Local Legend:
A Look at the Life of Joseph Johns, a Black Collier

A Honors Thesis in partial fulfillment for the requirements for Bachelor of Arts Degree in Anthropology in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Stuart Hanford (Anthropology)

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Muhlenberg College

Approved by:

____________________
Dr. Janine Chi, Associate Professor of Sociology
Department Chair, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

____________________
Dr. Ben Carter, Assistant Professor of Anthropology

____________________
Dr. Casey Miller, Assistant Professor of Anthropology

____________________
Dr. Maura Finkelstein, Assistant Professor of Anthropology

____________________
Dr. Crystal Adams, Assistant Professor of Sociology

____________________
Dr. Sahar Sadeghi, Assistant Professor of Sociology
ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the story of Joseph Johns, as it appears in local publications. He was an African-American formerly enslaved collier who lived in northern Lebanon County, Pennsylvania from the mid-19th century until 1906. Johns’ life has been well reported on relative both to many formerly enslaved people and nearly all colliers, but both clear differences in his story over time as well as details that contradict what little information there is about other colliers stand out as unusual. Twelve local newspaper articles and a book published about Johns between 1906 and the present were collected. The documents were scanned with optical character recognition (OCR) and word frequencies were analyzed to quantitatively demonstrate thematic change over time. Further, Johns’ life was also compared to records available for other colliers to highlight both commonalities and significant differences. Ultimately, the two analyses support the conclusion that Johns’ life probably differed from collier norms substantially, making him a unique and interesting example of a collier. Importantly, the unique aspects of Johns’ story serve both to highlight the possibility of diversity in collier lifestyles and to provide new information that is hopefully broadly applicable to other colliers.
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Chapter One: Introduction

After a short hike from the Bashore Scout Reservation in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania, one may come across a peculiar looking reconstructed hut next to a stone plaque commemorating a man who once lived there (see Figures 1 and 2). Joseph Johns, the man who lived there from around the 1850s until his death in 1906, is remarkably important to the Scouts at Bashore and to those interested in the history of the county. Records of Johns tell the story of his life, but an incomplete one. A formerly enslaved collier, Johns was not an influential person, but the story of his life has surprising relevance to archaeologists who study charcoal and iron production.

This project examined written records of Johns’ life in an effort to determine what they could elucidate about the lives of colliers. The relative wealth of information about Johns, coupled with his unique story, made him an attractive individual for this type of examination. Local publications about Johns were collected and analyzed with both a quantitative and qualitative eye to determine patterns in the story and identify important similarities and differences between Johns’ story and information about other colliers.

These dual analyses were sufficient to demonstrate the uniqueness of Johns compared to other colliers. The evidence provided by these sources shows that Johns very likely spent less time working as a collier than others, and had a number of other pastimes and side jobs that are often not mentioned in discussions of colliers. For example, Johns is said to have spent much time at church and at friends’ homes, helping on farms, and lived in a single hut—all of which contradict conventional knowledge about colliers and how they operated. Rather than conclude that Johns was a completely unique or unusual collier, we can take this as positive evidence that the lifestyles of colliers may have operated on a spectrum of involvedness, which contradicts
previous assessments that all colliers worked long, arduous hours for eight consecutive months a year (Walker 1966, 245).

Other parts of Johns’ story don’t explicitly align with accounts of other colliers, but they are also not contradictory. Instead, people reporting on Johns identify details that writing about other colliers doesn’t seem to address, like food acquisition and botanical knowledge. Although Johns is taken to be unique, he need not be exclusively unique, and there is a realistic probability that other colliers shared in these activities. For example, there are some mentions about Johns hunting and gathering, but this is not mentioned when reading about other colliers. It seems reasonable to conclude that other colliers may have hunted and gathered in similar ways.

Although this one individual is not enough to completely change how we think about colliers’ lives, examining Joseph Johns may be a step in that direction. The nuance that he adds was not previously there, and this is enough to make his story a significant case worth consideration.

As a final note, some details of Johns’ story may best be considered with some reasonable doubt because of the inconsistencies in Johns’ story. In fact, past 1992, it may even be fair to say that the story is more about the Scouts at Bashore than Johns himself. Should this mean we discard all information? I don’t think so, but we should be cautious not to take any facts presented about Johns at face value—he was, after all, a man who lived alone on a mountain for five decades or more. It is reasonable to assume that his contemporaries didn’t know everything about him, let alone journalists writing up to a century after his death. None of the authors of the sources used spoke to Johns himself, and some may have been compounding upon previously reported misrepresentations or inaccuracies. However, while some skepticism is advised, we shouldn’t be too pessimistic; the story of Johns’ life is probably more consistent than not, and
still a valuable source of information about colliers. The importance of Johns’ story partially stems from its uniqueness; although both the details of Johns’ story and the fact that it is primarily handed down by the Scouts at Bashore differ significantly from collier norms, these factors both contribute to a more diverse and variable understanding of what it means to be a collier.

*Figure 1. The current reconstruction of Joseph Johns’ hut at the Bashore Scout Reservation. This is not the first reconstruction.*
Figure 2. The plaque next to the reconstruction of Johns’ hut at Bashore.
Chapter Two: Background

Charcoal and Colliers

Since Joseph Johns was a collier, an explanation of what he did and why can help us understand both the broader context of his life and what his daily life entailed. In the 19th century, charcoal production was a major industry in the United States. The reason charcoal was such an important industry is because for more than a century blast furnaces produced iron from ore, flux, and charcoal, fuelling industrial progress. The sheer quantity of charcoal needed to maintain a furnace—about four acres of woodland converted to charcoal per ton of iron produced—necessitated that colliers make the charcoal for much of any given year. Some were directly employed by furnaces, while others sold their charcoal to furnaces independently (Straka and Ramer 2010, 59-60). These people are known as colliers, and the nature of this work could be solitary, time-consuming, and not especially highly regarded.

Charcoal was made by smoldering wood in large, covered piles, reducing the wood to little but carbon. In order to make charcoal, colliers worked on extremely flat areas about 10-12 meters across, called charcoal hearths or pits. Colliers stacked slightly angled cuts of wood around a central wooden chimney until it created a rough dome shape—most commonly accomplished in three layers (see Figure 3). The wood was then covered with leaves, and that layer was covered in dirt to prevent air from reaching the wood, although a chimney was left open. When the hearth was ready, hot coals would be dropped down the chimney, which would then be covered, starting the burn (Straka and Ramer 2010, 59-61). After the first few days of a burn, a collier could begin another, and could simultaneously maintain up to eight hearths. As a result, colliers would utilize many individual hearths over an area. Though the distance between hearths was not constant, one study revealed that the average distance between hearths on the
Blue Mountain near the Lehigh Gap was about 119 meters (Conner 2018, 35). Colliers would often build and live in huts near active hearths because hearths were susceptible to going up in flames if not tended regularly. Though it didn’t necessarily require constant activity to keep a hearth burning properly, it did require constant attention. According to one scholar, a “collier had no work-day or work-week. He was on constant duty, eating and sleeping when the condition of the work permitted him to do so” (Walker 1966, 245). The fact that colliers employed by a furnace were charged for any loss of product due to fire further incentivized them to stay nearby (Straka and Ramer 2010, 59-60; Walker 1966, 247).

