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**SPIRIT MEDICINE: NATIVE AMERICAN USES OF COMMON  
EVERLASTING (*PSEUDOGNAPHALIUM OBTUSIFOLIUM*) IN  
EASTERN NORTH AMERICA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Pseudognaphalium obtusifolium* (L.) (= *Gnaphalium obtusifolium* L.) is an important plant used in the practice of traditional medicine among many Native American groups in eastern North America. This essay documents use of this plant among the Yuchi, an American Indian people from the Southeast now residing in eastern Oklahoma. This use is contextualized within a survey of published and unpublished sources on the plant as utilized by other peoples in the Eastern Woodlands. This survey finds several clusters of practices and beliefs that are widely held across the region. Viewed more broadly, these findings suggest the value of a comparative study of American Indian ethnobotany and the place such study might have for reassessing anthropological understandings of American Indian life throughout the region and general models of regional social patterning. As a preliminary test case in the comparative ethnobotany of eastern North America, the study of *P. obtusifolium* contradicts previous findings that have suggested that the pharmacopoeia of individual groups tended to be unique.

*Key words:* Yuchi, ethnobotany, Indians of North America—Woodland Region, mourning practices, ghosts, *Gnaphalium* sp., *Pseudognaphalium* sp., Common Everlasting, Rabbit Tobacco

From an anthropological point of view, ethnobotanical studies among the Native American peoples of eastern North America can simultaneously serve at least two purposes. The first is descriptive. Ethnography in the Americanist tradition takes rich documentation of local cultures as a significant goal in and of itself. Distinct ways of life rooted in the history of a people are worthy of respect. In the face of cultural change, their future appreciation may depend, in part, on the documentary record produced through collaborations between researchers and the tradition bearers found in indigenous communities. Such work also serves a comparative purpose as a series of studies of local cultural patterns can be examined through time to produce a cultural history of a single group or compared regionally to understand complex social processes of interaction as they unfold across space and time. This examination of traditional plant lore among the Yuchi and other native peoples of eastern North America is grounded in these principles.

A plant used in important ways by American Indian peoples in the eastern U.S. is *Pseudognaphalium obtusifolium* (L.). Knowledgeable Yuchi people know this species as *tsodasha* 'spirit medicine'. Literally, the Yuchi name *tsodasha* is a compound word. The head of the compound, *tso* 'sun' is found in other Yuchi plant names and relates, in a broader way, to Yuchi cosmology in which the Sun is associated with the Yuchi Creator diety. The remaining element of the word cannot be confidently analyzed (Mary Linn, personal communication, 24 January 2000). While use of this plant among the Yuchi with whom I have collaborated in ethnographic research is consistent with those documented for other peoples of Eastern North America, its specific nature has not been documented in detail for any single group.

This paper is organized into three sections. First, the plant's use and significance among the Yuchi is described. Then the published and unpublished literature on *P. obtusifolium* is examined to place it within the regional context of Woodland Native America. This survey opens up consideration of some broader theoretical issues that are raised by data on *P. obtusifolium*, which are examined in the final section of this paper. Among the Yuchi, utilization of *P. obtusifolium* is closely linked to use of eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana* L.). Comparatively, Yuchi uses of these two plants are similar to uses of these and other plants among other Woodland groups.

Thus, my comparative analysis follows two tracks, one examining uses of *P. obtusifolium* throughout the region and the other looking at patterns of belief and practice that are symbolically and structurally similar to those I know best from fieldwork among the Yuchi. The paper is both a comparative ethnobotany of *P. obtusifolium* and an examination of Woodland Indian beliefs about traditional medicine, spiritualism, and cosmology as revealed in uses of *P. obtusifolium* and other plants.

*Pseudognaphalium obtusifolium* is a flowering plant belonging, in traditional botanical classification, to the Asteraceae family. It is typically 0.1–1.5 m high. Like related species, it flowers in clusters of small white globular heads. The plant's stems are cottony and its leaves are long, narrow, and gray-green in color on their upper surfaces and wooly on their undersides. It is common to dry soil and fields. Its range in eastern North America extends from the woodland regions of Canada south to Florida and west to the margins of the Plains. Its common Anglo-English names, in addition to common everlasting, are Indian posy, sweet everlasting, life everlasting, sweet-scented life everlasting, blunt-leaved everlasting, old field balsam, white balsam, catfoot, rabbit tobacco, and fragrant cudweed (Fernald 1950; Grieve 1996; Howard 1984; Moerman 1998; Small 1933; Steyermark 1963). The plant has long been known by the binomial *Gnaphalium obtusifolium* L., but the genus has been changed and is currently given as *Pseudognaphalium*, a usage recognized in USDA NRCS (2001). No ethnographic source, including those compiled in recent years utilizes this new nomenclature. *P. obtusifolium* is used in this paper except in direct citations of original materials by other authors. Otherwise, older references to *G. obtusifolium* have been converted to *P. obtusifolium*. Other changes in nomenclature are discussed where relevant below.

## THE YUCHI

Before examining Yuchi uses of *tsodasha*, readers unfamiliar with the general situation of the tribe and their neighbors in eastern Oklahoma may benefit from some preliminary comments on Yuchi language, culture, and society. The Yuchi have lived in eastern Oklahoma since the 1830s. They came to what was then known as Indian Territory in the company of Muskogee (Creek) peoples, among whom they maintained their own autonomous towns prior to being fore-

ibly “removed” from their territories east of the Mississippi River by the government of the United States. After removal, the Yuchi reestablished their own communities in the northwest corner of the Creek Nation, near the present day municipalities of Bixby, Sapulpa, and Bristow, Oklahoma (Fig. 1). The Yuchi language is unrelated to Creek and the Yuchi constitute the most culturally divergent minority population politically encompassed within the modern, multi-ethnic Muskogee (Creek) Nation. Population estimates are difficult to assemble, but during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Yuchi seem to have consistently comprised about 15% of the total Creek Nation population. Today, knowledgeable Yuchi people estimate the tribal population at 1500–2000 individuals.

Yuchi culture is broadly similar to that of other native agricultural groups whose traditions are rooted in the Woodlands of Eastern North America. Despite the Yuchi people’s political encapsulation in the Muskogee (Creek) Nation, Yuchi culture preserves many distinctive features that sets it apart from that of their Creek neighbors. In particular, the Yuchi maintain close social ties with the Absentee Shawnee and, to a lesser extent, the Loyal Shawnee. Yuchi culture patterns are shared as much with the Shawnee and other Northeastern groups as with the Creek and other peoples speaking Muskogean languages. Speck (1909) and Jackson (1998) provide general descriptions of Yuchi culture and society. Lacking a modern-style, federally recognized tribal government, older community institutions, particularly three town-based ceremonial grounds and two Yuchi Methodist church congregations, help organize Yuchi society. Language and cultural preservation activities have become an important focus of Yuchi community life, expanding the longstanding seasonal round of secular and sacred activities.

