

Crackling Bread

HL_MSS17-03_21_90_Greene_Greene_1982-02

Transcribed and Edited by

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For ENGL 659-70: Southern Literature

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Introduction to the Series

This transcription and its attendant annotations, explanatory material, and bibliography was prepared by students in ENGL 659: Southern Literature. The learning outcomes for this class include the following:

- Demonstrate proficiency with research tools and relevant technology for this subject along with appropriate scholarly material
- Communicate scholarly information to a group of peers
- Develop an appreciation of the culture, history, and art of the region

All work is presented as submitted by the graduate students. While they take great care with their transcriptions and annotations, errors are possible. As they learn throughout this class, good scholarship requires meticulous research and corroboration by authoritative sources. Our objective is to provide transcriptions and annotations of WCU's Special Collections materials that will be useful to the institution, students, scholars, patrons, and all users of our library's resources.

If you wish to submit an emendation or correction for this document, please email Dr. Mae Miller Claxton (mclaxton@wcu.edu).

Introduction to the Transcription

John Parris calls Jane and Arvel Greene to discuss traditional recipes for his upcoming article in Sunday's paper. Jane answer the phone and John tells her about how he has been thinking about them and has seen their son at the market. They talk about the snow from January and the winter still to come.

John asks Jane about crackling bread, and Jane tells John about how they kill a hog every year, render the lard and cans cracklings for crackling bread. They discuss how they prefer to eat their crackling bread with either buttermilk or sweet milk, and about how you can now buy cracklings at the grocery store. Jane talks about how she didn't get as much put up this year as she should have, but that she did get to can some cracklings. She mentions her age and ability as to why she wasn't able to get as much done as she had hoped for.

The conversation touches on leather britches, greens, and other foods to eat crackling bread with. John and Jane also discuss how Jane and Arvel's family both made and ate crackling bread when they were growing up. Jane tells John that she cooks crackling bread as a demonstration at the Pioneer Farmstead in Oconaluftee where Dick (unknown) is but won't be going much except for holidays and Saturdays.

John asks Jane what Arvel has been doing this winter and asks to talk to Arvel if he's around. Jane retrieves Arvel from the yard, and they have a lively discussion about the snow on the ground over the last few weeks and hibernating, coming out at Groundhog's Day. John talks to Arvel about cracklings and makes Arvel hungry. John mentions he's working on a piece for the Sunday paper on crackling bread and other traditional foods from the region. Arvel tells John that his ears must be burning because he's been talking about him lately. They talk about how bad the roads to the houses are and the two promise to get out when the weather is better for a visit.

Transcription

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Speakers (in order of voice appearance):

Jane Greene

John Parris

Arvel Greene

0:00 [long quiet space]

[telephone ringing]

0:26 Jane: Hello.

John: Jane¹!

Jane: Uh huh.

John: John Parris². How are you all doing?

Jane: Oh, just fine. How are you, John?

John: Fine. I've just been, uh, I've seen your boy³ at the market, and I ask him about you all every now and then, uh. How is, how have you been faring this winter?

Jane: Just fine.

John: Well good.

Jane: Done real good.

0:45 John: Did you stay in during all the snow⁴?

Jane: Oh yeah.

¹ Mary Jane Parton Greene (1916-1997), wife of Henry "Arvel" Greene

² John Alvin Parris Jr. (1914-1999), journalist and author

³ Most likely referring to William Verlon Jones (1936-2013), son-in-law of Jane and Arvel Greene

⁴ A major snowstorm hit Jackson county and surrounding areas on January 12th, 1982, dropping up to 6 inches of snow, with extreme cold temperatures down to -8 degrees

[Parris laughs]

Jane: Yeah, yeah.

0:49 John: Let me ask you this. Do you uh do you ever make any crackling bread⁵?

Jane: Yeah.

John: And uhm, do you uh do you make your own cracklings⁶?

Jane: Yeah.

0:59 John: Well, tell me about it! [laughs]

Jane: Well, I just render⁷ my lard⁸ you know.

John: You all kill a hog?

Jane: Yes, when I kill my hog. So, I render the lard down and then I have my cracklings and I just can⁹ ‘em, and pour grease¹⁰ over ‘em and can ‘em, an then when I want crackling bread I open a can and make my bread.

1:19 John: Uh huh, uh. Now I, how do you, do you just make the regular cornbread¹¹?