Figure 3. A charcoal hearth before being covered in dirt. The three layers of stacked wood are visible (Kemper 1941, 2).
Figure 4. Lafayette Houck, a collier from Hopewell Furnace. Hopewell Furnace is around 50 miles southeast of Green Point, Pennsylvania, where Joseph Johns lived (Kemper 1941, 1).

A collier’s hut was typically a small, conical structure made of a few wooden uprights and covered in mud and leaves for insulation. Most were about eight feet in diameter at the base and ten feet high, with a wooden door on one side (see Figure 4). They were typically sparsely furnished with not much more than a wooden or straw cot and a small hearth. As will be discussed later, they were temporary residences, and because of the nature of their work, colliers likely wouldn’t have spent much time in their huts (Kemper 1941, 8; Walker 1966, 242). Since the nature of a colliers work required them to live isolated in mountains, they could be perceived
as solitary figures, or even portrayed as a sort of “boogeyman” to scare children (Hower 1992, 10A).

The high demand for charcoal meant that colliers could spend as many as eight months per year on the mountain making charcoal. They likely would have worked year round, but colliers spent only around eight months making charcoal is because winter was not conducive to the process. It was often too wet and windy to get an efficient yield. Despite that, it wasn’t as though colliers took the winter off, and many did other jobs like cutting wood in preparation for the next burn (Kemper 1941, 10).

Joseph Johns and Bashore

Joseph Johns, a collier who lived in northern Lebanon County, Pennsylvania from the mid-1800s until his death in 1906, stands out for a number of reasons. One is that he is relatively well-known. There are at least 12 newspaper articles and a short book written about him, and stories of him are told among local scouts at the Bashore Scout Reservation. This is not a treatment that colliers often receive; the peripheral, dirty nature of their jobs meant that many colliers were overlooked to the extent that many don’t even appear consistently in census data (FamilySearch, n.d.). Part of this lack of prevalence in census data can be attributed to some colliers choosing not to list it as their primary occupation, but spending eight months living in a hut in the woods and not listing that as a primary occupation may be telling in its own way. This may suggest that listing one’s occupation as a collier was considered undesirable, or that many worked as a collier in a much more part-time capacity. Alternatively, it could be evidence that some census takers were negligent. The other reason is that Johns was an African American, another group that receives very little historical documentation or recognition. Interestingly, there is at least one other historically known black collier from Lebanon County. Governor Dick
was enslaved by the Coleman family and employed at the Cornwall Iron Furnace in the late 18th century, but significantly fewer details about him are known (Forney 1994b; Rutter 2008).

Figure 5. A map of Lebanon County. The approximate location of Bashore Scout Reservation within Union Township is marked with a red star. Source: Lebanon County Pennsylvania Township Maps, n.d.

Although some parts of Johns’ story are unclear or debated, there is still a relatively decent amount of consistency—the most consistent parts are taken here to be facts about his life. Details of Johns’ early life before settling in Lebanon County are almost completely unknown, except that he was enslaved in Fauquier County, Virginia before escaping north prior to the Civil
War. His birth year is disputed, and sometimes reported as either 1789 or 1794, but these would mean that he was a surprising 117 or 112 years old, respectively, at the time of his death. Most sources accept the 112 year-old number uncritically. In the one extant photograph of Johns, taken in 1906 just months before his death, Johns looks elderly, but likely not 112 (see Figure 6). Estimates for his arrival in the Lebanon County area vary from the early 1840s to as late as 1856 (Forney 1993, 1, 1997; Ditzler 2007). Most stories agree that he fled to Pennsylvania with one or two other enslaved people around a decade before the Civil War, and that he was the only one who made it. Some sources also mention that Johns likely worked around the Harrisburg area on the H&H Railroad for a number of years before finally making his way to Lebanon County (Forney 1997; Remlinger 2006, 8C). He settled near the town of Green Point in modern day Union Township, making his home in the form of a collier hut on the slopes of the Blue Mountain (see Figure 5). Some stories mention that he very briefly lived in a hut on one side of the mountain before moving onto the land of a local man named John Fahler, who allowed Johns to live there and on one occasion, even protected him from Southern bounty hunters looking to return him to his master (Gilara 1964; Forney 1993, 1, 1994b, 1997; Gulli 2002, 1A, 4A; Remlinger 2006, 8C; Ditzler 2007, 1, 5-6).
Interestingly, as the stories are told, Johns seemed to live in a single hut for most of the time he was in the area, or two huts at most. There is no reference to him ever living in a house. However, collier huts are intended to be temporary. They are typically inhabited for only a few months at a time, and would probably quickly rot and collapse because they were made from untreated wood and had little to no protection from moisture. It seems extremely unlikely that Johns would have lived in one of these huts for nearly five decades. Possibly, he regularly rebuilt it, and the people of Green Point either didn’t know or think it was worth reporting. Articles from several decades after Johns’ death claim that the uprights from his hut remained standing
for many years (Elia 1956, 1, 20; Gilara 1964), despite the fact that these huts would likely deteriorate considerably in only a few years. Other colliers regularly moved their huts not only because they were intended to be temporary residences. Additionally, staying in a single hut negates the purpose of building them close to hearths. Staying in the same hut would mean that a collier would have to walk great distances to and from active hearths, but if Johns only occasionally made charcoal this would be less of a problem.

News stories from after Johns’ death paint him as an honest and well-liked, if peripheral member of the community. Johns was “everyone’s friend,” (Gilara 1964) said one man, interviewed in 1964, and he supposedly was much beloved among children for giving them candy at church services he attended. Some depict Johns as a godly man who was literate, owned a bible, and regularly prayed for children and the elderly (Gilara 1964). However, some depictions of Johns are less explicitly positive (though still not negative), claiming he was a “mystery even to the people who knew him well and visited him often in his mountain dwelling,” (Hower 1992, 10A). One man, Francis Ditzler, a historian and the author of the book about Johns (Ditzler 2007), claimed that most children were afraid of Johns because he was black when interviewed in 1993, though he quickly added that he was befriended by the locals (Forney 1993, 1).

Johns apparently supported himself cutting wood, making and selling charcoal, and selling berries he picked on the mountain (Gilara 1964; Hower 1992, 10A), though some sources depict him as something like a mountain healer with a remedy for yellow fever (Hower 1992, 10A; Remlinger 2006, 8C). More will be said about this later.

