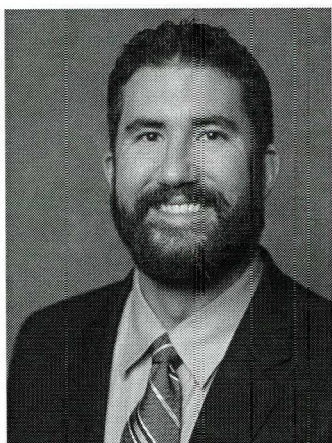


# In Memoriam: Michael B. Montgomery

15 May 1950 - 24 July 2019

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PAUL REED



*Paul E. Reed is an assistant professor of phonology/phonetics at the University of Alabama. His research focuses on the sociophonetic variation and change in the English varieties of the American South, particularly of the Appalachian region. His research analyzes the impact of local identity on a variety of phonological features. His work has appeared in the Journal of the Acoustical Society of America, Journal of the American Speech-Language Association, American Speech, and the Southern Journal of Linguistics, as well as collections about the South, such as Language Variation in the New South: Contemporary Perspectives on Change and Variation.*

In July, the Appalachian Studies community lost an influential member who devoted his life to better understanding the language varieties spoken in our beloved region. Michael Bryant Montgomery left “this mortal coil” on July 24th after an illness. We lost an eminent scholar, a tireless champion for the region, and a dear friend and mentor. In his scholarship, advocacy, and friendship, Montgomery noted links to the past, with an eye toward the future.

Some of his accomplishments speak for themselves—Distinguished Professor Emeritus of English at the University of South Carolina, where he taught for two decades, former president of the American Dialect Society, the Ulster-Scots Language Society, and the Southeastern Conference on Linguistics. Within the realm of Appalachian Studies, he was a recipient of some of the most prestigious awards that the Appalachian Studies Association can bestow. He received the Cratis Williams/James Brown Service Award in 2005. This honor goes to an individual who has made “exemplary contributions to Appalachia, Appalachian Studies, and/or the Appalachian Studies Association.” He also received the Weatherford Award for the best non-fiction book for his *Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English* in 2004. He was named as one of the 100 Most Influential People in the history of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park by the Great Smoky Mountain Association. From the East Tennessee Historical Society, he was awarded the Wilma Dykeman Award in 2004, given to an individual “whose writing reflects the excellence, heritage, culture, and diversity of East Tennessee and, who, as an ambassador for the region and for the state, has demonstrated a commitment to the best interests of the land and the people of the region.” The statements associated with these awards capture the essence of Michael Montgomery’s scholarship. He wrote about the language and culture of our region from an insider’s perspective. He was a native of Knoxville, Tennessee, and carried a connection to

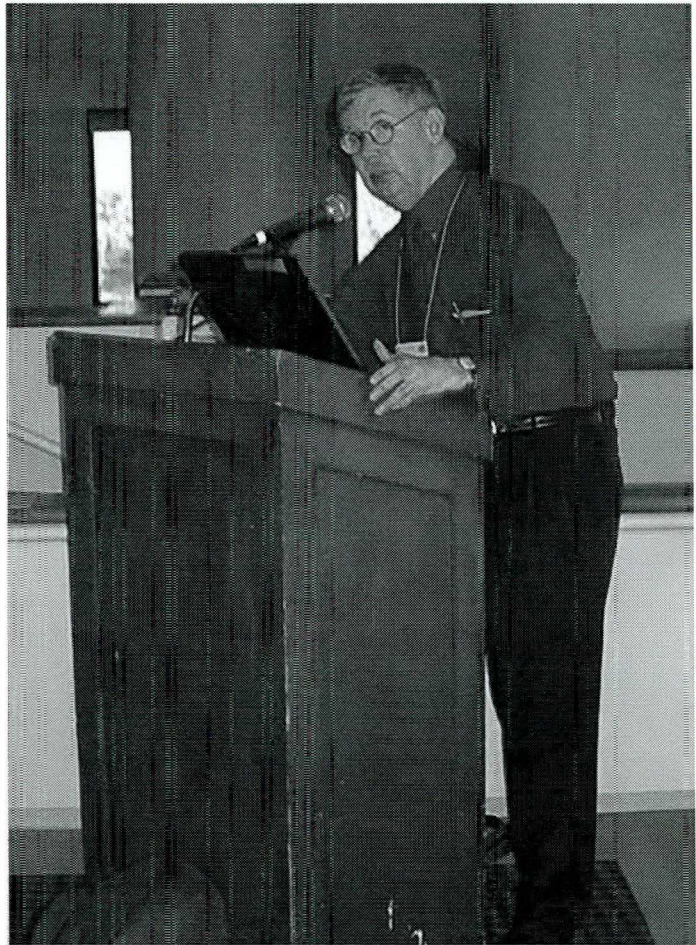


his birthplace with him, and this connection infused his writing.

