

Introduction

Teller Tales: stories written for telling aloud. *Imagine two voices as you read these stories.*

Better yet, read them aloud with two voices—that's how they were meant to be done. Better yet, make performances of them. That was their first, best use. You can contact me for arrangements through Ohio University Press.

These two stories are local to East Tennessee/Western North Carolina and not particularly well known, but they are tremendously important pieces of history in the development of this country.

They are as accurate as I can make them in the time it takes to tell a story. History, of course, takes longer—weeks, months, years—so there will be folks who say I'm not telling enough. Worse for the historians, I am a playwright and my inclination is to the dramatic. And in the telling of history stories, if I intend to ask an audience to sit for an hour and a half listening to something, I do my best to make that story compelling, which means I skip some details. Any writer does this; I'm not naming anything new, and it is the traditional hazard of writing history. Any selection of facts I make in the

telling of a story tilts the story. So, resources with notes are listed for those who want to know more. This was a formative time; we live with the repercussions yet, and I do recommend learning more.

These stories were written for the Orchard at Altapass, which is an apple orchard on the Blue Ridge Parkway, three miles north of the Spruce Pine, North Carolina, entrance to the Parkway. These particular stories have real grounding at the Orchard—the old Yellow Mountain Trail runs through the Orchard. You will find the Yellow Mountain Trail mentioned in both of them.

The orchard itself was put in by the Clinchfield Railroad when the Clinchfield laid their tracks through Altapass at the turn of the twentieth century. Late in the twentieth century, a set of my favorite cousins (one of them was part of the team at NASA that put the first man on the moon; you'll find reference to that in "What Sweet Lips Can Do") took over the old orchard, which was falling to ruin, and set out to resurrect it. Among the things they have done, along with learning a lot about growing apples, is research local history and stories. The Orchard at Altapass is an extraordinary place for that old Yellow Mountain Trail. My cousins commissioned me, the scribbler of the family, to figure a way to begin to tell the stories of that place. "What Sweet Lips Can Do" and "Men of Their Time" are the first two of these stories. I wrote "Sweet Lips" first, and got interested in the Cherokee war chief, Dragging Canoe, while doing it. Dragging Canoe's ongoing war is background to the "Sweet Lips" story; "Men of Their Time" features Dragging Canoe as a major player, and the events of "Sweet Lips" as a sidebar. That's why these two are something of a set.

The stories were written to be performed on a postage stamp of a stage in the apple house of the Orchard at Altapass. This determined their format. They were written for essentially no set (no room for a set) and minimal props (mostly hats), and two people each. But that does not speak of their larger import. They are big stories.