In 1946-7, Fahler’s land was converted into a Boy Scout camp, the Bashore Scout Reservation (Elia 1956 1, 20; Forney 1994b). In 1971, scouts took an interest in the story of
Joseph Johns, and began reconstructing his hut as a project, which has been rebuilt every few years, further proof that these types of huts are temporary by nature. The hut and adoption of its maintenance by the scouts in particular is a prominent detail in the story for most, as almost every text mentions his hut and its reconstruction, when applicable. ("County's Oldest" 1906, 1; Elia 1956; Gilara 1964; Shay 1971, 10; Hower 1992, 10A; Forney 1993, 1, 1994b, 1997; Gulli 2002; Sholly 2004; Remlinger 2006; Ditzler 2007). From the time of the hut’s reconstruction onward, tales of Johns can be viewed through a very scout-centric lens, and one article even explicitly attributes Johns’ fame in the area to the founding of Camp Bashore, shown in Figure 7 (Forney 1994b). Despite the emphasis on how the scouts maintain the reconstruction of Johns’ hut, there is an acknowledgement that their version of the hut is not accurate--it is actually about a third bigger and is built with more durable materials (Sholly 2004). Bear in mind that despite its more durable construction, the reconstruction still needs to be rebuilt regularly, casting further doubt on Johns’ permanent residence.

Overall, it may seem like Johns was not as peripheral as one might expect from a man living alone in the woods full-time, but this may be a bias of the information--people wouldn’t really tell stories about all the times they didn’t see or interact with Johns. My initial perception was that there are a lot of personal stories about Johns, his supposed friends, and other activities like attending dinners and church, all of which would be surprising if he was working as a collier full time for eight months per year. Colliers are often presented with little to no free time while working (Walker 1966, 245). It seemed like Johns had a somewhat different schedule than other colliers, and it turns out that a more detailed analysis bears this out. In addition, it caught my attention that Johns is always discussed in very positive ways, and the sources closer to his death that were able to interview people that knew Johns all claim to be his friends and that he was a
much beloved member of the community (Elia 1956, 1, 20; Gilara 1964) This was surprising, considering Johns lived in a rural area in the 19th century. I felt that there may be a “token” aspect to Johns’ story, but ultimately this project was about Johns as a collier, not as an African-American, so I leave that work for someone else.

Figure 7. The current Bashore Scout Reservation trails converted from John Fahler’s property.

Chapter Three: Methods

First, it should be noted that this project began with a very different focus. The initial idea was to research slave labor at historical Pennsylvania ironworks, but after the better part of a summer, a lack of information forced a change of direction. A local family friend and friend of the Bashore Scouts, Pete Sildorff, heard that I was working on this and was kind enough to provide me with some information about Joseph Johns. After some preliminary research, I decided that there was enough information about Johns, including the site of his hut, to make him my subject. It seemed like a reasonable direction because I had already worked with my advisor, Dr. Ben Carter, on researching colliers along the very same Blue Mountain where Bashore lies! I had planned to do some pedestrian surveys and examine LiDAR scans of the area to determine the extent of Johns’ work, but the entire region is covered in charcoal hearths, so there were probably a number of other colliers working in the area and it would be next to impossible to determine which were used by Johns. The next idea was to excavate the site of Johns’ hut, but I don’t have enough training or tools to conduct an excavation, and it was likely the Scouts at Bashore would not have supported it anyway. What I was left with were the texts that I have used. So, text analysis was not part of the initial plan for this project, and I had to learn these techniques as I went. This type of analysis is fairly distant from the archaeology I intended, so I was careful to try to reconnect my work to archaeologically relevant writings about other colliers.

From reading the articles and the book about Johns, I knew that he was unlike any other collier I had heard of, but I needed to develop a methodology to demonstrate that. Because I had texts, this methodology had to be some form of text analysis. It had to be detailed enough to connect the few sources about Johns to the larger conversation about colliers in a meaningful
way, but also forgiving enough to work around methodological problems like questionable
accuracy and inconsistency of my sources. What I decided was that I should bring these
problems to the forefront, making clear that they are present, but not insurmountable. From there,
a comparison between Johns and other colliers can evolve with the knowledge that weaknesses
in argument are not there because of ignorance or oversight, but as a result of the nature of the
data. The idea was that an analysis that wears its flaws on its sleeve is more nuanced and
palatable.

The basic idea of the analysis was to group words of interest into themes and note the
prevalence of those categories versus a grand total in the texts used. The methodology is a
simplified, adapted combination of content analysis and narrative analysis, as demonstrated in
Bernhard H Russell’s 2002 book, “Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and
Quantitative Methods.” Using a framework of content analysis allows for a simple quantification
of content--it allows for texts to be analyzed in simple binaries like whether or not a term is
present. Russell explains that content analysis is able to explore both explicit and covert
meanings in text, and that it “doesn’t have to be complicated to be effective,” (Russell 2002,
423). Russell also notes that sampling can be a methodological issue with certain topics (Russell
2002, 424), and I considered this twice: in collecting my sources, and in determining how much
of my data was usable. Additionally, Russell explains Galton’s Problem, which notes that there
is difficulty using related sources as independent examples of variables (Russell 2002, 429-430).
I had to consider this because several of my sources have the same author and many were
published in the same newspaper and probably used the same information. Ultimately, I decided
that this should not be too much of a problem because I was trying to demonstrate change over
time in the telling of a story, so I was not really looking for independent variables. This type of
analysis was the driving force behind much of the data gathering. It allowed the language used to talk about Johns to be represented clearly and numerically, and more easily categorized into themes.

Whereas content analysis allows one to identify numerical values like the number of times a term appears, narrative analysis is able to identify more holistic qualitative trends like the same thing being discussed in different ways. Narrative analysis is “the search for regularities in how people, within and across cultures, tell stories,” (Russell 2002, 397). So, while drawing inspiration from content analysis helped assemble tables of data, implementing a variation of narrative analysis allowed me to identify themes in the data and look for predictables uses. These themes were the primary means by which I identified change over time. The difference between the two types of analysis can be explained like this: content analysis reveals that the word “scout” appears 59 times in the sources, while narrative analysis allowed me to return to the text to note that “scout,” “Bashore,” “camp,” and “reservation” are all used in slightly different ways to refer to the Scouts at Bashore Scout Reservation and group them all under the “Scouts” theme, as well as noting that the context of the “Scouts” theme is exclusively positive.

Of course, I mentioned that I have adapted and simplified the forms of analysis that Bernhard describes. Formal text analysis relies upon several individuals identifying, or coding, themes and comparing this data to try to reach some degree of consensus. Because of the nature of my research, I identified and classified themes myself, so it would be fair to say that my codes are preliminary and should be double checked. (Russell 2002, 389-436).