Their three ceremonial grounds remain the most prominent institutions of Yuchi social life. While functioning as religious congregations today, the ceremonial grounds are, in form and historical origin, town governments encompassing the secular and religious life of a local Yuchi town possessing a town square—the physical form providing the ceremonial ground with one of its English language labels—“square ground.” (This conflation of social organizational unit and physical meeting site is common in general American practice, found associated with, for example, Christian churches and fraternal organizations.)

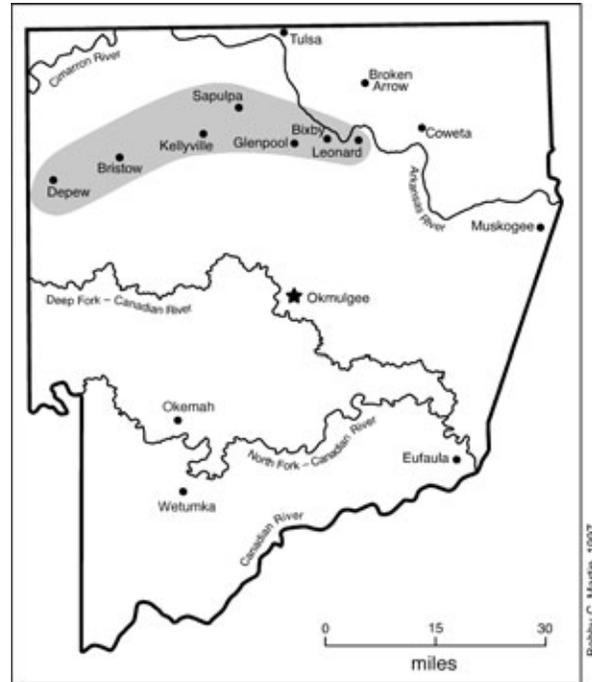


Figure 1. The jurisdictional territory of the Muskogee (Creek) Nation with Yuchi settlement areas shown as a shaded region.

In contrast to 19<sup>th</sup> century practice, not all Yuchi people today participate in ceremonial ground life, but many do. The ceremonial grounds are still the social focus and cultural symbol of local communities. Physically, they retain the town square architecture they have possessed since at least the early historic era and socially they continue to be led by a town chief and other traditional political and religious officers. These leaders organize a series of ceremonial events that take place at each settlement’s square ground site, beginning with ritual football games in early spring and continuing through an event known as the Soup Dance in the late summer or early fall. During the winter season, the ceremonial ground organizations are ritually inactive, but they continue to organize secular social activities for the Yuchi community, including holiday dinners, wild onion suppers, and indoor “just for fun” dances. This seasonal round is described in Jackson (1998).

Today, plants are important in two related domains of Yuchi traditional life. Certain plant species are used in community rituals, particularly in the ceremonies, such as the Green Corn Ceremonial, that take place at each community’s town square, and in funerals. Plants are also used individually by knowledgeable Yuchi people in

herbal remedies intended to relieve particular ailments. Sometimes the plants used in these different ways are the same species, with ceremonial ground uses acting as collective preventative medicine and personal uses serving as therapies or cures. These two kinds of uses are linked to formal “doctoring,” which involves knowledge of elaborate sung formulas and other specialized techniques of healing, as well as plant lore. Formally recognized and trained “Indian doctors” no longer practice among the Yuchi today. Yuchi people rely on such doctors active among neighboring groups for more elaborate medical treatment in the Southeastern Indian way. Yuchi individuals and families seeking such assistance turn especially to doctors of Cherokee and Seminole backgrounds. The number of plants known and used by Yuchi people is today much reduced from the total number once held in the pharmacopoeia of Yuchi specialists. Those remaining in the Yuchi repertoire are either used in ceremonial life, and are thus known to ritual leaders, or are part of the simpler tradition of herbal medicine known by Yuchi people at-large. Doctoring and medicine is a vast area of belief among the Yuchi and their neighbors. Consideration of their uses of tsodasha represents one small part of this larger picture. (For an examination of another Yuchi plant use, see Jackson [2000]).

#### **TSODASHA—A YUCHI MEDICINE**

Yuchi herbalists collect tsodasha in the fall, winter, and early spring, when its flowers and leaves have dried. In the Yuchi area of northeastern Oklahoma, the plant is frequently found in neglected meadows or pastures that have not been mowed and are becoming reclaimed by wild plant species. As with other medicinal and ceremonial plants, harvesting is typically undertaken in a reverent frame of mind. Individuals vary in the elaborateness of their ritual preparations. One typical step for collecting such plants is to fast after midnight on the day during which medicine plants will be obtained. Among the Yuchi, collecting is ideally, although not always, done just after sunrise. Before undertaking the harvesting of medicinal plants, Yuchi herbalists will often pray to the Creator, explaining the purpose of their undertaking and asking for support and guidance in it. Such prayers, whether spoken or thought, are offered facing the east, from which the sun rises. When a plant to be harvested is found, the collector removes it from the ground similarly facing in an eastward direction. In Yuchi belief

and cosmology, east is the direction from which life and good things come. As the agent of Yuchi creation, the Sun is revered, at least to many present-day Yuchi, as an embodiment of the Creator, whose Yuchi name, *Gohætone*, is most often translated as ‘master of breath’.

Additionally, Yuchi herbalists will only harvest a portion of the plants found in any given location. They feel that leaving a significant number of plants behind insures the availability of the species in the same location in the future. Native people in eastern Oklahoma decry large-scale commercial gathering of medicinal plants and reserve their greatest scorn for Native American people who have endangered the availability of important plants through indiscriminant collecting and commercializing practices (for a Delaware view on this point, see Hill [1971:5]; for a Catawba one, see Speck [1937:183]).

Yuchi uses of tsodasha cluster around a common set of interrelated problems—ones simultaneously spiritual and medical. As a preventative medicine, tsodasha is burned together with dried cedar needles (*Juniperus virginiana* L., known in Yuchi as *de*) following a funeral. A man appointed for this task mixes the dried flowers and leaves of tsodasha with dried needles of cedar. In a cast iron pan, a metal bucket, or in the horizontally held blade of a shovel, the two are burned together to produce smoke. Entering the home of the deceased, the man, usually with an assistant, carries the smudge throughout the residence, visiting all of its sides and rooms. The male official may use a feather or a feather fan to distribute the smoke around the home.

Similarly, during a baby naming ceremony, a smudge of cedar and tsodasha is built and the child being named is fanned with the smoke, typically using an eagle feather or a feather fan. In such instances, the cedar and tsodasha will often be burned on coals placed inside of a metal kettle or pan. This is analogous to similar uses of cedar associated with the now widespread rituals of the Native American Church (LaBarre 1989:81–82). By way of context, the use of tsodasha in funeral ritual described here was common, but not universal, among Yuchi families during the 1990s. The practice of the Yuchi baby naming ritual mentioned here was uncommon during this same time period, although one Yuchi speaking elder performed it for whomever requested his help in doing it.