His research and writing are foundational and fundamental across linguistics, sociolinguistics, Appalachian Studies, Scots-Irish Studies, and more. In particular, his ability to see historical connections and the current relevance of these connections is unmatched. His monumental work, the *Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English* (Montgomery and Hall 2004), is a dictionary of the highest order that also provides a grammatical overview of the variety of English spoken by inhabitants of what is now the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. This work is derived from interviews conducted by Joseph Sargent Hall in 1937-1939. Some

of these speakers were in their 80s and 90s; thus, this work taps into the deepest reaches of recorded English! Many of these speakers were acquiring language in the mid-19th century. You can hear some of these voices at our website, *The Appalachian English Website* (Montgomery and Reed). Michael Montgomery was also the Language section editor for both the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Ferris and Wilson 1989) and the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* (Abramson and Haskell 2006). He, along with Ellen Johnson, served as editors of the *Language* volume of the *New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (2007).

Another area of fruitful research has been his study of the historical roots of Appalachian speech in the British Isles. He made frequent trips to both Ireland and Scotland, scouring archives to find what he called “the voices of my ancestors” and producing more than 20 articles and one book (Montgomery 2006/2017). Across all of his linguistic writing, one can find deep descriptions of many aspects of Appalachian Englishes, from phonology to morphology, syntax to pragmatics. His perceptive understanding of the nuances of mountain speech, and his ability to explain the diversity of varieties, has impacted countless scholars.



