

**Great Smoky Mountains National Park**  
**“Individuals in History”**  
**Potential Social Studies Fair Topics**

1. **George Masa:** George Masa, an immigrant from Japan who excelled in photography work, moved to Asheville, NC in 1915. His selfless work on behalf of the Smokies played a major role in the campaign to establish Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Starting in the 1920's, Masa became acquainted with Horace Kephart of Bryson City who wrote dozens of articles for newspapers and magazines promoting the natural virtues of the Smokies and the benefits of preserving this magnificent area as a national park. Stunning photographs by Masa accompanied many of these articles, which aided tremendously in convincing the public of the need to raise money and purchase the lands for a national park.

Not only did Masa's photographs play a large role in the creation of the Park, but Masa over a 15-year period, became an expert on the trails and names in the Great Smokies. In 1931 he served on the 3-person nomenclature committee for the NC side of the Park, which had the responsibility for accurately naming the peaks, streams, and other features, as well as resolving duplicate names. Masa was the first person to systematically measure many of the trails in the Park and to chart the terrain of the Smokies. He and his photographs played a major role in getting the Appalachian Trail (AT) routed through the Smokies, rather than Mt. Mitchell and the Black Mountains. Masa, working with Kephart, Paul Fink, and a couple others, played a major role in selecting the trail route through NC and TN, all the way to Georgia. Masa served on the AT Board of Managers for the unexpired term of Horace Kephart when Kephart was killed in an automobile accident in 1931.

**Information Sources:** A 28-page biography of George Masa under the title “George Masa, The Best Mountaineer” by William A. Hart, Jr. and published in 1997 in MAY WE ALL REMEMBER WELL, edited by Robert S. Brunk. In 2002, a 92-minute video, “The Mystery of George Masa”, was produced by Paul Bonesteel. This video/dvd can be purchased in GSMNP visitor centers. In September 2009, Ken Burns will be releasing a PBS documentary on our national parks, and much of the one-hour segment on the Great Smokies will honor the work of Horace Kephart and George Masa.

2. **Horace Kephart:** Horace Kephart came to the Smokies in 1904 and lived among the settlers of Hazel Creek in the Smokies for several years before moving to Bryson City, NC. He wrote Our Southern Highlanders, first published in 1913, about people who lived in the Smokies, based on first-hand observations. This book, revised several times by the author, has remained in print, as has other publications by Kephart. Prior to 1923, Kephart was exchanging letters with Paul Fink of Jonesborough, TN, concerning the desire of creating a national park in the Great Smokies. When the movement got underway in earnest in 1923, Kephart became a major voice through his many writings advocating for the Park.

**Information Sources:** A number of books and articles detailing Horace Kephart and his work on behalf of the Smokies are available, including Strangers in High Places by Michael Frome, and The Great Smokies, From Natural Habitat to National Park by Daniel S. Pierce.

3. **Colonel David Chapman:** Beginning in 1924 and continuing through the 1930s, Colonel David Chapman played a leading role in the tough battle to bring the Park idea to fruition, especially on the Tennessee side of the park. Chapman, president of a Knoxville drug company, became totally committed to the Park movement and dealt successfully with multiple obstacles such as opposition

from Park opponents, lack of funding for land purchase, and controversial condemnation actions. As chairman of the Great Smoky Mountains Conservation Association, he was the Tennessee leader for the Park campaign and developed close relationships with parties in both TN and NC working toward creation of the national park. Chapman deserves much credit for shaping the GSMNP as we know it today.

**Information Sources:** Many books have detailed the extraordinary work of David Chapman, including the ones mentioned above for Horace Kephart. Also, the Park library includes much information on Chapman, as well as others involved in the Park movement.

4. **Dr. Chase Ambler:** Dr. Ambler of Asheville, NC spearheaded the first serious movement to establish a national park in the Southern Appalachians, though not particularly in the Great Smokies. Through his efforts, a mass public meeting was held in Asheville in November 1899 to discuss the national park idea, leading to the formation of the Appalachian National Park Association. Despite its initial enthusiasm, the movement quickly ran out of steam and in 1901 the group changed its name to the Appalachian Forest Reserve Association, reflecting the infiltration of persons favoring utilitarian conservation rather than preservation. This movement was extremely important, however, in that it brought together persons such as newspaper editors who would a couple decades later become involved and committed to the Great Smokies national park movement of the 1920's and 1930's. Dr Ambler and his group was a major force that led to the passage of the Weeks Act of 1911, which authorized national forests to be purchased and created in the Eastern United States. The first national forest land purchase in the East occurred in 1912, and became a part of the Pisgah National Forest, one of the 3 national forests adjoining Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Almost all national forest lands in the eastern US have been purchased and assembled under the Weeks Act, including the 3 adjoining the Park (Pisgah, Nantahala, and Cherokee).