Texts used are primarily newspaper articles written from 1906, the year of Johns’ death, to the present (see Table 1). They are primarily from the Lebanon Daily News (LDN), but gathered from various sources. Those from 1906-1971 were available from newspapers.com,
with the exception of the 1964 Gilara, which was held in print at the Lebanon County Historical Society (LCHS). The rest of the LDN articles were received from microfilm archives at the Lebanon County Historical Society. The 2007 Ditzler book, “From Slavery to Freedom,” was provided by a family friend, Pete Silldorff, and can also be found at the Lebanon County Historical Society.

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Author</th>
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<td>newspapers.com</td>
<td>me</td>
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<td>1956</td>
<td>Elia, Charles J.</td>
<td>newspapers.com</td>
<td>me</td>
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<tr>
<td>112-Year-Old Slave's Burial Spot is Still Legendary Attraction</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Gilara, Minerva</td>
<td>LCHS (photocopy)</td>
<td>me</td>
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<td>Old Black Joe Legend Revived</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Shay, Jack</td>
<td>newspapers.com</td>
<td>me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Joe Former slave provides fuel for campfire tales</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Hower, John</td>
<td>LCHS (microfilm)</td>
<td>LCHS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain Man: Society to mark site of Old Black Joe's hut</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Forney, Rahn</td>
<td>LCHS (microfilm)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mark of a legend: Stone monument honors well-known runaway slave</td>
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<td>Forney, Rahn</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>Ditzler, Francis</td>
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<td>me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. The sources used for this project.
First, some texts were transcribed using optical character recognition (OCR). Optical character recognition allows a computer to identify text, putting it in a searchable form such that a newspaper, for example, becomes a body of text rather than simply a flat image of the newspaper—the end result was a pdf file. From there, if one used the “ctrl+f” command to search for the word “black,” all instances would be highlighted as expected. If OCR was not used, this would not be possible.

The texts from newspapers.com, the 1964 Gilara article, and the book all needed to be transcribed in this way, though the results were imperfect, especially with the older articles—because the text was small and the scans and photocopies used had some dark blemishes, the text was not recognized particularly well. I went over the completed OCR documents and fixed them manually, then read over them again to ensure they were accurate. The microfilm reader at the LCHS had a particularly good OCR feature, so those were usable right away with no further editing. It should be noted that there are several other texts that I was either unable to acquire because they were not housed at the LCHS or found online, or that I acquired and took the time to transcribe with OCR, but had no identifying information like a title or date. I was ultimately unable to use these texts.

Once all the usable texts were transcribed, they were compiled into a master document in Microsoft Word. The master document and each individual text were then processed through a word counting website, writewords.org/uk/word_count. Writewords.org was used because it counted more words than the other free option, wordcounter.org. Words like “the” were counted, while wordcounter often omitted smaller words like conjunctions, and writewords differentiated where punctuation was concerned—for example, using writewords, identified "Johns" as different
than "John's" while other tools did not and this mattered in the context of having men named both Johns and John mentioned in the text.

For example, as in Table 2, each completed word count list was compiled into a spreadsheets in Microsoft Excel for individual viewing, if necessary, and as an intermediary step before utilizing Microsoft Access for comparison. Though it seems slightly redundant, Microsoft Access requires the components of its database to be individual Excel spreadsheets. The spreadsheets were put into a Microsoft Access database, and the relationships were set such that the master word count list is the leftmost column, the next column to the right is the frequency of words in the master document, and each column to the right is the next article written in chronological order, with the words lining up. Access allowed me to compare like data across spreadsheets without manually organizing them. Since not all articles use all words, some spaces are blank in certain columns in order to ensure the rows all match up. In other words, one row looks like this: first the word, then the amount of times that word appears in all texts combined (the master file), then the amount of times it appears in the first article, then the second, and so on (see Table 3).
<table>
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<th>MASTER FILE</th>
<th>Tombstone Marks Grave, 1906</th>
<th>Lebanon County was Haven, 1956</th>
<th>112-Year-Old Slave's Burial Spot is Still Legendary Attraction, 1964</th>
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Table 2. This is how the data looks in Microsoft Excel. Each pair of columns represents the word count results for a particular document. In this form, the words do not line up across rows, so a comparison would be difficult.
Table 3. The Microsoft Access Database form of Table 2. The words have been correlated across rows so that they can be directly compared. Empty spaces represent a value of 0.

The Microsoft Access Database is a helpful tool for combining the different frequency lists compiled, but it can be overwhelming and trends are not especially self-evident in a large
database of words, numbers, and occasionally, blank spaces. However, this is not so much a
problem with Access as it is with the amount of data. In an effort to simplify this somewhat, I
made an effort to eliminate words like contractions and articles. “And,” “the,” or “a” are not
relevant in this analysis. Additionally, I set a limit on the number of words I could use. There
were over 1,000 unique words used across the texts, and past a certain point, words would only
appear two or less times in the master file, so I considered them too insubstantial to use
meaningfully. Because analyzing the full set of over 1000 words would be arduous and there
would be diminishing returns on the effect of low-frequency words on the data, a cutoff point
was chosen where words began to appear less than ten times total. This left me 261 words with
which to work. Other options included choosing an arbitrary cutoff point like the 250th or 300th
word. Ultimately, choosing to only include words that appear ten or more times is also arbitrary,
but it does give all words selected some degree of parity in frequency. Choosing to include only
the first 250 words would leave some words that appear ten times in the data, and some out, so I
decided to use a cutoff point that had some tangible divide—in this case the difference between
10 and nine uses.

That said, not all 261 words selected were meaningful. Though a lot of inconsequential
grammar words were removed, not every unimportant word was. Words like “us,” and “few”
remained in the list. To combat this, words considered important were classified according to a
theme I believed they fit into (see Table 4 for a listing of themes). For example, words like
“Bashore,” “reservation,” and “scout” certainly refer to the Scout group that now resides on the
property owned by John Fahler and inhabited by Johns, so I’ve classified those words into a
“Scouts” theme. Since this system is susceptible to redundancy, only one part of words that were
always part of a phrase were counted. “Moonshine” always refers to “Moonshine Church,” so
counting both “Moonshine” and “church” would effectively double that theme’s prevalence in the analysis. In this case, only “Moonshine” was included in the total because it was slightly more prevalent--31 uses in the master as opposed to 27 for “church,” which was probably lower because occasionally the word “church” is implied by “Moonshine” in the texts. I have triple checked, and no texts make reference to moonshine as a beverage, so it is safe to associate “Moonshine” with the theme of “Death,” but not all words were lucky enough to be so unambiguous.

