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(Photograph donated by the heirs of the Helen B. Siler estate to the Chatham County Historical Association. Explanation contributed by Wade Hadley.)

BREAKING GROUND FOR SILER CITY POST OFFICE BUILDING

The ground-breaking rite for the U.S. Post Office at 116 East Raleigh Street in Siler City took place on October 8, 1939. Shown in the photograph are, from left to right, Walter D. Siler, Helen B. Siler, and Julius C. Gregson.

Mr. Siler was a former mayor of Siler City and state legislator. At the time of the ceremony he was a Recorder County Judge of Chatham. Miss Siler was postmaster at Siler City from 1934 to 1967. Mr. Gregson was a Siler City councilman when the photograph was taken. He had donated the land on which the post office was built.

The photograph looks north from the south side of East Raleigh Street. In the background is the Siler City Hardware building on the opposite side of the street.

FISH IN STREAMS IN CHATHAM OVER 100 YEARS AGO

Primeval Chatham, like much of North Carolina, had an abundance of fish and other wild game. The following notes touch upon the occurrence of shad in streams of the county in the early and late 1800s.

An article in the *Chatham Record* of May 8, 1884, recorded that a large shad had recently been caught in the Haw River near Moore's Mill. The writer then says, "This is the first we have heard of shad being caught so high up that stream since the navigation works were constructed over thirty years ago." Moore's Mill was located between eight and nine miles above the confluence of Haw and Deep Rivers.

An article in the *Chatham Record* of May 15, 1884, tells of shad in Deep and Haw Rivers and their tributaries prior to 1850. An abundance of shad were in Deep River as high up as Hancock's Mill (near Glendon), in Rocky River, in Bear Creek, and in Haw River up to the area of Burlington-Graham. In the Haywood area (near Moncure), wagons from a distance came to get shad.

After 1850, dams built across the rivers restricted the passage of fish upstream. Citizens of Chatham complained about the loss of what had been an important source of food. In 1881, the General Assembly passed an act that required all dams on the Haw River in Chatham County be provided with fish-ways. This and other laws against obstructions to the passage of fish in the rivers apparently were not enforced. The above-mentioned article written in 1884 said that not a single dam on Deep and Haw Rivers in Chatham County was provided with a sluiceway (fish-way).

While shad in Haw River remained rare, other fish appear to have been plentiful. An article in the *Chatham Record* of April 14, 1887, records that about 500 pounds of fish had recently been caught at Bynum by seining in a single day, a record number for that place. This catch involved one shad, a very unusual event attributed to the dams below there being broken.

In September of 1888, a sturgeon weighing 133 pounds and seven feet long was caught in a fish trap above Bland's Mill [reported in *The Home*, September 20, 1888]. This mill was located a few hundred feet below the confluence of New Hope Creek and Haw River.

Wade Hadley

Standing in the road near the church are, from left to right, Leitha Howard (Glosson), who married Leon Glosson and lives in Pittsboro; Ava Tripp (Sipes), who lives in Pittsboro; Doris Johnson (Mann), who still lives in Bynum; and Emily Williams (Meacham), who lives near Bynum.

At the extreme left are the columns of the post office. The building next to it was the Star Theater. Carey's store is next, with the rock wall dividing the parking lot between the store and theater. The next building is Lewis Durham's store; its big sign hangs to the left of the light poles. The house on the far right in the background was the old parsonage.

There was a little store called "Fats" that opened on Sunday afternoon. It was across the road and to the left of the post office. That is where the girls got the "Nutty Buddy's." It was the only thing that opened on Sunday and sold only candy, bottled drinks, etc.

(Photograph and commentary contributed by Lora Sparrow.)

WORK AND CULTURE IN A PIEDMONT MILL VILLAGE

by Douglas DeNatale

[Doug DeNatale, folklorist, was a research assistant for the Southern Oral History program at UNC-Chapel Hill in 1978 and 1979, conducting interviews with former textile workers and researching documentary sources. His forthcoming book deals with the study of the transformation of local culture in Piedmont North Carolina between 1870 and 1940 during the development of the southeastern textile industry, analyzing in particular the mill village of Bynum, Chatham County. In the first part of this article, DeNatale discusses the continuum of Bynum villagers with their rural past and describes the role of Mrs. Ida Jane Smith as a specialist in folk medicine as an example of this carryover of rural practices in the mill environment.]