**Information Sources:** The books mentioned above, as well as other sources have information about Dr. Ambler. Information can also be obtained at the Park library.

5. **Arno Cammerer:** Arno Cammerer, the Associate Director of the National Park Service under the first two directors, Steven Mather and Horace Albright and who would himself succeed Albright as Director, played a pivotal role in the establishment of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. He was the person behind the scene who provided guidance and direction to Chapman and others of the Park movement in matters such as boundary establishment, resolution of disputes, etc. Cammerer made many visits to the Smokies and became intimately familiar with the area. In Washington, DC, he moved among the movers and shakers, and had the confidence and trust of John D. Rockefeller. Cammerer, more than any other individual, was responsible for convincing Rockefeller to make a critical \$5.0 million donation to the movement in early 1928 when funding for land purchases looked so bleak.
6. **Jim Thompson:** Jim Thompson, a Knoxville photographer, played a major role in promoting creation of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, particularly on the Tennessee side of the Park. Photographs taken by Thompson made a convincing argument for choosing the Smokies in the early 1920's as a suitable area for a new national park by the Southern Appalachian National Park Committee, a committee established by the Secretary of the Interior and National Park Service to investigate various sites proposed for a national park in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. Thompson's photographs proved invaluable in gaining public support for the campaign for a national park in the Smokies, especially in the mid to late 1920's when funding sources were being

sought. In the early 1930's, Thompson served on the Tennessee nomenclature committee identifying place names and eliminating duplicate names.

7. **Paul Fink:** Paul Fink of Jonesborough, TN was an early advocate for a national park in the Great Smokies, as evidenced by letters he exchanged with Horace Kephart in 1919 and the early 1920's. A book written by Paul Fink and published in 1975 details many backpacking and camping trips he made into the Smokies and nearby mountain ranges, beginning in 1914 and continuing through the 1930's. Fink and his lifelong companion Walter Diehl were pioneers in backpacking in the rugged mountains of East Tennessee and Western North Carolina. Fink worked closely with Chapman, Kephart, and others in promoting the Great Smokies as a national park in the early 1920's and continuing throughout the park movement. Working with George Masa and others, he was largely responsible for routing the Appalachian Trail through the Great Smokies and nearby mountain ranges. The initial proposal was to route the trail through Mt. Mitchell and the Black Mountains, staying entirely out of TN. Fink was an active leader in the Appalachian Trail Conference, serving on its Board from 1925 to 1949.
8. **Mark Squires:** Like Chapman in Tennessee, Mark Squires, a State Senator from Lenoir, NC, was instrumental in leading and keeping the National Park campaign on the NC side on track. He remained strongly committed, and was able to secure state funding despite strong opposition from logging interests, especially by Champion Paper Company, and lukewarm interest by the governor in the late 1920's.
9. **Ross Eakin:** The Park's first superintendent, Eakin arrived in the Smokies in early 1931 while much of the land acquisition was still in progress. Eakin faced a task without precedent in dealing with locals who were accustomed to using the park lands for their own purposes, such as hunting and collecting plants. Wisely, Eakin hired many locals familiar with the people and the area as rangers. Eakin also faced the task of building the park's facilities and trails, and had to quickly put into place work plans for the 16 Civilian Conservation Corps camps which operated from 1933 to 1942, building much of the Park's infrastructure that remain in use today. It would be difficult to overstate the contribution of Eakin in developing the Park we know it today.
10. **Ann Davis:** Ann Davis is credited for suggesting a National Park in the Smokies when she and her husband returned from a trip visiting several Western national parks in 1923. This started discussion of the idea with leaders in the area, especially around Knoxville. Her husband, Willis Davis, began talking about the Park idea with anyone who would listen. This early period, 1923-1925, was a particularly crucial time in recruiting advocates who would push this idealist goal. Ann Davis herself entered politics and in 1924 was elected the first female from Knox County to serve in the Tennessee State House of Representatives.
11. **Harvey Broome:** Harvey Broome was a Knoxville attorney and clerk for the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals whose voice, along with some influential friends, shaped the development of GSMNP during the 1930's. In 1931, the National Park Service, with strong support from park advocates and development interests, conceived a plan to build a skyline drive from Clingmans Dome westerly across the crest of the Smokies. Broome was the sole individual who voiced opposition to that plan. By 1933, the skyline drive idea seemed inevitable, with strong support coming from all parties, including organizations such as the National Parks Association and Smoky Mountains Hiking Club. Only Broome stood in opposition. In 1934, Broome met and formed an important alliance with Benton MacKaye, the founder of the Appalachian Trail who had recently moved to Knoxville to work with the TVA. That alliance led to other national leaders, including Bob Marshall, Aldo