Some words, like “property,” could refer to more than one relevant thing. “Property” could at least refer to human beings as property, in which case it would be related to a “Slavery” theme, or the land owned by John Fahler where Johns lived, in which case it could be related to a “Fahler” theme, or perhaps even a “Hut” theme. Unfortunately, this word was far too ambiguous to resolve on anything but a case-by-case basis, which is not simple with the spreadsheet format used. So, only those words that I deemed to be largely unambiguous were retained.

Of course, it wasn’t possible to eliminate redundancy entirely, either. Some words, like “camp,” and “Bashore” often appear together, but not always. Often, there is a direct reference to “Camp Bashore,” but there are also a large number of references to a “Scout Camp,” or just to “Bashore”. So, while efforts have been taken to minimize redundancy where possible, some numbers may be artificially inflated by redundancy that was not easy to mitigate. Ultimately, the impact of this should be minimal because the raw data was used primarily to outline potential routes of inquiry. Any trends that the potentially redundant data brought to attention were examined within the text and therefore validated. Effectively, the connection between the data and the analysis is that the data highlighted things that could be analyzed and did not directly influence the analyses.
One final note about themes: not all themes will be discussed here. Some don’t appear to follow any noteworthy or recognizable trends, and others, like “Slavery” are just unsurprising. Johns was an escaped enslaved person, so it makes sense for that part of his identity to be commonly reported. Some of these themes without enough content to be discussed may be attributed to the small data set and could have materialized if there were more articles to examine or more words from the total were used. Some may be due to methodological errors in classifying the themes. In any case, only those themes with clear and/or surprising trends will be used.

The direct comparison database on Microsoft Access was converted back to an Excel spreadsheet in raw data form so that it could be made into pivot tables. A pivot table is effectively a summary of a larger set of data, capable of processing larger sets and displaying them in a much more palatable form, like sums or percentages of the whole. The pivot tables in Excel were used to provide an easy way to manipulate the data without regard for the relationships among it—Access was necessary to assemble the spreadsheets so that their rows matched and the data could be interpreted intelligibly, but there are only so many ways for it to be displayed in Access. Moving the data back into Excel allowed for pivot tables to manipulate the data in novel ways like changing the axes, displaying it in graphical form, and converting the raw frequency data into percentages of the column—in other words displaying not just that the “Scouts” theme occurs 39 times in a 1971 article, but that this accounts for 6.4% of all words in the article.
Table 4. A pivot table displaying the sum of uses of each theme per text. The pivot table could also be adjusted to display the percentage of each text that a theme constitutes.

This numerical analysis of themes was done to demonstrate that the story of Johns is far from static. After this, a more qualitative analysis of the texts was done to discuss details of Johns’ lifestyle that were not clear in tables of data. Whereas the quantitative analysis was intended to show changes over time, the qualitative analysis was intended to explicate the details that were more static and compare it with known information about other colliers. Given that Johns was a collier and much research has been done on colliers at Muhlenberg, this seemed a natural progression.

The same sources about Johns were used, and compared primarily with works by Kemper, Straka and Ramer, and Walker (Kemper 1941; Walker 1966; Straka and Ramer 2010). Largely, I was looking for details that clearly didn’t match the norm for colliers, like the
permanent status of Johns’ hut. However, I also noted that certain details are not dissimilar to accounts of other colliers. For example, there is no detailed discussion of what either Johns ate in these sources, just as there is no discussion elsewhere of what other colliers ate.
Chapter Four: Analysis

Changes in the Story

Some trends appeared in the data and were made much more visible in the conversion to pivot tables and graphs, indicating shifts in the “popular” version of Johns’ story. Some themes did not appear to follow any recognizable patterns, so it was difficult to establish a predictable change over time. Others did not change much over time, and many of these “static” themes have already been presented and discussed in the overview of Joseph Johns. Initially, I noted that certain themes like “Death” decreased in frequency after 1992, while “Scouts” in particular increased dramatically. Decreasing themes were primarily negative, like “Death” and “Periphery,” while themes that increased alongside “Scouts,” like “Hut,” represented parts of the story that the Scouts actively participated in and/or took pride in. This polarization became most clear after 1992, which acted as a sort of inflection point--not only did these trends solidify after that point, but the number of articles mentioning Johns more than doubled. Arguably, the fact that certain details shift so clearly and Johns recedes into the background of his own story calls into question the accuracy of these details. Additionally, his story, despite being a “local legend,” is still largely devoid of meaningful details about his livelihood, and in some cases, the details provided about Johns contradict collier norms and give the impression that he did not work as a collier often. These two circumstances probably affect the viability of Johns as an example of what life was like for an average collier, but open him to the possibility of being a useful example that colliers were not all “average”.

I analyzed the data in two ways: percentage of a total text that a theme represented, and a gross sum of instances where a theme appeared. It should be noted that what the two sets of data show is not redundant--since the length of each text is inconsistent, the two sets didn’t
necessarily emphasize the same things. For example, “Death” words made up over 5% of
“Tombstone marks grave,” but since that article is only 234 words long, that means that there
were only 12 “Death” words used, which is relatively low when compared to the rest of the
longer texts as a gross sum.

Because percentages of the total text can be more safely compared across texts, I believe
that the percentage tables should be more revealing, and I focused on the percentage of grand
total set of data. The percentage tables were converted into smaller scatter plots for readability
(ex. Table. 5).

![Image](image_url)

Table 5. Trends that seemed to roughly decrease over time as an example of more readable
format.

The data seems to indicate a decrease in prevalence of specific aspects of Johns’ life as
his story became increasingly adopted and adapted by the Scouts at Bashore and the importance
of actual details about his life gave way to a rough outline just detailed enough to drum up
interest. Johns seems to become more akin to a landmark, conflated with the spot of his hut, than
an actual individual.
Certain themes appeared to have a general tendency to become less prominent as time went on. The first of these is “Age,” which included the words ‘years,’ and ‘age.’ One thing that should be clarified is that the word ‘old’ was excluded from this theme, despite the fact that it was the 5th most commonly used word in the texts. There are two reasons for this--one is that in terms of age, it would almost always be paired with ‘years,’ forming the phrase ‘X years old,’ so it would be redundant to include both of those words. The other is that Joseph Johns’ common nickname was “Old Black Joe,” which is certainly used enough that it would artificially inflate the data for the ‘Age’ theme; one could make the argument that the nickname could also be associated with this theme, but I’ve chosen not to include it because it would be part of two themes and this would become complicated. Despite its exclusion, we should bear in mind that Johns’ age was considered important enough for “Old” to be part of his name.

The peak of the “Age” theme early on can be partially explained by the fact that the very first text was an obituary. Mentions of his age are not especially surprising in that context. Later texts never mention his age as much as that obituary, though the fact that he supposedly lived to a very old age is mentioned in all but one text does seem to indicate some sort of fascination with it. While it seems to be an interesting talking point, its appearance never seems to be more than that--texts always report on his surprising age without any critique of whether or not it is a realistic number. Arguably, this supports the idea that actual details of his life became less important as his story became more and more about the Scouts.