Mrs. Smith's position of authority in the area of medicine is one example of the status a member of the community could obtain in cultural terms not directly related to the work situation. The example can be repeated. In the area of music, the community member with high status was a confirmed drifter who wandered into Bynum for several years. Though a member of that despised class of "shiftless" mill workers, he was held in esteem by the Bynum community, including the overseer, who learned to play from him and who later joined a string band. Such cultural forms were significant because they complicated the single relationship between management and worker with many relationships centering on various aspects of culture. Every villager could define his or her own identity in relation to such extra-mill activities, regardless of individual talent. One might be a member of the group that fished, or hunted, or sang hymns, or played pranks, or quilted, or told stories, or kept gardens and livestock, or drank, or danced—activities which had significant places in peoples' social lives. In most cases, the individual shared several identities. This had particular significance in the mill village, for certain forms of culture were at odds with the interests of the mill company. The sharing of more than one identity placed the individual in a complicated position which had to be continually reassessed. The member of middle management who shared a musical identity with fellow villagers could not escape a certain identification with the rowdier aspects of village life. This would place him in an equivocal position in regard to his disciplinary role. In order to remain viable, mill village culture had to mediate between the retention of such forms of rural culture and the pressures of the paternalistic relationship. A mill village *ethos* had to develop which allowed such complication while relieving the resulting tension.

The cultural form which shows this development of a communal ideal most clearly, and which has particular relevance to those of us interested in oral history, is the narrative tradition. For the moment I will make a somewhat artificial distinction between two branches of this cultural form. As a highly developed, artful form, narratives again required specialists. Narratives had value in a largely non-literate community as entertainment and as historical record. In Bynum, one of the best storytellers was introduced to me in the guise of town historian. The stylistic devices he employed in producing polished, structured stories are common to rural culture, and involve hyperbole, patterned repetition, the insertion of floating motifs, and reference to communal norms. Narratives were very much an insider's form. The individual demonstrated cultural competence by correctly classifying narratives as fact or elaboration. To cite an extreme example, tall tales were relished within the community because of the inside knowledge of their duplicity. As the major repository of the community's knowledge about itself, the narrative tradition celebrated and developed communal ideals.

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The second branch of this form is the personal experience story—the individual oral history. We must all recognize that our discourse is shaped by our cultural identity. As the individual plays out his or her memory, it begins to fit communal patterns. When an individual's retellings of a single important incident are compared, it is apparent that these become structured in a coherent pattern over time, making reference to communal ideals.[12] In Bynum, the important themes which emerge in personal narratives are community-as-family and the importance of cooperation.

While I cannot fully discuss narrative in this space, I will point to a brief example of how these communal themes can enter personal discourse. The most crystallized of these narrative forms is the proverb. As one Bynum resident told me, "[There's] an old saying here, you know, 'Bynum's red mud. If you stick to Bynum, it'll stick to you when it rains.' "[13] The outsider may completely miss such a form if it is couched in casual discussion. Another person in describing her first impression of Bynum told me: "I though, 'well, this is the muddiest little place I had ever seen' . . . And they used to say once you got this mud between your toes, you couldn't get it out."[14] In this light, we should consider the implication of the following statements made in separate interviews:

"Bynum is sort of like, just like a big family."

"We're all just kind of one big family."

"It was almost like one big family."

"It was all kind of like a family."

"It was all such, like one big family."

"It was more or less just kind of like a big family."[15]

While it may be argued that "one big family" is simply a universal succession of words, at least one Bynum member has signalled her awareness of it as a communal phrase: "A lot of people'd say, 'Aw, it's just about like one big family.' " Another person began, and then decided not to use the phrase: "Everybody knew one another, yeah, knew everybody here, and it was just [pause], they got along mighty good, I'll say."[16]

I do not wish to imply by this that village narratives—and oral histories—are one, big tall tale, rather to stress that we are dealing with an esoteric culture. The communal account of a mill village *ethos* provided that matrix by which individuals oriented themselves in village society. To varying degrees, workers were aware of the ideal *as* an ideal, and of the paradoxes in their own lives. In many ways, they were more attuned to stylization than we are as outsiders. While it would be an extraordinary person within the culture who could see the effect of such stylization in creating an *ethos*, the process was something quite different from indoctrination.