Leopold, and Robert Sterling Yard, joining the fight against the road. The alliance of these individuals, along with several others, led to the creation of The Wilderness Society (TWS), an organization devoted to protecting roadless areas of the nation. As one of the co-founders of TWS, Broome and others of TWS convinced the Secretary of the Interior not only to oppose the Smokies road, but also to limit road incursions into other Park wilderness areas. In 1964, after many years of work by TWS, Congress established The National Wilderness Preservation System that now preserves about 100 million acres of Federal lands. In addition to the road issue, Broome was an important opponent of a lake in Cades Cove the Park Service and park advocates had proposed. In 1966, as President of The Wilderness Society, Broome led the successful fight against another destructive road proposal, a transmountain highway linking Bryson City, NC and Townsend, TN. Construction of this road was tied to an agreement between NC, Swain County, TVA, and the NPS.

**Information Sources:** Several books on the Smokies contain information on Harvey Broome, including Daniel Pierce's book, The Great Smokies, From Natural Habitat to National Park. Broome himself wrote a book on his personal journeys into the Great Smokies, Out Under the Sky of the Great Smokies, published by his widow in 1975.

**12. Arthur Stupka:** Arthur Stupka arrived in the Smokies in 1935 as the first national park naturalist in the East. For the first three years, Stupka inventoried, collected, and made meticulous notes on the thousands of plant and animal species, insects, etc. found in the Smokies. He later developed nature trails, interpretive programs, and led many walks for visitors. He wrote the first nature field guide for the park, Trees, Shrubs, and Woody Vines of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The work of Stupka formed the basis for the current effort at Twin Creeks for inventory all living species in the Smokies. In 1938, the NPS formed a 3-person team consisting of Arthur Stupka, H. C. Wilburn, and C. S. Grossman, to study and report on the best way to preserve the culture of the mountain people. The report by this group led the NPS to preserve the historic structures now existing in the Park.

**13. FDR's CCC and the Smokies:** From 1933 to 1942, thousands of young men descended on the Smokies as enrollees in the FDR's Civilian Conservation Corps. The Park was largely developed by these men who eagerly sought employment during the Great Depression. In this exciting period of history, the CCCs built the Park headquarters, ranger stations, campgrounds, picnic areas, roads, and hundreds of miles of trails. They also restored historic properties such as Mingus Mill and the Cades Cove Mill. The CCCs literally built the Park.

#### **14. Park Service Director Stephen Mather**

1923: National voices his support for creation of a national park in the East. Stephen Mather was the first director of the National Park Service (NPS) beginning in 1916 when it was created by Congress. His leadership shaped the NPS with policies that are still in effect today. The high level of integrity and respect he exemplified in administering the NPS remains in effect today. He set the stage for the many high quality National Park System areas that have been added over the years, including Great Smoky Mountains National Park which he vigorously supported. His 1923 recommendation for a national park in the East resulted in creation a commission that examined many sites in the Southern Appalachians for their suitability and qualification for national park status, including the Great Smoky Mountains. Without his support and encouragement, it is doubtful the movement for a national park in the Smokies would have gotten very far off ground.

**Sources of Information:** Books on the history of Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the National Park Service.