Johns’ obituary mentions twice that he was the “man who attained the greatest age ever recorded in Lebanon county [sic]” ("County's Oldest" 1906, 1). The title of a 1956 article claims that “Old Black Joe lived to be 112,” and a 1964 article discloses that Johns was a “112-Year-Old Slave,” (Elia 1956 1, 20; Gilara 1964). In particular, Elia (Elia 1956, 1, 20) mentions Johns’
supposed age of 112 no less than five times. As well, Elia mentions that he was around 60 when he fled slavery twice; that he lived in the Green Point area for at least 40 years twice; and that he claimed to have been born in 1794, seen George Washington’s funeral, and lived through 26 presidents at least once each. Clearly, these older articles fixate somewhat on John’s advanced age. The 1993 article also mentions John’s age several times, noting that he “spent nearly 70 of his 112 years living in a crude hut that is now part of Camp Bashore Scout Reservation,” and that he was 112 one additional time, but not with the apparent enthusiasm of earlier articles (Forney 1993, 1). Numerically speaking, the 1906 and 1956 articles are the only two that ever achieve a higher than 1% frequency of “Age” words, and the only article to not directly mention his age is from 2004.

The theme of “Death” sees a similar decrease over time and the reason for its prevalence early on is the same as “Age,” as it is not surprising for death to be discussed in an obituary. The “Death” theme was made up of the words ‘Moonshine,’ ‘died,’ ‘cemetery,’ ‘death,’ ‘tombstone,’ ‘funeral,’ and ‘grave.’ Perhaps the only one of these terms that need elaboration is ‘Moonshine,’ which is the name of the church where Johns was buried. For this reason, I have not included the word ‘church’ to avoid the redundancy of ‘Moonshine Church.’

The prevalence of discussions of Johns’ death reaches a significantly lower average by the mid-1990s. Most texts past that point use “Death” words at under 1% of the total, which is reasonably sizable compared to the over 5% peak in the obituary, and there are two texts which contain no “Death” words, as I have categorized them. This seems sufficient to claim that the details of Johns’ death and interment became less important or interesting to people as time went on. Effectively, it suggests that Johns’ death was not so important as his life. From the perspective of the Scouts, his life gives meaning to their hut project and storytelling, but his
death is not as relevant. Notably, peaks of the “Scouts” theme generally coincide with lows in the “Death” theme, especially past 1992 (see Table 6).

![Graph showing trends of "Death" and "Scouts" themes]

**Table 6. A side-by-side comparison of the “Death” and “Scouts” theme**

The final noteworthy decreasing trend is the theme of “Periphery,” which includes the words ‘mountain,’ ‘mountains,’ and ‘gap.’ These are words that I feel like in context were used to present that Johns was a man living at the edge of society—a hermit (a word which just barely missed the data inclusion cutoff with 9 total mentions). This theme was not one of the more prevalent ones, but I believe it expresses an important point, while still following the theme of inversion in relation to Scouts. Johns was both African-American and a collier, and he would have been seen as an outsider. Additionally, though this theme could be understood as simply describing where Johns lived, there are other ways of doing so: he is sometimes said to have lived on John Fahler’s land, or the land that is now the Bashore Scout Camp, and these ways do not express the same “outsider” feeling.

Although “hermit” did not meet the frequency necessary to be incorporated into the data,
I decided that it was a term indicative of the “Periphery” theme and although not included above, I have included it here. Because of this, it should be noted that the occurrence of the “Periphery” theme would have been higher in the earlier articles if “hermit” had fallen within the data set. The 1906 obituary calls Johns both an “aged colored recluse” and a “hermit,” meaning that the theme of “Periphery” is salient both numerically and contextually ("County's Oldest" 1906, 1). There was another article published in 1906 that is quoted in Ditzler’s 2007 book though I was unable to acquire the article--its title is “Hermit Johns passed away,” (Ditzler 2007). The article from 1956 describes his “hermit hut,” and in 1992 he was said to have “lived the life of a hermit” (Elia 1956 1, 20; Hower 1992, 10A). By 2002, the last article to use the word, the phrasing is that Johns lived a “hermit-like life in a collier’s hut” (Gulli 2002, 1A, 4A). It seems as though each description became further removed from describing Johns as an actual hermit and more careful about the comparison.

I believe the fact that this trend decreased and remained low as time went on is evidence that people telling this story wanted to portray Johns as an included member of the community, perhaps due to embarrassment or a desire to minimize his exclusion from the community. Interestingly, the decline in the “Periphery” theme also coincides relatively well with the appearance and growth of the “Scouts” theme, although the “Scouts” theme is not quite so linear (see Table 7). The Scouts do seem to have adopted Johns as something of a local point of pride and would have a vested interest in not portraying him as an outcast or hermit, at least because that would be a somewhat uncomfortable legacy to be building upon.

Note the significant low point in the “Scouts” theme in 1992. The content of the article is one of the more detailed descriptions of Johns’ life, including a discussion of his work as a collier. Of course, this is not to say that “Black Joe: Former slave provides fuel for campfire
tales” makes no mention of the Scouts. The article tells how most scouts in the Great Northern District have probably been to the site of his hut at least once and it devotes a section to relating how one scout in particular spent 155 hours rebuilding the hut in 1969. Overall, however, the “Scouts” theme is not dominant in the article.

Table 7. A side-by-side comparison of the “Scouts” and “Periphery” themes.

For those two reasons, the article seems to be what could be considered the last Johns-focused article. Further, the period after 1992 can be designated as the “Scouts Period,” although the Scouts had been on the land for years prior. The name simply designates a period where the stories of Johns and the Scouts become effectively inseparable. A 1994 article directly credits the Scouts for the circulation of the story, claiming that Johns “likely would not have attained legend status if not for the founding of Camp Bashore in 1946” (Forney 1994). That the connection is made in this way is probably telling of the appropriation of Johns’ story by the Scouts. Surely it would have been far more direct to say that Johns likely would not have attained his status if not for specific Eagle Scout projects to reconstruct the hut, or the efforts of locals to circulate his story--the founding of Bashore in 1946 is not directly connected to Johns in any immediately
apparent sense, even if Bashore has played an important role in maintaining Johns’ story.