As a preventative, the use of tsodasha in these ways prevents disruption or ill health brought by

ghosts or malevolent spirits among the living. Yuchi people discuss these issues in different sorts of ways and my presentation here represents a summary of what various elders told me. Possessing a range of interpretations of religious and spiritual matters, not all Yuchi would agree with my interpretation here. My account draws on the teachings of Yuchi elders who are leaders in the practice of ceremonial ground religion or who have taken an interest in traditional Yuchi beliefs and practices.

The spirits of the dead are not inherently harmful in traditional Yuchi belief, but there are appropriate times and places for them to return to this world and interact with the living. The annual Soup Dance Ceremonial is the most prominent of these times. Problems arise when spirits cling too tightly to their family and friends in the world of the living and refuse to join their kinsmen in the world of the departed. Yuchi funeral rituals are directed at guiding and encouraging the spirits of the deceased along their path to the next world. This departure of the spirit is a process Yuchis refer to as “going home.” This idea refers to the deceased’s reunion with those other Yuchi people—family, friends, and ancestors—who have already departed the life of the living. Grieving family members are in a weakened condition after a death and they are most susceptible to harm from ghosts that choose to ignore the urgings of their living relatives to take the journey to the next world. The use of tsodasha and cedar after a funeral is further encouragement for the spirits of the deceased to leave the home of the family. It is a signal and an agent pushing them onward in their journey.

In its use in a baby naming, tsodasha and cedar protect a young child from the illness that spirits of the dead can cause, as well as from other sources of harm, such as witchcraft, meanness, and ill will. Young children are not fully formed at birth. They are soft, fragile, and easily affected by powerful forces. This fact joins with Yuchi love of their children to explain why Yuchi leaders do not allow children who are too small to walk on their own to be carried in the arms of adults during ceremonial dances. The fire built at ceremonial ground events is a powerful agent and infants are not yet developed enough to interact with it directly. Also, in ceremonial dances, the spirits of the dead return to fellowship with the living. Both the power of the fire and the return of the departed during dances are important and good things. The fire inspires faith and positive harmo-

nious social relations; the presence of ancestors reminds Yuchis of their past and brings good feelings of fellowship and cultural continuity. These positive forces are prominent in the ethos of ceremonial ground life, but newborns do not yet possess the strength of body and spirit to interact with them directly. Similarly, in everyday life, babies require the care and protection of their parents. The use of tsodasha and cedar in the naming ceremony purifies and protects a child from a chance encounter with a harmful spirit or force.

Additional uses among the Yuchi are related to these. In an instance reported by a church-going Yuchi family, all of the family’s children were once unable to sleep at night. The concerned parents sought the help of a Yuchi herbalist. The man prepared the mixture of cedar and tsodasha and fumigated the home and “smoked off” the children—enabling them to sleep normally. This use, common in the Woodlands, suggests the ways a series of similar potential causes are confronted with a common treatment. A web of symptoms—insomnia, anxiety, nervousness, strange or atypical behavior, awareness of spiritual visitation—all suggest to a knowledgeable herbalist or Indian doctor the potential usefulness of tsodasha as a medicine.

Among the many English language names used for *P. obtusifolium*, it is known to some Yuchi as “Indian perfume.” This name is associated with a different but related use as a preventative medicine. The plant’s flowers may be picked and placed into a bundle made with a small piece of cloth or a handkerchief that is tied closed with a thong, cord, or string. Such a bundle may be carried by an individual as a protective medicine. In recent years, such bundles have been tied by Yuchi men onto bead bandoleers worn during participation in intertribal powwow and gourd dances. The small bundle attaches to the bandoleer at the point at which it crosses the shoulder blade on the back. Such uses combine powwow practices and clothing styles learned from Plains tribes with older Yuchi medicine traditions. Such a use is formally a small aspect of a larger expression of commitment to, and engagement with, Indian tradition. More subtly, this use participates in a broader set of beliefs and helps to protect the wearer from unknown harms that are sometimes found in large social gatherings.

A similar use is described among the Oklahoma Seminole and a host of similar measures are widely known and practiced among Native North

American peoples (see Howard and Lena 1984:33, 229). My identification of *P. obtusifolium* as a plant used for this purpose by Yuchis should not imply that it is the plant universally used for this purpose by other contemporary groups or individuals. James Howard identified several species of “Indian perfume” used in the bandoleer bundles of Ponca dancers, but the purpose he describes is as a perfume associated with love medicine rather than as a form of protection (Howard 1965:63-64, 69-70). In contrast, his student George Hill identified wild mint (*Mentha arvensis* L.) as the plant tied in bundles to the bandoliers of male peyotists and dancers among the Delaware (1971:13). Hill did not provide a Delaware justification for this practice.

Viewed historically, the basic Yuchi uses of tso-dasha have some antiquity. Frank Speck’s (1909) ethnography of the Yuchi does not identify the plant or its use, but his fieldnotes preserve record of the practice of smoking a house. His notes record that tobacco “has to be doctored. Cedar and tobacco [are burned] with hot coals in a shovel [that is] carried through the house [in order to] drive away evil spirits [or], witches, spying on [the] home. Yuchi do it any time when children are frightened.” This note ends with the statement “Creek do as above after a person has died in [a] house (Speck n.d.)” While Speck identifies the plants used as cedar and tobacco, *P. obtusifolium*’s common name—rabbit tobacco—suggests the link (or confusion) between the two plants. The time depth of these uses is also suggested by the wide distribution of similar uses among other American Indian groups, some of whom have not been in sustained contact with one another since the colonial era.

#### USES OF *PSEUDOGNAPHALIUM* IN SOUTHEASTERN NORTH AMERICA

Yuchi uses of *P. obtusifolium* become clearer when viewed comparatively in the context of the medicinal practices of their present-day neighbors and other native peoples of Eastern North America. In turn, a richer knowledge of Yuchi practice helps make sense of common themes present in these other uses that might otherwise not be noticed when considering the medical botany of a particular community based on the available ethnographic information.

##### Oklahoma Seminole

The Oklahoma Seminole use cedar and everlasting in much the same way as the Yuchi.

According to James Howard and Willie Lena these plants are used to counter witchcraft or bad medicine that may have been picked up accidentally in a crowd. The plant mixture is burned and the patient fumigates his or her hands and body with the smoke. The patient breathes the smoke four times, four being the basic ritual pattern number in Woodland Indian societies. The Oklahoma Seminole authorities also report that a house is smoked in the Yuchi fashion after it has been visited in one’s absence by a person who has attempted to leave behind “bad medicine” in order to bewitch the occupant(s). Finally, the Oklahoma Seminole share a use of the everlasting and cedar smudge that is also widespread—as a means of relieving stress and anxiety (Howard and Lena 1984:32-34).

