm believer in socialism. Moreover he knows personally a great many men who are either prominent themselves in the political world or are powers behind the scenes. He often discusses one of the numerous "schemes" which he and some friend, or friends, have <sup>been</sup> "working out." Sometimes the powwow is for the sole purpose of re-living old times.

An outgrowth of these powwows is the Community Club in the town which he calls home. Although most Community Club meetings are a hopeless farce at which the Dump Committee reports that the townspeople persist in throwing rubbish outside the bounds of the dump, and everyone complains about the speeding which is bound to take place on the newly-constructed road and does nothing about it, <sup>this</sup> the club is successful in its social phase. Just as its founder intended, it affords an opportunity for the members of our small community to get together and exchange ideas on the well-being of their town. That it has not accomplished all of its ideals is not his fault.

Another outgrowth of his powwows was the "Old Fogies' Club." This lasted for about two meetings and then passed out of existence. Its purpose was social and conversational, but somewhat impractical. Its members included Benton, and three

16.

of his best friends--a millionaire, a former Rhodes scholar, and a business man. Difficulties arose when the topic of discussion proved to be literary criticism and interpretation--specifically, the reading of the criticism of Einstein's theory by Benton's brother. Undoubtedly the whole "scheme" was excellent; but Ben did not realize that it was, like many of his other schemes, impractical, for of the three, only the scholar had the slightest notion of what they were talking about. The other two sociably ate crackers and cheese and tried not to appear bewildered.

But that is one reason why Ben's friends love him-- he is so impractical. Like the dreams of his father, -Steele MacKaye, his plans are ~~is~~ often impossible to put into practice. In his heart of hearts I am sure he wishes the world would follow Rousseau's impractical philosophy and go "back to nature."

Since boyhood he has been interested in nature, geography, and maps. Recently he read aloud a selection from his Geography of the World which he wrote in about his thirteenth year. This included detailed accounts of the territory surrounding his home. The account was divided into sections written on various "expeditions." "Expedition Nine" is the most famous of these. This was written as the young geographer sat on the top of a high hill and observed the village of Shirley Center about two miles away. It is "a good enough place, but overrun by Gossip," he wrote. After including in

17.

detail the points of the compass and other geographical features, he concluded by philosophizing on the beauty of Nature and <sup>the</sup> ~~harm~~ it suffers from man.

This philosophy of the boy is very close to that of the man. His life's work has become regional planning, which involves the guidance of increased population through the proper channels, and the conservation of natural resources and natural scenery by means of careful study and deliberate planning.

In his article The Townless Highway, published in The New Republic, he proposes a plan for the construction of motor roads which, just as railroads, shall be as direct as possible and be intercepted only at definite crossings. This highway shall avoid all towns, thus protecting the lives of the pedestrian within the town and saving time for the motorist. The road shall go through the country where billboards and filling stations shall be excluded by government ownership of the land bordering it. One of the main purposes of such road construction would be the prevention of what the writer calls "motor slums" or "rural wayside development" and <sup>the</sup> stimulation of the growth of distinct communities .

Since this article was written in 1930, a highway (Route 2) meeting almost all the requirements of MacKaye's townless highway has been constructed from Boston to Concord. It avoids towns, it is direct, it goes through miles of uninhabited woodland. Certainly its four lanes make driving much safer than it has been. It remains to be seen whether or not houses will be built along it.



18.

If this road and others like it are entirely successful then Ben will have lost one of his pet topics of discussion. Unlike Jamie, Ben becomes very passionate when one of his favorite theories is questioned and he holds forth violently. I like nothing better than to listen to him express <sup>his</sup> sound, logical arguments to an audience who agree with him but have merely tried to get him roused. His hatred of the automobile for ruining the world of nature and ~~even~~ penetrating to his own country town is very reminiscent of the disgust of the small boy who sat atop Hunting Hill and wrote "Expedition Nine."

Ben's love of expeditions, of long tramps into the country, has never left him. One of his greatest interests today is the conservation of nature and the encouragement of public interest in nature at its purest and best, unharmed by man. As "Father of the Appalachian Trail" which in its proposed form will extend from Mount Katahdin in Maine to the Smokies of Tennessee, he has aided in the organization of Appalachian Trail Clubs throughout eastern United States. The purpose of the Appalachian Trail, a footpath along the crests of mountains, is expressed in a pamphlet entitled The Appalachian Trail, a Guide to the Study of Nature. He hopes that the mountain hiker will come to know nature at first hand, and will be able to "become acquainted" with the scenery and learn to understand and interpret it as well as to enjoy it. The Appalachian Trail was one of the first fruits of Benton MacKaye's work as a regional planner.

1. B. MacKaye, The Appalachian Trail, p.1

## 19.

His book The New Exploration dedicated to "Shirley Center an Indigenous Community," is a study of regional planning. Writing as if he were atop Mount Monadnock surveying New England, he describes the "three invasions" of the region, first the invasion of the great ice sheet, then the invasion of population and finally the "metropolitan invasion" of the "Socony station, - ----chain stores, ---hot-dog stand, --and Main Street generally". "The contact of the indigenous with the metropolitan" is the chief problem of the regional planner.<sup>1</sup>

At present Benton MacKaye is engaged as regional planner for the Tennessee Valley Authority, on a government project which is carrying out the principles of intelligent regional planning for a district which might otherwise grow up slowly and represent an infinite waste of potential wealth. Like his grandfather Colonel MacKaye, he is helping to make his-  
tory.

Each of the MacKaye's, Percy, James, and Benton, is a product of the combined forces of environment and heredity. In them can be traced easily the characteristic traits of their ancestors. But although the influence of father upon son has been in each case considerable, nevertheless the son has always had a sufficiently strong personality to become a distinct individual and has taken his place in the world through his own merit.

1. B. MacKaye, The New Exploration, pp. 48-50