

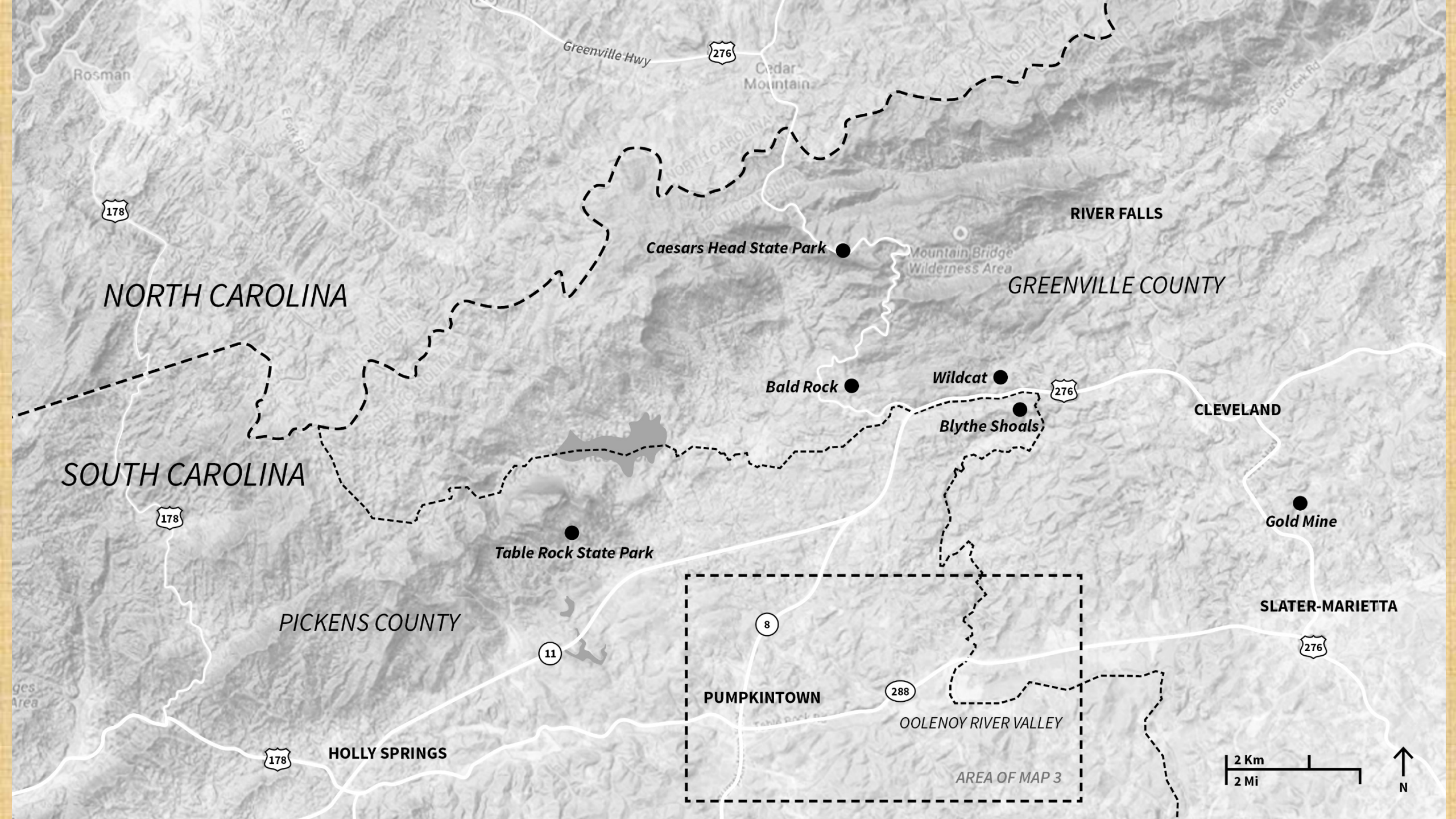
“‘This is my home:’
defending a black
enclave in Appalachian
South Carolina”