##### Creek (Muskogee)

During his research among the Yuchi, Speck also documented aspects of the cultural life of their neighbors, the Creek of Taskigi (Tuskegee) town. Among this group, he reported that *Gnaphalium* (species unknown) was used in a cure for fever caused by spirits (Speck 1911:236). During his research in 1905, Speck purchased medical training from Laslie Cloud, an Indian doctor, the chief of Taskigi town, and an ancestor to prominent members of both the Yuchi and Creek communities today. Based on this training, Speck describes spirit sickness in greater detail, noting:

The spirits of dead people, *poyafi’kdja*, literally ‘our spirits,’ referring to dead ancestors, who have not reached the home of the spirits, are thought to wander about the earth inflicting fever in its various forms. The medicines steeped by the shaman for this trouble were given as *kofa’tska*, peppermint (*Mentha* sp.?) and *ahálbakstcē*, ‘potato very straight (?)’, said to be Life Everlasting (*Gnaphalium* sp.). There are ten verses to this song, between each of which the medicine is given a blowing. The song invokes the troublesome spirit, mentioning his defunct relatives with the idea of obtaining his mercy in some way through his affection for them [Speck 1911:226, italics added].

Speck also presented the curing song and a translation of its words. The use and associations Speck reports are consistent with the others reported here.

Unlike Speck’s work with the Creek of Taskigi, John Swanton’s field studies spanned all of the Creek communities in Oklahoma. His principal

consultant in the area of herbal medicine and doctoring, Jackson Lewis, reported that *P. obtusifolium* was used in a cure for mumps. Caley Proctor explained to Swanton that it was used in remedies for bad colds and for when a patient could not keep anything in her or his stomach. Closest to the cluster of phenomena described above is its use in water as a medicine when older people “could not rest well and woke up with a start as soon as they had fallen asleep (Swanton 1928:661).” Among the Creek, it is likely the use Speck described on the basis of work with Laslie Cloud was (or is) found more widely among Creek doctors, despite the fact that Swanton was apparently not told of it. As will become evident, the use Speck described is found among other groups associated in the historical era with the so-called Creek Confederacy.

### Alabama

Swanton obtained more detailed information on *P. obtusifolium* among that part of the Alabama tribe residing in eastern Texas. Although they speak a distinct Muskogean language, the Alabama are culturally and historically related to the Creek and especially to the Koasati.

It was used, furthermore, when a man was nervous, woke up frequently, and wanted to run away. It was then boiled in water along with cedar and the face of the patient was washed in it until he got well. This sickness was thought to be brought on by ghosts and the medicine was intended to drive them off. Another way to effect the same end was by burning this plant and cedar together [Swanton 1928:663–664].

Swanton’s description of “wanting to run away” has a direct parallel in the comparable use of cedar in Florida as reported by William Sturtevant and described below. The second use Swanton describes for the Alabama is identical to Yuchi belief and practice.

### Koasati (Coushatta)

While Alabama and Koasati towns are found among the Creek in Oklahoma, the majority of both groups resides on two reservations, one in Louisiana and one in east Texas. Among the Koasati of this region, Lyda Taylor undertook ethnobotanical research and reported several uses of everlasting. It was combined with other (unknown) plants, water, and salt and drunk as a cure for fever. A child with a fever was given a decoction made by boiling the leaves in water.

The child was also bathed in this decoction. For the same purpose, a final Koasati technique is, by now, familiar: “Smoking leaves are also carried around the house” (Taylor 1940:62).

### Choctaw and Houma

In his ethnographic notes on the small settlement of Choctaw residing at Bayou Lacomb, Louisiana, in 1909, David Bushnell reports that the leaves and blossoms of *Gnaphalium polycephalum* (an older name for *Gnaphalium obtusifolium*) “are boiled in water and the extract is taken for colds or for pains in the lungs (Bushnell 1909:24).” These uses are echoed in its wide use as a cold medicine (Houma, Eastern Cherokee, Native Virginia, Mohegan, Creek, Catawba) and in treatments for asthma (Eastern Cherokee, Iroquois). In unpublished notes compiled by Speck in 1941 on medicines from this same Choctaw community, he records that *P. obtusifolium* was boiled to make a tea used to cure fever and boils (Speck 1941b). A second use was in a cough syrup made by boiling it with sugar (Speck 1941b). Also in Louisiana, Speck recorded the use of *G. purpureum* (now = several species in the family Asteraceae) among the Houma, who used it in a tea for colds (1941a:64). In comparing Houma medicine with that of other Southeastern groups, Speck noted the Choctaw use of *P. obtusifolium* as reported by Bushnell. Because they are different species, he did not consider the two uses to be cognate as I have here (Speck 1941a:69).

I am unaware of any sources providing information on the plant among the main bodies of Choctaw in Oklahoma and Mississippi. The regular contact between the Oklahoma Choctaw and the neighboring Seminole and Creek would suggest that its use there is likely. The Choctaw, Creek, Cherokee, Seminole, and Yuchi (and other) people in eastern Oklahoma regularly consult traditional doctors and healers across tribal groups, as has been discussed by Willard Walker in an important series of articles (Walker 1981, 1989).

### Catawba

Based on work with elderly Catawba consultants in the first decades of the 20th century, Speck collected information on a number of Catawba herbal remedies. “Life everlasting [also known as] ‘rabbit tobacco’ leaves are steeped and drunk for colds and pneumonia” (Speck 1937:190). Speck identifies the plant as “*Lobelia inflata* or possibly *Gnaphalium obtusifolium*” (Speck 1937:197). As the former does not appear

in known cold medicines among other groups and the latter does widely, it seems likely that *P. obtusifolium* was the plant being discussed by Speck's consultants under the name rabbit tobacco (compare Moerman 1998:250, 312).

### Algonquian Peoples of Virginia

Robert Solenberger, then an anthropology student working under Speck in studies of American Indian communities in the East, obtained an Upper Mattaponi cough medicine around 1939–1940 in Adamstown, Virginia, that contained life everlasting. In notes preserved in the Frank Speck papers at the American Philosophical Society, Solenberger states that: “Molly Adams gave me some cough medicine for you [Speck]. It is made of heartleaf, pine top, and life everlasting boiled. Molly said she used cedar bark as internal medicine for children's indigestion. The berries are also used for tea and ointment (with starch?). Cedar wood is also burned to fumigate chicken houses” (Solenberger n.d.). I include the latter comments here because they expand the ethnographic record related to cedar uses. Fred Gleach reports that Molly Adams was the wife of Upper Mattaponi chief Jasper Adams (personal communication, 4 January 2000).

Solenberger was one among a large group of Speck students who were undertaking ethnographic research among Native American groups in Virginia during the years 1939–1941. Among the publications assembled by this group is an account of Rappahannock medicine. They report there that *P. obtusifolium* has several uses among the Rappahannock “(a) Stems, dried and kept, steeped to make tea for asthma. (b) Dried leaves smoked in a pipe as substitute for tobacco. A relief for asthma. (c) Leaves chewed for “fun.” (d) Handful of roots steeped in hot water, a teaspoon of which is drunk three times a day for chills (Speck et. al. 1942:29).” Excluding c, these uses are reported elsewhere in the east.