Nonetheless, if we accept the notion of a communal ideal which was not fully internalized by workers, we must still ask what purpose it served. It may be argued that as Piedmont mill workers were increasingly viewed as "an hereditary helot class"—"boll weevil lintheads" in the vernacular—it allowed them to counter with a positive identity.[17] This was certainly an important factor in the struggle which all mill workers fought for a sense of self-worth. Unless the ideal had relation to reality, however, we have not really changed our stance in viewing workers as a "type," continuing to portray them as pulling the wool over their own eyes. I will close by giving an example of the manner in which the ideal promoted the negotiation of difficulties in a communally constructive way.

Many observers have noted the pranks played by industrial workers as a means of subverting the hierarchical relationship between management and workers.[18] While such pranks were present in the Bynum mill, they were not the major form of pranking. Some pranks can be explained as means of initiating newcomers, but there was also a large body of pranks which were played on long-term fellow workers. Some observers have shrugged off such activities as harmless devilment: "The recollections of long service employees. . .support the old bromide that "kids will be kids."[19] There were a good number of pranks played with serious import, however. Locking fellow workers in the bathroom, filling a snuffbox full of pepper, or a pie full of Ex-lax, or a biscuit full of red pepper could have harmful consequences. Incidents have been reported in other North Carolina mills where pranks resulted in hospitalization, or even tragedy.[20] In a production-rate setting, any prank played on a fellow worker constituted an economic assault by impeding production. Yet such disruptive activities were prevalent and endured because they served an important function. While initiation pranks

This was Bynum's social life on Sunday afternoons. There was nowhere to go, so the young people congregated on the porch of the post office and the rock wall of Carey's store to talk and visit. This was a ritual for many years and was all the social activity you had access to, unless you owned a car.

Seated on the bench, from left to right, are Jimmy Elgin, a bachelor for many years and a colorful character, now dead; Shirley Hodge (Johnson), now dead; and Cornelia Riggsbee (Elmore), who lives with her husband, Robert Elmore, in Pittsboro. Standing is Manley Dawson, who is now with the Chapel Hill Police Department.

(Photograph and commentary contributed by Lora Sparrow.)

defined group boundaries and introduced outsiders, these pranks maintained boundaries for those within the group. Pranks were directed toward fellow workers in response to real grievances such as excessive borrowing of goods, interfering with the work process, or hostilities developed in or out of the mill. If the reprimands were serious, however, pranks relied on their association with play to work effectively, to circumvent an escalation into open warfare. This was possible because workers themselves referred these activities to the communal ideal of family: "They just enjoyed themselves by doing a thing like that. But they all did seem to have a good time. It was just a happy family almost, looked like."[21] By allowing individual expression of antagonism within the framework of family, activities such as pranking enabled mill workers to work cooperatively in the face of considerable pressure. They confirmed the ties of responsibility between workers while controlling the degree of reciprocity that responsibility entailed.

The middle management, as members of the community, were not immune to the effects of mill culture. While their position did give them greater power, they were nonetheless part of these relationships that proceeded from the workers themselves. In Bynum, the superintendent was forced to leave the village for seven years because he had violated the mores of the village by seducing one of the women in the mill. According to his nephew, "He got into trouble one time with a woman. . . . That's the reason he left here. . . . The rest of the help wouldn't have worked for him no more, I don't reckon. They were planning to come out, I think, and strike."[22] The incident is emblematic of the extent to which workers could influence the work situation, for the London family brought the superintendent back after the family of the woman involved had left Bynum. In the long run, such influence possessed by workers could not redress the balance of power. I would even argue that the partial success of mill culture prevented its abandonment for other systems of bargaining, such as union negotiation. Nonetheless, the influence of mill culture was real. The complications which arose assured that channels of communication would remain open, even if the problems of mill life remained unresolved.