Jane: Uh huh. Plain cornbread.

John: You use milk and all with it?

Jane: Buttermilk¹².

John: Buttermilk, mmhmm. And then mix your cracklings in?

Jane: Yeah.

⁵ A combination of cracklings cooked with cornmeal, made as a bread

⁶ The crispy, browned bits of pork fat and skin left after rendering lard from a hog

⁷ The process of cutting fat from a slaughtered hog and heating it slowly until the liquid lard separates from the solid cracklings, where you strain and store it in glass jars

⁸ Rendered fat from a hog

⁹ Cracklings were often stored in jars that have had lard poured over them to preserve them

¹⁰ Lard, often what was rendered in the same process of making cracklings

¹¹ A traditional Appalachian bread made primarily from cornmeal and typically cooked in cast iron

¹² Liquid left over after churning butter from cream. It is typically thin and tangy in taste.

John: Uhuh. What do uh, what do you uh. [short pause] Now I know what I eat cracklings with, I eat ‘em with beans and stuff like that. What is that what you eat ‘em with, crackling bread?

1:43 Jane: Well now, I like a little buttermilk or just anything I’ve got cooked.

John: Alright, you, well, now what about...

Jane: And the turnip greens¹³.

1:50 John: Mmhmm. Do you ever make just a meal on uh, hot crackling bread and buttermilk?

Jane: Oh yeah.

John: Like we used to, uh. Now some of the old-timers used to put uh, uh, I never did like buttermilk, and I used to crumble mine up in sweet milk¹⁴.

Jane: It’s good that way if you like sweet milk, and I don’t like sweet milk.

John: [laughs] I didn’t like buttermilk!

Jane: Arvel¹⁵ don’t either [laughs].

2:10 John: Does he mix his up with sweet milk?

Jane: Oh yeah.

2:14 John: Uhm. Did you, have you had any this winter?

Jane: Yeah, I had a mess¹⁶ not long ago.

2:19 John: Mmhmm. How often during the winter do you, do you uh, have it?

Jane: Well, just anytime we take a notion¹⁷.

John: Mmhmm.

¹³ The green leaves of a turnip plant, often cooked in water or broth with additional spices and lard or bacon added for flavor

¹⁴ Fresh, regular cow’s milk

¹⁵ Henry “Arvel” Greene (1911-1992), husband to Mary Jane Parton Greene

¹⁶ An old-fashioned southern term meaning a good amount, usually enough to cook with and share

¹⁷ An old-fashioned southern term meaning “idea” or “impulse”

Jane: So, some of these days when you all come down this part then I'll have you some baked.

[laughs]

2:29 John: Okay, uhhhh, did uh, your mother¹⁸ make it too?

Jane: Oh yeah, we's always had it.

John: Uhm, you know uh, you can buy the cracklings now, they keep 'em in the market during the winter.

2:43 Jane: I should have got a, I should have got a big half a bushel¹⁹ canning²⁰ full this fall, but I just couldn't can 'em. I didn't have cans, and I was too tired.

John: Mmhmm.

Jane: [laughs]

2:52 John: How much did you can?

Jane: Huh?

John: How much did you can this year?

Jane: Oh, I've got a few pints out there.

John: Uh uh, uhm, did uh, Arvel's folks²¹ grow up with 'em too?

Jane: Oh yes.

John: Mhm.

Jane: Yeah, they always took care of 'em too.

John: Mm [pause] Oh how does uh, leather britches²² go with 'em, good?

Jane: Fiiine, real good.

¹⁸ Sarah Elizabeth Ella Freeman Parton (1886-1948), Jane Greene's mother

¹⁹ A measure equaling to approximately 17.6 liters, or 10-12 pints depending on rendering efficiency

²⁰ To can, to pack or preserve

²¹ Frank Collins Greene (1881-1974) and Annie Mae Greene (1890-1976), Arvel Greene's parents

²² Beans dried in the pod, then boiled with a chunk of salt pork or ham hock

3:16 John: I've never, I've never eaten leather britches. I've never had crackling bread right at the time we made crackling bread and I've had other things you know but just didn't have uh, didn't make it at the time we had leather britches.

Jane: It's good.

[pause]

3:32 Jane: Well, listen, is it still gonna be winter right on?

John: I don't know.

[long pause with muffled sounds]

3:43 John: I dropped my phone here, uh. It looks like uh, we are gonna have some more rain, and...