### Cherokee

I consulted three sources that report on the use of *P. obtusifolium* among the Eastern Cherokee. In the famous Swimmer Manuscript collection of curing formulas analyzed by James Mooney and Franz Olbrechts, it is used, in combination with Carolina vetch (*Vicia caroliniana* Walt.) and water in a medicine that is applied to the body over scratches administered by the doctor in a treatment for muscular pain and cramping (Mooney and Olbrechts 1932:207). This same source details a cure for a “clogging up of the

throat passages so as to seriously interfere with breathing and utterance.” The cause is a ghostly form of water insect. The herbal component of the cure involves blowing a warm solution of *P. obtusifolium* down the throat of the patient using a tube made from the stalk of Joe-pye-weed (*Eupatorium purpureum* L.) (Mooney and Olbrechts 1932:261–262). Mooney's older work on Cherokee medicine, Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees, reports that life everlasting is used for colds and in the sweat bath for various diseases. He notes that it is “considered one of their most valuable medical plants” (Mooney 1891:325). (In this source, Mooney identified this species as *Gnaphalium decurrens*, an older name for *Gnaphalium viscosum* Kunth., (now = *Pseudognaphalium macounii* (Greene) Kartesz) but this does not appear to be an eastern species and *P. obtusifolium* is likely the plant Mooney was studying.)

A more recent compendium of Eastern Cherokee herblore compiled by Paul Hamel and Mary Chiltoskey indicates that *P. obtusifolium* is also used in a decoction for colds, is chewed for a sore mouth or throat, and is smoked for asthma (Hamel and Chiltoskey 1975:51–52.). These final uses are again widespread in the region.

James Mooney's extensive field notes on Eastern Cherokee ethnobotany have recently been studied by David Cozzo (2002). These provide information on the place of *P. obtusifolium* in Cherokee ethnobiological classification. Although an intermediate category that is based on odor does exist in the Cherokee system (*gawsuki* ‘smeller’), *P. obtusifolium* is identified in Mooney's manuscripts as *kastuta egwa* ‘simulating ashes, large’ belonging to the category *kastuta* ‘simulating ashes’ for which nine member species were documented (Cozzo 2002:142).

No published source of which I am aware reports the use of *P. obtusifolium* by the Cherokee in Oklahoma. For this reason, I was particularly pleased that a Western Cherokee friend who is well acquainted with traditional medicinal practice was willing to explain aspects of its use to me. Used alone in a tea, it is part of a cure for chills. To dispel ghosts, it is burned either alone or mixed with tobacco. The former use is found elsewhere in the east, while the latter is a variation on the basic use made of it among the Yuchi, Creek, Alabama, and Koasati. It is widely acknowledged by members of other Southeastern tribes that Cherokee doctors make greater use of tobacco than practitioners of other groups. In this light,

the specific differences between the use of everlasting in Western Cherokee practice and in that of their neighbors are consistent and expected.

Studying Western Cherokee ethnobotany with Willie Jumper in the early 1970s, Jim Sarbaugh also learned about uses of (*Pseudo*)*Gnaphalium*. Together they collected a specimen of a plant that was either *Pluchea camporata* L. or a species of (*Pseudo*)*Gnaphalium*. Their notes, generously provided to the author, give one of the Cherokee names for this plant as *kosdedv'usti'ʔi* 'ashes little' (Sarbaugh personal communication, 31 October 2000.) This Cherokee term reveals this plant as a member of the *kastuta* class documented by Mooney and Cozzo for the Eastern Cherokee. Mr. Jumper explained that this plant was used "to dispel lonesome feelings or ghosts." The leaves were placed "in [a] bucket or other metal container and heat[ed] over [a] fire until smoke and vapors fill [the] house." As among the Yuchi, this technique "will drive out lonesome feelings or the ghost of a departed loved one." "According to Willie Jumper, to be effective, the plant must be collected when it is dry (in August or early fall). Also, a ritual formula must be said when the leaves are burned." Sarbaugh notes further that Mr. Jumper knew two Creek medicine women who used this plant similarly (personal communication, 31 October 2000). Another specimen collected by Sarbaugh and Jumper was also tentatively identified as a species of (*Pseudo*)*Gnaphalium*. This was used in a cold tea as a treatment for coated tongue, especially in small children. Alternatively, for the same condition, a basil leaf could be placed on the patient's tongue.

Cedar is absent from the Cherokee uses just described, but Alan Kilpatrick's writings on Western Cherokee medicine describe beliefs about spirits and about the use of cedar smoke that are closely analogous to those of the Yuchi and the Muskogean-speaking groups. He writes:

Although Cherokees semantically distinguish in their language between the ghost of an animal (*udhá:li*) and that of a human (*asgi:na*) they acknowledge that both spiritual entities can cause problems for the living. Cherokees, like their Muskogean counterparts, use smoked cedar leaves to ward off malicious haunting spirits. As a safeguard, mourners at funerals would often drop cedar leaves (about three inches long) on the casket. There was a folk belief that anyone who attended a funeral without smoking himself or herself thoroughly with cedar would become ill within seven days. [Kilpatrick 1997:76-77]

These same uses for cedar were documented by Jumper and Sarbaugh who noted that cedar "is often burned in Cherokee houses where death has occurred to expel the ghost of the deceased and to make the acceptance of death easier for those remaining members of the household" (Jim Sarbaugh, personal communication, 31 October 2000). The literature on Cherokee medicine, ritual, and belief is extensive and additional information on the topic may be available. In addition, the practice of traditional medicine among the Western Cherokee remains widespread and much could be learned through collaboration with knowledgeable Cherokee specialists.

### Florida Seminole and Miccosukee

The most complete available study of Southeastern ethnobotany, ritual, and medical practices is Sturtevant's (1955) account of Miccosukee Seminole doctoring. While *P. obtusifolium* was not among the plants he identified in collaboration with Florida Seminole specialists, the basic set of medical/spiritual conditions cataloged for the Yuchi and other Eastern peoples are clearly present in the Florida Seminole/Miccosukee medico-religious system described by Sturtevant. The conditions most closely approximating those described for the Yuchi employ cedar in similar ways. Although not including use of *P. obtusifolium*, I describe these related Seminole practices because they enhance my account of a regional belief system that connects cedar and other aromatic plants, a common set of therapeutic techniques, and a cluster of illnesses caused by spirits of the dead.

Cedar is used in at least eight distinct disease cures. Two appear especially relevant. One form of insanity or craziness is cured among the Muskogee-speaking Florida Seminole by smoking an individual with cedar mixed with gourd seeds (Alexander Spoehr fieldnotes, cited in Sturtevant 1955:293). Cedar and tobacco leaves were once used in this same way by a prophet in a Miccosukee historical narrative to cure a crazy person (Sturtevant 1955:290). As noted above, this combination was identified by Speck as that used in fumigating a Yuchi house after a funeral. As noted above, this combination is also used to dispel ghosts among the Western Cherokee.