Resolution could never be reached in the mill village as it existed. In this light, apparently anti-social aspects of mill culture such as pranking were essential to the individual's sanity. While paternalism often forced workers into a childish position, their response was anything but childish. Activities such as pranking were not simply means of blowing off steam. They encapsulated the paradoxes under which mill workers had to live. In this respect, mill culture was interpretive, "a story they tell themselves about themselves."[23] The paradoxes are there for the outsider to ponder, but it does little credit to mill workers to assume that they themselves were unaware of them. When mill workers talk of their sense of being one family, they are not indulging in misguided nostalgia. They are acknowledging the power of the culture which helped them survive, without denying the hardships they have endured. The mill village *was* a family—if we can accept all the connotations of that word. Like any family, the relations among its members were complex, full of concern, and full of difficulty. Mill culture was troubled as a result of its demanding and exploitative environment. It was successful in the humanity which mill workers preserved.

(This is the second part of a two-part article.)

NOTES

[12] For example, compare how the two following tellings connect two separate incidents into a single narrative:

"One time me and this girl friend of mine went across the river over here. . . . We caught up one morning and we walked over there and got us some water and sat down on the ground and was hunting four-leaf clovers. (Arthur London) drove along and stopped, said, 'What y'all doing over here?' We told him we come over after a drink of water and found some four-leaf clovers. And he brought us back to the mill, and we went on and caught up. And he started leaving, we was back out doors again. He said, 'Y'all back out again?' We said, 'Yeah. Come on and carry us and get us a co-cola.' He said, 'You mean you want me to carry you to get a co-cola?' We said, 'Yeah, carry us to get a co-cola.' He brought us over here to Durham's, got us a co-cola, and brought us back to the mill. (Laughter) He was good." Interview with Eula Durham, November 29, 1978.

"We used to go over to the spring. We were all there one time, me and Rose Smith were sitting there after work. . .hunting up four-leaf clovers. And Mr. London come by and picked us up, and carried us back to the mill. He said, 'What was y'all doing over there?' And Rose said, 'Mr. London, we was hunting four-leaf clovers, but we didn't find none.'

"And we made him one time go and get us a drink, you know, and an old Mary Jane. . .and we told him, 'Mr. London, go and get us a drink and a Mary Jane.' And he carried us up to that store and got us a drink and a Mary Jane, brought us back." Interview with Eula Durham, March 1, 1979.

It is clear that Mrs. Durham associates the incidents together and had a usual narrative order for them. In the first telling, elicited in the context of a discussion of relations with management, the two are given closer connection to make a better story.

[13] Interview with John Wesley Snipes, August 22, 1979.

[14] Interview with Helen Howard, October 22, 1979.

[15] Interviews with Beulah Eubanks, October 27, 1978; Mary Council, November 1, 1978; Louise R. Jones, October 13, 1976; Frank Durham, September 10, 1979; Helen Andrews; Anonymous, November 12, 1978.

[16] Interviews with Flossie Durham, September 2, 1976; J. N. Atwater, October 4, 1979.

[17] George B. Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1967), p. 324.

[18] See for example Jack Santino, "Characteristics of Occupational Narrative," *Western Folklore* 37 (1978): 199-212; Roger Abrahams, "Towards a Sociological Theory of Folklore," *Western Folklore* 37 (1978): 161-184; Pamela Bradney, "The Joking Relationship in Industry," *Human Relations* 10 (1957): 179-187.

[19] Gilman, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

[20] Camilla Collins, "Twenty-four to a Dozen: Occupational Folklore in a Hosiery Mill." Diss. Indiana University, 1978, p. 99. A writer for the Federal Writers Project in North Carolina reported the following narrative: "Ira and me was doffers and the other doffers played tricks on us. You know how they always is about new hands. We was awful green without no learnin' nor nothin'. One day Ira got mad at the way they picked on him and had it out with another boy at dinnertime. That little boy—he won't (*sic*) but twelve year old—stuck a knife in Ira's heart and he was dead before the doctor got there." Papers of Regional Director William Terry Couch in the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill, Folder 72.

[21] Interview with Frank Durham, September 10, 1979.

[22] Interview with Frank Durham, September 10, 1979.

[23] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures.* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), p. 26.