Jane: Yeah.

3:49 John: Now and all but I don't know of whether we're gonna have much more winter or not.

What does Arvel say?

Jane: Well, he just says what is happening when it comes down.

Jane and John: [laughs]

4:09 John: Ahhh, is he doing anything this winter?

Jane: He's kinda piddling around at home and gettin' wood and cleanin' up, an.

John: Nothing to do up at the park²³?

4:15 Jane: No, he ain't done anything to the park this winter.

John: Mmm.

Jane: He went over and talked to Dick²⁴ a time or two.

²³ Most likely refers to the Pioneer Farmstead in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park at Oconaluftee, a living history exhibit designed to preserve and showcase traditional mountain life, now a part of the Oconaluftee Visitor Center

²⁴ Unknown

4:22 John: Mmhmm, uh, when you all cook up there, did you ever make crackling bread and have it up there?

Jane: Oh yeah, lots of times. So far more than I do at home.

John: Is that right?

Jane: Yeah.

John: During the summer?

Jane: Oh yeah.

John: Mmhmm. I know so many people don't. I, I don't know, sorta always seems like a winter dish.

Jane: Well it is, but still they's so many people that want to see it.

John: Uh huh.

Jane: So I bake it over there.

John: So you bake it over there so they could see it?

Jane: Oh yeah.

John: Mmhmm.

4:51 Jane: I probably not be over there this next summer much.

John: You don't think so?

Jane: No. I, I told them not to sign me up on except uh, just for special days or Saturdays.

[laughs]

5:03 John: Uh huh. Is Arvel around?

Jane: Yeah, he's out in the yard, would you want to talk to him?

John: Yeah, I like to, like to say hello to him.

Jane: Well, I'll holler²⁵ at him.

John: Okay.

[long pause]

5:58 John: Arvel how you doing? John Parris here.

Arvel: Huh?

John: This is John Parris here!

Arvel: Yeah, I hear him. How you doing?

John: Okay. How are you?

Arvel: Oh, just fine.

John: How you like uh, that big snow we had?

6:09 Arvel: Well alright. I was hibernatin'. Was you?

John: [laughs] I sure was.

6:13 Arvel: Well, you know round they had that newfangled Groundhog Day²⁶ awhile back?

John: Yeah.

Arvel: I uh, I had hibernated so long that I decided to come out on their uh, their groundhog day!

John: [laughs]

Arvel: And not mine.

6:24 John: I was just talking to uh, Jane about crackling bread.

Arvel: Yeah.

John: How do you like it?

Arvel: Well shucks, you like to make me hungry again. I just eat supper.

²⁵ Meaning to call out

²⁶ Occurring on February 2 and observed traditionally as a day that indicates six more weeks of winter if sunny or an early spring if cloudy

6:35 John: [laughs] You like crackling bread then?

Arvel: Yeah buddy.

John: You can't beat it, can you?

Arvel: The only thing is just more of it.

John: Just more of it.

Arvel: Yeah.

6:41 John: Well, she's told me that every time you kill a hog, she puts up cracklings.

Arvel: Yeah boy, we always hafta take care of them. You had a very good mess this year?

John: Uh naw, I got, I had some back in the fall.

Arvel: Yeah.

John: I've got some that I'm gonna fix up one of these days with. I've got some leather britches, fix 'em with leather britches.

Arvel: Ooh, now you're talking,

John and Arvel: [laughs]

Arvel: Something on your mind?

John: No, I just wanted talk to you.

Arvel: Well, good then.

John: I wanted to talk to Jane a little. I was gonna do, I was talking to another woman today. I was gonna do a piece for Sunday²⁷ on uh, crackling bread and a few of they other things like corn mush.

Arvel: Yeah, yeah. I'll, I'll see that if I can. I'll read it.

John: Okay.

²⁷ Refers to Roaming the Mountains, an article written by John Parris, published in the Asheville Citizen Times from 1955 until 1997

7:26 Arvel: Uh no, imma telling you what, so I've been thinking about you. I've talked about you. I guess your ears been burning²⁸,

John: [laughs]

Arvel: Uh the last few days, I mentioned you several times wondering about how you getting along²⁹.

7:36 John: Well, we hadn't, over here, we uh, our road is such it up and down and it gets ice on it I can't get out. There's days I couldn't get out.

Arvel: Same way over here. We, we sit in two weeks one time.