A second relevant Florida Seminole/Miccosukee example is ghost sickness. The cause and symptoms are familiar to the Yuchi case, with the addition of coughing and vomiting. In the Miccosukee cure, red bay (*Persea borbonia* L.) leaves

are used in a manner similar to the uses of *P. obtusifolium* elsewhere in the Southeast. For Miccosukee ghost sickness, bay leaves are doctored in heated water and used as an internal medicine (emetic) and as a wash (compare the Alabama data above) (Sturtevant 1955:259–260). Among the Muskogee speaking Seminole, these same characteristics applied, but cedar could be substituted for bay leaves (Alexander Spoehr fieldnotes cited in Sturtevant 1955:260).

In connection with Miccosukee funeral ritual, bay leaves are carried to the gravesite by the funeral party to protect participants and to ward off the spirit of the deceased. Bay leaves are also burned in the camp of the deceased in the same manner and for the same purpose as the Yuchi use of *P. obtusifolium* and cedar (Sturtevant 1955:338, 342).

A third use, one that appears related to all of those under discussion, is the use of bay leaves and cedar, together with two other plants, tied into a pouch and worn as a necklace by an infant as a means of protection from disease and danger (Sturtevant 1955:221–222; see also Greenlee 1945:145). This use is especially similar to the Oklahoma Seminole use of *P. obtusifolium* described by Howard and Lena (1984:33) and its use as “Indian perfume” described for Yuchi above.

This discussion of Florida Seminole medicine is based on Sturtevant (1955), but this source has recently been augmented by the work of Alice Micco Snow, a Florida Seminole herbalist, writing in collaboration with anthropologist Susan Enns Stans (2001). For the topic under consideration here, Snow and Stans provide wonderfully detailed information that expands the record initially compiled by Sturtevant without contradicting it. For added detail, particularly for uses of bay in connection with funeral ritual, protecting children, and controlling ghosts, readers are encouraged to consult their work.

The regularity of use of red bay by the Miccosukee in situations in which *P. obtusifolium* is used by other groups suggests a systematic rather than coincidental relationship. Bay and everlasting both possess powerful, distinctive, and pleasant scents. This feature may be the common link they share or it may underlie a substitution made in the context of Seminole geographic and cultural separation progressively further into Florida (Sturtevant 1988). Red bay is a tropical American plant, not found throughout the East, as is everlasting. The puzzle of red bay’s relationship to

everlasting, and the cultural processes that might explain its use in Seminole medicine may remain a mystery. Knowledge of the medicinal practices of the pre-Seminole inhabitants of Florida would be helpful in this regard, but ethnohistory and archaeology can only be expected to contribute so much. (Milanich and Sturtevant 1972 provide some important information on Timucuan medicine practices. The material presented there suggest strong similarities between the Timucua and other Southeastern groups. See especially pages 44–45.) The topic will likely remain in the realm of speculative culture history, although drawing linkages between Seminole practices and those elsewhere in the east seems like a good first step. Regardless, Sturtevant’s dissertation remains a primary resource for the kind of comparative ethnobotany and ethnomedicine I have begun to sketch here. (Parenthetically, I should note that I initially speculated that *P. obtusifolium* was not used by the modern Seminole because it was absent from the southern regions of the peninsula, but it is reported as far south as Dade County, according to the Atlas of Florida Vascular Plants (online at [www.usf.edu/~isb/projects/atlas/maps/gnapobtu.gif](http://www.usf.edu/~isb/projects/atlas/maps/gnapobtu.gif) as of 7 January 2000). Appreciation is extended to Kent Perkins of the University of Florida Herbarium for directing me to this source.)

## USES OF *PSEUDOGNAPHALIUM* IN NORTHEASTERN NORTH AMERICA

*Pseudognaphalium obtusifolium* is used among Northeastern as well as Southeastern groups. Particularly among Central Algonquian peoples, its use closely mirrors those found among the Yuchi and in the Southeast. Once the data for Northeastern groups is reviewed, I will assess such patterns in geographic, social, and cultural terms.

### Delaware and Shawnee

Use of (*Pseudo*)*Gnaphalium* is not reported for the Delaware and Shawnee, who are present-day neighbors of the Yuchi, but their use of cedar is consistent with uses described here. Among the Delaware, cedar is carried by individuals at social gatherings as protection from ghosts and is burned in ceremonial settings for purification (Hill 1971:12). Gladys Tantaquidgeon reports:

To avert unpleasant dreams, a person smokes and prays to the Creator, appealing to him for aid in propitiating the supernatural powers responsible for such dreams. Cedar is also burned in the house to cleanse it. If a child is

troubled by dreams at night, cedar boughs are soaked in water, which is sprinkled over his person and the bed. This is believed to keep evil spirits away. [Tantaquidgeon 1972:51]

Nora Thompson Dean, an especially knowledgeable Delaware ceremonialist, reported that at the conclusion of a Delaware funeral, “of course, they then smoked themselves with cedar and they smoked the entire house with cedar smoke (Dean 1968:4).” Describing the importance of cedar more generally, she notes:

The Delaware always looked upon the cedar as being a clean tree. So, in nearly all of our rituals that we have ever held, somehow the cedar has always held an important part, especially in the Big House. And then, too, at the funeral when anyone passed away at a home there was always someone who burned cedar and took it all around inside and outside of the home. And the clothing that was given away of the descendant, given to the workers that were appointed for the funeral. Before these clothes and personal effects were given to the workers, these clothes were purified or smoked with cedar. And if anyone who was sick, someone always prayed for this sick person and they used cedar and they fanned this sick person with cedar smoke. So, as long as I can remember, the cedar played an important part in the lives of the [Indian name] people. [Dean 1968:3; see also Miller 1997 and Grumet 2001] [Note that the transcriber of the interview tape, Nora Kerr, did not attempt to render native language words given by Mrs. Dean. Lenape, the Delaware name for themselves is a likely candidate for the word used in the final sentence given here.]

Among the Shawnee, cedar is used in ways similar to Delaware. It is a purifying agent and a truth-bearer or witness assisting in prayer and other communications with heavenly powers (Howard 1981). These widespread practices suggest that a complete analysis of Yuchi use of *P. obtusifolium* will require a more comprehensive study of cedar, with which it is regularly paired. Important as well will be a deeper understanding of spiritualism and disease concepts in eastern North America. Among the Yuchi alone, a discussion of cedar is a major undertaking, as the plant figures in important sacred narratives. See Gatschet (1893) and Jackson (1998:255–292) for sacred narratives relating to the power of cedar.

### Mohegan

Tantaquidgeon also reports that a different species of everlasting—Pearly Everlasting

(*Anaphalis margaritacea* (L.) Benth.)—is used by the Mohegan of Connecticut in a cold remedy. These Mohegan are culturally and linguistically related to the Delaware and are Tantaquidgeon’s own home community, about which she is especially well informed (Tantaquidgeon 1972:70). *A. margaritacea* is found throughout the United States except in the Southeastern states.