All of this is to say that since thematic shifts can be shown so clearly, a degree of skepticism is healthy. This is particularly true where these shifts have been demonstrated, but not every theme has been discussed here. There were shifts that have not been explicitly analyzed. It also stands to reason that since certain details became exaggerated or minimized, others could have as well. In other words, because there is such variety in not only how Johns’ story is told and what makes it into the story, we ought to be critical about believing that any version is entirely accurate. In that sense, it may be reasonable to doubt even the few details we do have about Johns’ work as a collier. Themes with a somewhat optimistic tone, like “Scouts” saw dramatic increases in use, while themes like “Death” and “Periphery,” which address ways in which Johns’ life was in some sense sad, lonely, or peripheral, became used much less as time went on and the Scouts took control of telling the story.

Johns as a Collier

In spite of the relative wealth of information regarding Johns’ life, a number of details are conspicuously absent or possibly incorrect. Interestingly, many of the missing or dubious details match details that are commonly missing from accounts of colliers. Namely, there is little to no information about Johns’ subsistence, details about his work as a collier, or doubts about his age and health. Additionally, the information given about how his time was spent and, most conspicuously his hut appears questionable when compared to the standards of other colliers.

Given that Johns lived on the mountain, he would have had different means of feeding himself than others. He didn’t have livestock or crops that could be relied upon. However, the area of the mountain where Johns lived would often be covered with an abundance of wild berries and other plants, including the possibility of blackberries, raspberries, huckleberries, and
blueberries. Many berries would thrive in the clearings left by charcoal hearths. I visited the site of his hut in July of 2018, and even today there was no shortage of berries, despite foot traffic and trails carved out by the Bashore Scout Reservation, fairly substantial logging, and a lack of clearings left by collier activity. Occasionally, the fact that Johns collected berries is mentioned, but never as a means of keeping himself fed. According to the newspapers, Johns mostly collected huckleberries to sell or provide to neighbors. (Hower 1992; Gilara 1964). Additionally, although other wild food sources are not mentioned Johns lived in a wooded area of eastern North America—a region with abundant wild food. Options available to Johns, whether he was aware of or made use of them, included pawpaw, greenbrier, a variety of mushrooms and nuts, wild leeks, wintergreen, even more berries than previously mentioned, ostrich fern, stinging nettle, sheep sorrel, pigweed, spring beauty, chokecherry, parsnip, common milkweed, burdock, and thistle, among many others. A rotation of these would be available at most points during the year, and such a variety lends itself to different uses and preparations (Moerman 2010; Peterson 1977, 275-81; Thayer 2006). Of course, Johns could have purchased food with the money he made selling charcoal and doing other work, but unknowns of transportation from town to the mountain, storage of purchased goods, and frequency of visits to a store make this a difficult topic to pursue.

Johns also likely consumed game. There is one direct connection made between Johns eating game and collecting it himself; the same source is also the only one to mention fishing and claims that Johns was primarily trapping rather than hunting (Shay 1971, 10). Johns was often given game and other food by local hunters and visitors (Gilara 1964; Ditzler 2007, 9). There seems to be some fascination with the several guns that Johns owned, yet they are not discussed in terms of hunting weapons. Johns owned a small pistol, a shotgun, and a “Kentucky Rifle,” and
the latter two could have been used for hunting. The pistol and rifle are in private collections, auctioned off after Johns’ death, while the shotgun is mounted at the Lebanon County Historical Society (Ditzler 2007, 16-20). This shows that Johns’ story is not strictly “local,” known only in Green Point, but throughout Lebanon County.

The only thing these sources say about the subsistence of colliers references Hopewell Furnace, and claims that colliers cooked their meals over open fires (Sholly 2004). No other sources I have seen go into much detail about what colliers ate or their gathering and hunting habits, so in this sense the way Johns is discussed does not stray far from this norm.

Of course, Johns is often said to have been a collier, but not much is ever said beyond that. Some go into a small amount into detail about what that entails, simply explaining that Johns made charcoal without ever using the term “collier.” The most common form this takes is a variation of “charcoal burner,” or “burning charcoal” (Shay 1971, 10; Hower 1992, 10A; Forney 1993, 1, 1997; Gulli 2001; Sholly 2004; Remlinger 2006, 8C). At other times, Johns’ occupation is not mentioned, unclear, or listed as something else. When Johns’ primary occupation is said to be something other than a collier, he is often said to have helped farmers (Remlinger 2006, 8C), sold herbal remedies and berries to townspeople (Gilara 1964; Hower 1992), and sold wood to other colliers (Gilara 1964).

To an extent, associating these non-collier occupations with Johns is reasonable for someone unfamiliar with the life of a collier. Because colliers couldn’t work very efficiently during the coldest months of the year, they were left with around four months to pursue other work. Although no explicit connection is ever made between Johns’ other work and the winter or the collier off-season, it doesn’t seem impossible, with the exception of berry picking, since they don’t grow in the winter. Additionally, because Johns is said to have lived full-time in a hut with
no family, it seems reasonable to assume that he may not have worked as much as other colliers in order to sustain himself financially. Less time spent making charcoal could easily be spent doing other things, whether work or leisure.

A relatively large amount is said about Johns’ leisure time being spent socially, whether attending church every Sunday, entertaining guests at his hut, or having dinner in town with friends (Elia 1956; Gilara 1964; Hower 1992, 10A; Ditzler 2007, 7). Given the standard story of colliers being very devoted to supervising their huts during the time they were working, this may be further evidence that Johns did not work full time as a collier, even during the eight months when other colliers were working full time. His attending church every week makes full-time collier work seem especially unlikely because a single burn could take 10-14 days and colliers could have up to eight hearths burning at once (Walker 1966, 245). At least one or two of those burns would be particularly volatile at any point, but it would be unwise for a collier to leave any burning hearth for something like church because it would take him more than a half day to walk to church, attend and return.

When not making charcoal, many colliers cut wood that they would later convert to charcoal, so those claiming Johns was a woodcutter may not be far from the truth (Kemper 1941, 10). As for helping nearby farmers, one source claims that Johns often helped with harvests, and if Johns was in fact making less charcoal than other colliers, he could have worked at other times of the year (Shay 1971, 10). Johns lived just on the outskirts of John Fahler’s farm, so it isn’t unlikely that he spent a lot of time there. It wasn’t uncommon for other colliers to fluctuate between being listed as colliers and farmers in different censuses (FamilySearch, n.d.). Johns’ selling of berries has already been discussed--the only unusual thing about it is that some consider it to have been a primary source of income. Johns’ status as a local healer is mentioned
several times in different sources. Supposedly, locals brought their children to him for healing and he had a remedy for yellow fever (Hower 1992; Remlinger 2006, 8C). While this is difficult to substantiate with regards to other colliers, the fact that Johns lived in the wilderness for around 50 years makes it entirely possible that he became well-versed in local plants and their medicinal properties. Of course, other colliers spent a large amount of their time in the wilderness, so it wouldn’t be surprising if other colliers had reasonable botanical knowledge.