7:48 John: Yeah, and uh, so but what. I've been thinkin' bout you and I'd wanted to get down and see you all.

Arvel: Say, uh, how's the good cook³⁰ getting along?

John: Oh, doing fine.

Arvel: She is?

John: Yeah.

Arvel: Jane said she forgot to ask.

7:59 John: Yah, doing, yeah doing just fine.

Arvel: Well, you tell her hello for us.

8:02 John: Alright, I sure will, and I'll get down that way sometime\\ soon.

Arvel: Okie doke.

John: Alright, take care.

Arvel: Bye.

²⁸ A phrase to say that someone has the feeling that other people are talking about him or her

²⁹ Meaning to move forward along a course

³⁰ Most likely a reference to John Parris wife, Dorothy Luxton Klenk Parris

John: Bye.

[long pause]

8:15 John: [to himself] And she's doing just fine.

Annotated Works Cited

Green, Jane, John Parris, and Arvel Greene. *HL_MSS17-03_21_90_Greene_Greene_1982-02*.

Audio recording. Hunter Library Special Collections, Western Carolina University, 2 Feb. 1982.

Accessed via Hunter Library Special Collections for transcription.

This recording hosts a conversation between Jane Green, John Parris, and Arvel Greene, offering ideas on Appalachian life and traditions, specifically making crackling bread.

The audio format preserves the speakers' voices which make it an important historical and cultural resource.

“Henry ‘Arvel’ Greene (1911–1992).” *FamilySearch*, www.familysearch.org/en/tree/person/details/L2X2-NLP. Accessed 23 Oct. 2025.

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“John Parris: Muse of the Mountains.” *Smoky Mountain Living*, www.smliv.com/stories/john-parris-muse-of-the-mountains/. Accessed 20 Oct. 2025.

This article provides an overview of John Parris' life, highlighting his journalism career and storytelling in Western North Carolina. It is useful for understanding the cultural impact of his column 'Roaming the Mountains.'

“Mary Jane Parton (1916–1997).” *FamilySearch*, www.familysearch.org/en/L2X2-NB1/mary-jane-parton-1916-1997. Accessed 23 Oct. 2025.

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This article discusses the reissue of John Parris' work and highlights his influence on Appalachian storytelling.

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This book offers a collection of Appalachian recipes and food traditions. The selected pages provide information about regional ingredients and cooking methods.

Parris, John. "Cracklin' Bread Tickles the Palate." *Roaming the Mountains, Asheville Citizen Times*, 7 Feb. 1982, pp. 1, 3A.

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This newspaper article is that which is referenced by Parris when he's talking to Jane Greene.

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This webpage explains the historical importance of pigs in Appalachian farming communities, particularly in the Great Smoky Mountains region.

“Publisher Reissues Parris’ ‘Roaming the Mountains.’” *The Sylva Herald*, 3 Nov. 2015, www.thesylvaherald.com/news/article_46e770c6-825e-11e5-bcb7-8f857b41b95e.html. Accessed 20 Oct. 2025.

This article gives information on the reissuance of John Parris’ ‘Roaming the Mountains,’ and gives pertinent information regarding the collection.

“SnowStorm Follows Bitter Cold Spell.” *The Sylva Herald*, vol. 56, no. 39, 14 Jan. 1982, p. 1.

This article gives information about the winter storm that Jane and Arvel discuss with John through the transcript.

Vander-Weide, Jacob. “Tombstone Tales: ‘Muse of the Mountains’ Wrote over 7,000 Articles on W.N.C.” *828 News Now*, 19 Apr. 2025, 828newsnow.com/news/228822-tombstone-ales-muse-of-the-mountains-wrote-over-7000-articles-on-w-n-c. Accessed 20 Oct. 2025.

This article commemorates John Parris’ writing career and his connection to Western North Carolina. It is important for understanding his work and the influence of his column ‘Roaming the Mountains.’

Wigginton, Eliot, editor. “Hog Dressing.” *The Foxfire Book*, Anchor Books, 1972, pp. 189–198.

This chapter of Foxfire helps in understanding how to butcher a hog and render its fat.

“William Verlon Jones (1936–2013).” *FamilySearch*, www.familysearch.org/en/tree/person/details/GH6J-6Y4. Accessed 27 Oct. 2025.

Reference for vital information on William Jones, location of birth and death, and marriages.