### Fox (Mesquakie) and Potawatomi

Huron H. Smith neatly summarizes the use of *P. obtusifolium* among the Fox (Mesquakie) (under the alternative name *Gnaphalium polycephalum* Mx. (= *G. obtusifolium* L.). “This is one of the best of this type of medicines and is sure to heal. It is smudged to bring back a loss of mind or to revive consciousness (Smith 1928:214–215).” Among the men who consulted with Smith during his Mesquakie research was a leading doctor among this group, a man who was himself a Prairie Potawatomi. This man provided Smith with the Potawatomi name for this medicine, a word that they translated as ‘to smoke a person’ further suggesting this usage is likely among the Prairie Potawatomi as well. The basic complex of belief and practice—mental illness or distress relieved through the use of this plant as a smudge—is again here documented.

### Menominee

Similarly, this same use is more fully reported in Smith’s study of Menominee (Menomini) ethnobotany. His consultant translated its Menominee name as ‘a reviver.’ He notes:

It is used separately or with “nāmā wí niūn” or gall from the beaver’s body, to make a smudge as a reviver. When one has fainted this is used to bring him back to consciousness again, the smoke being blown into his nostrils. Then again, when one of the family has died, his spirit or ghost is supposed to come back to trouble the living. Bad luck and nightmares will result to the family from the troublesome ghost. This smudge discourages and displeases the ghost which, after fumigation of the premises with this smudge, leaves and never returns. Burning of these herbs gives off a peculiar characteristic odor, reminding one of the smell of elm bark, dried medick flowers, and coltsfoot herb. [Smith 1923:30]

This richer description for an Algonquian-speaking people is consistent with the Yuchi uses I described above.

### HoChunk (Wisconsin Winnebago)

Among the HoChunk, Smith obtained the native name for *P. obtusifolium*, which translates as ‘medicine smoke.’ His recently published manuscript notes report its use: “When someone is bad sick, use a funnel to smoke and revive them (Kindscher and Hurlburt 1998:361).” No indication of an association with spiritual causes for illness is given, but its use as a smudge among the Siouan Winnebago parallels those for the Algonquian Fox, Menominee, Potawatomi, and the various Southeastern groups.

### Iroquois

According to James Herrick’s *Iroquois Medical Botany*, *Gnaphalium unliginosum* L. is used in an Iroquois remedy for asthma. This medicine is steeped (Herrick 1995:233). Such a use is reported for the linguistically related Cherokee, as noted above and in Florida folk medicine as discussed below.

### European–American Folk Medicine

General and popular sources on the medicinal use of wild plants from eastern North America regularly report the use of *P. obtusifolium* as a folk remedy for a wide range of conditions. In their field guide to medicinal plants in eastern and central North America, Steven Foster and James Duke identify it as a remedy for “sore throats, pneumonia, colds, fevers, upset stomach, abdominal cramps, asthma, flu, coughs, rheumatism, leukorrhea, bowel disorders, mouth ulcers, hemorrhage, tumors, mild nerve sedative, diuretic, and antispasmodic. Fresh juice [is] considered [an] aphrodisiac (Foster and Duke 1990:82).” A more formal report of particular relevance is Alice Murphree’s study of herbalism in rural Lafayette County, Florida (Murphree 1965). In this community, life everlasting was used as a pillow filling as a treatment for asthma.

According to M. Grieve’s *Modern Herbal* (first published in 1931), the plant is an astringent:

...beneficial for ulcerations of the throat and mouth; warm infusions used to produce diaphoresis; also of service in quinsy, pulmonary complaints, leucorrhœa. Can be used internally and as a local application, likewise used as formentations to bruises, indolent tumours. An infusion given to diseases of the bowels—hæmorrhages, etc. The fresh juice is reputed anti-venereal and anti-aphrodisiac; the cold infusion vermifugal; the dried flowers are

used as a sedative filling for the pillows of consumptives. A tincture is made from the whole plant. [Grieve 1996:81]

The uses identified by Grieve, when contrasted with those enumerated for Woodland native peoples, suggest only partial overlap in the association of the dried plant’s smell with sedative effects. The plant’s use in north Florida as an asthma treatment may belong to a regional folk tradition derived from colonial era contacts between native and non-native peoples in the South and East. William Fenton described a similar process in the Northeast with the adoption by non-Indians of Iroquois herblore (Fenton 1942).

Foster and Duke’s identification of the fresh juice as an aphrodisiac and Grieve’s notation that the juice is reputed to be an anti-aphrodisiac present an interesting puzzle and suggest a notable contrast between European and Native American herbalism. Native American medicine is often viewed as idiosyncratic and unsystematic in contrast to that of Europeans. The consistency of Woodland Indian uses of *P. obtusifolium* across many distinct languages and cultures, stands in striking contrast to the almost random patterning of European uses.

### DISCUSSION

Exploring the history of the many uses of *P. obtusifolium* in American contexts is perhaps too large a task. The goal of this essay has been a more controlled comparison for Woodland Indian societies treated separately. What patterns appear in the comparative information for the uses of *P. obtusifolium* among native societies in eastern North America?

As a herbal medicine disassociated from more complex cultural traditions of medical-religious-ritual specialization, its uses are diverse. I suspect that such uses reflect a common pattern in American folk herbalism, shared by community specialists and “lay people.” Everlasting’s use in remedies for the common cold (Creek, Louisiana Choctaw, Houma, Catawba, Eastern Cherokee, Mohegan), breathing ailments (Louisiana Choctaw, Eastern Cherokee, Iroquois, Rappahannock), mumps (Creek), stomach illness (Creek), cough (Louisiana Choctaw, Mattaponi), sore throat and/or mouth (Eastern Cherokee), and chills (Western Cherokee, Rappahannock) are, I believe, of this type, although the available ethnography is not detailed and such an assessment must be considered provisional.

Instances where the use of everlasting is associated with specialist treatments (indexed by the use of curing songs or formula) or smudging rituals are also where its use is associated with dispelling or preventing harmful forces contacted with ghosts or witchcraft. In these situations, a reoccurring cluster of symptoms is noted—fever, insomnia, anxiety, “craziness,” unconsciousness, all of which affect not so much the body, but the mind. Such uses are directly attested to for the Yuchi, Oklahoma Seminole, Alabama, Western Cherokee, and Menominee, and are implied strongly in the available information for the Koasati, Fox, and Prairie Potawatomi. In addition, these are instances where exactly the same dilemmas are addressed with similar treatments that lack *P. obtusifolium*, but retain plants linked to its use elsewhere. This is the case in Florida among the Seminole groups, where ghost sickness is well documented. There, its regular companion, cedar, plays important roles and red bay may have taken on the function filled by everlasting elsewhere in the Southeast.

Finally, in a broader comparative frame, use of red cedar is widespread in Native American purification rituals. In some instances, these uses participate directly in the regional pattern described here. This is the case for the Oklahoma Delaware described above, and probably other groups in the region as well.