### **15. Austin Peay, Governor of TN**

1926: Signs a contract purchasing 76,507 acres owned by the Little River Logging Company. This will be the first land purchased for inclusion in the park area. Austin Peay, originally from Hopkinsville, Kentucky, was governor from 1923 to 1927. As such, he did more to reform state government than any other governor in Tennessee history.

### **16. John D. Rockefeller Jr.**

1927: Pledges \$5 million for land acquisition from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund. He was a major philanthropist and a pivotal member of the prominent Rockefeller family. He was the sole son and scion of the billionaire Standard Oil industrialist, John D. Rockefeller and the father of the five famous Rockefeller brothers.

### **17. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt**

1933: As a part of his New Deal, creates the Civilian Conservation Corps, members of which appear in the park shortly after. Over the next several years the men of the CCC will build much of the basic infrastructure of the park such as roads, trails and buildings. 1940: The new CCC-constructed Headquarters building is occupied. 1943: 37 CPS (Conscientious Objectors) workers have moved into NP-2 at Sugarlands.

Sept 2, 1940: Thousands of people gather at Newfound Gap to hear the FDR dedicate the park that he had been quite influential in building. Standing on the recently finished Rockefeller memorial, with one foot in each state, FDR speaks of the importance of preservation, but also of the growing conflict in Europe.

### **18. Walker Sisters**

**1946:** "Time Stood Still in the Smokies" an article about the very popular Walker Sisters of Little Greenbrier, is published in the Saturday Evening Post. The Walker Sisters were five unmarried women who remained in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park after their neighbors move away when the park was created.

### **19. President Eisenhower**

**1956:** President Eisenhower approves a sweeping NPS development program titled Mission 66, focused primarily on restoring slowly deteriorating National Parks all over the U.S. Bringing to the Presidency his prestige as commanding general of the victorious forces in Europe during World War II, Dwight D. Eisenhower obtained a truce in Korea and worked incessantly during his two terms to ease the tensions of the Cold War.

### **20. Howard Zahniser**

**1956:** Howard Zahniser, then executive secretary of The Wilderness Society, drafts (with the help of early park advocate Harvey Broome) the Wilderness Act. Wilderness Movement in the Smokies, The Wilderness Society

**1964:** Congress passes the Wilderness Act, providing for enhanced protection of wild lands, including sections of the national parks. Wilderness Act Info

**1966:** "Save our Smokies" hike helps to defeat a proposed second trans-mountain road connecting Bryson City with Townsend. Wilderness Movement in the Smokies

### **21. Elizabeth (Cushman) Titus Putnam, founder of Student Conservation Association**

1965: The first Student Conservation Association (SCA) group does volunteer work in the park. The group of 16 high school students from ten states, marks the beginning of a longstanding relationship

with SCA that continues to provide up to 50 young adults each year to do jobs in every division in every park division. [www.thesca.org](http://www.thesca.org)

**22. Joseph Sargent Hall, (1906-1992)**, was a great collector of Appalachian cultural materials and a student of the region. He had a life-long passion for documenting mountain language and lore.

**23. Wiley Oakley**, He was a man whose name became an icon in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Many described him as a simple, hard-working, and good-natured individual who was quick to help anyone who found themselves in need and at his doorway. It was this simple man, however, whose intimate knowledge of the forbidding and dangerously isolated region of the Smokies would open up what many Americans thought was a place better left to the few hardy natives who called it home. His efforts as a guide in the region would set new standards for those who followed in his footsteps and there were many, but, as long as he lived, there was none better than he and such reputations don't come easy. (Taken from: <http://www.tennesseehistory.com/class/wileyoakley.htm>)

**24. Thomas Lanier Clingman**, Thomas Lanier Clingman (July 27, 1812 – November 3, 1897), known as the "Prince of Politicians," was a Democratic member of the United States House of Representatives from 1843 to 1845 and from 1847 to 1858, and U.S. senator from the state of North Carolina between 1858 and 1861. During the Civil War he refused to resign his Senate seat and was one of ten senators expelled from the Senate in absentia. He then served as a general in the Confederate States Army.

**25. Nancy Ward**, (c. 1738–1822 or 1824) was a ghighua, or "beloved woman" of the Cherokee nation, which meant that she was allowed to sit in councils and to make decisions, along with the other Beloved Women, on pardons. She believed in peaceful coexistence with white people.