Michael Montgomery at sociolinguistics conference, Univ. of Michigan, 2004



# DICTIONARY of SMOKY MOUNTAIN *English*



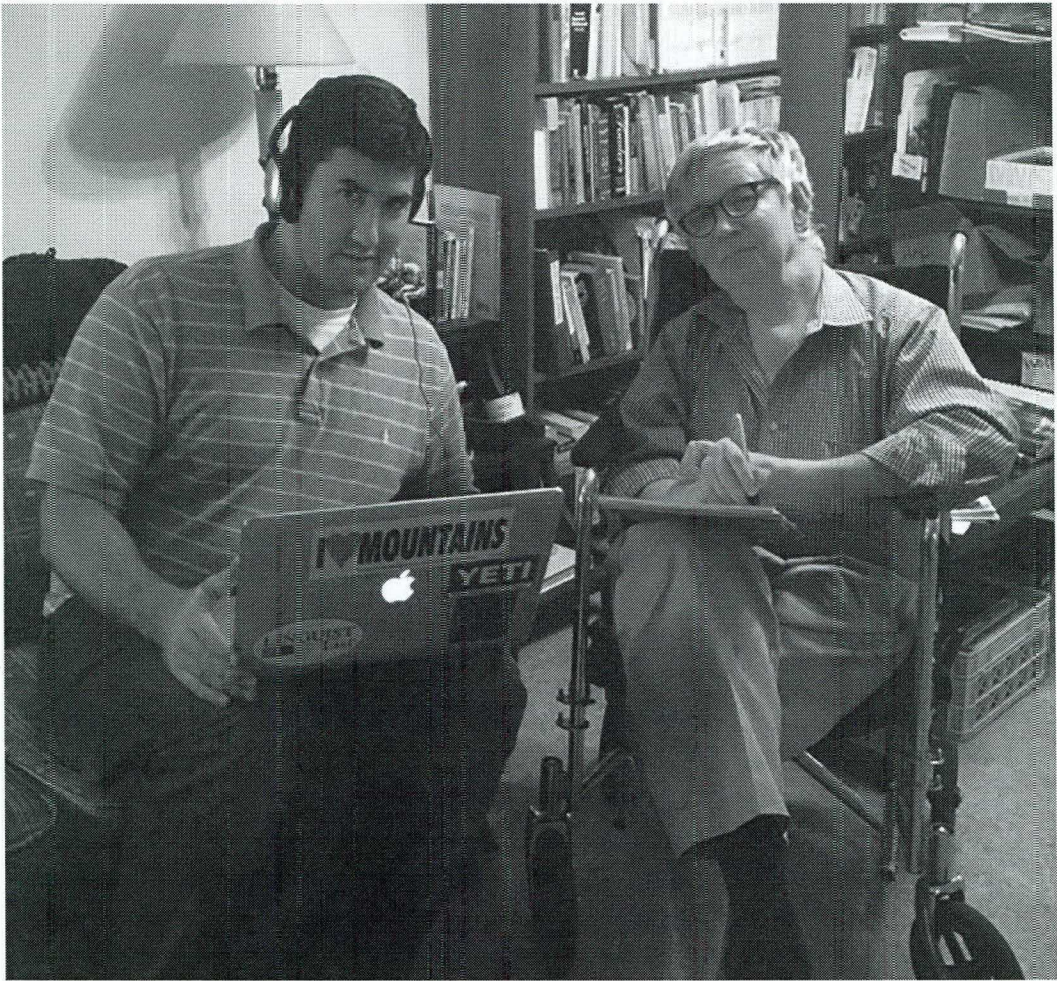
Michael B. Montgomery  
Joseph S. Hall

One of the best expressions about the region came from his pen. Montgomery (2013:25) notes, "Appalachia is a place as well as places, a people as well as peoples," and this description helps us understand the diversity as well as the sense of connectedness that many mountain people feel. As an advocate for the region, Montgomery made sure to emphasize the diversity and complexity of our region. In many of his papers, Montgomery sought to challenge some of the accepted "wisdom" about our region. For example, he problematized the idea of Appalachia as an isolated region. He methodically examined many of the claims about isolation and demonstrated that certain parts of Appalachia were as connected as any other area of the country. He showed that commerce flowed, newspapers were read, and stories shared, and

many connections existed between large parts of the mountains and many of the larger urban areas of the nation. He also noted that certain areas may have had some degree of relative isolation, but even in these areas, connections existed (Montgomery 2000). Since isolation of the region is more myth than truth, he challenged another circulating trope about the region—that of the language of the region being old and/or archaic. He dismantles the idea that "in the mountains they talk like Shakespeare" (Montgomery 1998). The notion that the speech of mountain dwellers somehow remained unchanged for centuries is pervasive on the part of outsiders and mountain dwellers both—yet it is completely without merit. In fact, the speech of Appalachia changes just like all other language varieties.

Michael Montgomery was also a mentor who touched countless people with his teaching and his presence in their lives. About nine years ago, he helped me—a young, burgeoning linguist from East Tennessee with a lot of ambition and drive—find my niche. Dr. Montgomery helped me find my inner mountain man. He knew it was there, and he guided me to find it myself. In the very first conversation we had, he recited our alma mater to me. I hadn't realized that we both graduated from Maryville College, but after receiving my rambling email, he looked me up! He recognized our connection and saw that as a way that we could bond quickly. He glimpsed some potential and guided me toward realizing it. Early on, I wanted to dive right in to study Appalachian English. He knew that I needed a deeper understanding, a more profound perspective. So we did an independent study where I read many of the great early works of the Appalachian Studies canon. He knew that to truly engage with the language, I needed an historical perspective, a cultural perspective, and





Paul Reed and Michael Montgomery transcribing interviews in Montgomery's home, Columbia, SC, 2016

an interdisciplinary perspective. So, we read, and read, and read some more! I had to send book reports and summaries with questions, ideas, and critiques to him weekly. I hadn't written a book report since about 7th grade! But he knew that I needed to engage with this research, that I needed to understand my homeland at a deeper level. And he knew that I had a perspective to offer. I could build on what had come before. He continued to send books, articles, blog posts, so many resources, to help me continue to grow. He knew that connecting to the past was crucial for my current research, but also for the future questions I would have. He was always trying to link the present with the past, with an eye for the future.

Dr. Montgomery was my dear friend. We spent many miles side by side, in planes, trains, and automobiles. We had so much in common—a love of sports, storytelling, and jokes. One thing that surprised me about him was his wit and his humor. Above, I mentioned the quasi-singing of the alma mater, which tickles me to this day. We also shared lively banter, and we would have long running jokes. Many of our emails and messages to one another contained these jokes and witty repartees. I can't remember why,



but he started referring to me as Private Reed. I thought it was funny, so I started calling him Commander M<sup>2</sup> (M squared). As I progressed with my degree, I got promotions—Private First Class, Sergeant, Lieutenant, and so on. At a party after I graduated, he told me that I was now a General. He also, at that same party, gave me a coonskin cap as a gift. He knew how much Tennessee, and especially East Tennessee means to me. He knew that gift would be incredibly meaningful, and also that it would be pretty funny to see a 6'8" Davy Crockett. Our love of sports focused especially on the University of Tennessee. I got more hot takes about football and basketball from message boards from M<sup>2</sup> than anyone! He used to get a kick out of my yelling at the TV when we would watch a game together. "Well, Sergeant, do you think they can hear you?" he would ask. "No, but it makes me feel better!!" and we would laugh. He had a hearty laugh and a wry grin. As much as his mentoring meant to me, as much as his scholarship continues to impact me, I'll miss my friend the most. I'll miss our trips, our conversations. I'll miss trying to see how many miles one of his stories could last (the record was 100). I'll miss getting his perspective about current events and things going on in my life. I'll miss his wisdom and advice. I'll miss his wit and his smile.

Academics say that if we see a little farther, it is because we are standing upon the shoulders of the giants who have come before. If I ever see any farther, it is upon Michael Montgomery's shoulders I'll stand, because he was truly a giant.

Rest in Peace.

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