Loosely connected but contextually removed is the widespread use of cedar in important purification rituals found among the native groups of the Plains (Carlson and Jones 1940:538; Moerman 1998:290–292). Among these peoples, everlasting is unknown and its cultural resonances grow faint as other plants and cultural patterns assume importance. Generalizations on the basis of the information collected here are perhaps hasty, but others familiar with Plains and Woodland cultures will probably see a familiar pattern. The complex, spiritual uses of *P. obtusifolium* seem to correlate with general cultural patterns that differentiate the Woodlands from the peoples to their west.

Medico-religious practices in the two regions retain differing casts and differing modus operandi. Fixed bodies of esoteric and ethno-biological knowledge, learned through formal apprenticeship, are a characteristic of Woodland medicine and ritual. In contrast, visions, which are so prominent in Plains traditions, play a much-reduced role as a source of spiritual power in the Woodlands, especially among Southeastern groups

(Fogelson 1977). In the Plains visionary traditions, animals provide power to humans, whereas in the Woodlands, animals are a source of potential danger and illness (Sturtevant 1981). In the Woodlands, plants are the source of beneficial power. Access to this power comes from customary knowledge, rather than from unique personal experience. Such issues are best explored more completely elsewhere, but the uniformity of spiritual uses of everlasting participate in a broader cultural system that plays out in both local and regional terms (see Jackson 1996, 1998).

A different outcome of this comparison is the realization that comparative ethnography, undertaken anew on the basis of both continued fieldwork in consultation with native authorities and utilization of the greatly improved literature on Native American ethnobotany, is certain to be productive and interesting. Publication of Daniel Moerman's *Native American Ethnobotany* (1998) makes a tremendous difference to the ease of such work. While no comparative source has been produced for the Northeast, a basic compilation of ethnobotanical information for the Southeast has long been available in Lyda Taylor's (1940) *Plants Used as Curatives by Certain Southeastern Tribes*. A finding of this comparative work was that few herbal treatments were held in common by the peoples of the Southeast. Taylor writes: “An examination of the 185 plants enumerated above shows that only 40 plants are used by two or more tribes. Only ten of these 40 plants are utilized by two or more tribes for the same ailment (Taylor 1940:65).” After listing these ten species and the tribes that utilize them similarly, she states further:

Since all of the 185 plants enumerated are found throughout the Southeast, and except in a few cases, are easy to procure, such a small percentage of similarity seems to indicate very little intertribal borrowing of plant cures. The ten plants, similarly employed by two or more tribes, might represent all of the borrowing that has actually taken place. However, the fact that they cut across linguistic, cultural and geographic lines, as shown in [her] Table 1, contrive to make even these suspect. If these tribes were unwilling to borrow plant uses among linguistic, cultural or even geographic lines, it is perhaps less likely that borrowing would have taken place from groups not so closely associated. [Taylor 1940:66]

Based on my own familiarity with Southeastern peoples in Oklahoma, this finding seems

unlikely on the basis of current knowledge of other cultural phenomena such as dance and the complex social networks in which Woodland people interact with one another (Jackson 1998; Walker 1981). Similarly, ethnohistorical research on the nature of Native American social interaction in eastern North America cannot support the premise of well-bounded distinct tribal societies (Smith 1987; Usner 1998; White 1991). This study of *P. obtusifolium* suggests that Taylor's (1940) finding warrants reassessment on the basis of both new data (since 1940) and a richer, more contextually sensitive reading of all of the available sources. In compiling the data on *P. obtusifolium*, she cited uses by Alabama, Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, and Koasati, but in attempting to summarize so much information economically, she did not recognize the obvious linkages found in her own data. Most glaringly, she did not notice the obvious commonality linking the Koasati uses she obtained in her own fieldwork with the use of their neighbors, the Alabama, that were reported by Swanton (1928) and summarized in her catalogue. The distortions introduced by Taylor's economical handling of her data explain why I have chosen to focus here on a single plant and why I have cited original sources at length. A related weakness of a sort emerges from Taylor's desire to use the western medical knowledge of her day to assess the scientific usefulness or uselessness of Southeastern plant medicines. The spiritual uses Woodland people assign to *P. obtusifolium* fall out of her analysis, despite their obvious importance to Woodland cultural systems of medicine, health, and cosmology.

For any given plant species, as known in any particular group, there will be an intertwined constellation of symptoms, ritual and cosmological associations, methods of treatment, behavioral contexts, associated and related plants, specified medical materials, and complex esoteric and ethnoscientific knowledge. The literature on Woodland ways of life is rich enough to gain insight into these phenomena, and my own experience suggests that knowledgeable people in Woodland Indian communities are interested in collaborating in such work. Obtaining comparative insights will require more than tabulations of plants and illnesses. They will necessitate familiarity with Woodland tribal cultures viewed as complex wholes and as nodes in a world of social interaction in which these societies continue to interact with one another in complex and dynamic ways.

Finally, the distribution of consistent beliefs and practices associated with the ghost sickness complex extending from Florida to the Upper Midwest strengthens the view that the Northeast and Southeast constitute culture areas only in the weakest sense of the concept. This view echoes that articulated by Alfred Kroeber in *Cultural and Natural Areas of Native North America* (Kroeber 1939:60) and many other writers, but the reality of anthropological practice, particularly a regionalized division of labor has resulted in many studies taking the Northeast, Great Lakes, and Southeast as their frames of reference, and few taking account of the region as a whole. In overcoming this weakness in recent years, historians have been more effective than have anthropologists with regard to American Indian life in eastern North America. Ethnobotany is only one of many topics fruitfully explored in this broader comparative perspective.

In arguing that Taylor's (1940) analysis was flawed in limiting comparisons to those medicinal uses viewed as effective by Western biomedicine, I have pointed to cosmology and ritual as central components of Woodland Indian ethnomedicine. To do so raises new questions that need to be addressed in a phase of new research. One such question was isolated well by an anonymous reader of this paper. Why were the plants discussed here initially chosen and reused in these manners so consistently over time and space? If plant chemistry is not directly relevant in the way that contemporary pharmaceutical prospectors might wish, what knowledge of ethnochemistry did (or do) Woodland peoples possess that can explain the selection of these particular plants out of the thousands of species available for this purpose? The ethnography makes clear that aroma is a factor in this constellation of choices, but the data are thin when confronted with such broader questions. Similarly, if aroma is relevant, what beliefs explain the linkage between ghosts and particular odors? The only more substantive data now available on such questions relates to ethnobotanical classification. As noted above, Cozzo has studied Mooney's ethnobotanical notes and described the Cherokee system of plant classification. While odor forms the basis for one intermediate class of plants in the Cherokee system (that which includes the mints), *P. obtusifolium* belongs to a different grouping based instead on coloring and texture (Cozzo 2002:142). We may never know the ethnosematic systems used by most Woodland peoples, but as languages vary so

radically across the region, it is likely that sematics will not provide easy access to other aspects of ethnosience. Despite an impressive body of ethnographic data, we know little beyond simple plant uses. The ethnochemistry of plant use in Native Eastern North America represents an unexplored domain, hopefully one that still remains possible to investigate.

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