**26. Civil War:** Park families divided

**27. Sequoyah**, The influence of the work of Sequoyah on the Cherokee Nation's efforts to develop a culture more in keeping with European standards was significant. His syllabary helped the Cherokee overcome the limitations of a strictly oral culture and establish a constitutional basis for their government. Without Sequoyah's work the Cherokee's newspaper would have been impossible, and the efforts of missionaries to convert them to Christianity would have lagged. (Taken from: <http://www.cherokee-nc.com>).

**28. John Ross**, When the Cherokee nation, numbering some 17,000 people, marched west in 1838, they were led by Principal Chief John Ross. Ross had lost his long political battle to overturn the Treaty of New Echota, but the dedicated leader would continue to serve his grateful nation up to the hour of his death in 1866. (Taken from: <http://www.cherokee-nc.com>).

**29. Junaluska**, the Cherokee who saved Andrew Jackson's life and made him a national hero, lived to regret it. Born in the North Carolina mountains around 1776, he made his name and his fame among his own people in the War of 1812 when the mighty tribe of Creek Indians allied themselves with the British against the United States. At the start of the Creek War, Junaluska recruited some 800 Cherokee warriors to go to the aid of Andrew Jackson in northern Alabama. Joined by reinforcements from Tennessee, including more Cherokee, the Cherokee spent the early months of 1814 performing duties in the rear, while Jackson and his Tennessee militia moved like a scythe through the Creek towns. However, that March word came that the Creek Indians were massed behind fortifications at Horseshoe Bend. Jackson, with an army of 2,000 men, including 500 Cherokee led by Junaluska, set out for the Bend, 70 miles away. There, the Tallapoosa River made a bend that enclosed 100 acres in a narrow

peninsula opening to the north. On the lower side was an island in the river. Across the neck of the peninsula the Creek had built a strong breastwork of logs and hidden dozens of canoes for use if retreat became necessary. (Taken from: <http://www.cherokee-nc.com>).

**30. Tsali,** This “average” man found himself in circumstances he might never have imagined, and his reaction to historical forces much greater than himself made him into a hero and martyr for the Cherokee who remained in the mountains of Western North Carolina. Tsali’s sacrifice, his death at the hands of a firing squad he chose for himself, proved to be a turning point in the history of the principal people. (Taken from: <http://www.cherokee-nc.com/index.php?page=60>)

**31. Arnold Guyot,** (September 28, 1807 – February 8, 1884), Swiss-American geologist and geographer who explored the mountains during the 1800s.

**32. Ella Costner,** Poet Laureate of the Smokies (Cosby area)

**33. Carlos Campbell,** Carlos Campbell, who wrote Birth of A National Park. He was a devoted outdoorsman and a devout supporter for the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

**34. Robert Collins,** Mount Collins is named after Robert Collins, an influential Oconaluftee resident who guided Arnold Guyot across the crest of the Smokies in the late 1850s.

**35. Will Thomas,** Will Thomas figures prominently in Cherokee history as one of the most important forces in the establishment of a Cherokee homeland on the Qualla Boundary. As the first and only white man to serve as a Cherokee chief, he was uniquely qualified to represent the Eastern Band at a time when Indians were forbidden to own land. Later, as a state senator, Thomas lobbied in Raleigh for Cherokee interests. He is described as “the best friend the Cherokees ever had” on a monument dedicated to him near the Qualla Boundary. (Taken from: <http://www.cherokee-nc.com>).

**36. Charles A. Webb:** Charles Webb was editor and co-publisher of the Asheville Citizen-Times (the leading newspaper for Western North Carolina) during the 1920’s and 1930’s. He became an important ally in rallying support for the Park movement in NC, beginning in mid-1925 when the movement had almost stalled because of lingering sentiments of people wanting a park in the Linville-Grandfather Mountain area instead of the Smokies and by opposition from large timber-holding companies. Mr. Webb, through an editorial published July 27, 1925, immediately aroused public support that brought enthusiasm among Park supporters up to the level of those in Knoxville. Webb remained a leader throughout the park movement, taking on the timber companies who published ads against making the Smokies a national park. He, along with other newspaper editors, such as Josephus Daniels of the Raleigh (NC) News and Observer, deserve a lot of credit for their continued editorials supporting the Park movement.