African Americans in
Western North Carolina
and Southern Appalachia
Conference

University of North Carolina-
Asheville October 19, 2018

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Rosman

Greenville Hwy

276

Cedar Mountain

Gap Creek Rd

178

NORTH CAROLINA

RIVER FALLS

Caesars Head State Park

Mountain Bridge Wilderness Area

GREENVILLE COUNTY

SOUTH CAROLINA

Bald Rock

Wildcat

276

CLEVELAND

Blythe Shoals

Gold Mine

178

Table Rock State Park

PICKENS COUNTY

SLATER-MARIETTA

276

8

PUMPKINTOWN

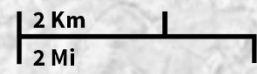
288

OOLENOY RIVER VALLEY

178

HOLLY SPRINGS

AREA OF MAP 3



Discovery

- a. Mountain Cultures – odd place name
- b. Met Mable Clarke; contracted for story





Oolenoy Valley



Liberia Valley



Old Soapstone Church

Soapstone Church and Table Rock Mountain





Soapstone School House

Methods

- Interviews (17 A-A; 10 E-A; 27 hours)
- Secondary documents
 1. Census
 2. Family histories
 3. Miscellaneous documents:
 - newspapers (e.g. Aunt Katie's biography)
 - archives (Hester will; 1865 labor contract)

Community History

1. Over 4,000 slaves in Pickens District prior to 1865
2. Founded by local freed slaves after 1865
3. Community name? Place in Africa or metaphor for Africa?
4. Expanded during Reconstruction (approx. 28% of pop.)
5. Major decline after 1890 (Tillman/Jim Crow)
6. Push/pull factors continue through 1960s
7. Local KKK arson in April 1967
8. Fish fries today for community support

Well-Known Liberia Residents

1. Emerson Kemp (mo Chaney; b. 1840; J. Hester's "boss slave;" Liberia resident)
2. Joseph McJunkin (Gr. Co. slave; obtains land; founds Soapstone Church; grandda. Lula)
3. "Aunt Katie" Owens

“Aunt” Katie Owens

- born about 1840
- died 1928
- buried Mt. Nebo Cemetery
- documented in newspapers
and oral histories



Rosa Glenn Owens

- married Katie Owens's son Will
- oldest son Chris Owens
- land taken by defaulting on mortgage
- died 1941



Chris Owens and Lula McJunkin Owens

- born late 19th century
- Lula grandda of Joseph McJunkin
- Chris grandson of “Aunt” Katie Owens
- Liberia community leaders
- both died early 21st century



Mable Owens Clarke

- born 1940s
- youngest child of Chris and Lula Owens
- Community Organizer for Liberia today



General Social Science Themes

- A. Not Truth, but multiple “truths;” multiple voices
(Post-modernism; Black Feminist Theory)
 1. Perception of Liberia by local whites vrs. blacks
 2. Liberia land “given” by former enslavers or bartered by former slaves for labor?
 3. “Othermothers” Lula Owens; Mable Owens Clarke
 - Lula Owens (school bus; Liberia Rd.)
 - Mable Clarke (cemetery salvage; fish fries)

B. Power/Knowledge/Resistance (Philosophy, Political Science, Anthropology)

1. Liberia as “safe haven” for Blacks and thus White attempts to destroy (take land; burn church)
2. “Culture of Terror” of lynching and injustices
 - plus stories about lynchings/injustices
 - vrs. “hidden” stories of resistance and resilience
3. Aunt Katie remaining in Liberia because --
 - loved her “white folks” or
 - safeguard her heritage
4. Phrase from 1865 labor contract: “and their own crops.”

c. Symbolic Meaning of Land

1. Common to Appalachia

2. How?

-- ownership

-- occupancy

-- using land

-- stories

-- memories

-- burials

3. Anthropomorphizing Land

Legacy

1. Mable's deathbed promise to her mother
2. "And that's why I do what I do." MOC
3. And that's the reason for the book. JMC

Questions?