



The Walker sisters, whose collective age totals 261 years, enjoy a short rest on the front porch. Their log-cabin home was built by their grandfather when Abe Lincoln was still practicing law in Illinois.

Time Stood Still in the Smokies

By JOHN MALONEY

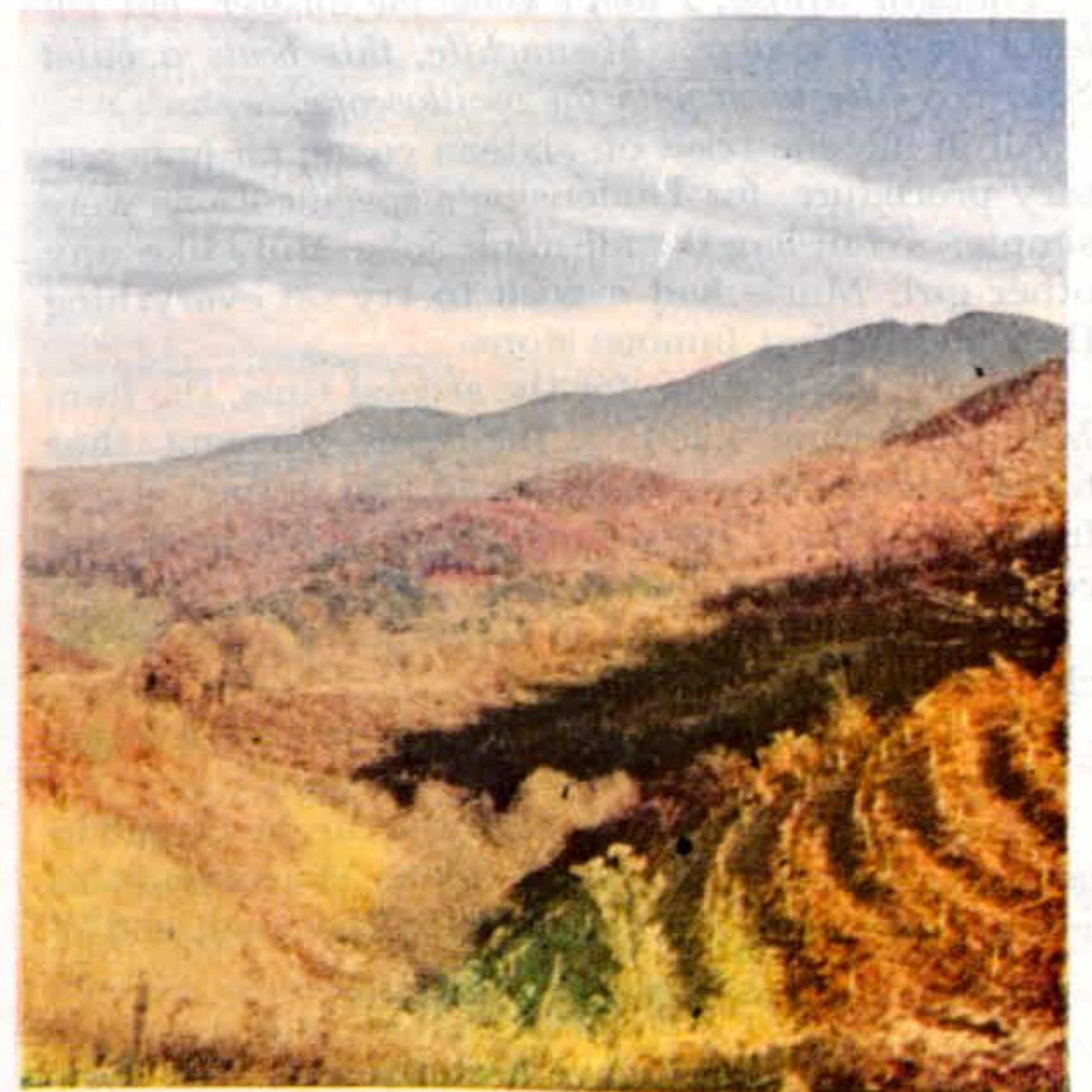
IF you are curious about how your great-great-grandfather lived—how he raised his family, grew his own food, produced his clothing and existed without benefit of supermarkets or mail-order catalogues, I'd like to take you back up Little Greenbriar Cove, in the heart of Tennessee's Great Smoky Mountains, to spend a leisurely autumn afternoon with the Walker sisters—Margaret Jane, seventy-five; Martha, sixty-eight; Louisa, sixty-two; and Hetty, fifty-six. There, surrounded by heavily forested peaks that in this range reach more than 6000 feet above the valley floors, you could look around you and say, with conviction, "Well, here I am back in the early nineteenth century, and it isn't so bad, after all."

The Walker sisters very definitely are out of this century, although when you taste some of their Dutch-oven-baked cornbread or sweet potatoes liberally smeared with butter they have just churned, you'll realize they are very much a part of this world. But they have kept any touch of these modern times away from their hearth, not through the slightest trace of eccentricity or any dislike for progress, but simply because, as women without

menfolk around, they have continued doing things in the ways and with the implements they know best how to use—which is to say, their father's and grandfather's methods and tools. The rocky mountainsides seem to respond to their touch. When I visited them, just as frost was putting the last splashes of color on high banks of forests that hem them in, their storerooms and cellars were full and they were settling down for winter with complete contentment.

This mountainous section of East Tennessee still is peopled by descendants of Daniel Boone and John Sevier and their contemporaries. The Walker sisters' grandfathers both were men of this independent, space-loving breed. Pushed out of Virginia by plowed land that left no room for game to multiply, they found the freedom they wanted in Tennessee's mountains. Wiley King, their maternal grandfather, found a little cove near where Fighting Creek and Little River join boulder-tossed waters. And here, while Abe Lincoln still was practicing law in Illinois, he built the house that is as solid today as it was when its yellow-poplar logs first were chinked with red mountain (Continued on Page 82)

Deep in the mountains of East Tennessee, the Walker sisters are still living in the early 19th century . . . and finding it not so bad, either.



On all sides the forested peaks of the Great Smokies rise 6000 feet or more above the valleys.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID ROBBINS



In this cabin, with nothing but the implements and methods of their forebears, the Walkers grind their meal, card their own wool and spin cloth for dresses and blankets.



Every thread that went into these colorful coverlets was spun by the sisters on their own old but still efficient wheel.



Cutting wood for fuel, shearing sheep or even stretching and drying sheepskin is all in the day's work to the four Walkers.

Spinning time is a social time, and during the winter months as many as five wheels are kept going. Before the six-foot-wide fireplace Miss Margaret stands at the spinning wheel while Miss Martha cards the wool.