**Sources of Information:** Books on the history of the Great Smokies including The Great Smokies, From Natural Habitat to National Park, by Daniel S. Pierce. Archives in the Park library.

**37. Ben Morton:** Ben Morton was mayor of Knoxville in the mid-1920’s and became an important advocate for creation of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. He was particularly effective during 1925-1926 when seeking financial and political support from business leaders in Knoxville. As former mayor in 1927, he was appointed by the governor to serve on the Tennessee Great Smoky Mountains Park Commission which Col. David Chapman chaired. In this role he was intimately involved in resolving many land acquisitions, including the 1931 negotiated land settlement with Champion in

Washington. The 3.0 million settlement with Champion, which owned almost 100,000 acres in the heart of the Smokies, finally assured that Great Smoky Mountains National Park would become a reality.

**Sources of Information:** Daniel Pierce's book, The Great Smokies, From Natural Habitat to National Park, and other informational sources at the Park library.

**38. Dorie Woodruff Cope:** Dorie Cope was born in 1899 near Cherokee, North Carolina. She grew up on an isolated mountain farm, where her family made everything they needed, from food and clothing to tools and toys. She eventually married a young man who had come to the mountains to work for the lumber companies. She tells of the challenges of living in the lumber camps and raising her family. Although she and her family had to leave the mountains with the creation of the national park, she always carried with her a deep and powerful love of the Smokies.

**Source of Information:** Dorie, Woman of the Mountains, by Florence Cope Bush.

**39. Lydia Whaley:** "Aunt" Lydia, as she was called, lived in the mountains and raised her family on her own after her husband was killed in the Civil War. She grew her own crops, sewed coats by hand to make money to pay her land taxes, and was known in the area as a fine weaver, weaving beautiful cloth. She not only wove, but raised and sheared her own sheep, and washed, carded, and spun the wool. She also made baskets and blacksmithed. Just like many other mountain women, Aunt Lydia was a "yarb" or herb doctor—someone who used herbs and plants for medicine. Most mountain folk used old remedies passed down through the families and learned from the Cherokee, and since doctors were scarce or very far away, local women had to serve as the doctors and midwives. Aunt Lydia taught spinning and weaving at Pi Beta Phi until her death at age 86.

**Source of Information:** All We Knew Was to Farm, by Melissa Walker.

**40. Becky Cable:** Rebecca Cable was born in Carter County, Tennessee in 1844. She and her family moved to Cades Cove in 1868 and her father built and operated Cable Mill, which ground corn and flour, powered a sawmill, and is still standing today. "Aunt" Becky as she was known, never married and was respected as a hardworking, honest woman of strong faith. She did her own field work and herded her own cattle, something not too common among mountain women, unless they were widowed or unmarried. It was said she could outwork any man around. She spun thread, wove cloth, operated a store out of her house, and rented the upstairs rooms to boarders. She also took in her brother's children and raised them when he was committed to a state hospital and his wife died of tuberculosis. She lived in her home in Cades Cove until she died in 1940, at the age of 96. She died the same year the new national park was dedicated.

**Source of Information:** The Cades Cove Story, by Randolph Shields, and other sources in the park library.

**41. Phyllis Higginbotham:** Phyllis Higginbotham was a nurse at the Pi Beta Phi Health Clinic. She arrived in 1920 and was the first registered nurse in Sevier County. She saw many students and families at the school's clinic, and also made numerous house calls--some of which were miles away in remote locations.

**42. Marjorie Chalmers:** Marjorie Chalmers was a nurse at the Pi Beta Phi Health Clinic during the depression years. She, along with nurse Phyllis Higginbotham, saw numerous students and their families at the clinic and made house calls, often in the middle of the night. She taught many of the local mountain women to become midwives, since doctors were not always available to deliver babies.

Many mountain women actually preferred a midwife or “grannywoman” as they were called, over a doctor. Marjorie Chalmers wrote a book entitled Better I Stay, which is about her experiences as a nurse in Sevier County.

**43. Lizzie Reagan:** “Aunt” Lizzie Reagan was a housekeeper at the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School. She was also a weaver and a spinner and taught both at the school. Aunt Lizzie used native plants and vegetables to die her yarn and cloth, and in turn, taught students at the school about natural dyeing. Her weaving was so admired that she was able to sell a lot of her handwoven coverlets and other items to help her earn a living.