Regarding Johns’ hut, the fact that all sources claim that a collier hut was his full-time residence may have interesting implications on his status as a collier. Past the point where he settled on John Fahler’s land, no mentions are made of his rebuilding or relocating, except for one source that claims he rebuilt in around 1880 after it was burned by thieves (Gulli 2002, 1A, 4A). This seems to strongly contradict what we know about other colliers. It is well-established that collier huts were only temporary residences for a particular season of work, and huts were primarily constructed from mud, with wooden uprights (Kemper 1941, 8; Walker 1966, 242). Although some claim that the structure of Johns’ hut remained standing into the 1960s, this is extremely unlikely given the makeup of these types of huts (Elia 1956 1, 20; Gilara 1964). Other colliers would relocate huts not only because of deterioration, but also because one of the major benefits of the hut was proximity to hearths. Since colliers would use different hearths over time, the ability to live in a temporary hut nearby could save them a lot of travel time. If we take the claim that Johns’ residence was static for most, if not all of his time in the area, this may be considered additional evidence that he was making less charcoal than other colliers. Ironically, that Johns consistently lived in one collier hut implies that he worked less as a collier than men who only sometimes lived in collier huts.

From a more hypothetical angle, if Johns was living in the same spot for such a long
time, it is unclear why he lived in a collier hut for so long. There doesn’t seem to be a reason he
couldn’t have built a more lasting structure like a log cabin. Certainly there was no shortage of
wood, and the narrative that Johns had so many friends means he probably could have gotten
help. The construction of a cabin ultimately may not have been much more work than that of a
hut, so why would he have lived in a hut for much of his life? Personal preference, no matter
how unusual, may provide that answer. One source mentions that Johns was robbed and had his
hut burned down by local outlaws around 1880 (Gulli 2002, 1A, 4A), so a possible motivation
behind staying in a hut was that it was inherently less valuable and a lesser target for theft. He
was old and lived alone in a remote area, so possibly he was interested in minimizing himself as
a target.

In terms of Johns’ charcoal production, although it seems possible that his output was
relatively low compared to other colliers, a vexing detail is that it is unclear where the charcoal
he did produce was going. The most detail that can be found is simply that his charcoal was
being supplied locally (Forney 1993, 1 1994b, 1997). Other colliers were often employed
directly by ironworks and therefore can be associated with a particular one, but this doesn’t seem
to be the case for Johns. Possibly, he didn’t sell to any single forge or furnace, and this seems
more likely in light of the fact that on the rare occasion Johns’ charcoal supply is mentioned, it is
said to have gone to “local forges.” Selling independently to multiple forges or furnaces does not
in itself mean that Johns produced less charcoal, but a collier directly employed by one would
have certain quotas to meet and would possibly be provided with wood from other employed
woodcutters (Straka and Ramer 2010, 59-60; Walker 1966, 247).

One last point about Johns’ life requires further investigation. Although Johns’ age
estimate is commonly given as 112 years old at the time of his death, there is not enough
evidence to confirm or deny it; since this age (or higher) is effectively universally accepted in the sources used, we can work with it ("County's Oldest" 1906, 1; Elia 1956; Gilara 1964; Shay 1971, 10; Hower 1992, 10A; Forney 1993, 1, 1994a, 3A, 1997; Gulli 2002, 1A, 4A; Sholly 2004; Remlinger 2006; Ditzler 2007). However, assuming this number is correct or close raises a concern about Johns’ health. Making charcoal involves a lot of heavy lifting and cutting of wood, inhaling noxious smoke, and various other laborious steps, in addition to living in a crude hut on a mountain. Farming and hunting are also labor-intensive, so it seems unlikely that a man past his 70s or 80s would be performing Johns’ jobs, let alone someone in his 110s. Johns was said to have been a very hale individual, at six feet tall and weighing around 200 pounds, but it ought to be uncontrovertial to call into question that capability of someone that elderly to live the life that Johns did (Elia 1956 1, 20; Forney 1993). One source directly claims that “Fahler fed Joe in his later years and looked out for his well-being,” (Gilara 1964) which seems likely but is not mentioned elsewhere. Possibly, some of the other stories of people bringing Johns food were examples of people helping provide for him in his old age, but none of them are clear about this (Gilara 1964; Ditzler 2007, 9).
Chapter Five: Conclusion

Johns’ story as analyzed here is told exclusively through local publications, and I have demonstrated that what is told is not consistent across time--that Johns’ primacy gives way to that of the scouts at Bashore is just one example of this. This evidence of editorializing calls into question accuracy and further highlights existing gaps in the story. Further, Johns is known as a collier, but it seems likely that Johns was producing little charcoal compared to other colliers because of the number of references to other work, simple means, free time, the static nature of his hut (however unlikely), and old age. Although any one of these details may not be enough to draw this conclusion, the sum of all of them makes it much more likely that Johns was not making charcoal full-time. Johns’ story is uniquely detailed among colliers, yet he seems to be a largely atypical example of what the life of a collier was like. This is not to say that he shouldn’t be used as an example collier life; Johns is clear proof that colliers were not locked into a specific lifestyle despite the demands of their work. That Johns differs from the norm is not discouraging because he is not a “standard” collier. Instead, it is exciting because it enriches our understanding of how colliers could live. If the information provided in Chapter Two, in Kemper, Straka, Walker, or elsewhere (Kemper 1941; Straka and Ramer 2010; Walker 1966) gives the impression that colliers were a homogenous group of people that all lived and worked in very similar conditions, Johns provides a great counterexample.

Additionally, we should not be too quick to attribute all differences between Johns and other colliers to significant lifestyle differences. There are aspects of Johns’ story that could help fill in gaps in our knowledge about other colliers. One example of how Johns can deepen our understanding of the lives of colliers is in the way that Johns is said to have trapped and gathered game and wild produce, respectively. Not much is ever said about the dietary habits of other
colliers, but if Johns participated in these means of subsistence, it isn’t unlikely that other colliers might have as well. Another example is in Johns’ supposed knowledge of not only edible plants, but also medicinal ones. It seems entirely possible that other colliers could also spend enough time in the woods to develop this knowledge base, but other sources of information about colliers don’t address this.

Additionally, some emphasis ought to be placed on the noticeable appropriation of Johns’ story by Bashore past 1992. The way the themes shift to be so Scout-centric past 1992, minimizing themes like “Death” and “Periphery” while themes like “Scouts” increase shows that there was a degree of editorializing of the story. Things considered worth noting or important became more prevalent, while things considered less important or sensitive became minor details. It is important to note that since Johns has been conflated with Bashore, people writing about Johns seem to get a large amount of their information from Bashore directly or through people who themselves got their information from Bashore. Certainly, the increasing prevalence of the “Scouts” theme is evidence that Bashore is a major component of the story. Further, it seems clear that the story as it is told since 1992 is effectively Bashore’s version.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


