

THE FOLLOWING INTERVIEWS WERE WRITTEN
BY MISS TRUDY MANNING, THE DAUGHTER
OF MR. AND MRS. D. G. MANNING, AND A
JUNIOR AT QUEENS COLLEGE, CHARLOTTE.

Mrs. W. S. Gurganus (Mrs. Omie Gurganus)
Bear Grass

Born October 19, 1898, Mrs. Omie Gurganus has lived in Bear Grass all of her life. She was the eighth child of the eleven born to Samuel and Amanda Rogerson. Her parents, like most others of the area, were farmers.

As a child, Mrs. Gurganus walked to a school which was about three quarters of a mile from her home. When it was raining, she would ride home in the family horse cart with the transportation being furnished by her father. The school she and her brothers and sisters attended was across the road from the present site of Bear Grass High School. The building has been torn down for some time now. It was a free school and only had one room. One of the teachers that she remembered was Olivia House.

School was in session only three and one half to four months out of every year. If repairs on the school were needed, their costs would decrease the funds appropriated for the teacher thus shortening the school year further. But some parents wanted to give their children more education. Mrs. Gurganus said that on several occasions, after the regular school year had ended, another teacher would be hired to teach some of the children more. The burden of paying the teacher's salary fell on the parents of those children who would receive the extra education.

The school only went through the equivalent of our seventh grade. It was rare for anyone to go to college. But if anyone did, they usually went to Buies Creek Academy.

During her youth, Mrs. Gurganus went to the Bear Grass Primitive Baptist Church. Often if there were night services, she and her family would go to the Rose of Sharon Church.

Mrs. Gurganus married W. S. Gurganus in 1913. She had been seeing him for about one and one half years. Her courtship, like most of those in that day consisted of parlor visits or horse and buggy rides in the afternoon. They got married in Parmalee.

After their marriage, Mr. and Mrs. Gurganus lived at his home in Bear Grass. They farmed until his health no longer permitted; then they rented the land to other farmers.

Quite interesting were the changes Mrs. Gurganus has seen in Martin County or rather her community over the years. Although she and her neighbors had easy access to salt, meat, and vegetables, she said they did some shopping in Everetts at Barnhill's and J.S. Ayers and Co. In Williamston, where she bought the few clothes she didn't make herself, she patronized Harrison Brother's and the J. L. Hassell Co., which was located across the street. She has seen the consolidation of all the little one room schools such as the Peele School, and the Mizelle School into the Bear Grass School that exists today.

Mrs. Gurganus had four children. Two are living today. They are Josephine Gurganus Rogerson and Rufus Gurganus. She is now a member of the First Christian Church in Everetts. She lives in a large, comfortable home built by her husband and completed in December, 1923.

Mrs. Sadie James
Hardison's Mill,
Farmlife, N.C.

The first time Pepsi Colas were sold in Mrs. Sadie James' store, back in the thirties, the distributor gave her a sign advertising his product, which she promptly put on the store wall. That sign, as well as others representing Coke and Sun Crest are still there, right where she put them almost forty years ago.

Mrs. James was born Sadie Griffin near Hardison's Mill on April 15, 1890. Her parents were James and Jenny Griffin. They were first cousins and both were born in 1859.

Mrs. James was the second child in her family. She had an older sister, Connie, a younger brother Marion and the youngest child in the family was her little sister, Myrtle.

The family farmed but when the needs of the farm permitted the children attended school. Miss Sadie attended two schools during her lifetime; both were supported by the county. The first was the Kelly Hill School. The teachers she remembers from there were Lonnie and Joe Mizelle. The second school was the Getsinger School. John Getsinger taught there and the late Sam Getsinger was one of her classmates. She and her brothers and sisters had to walk to the school a distance of about three miles. Sometimes her father would take them halfway on a mule and cart. Miss Sadie attended school until she was 22. She went mainly to accompany the younger children to and from school. There were no graduations as such but she studied in the "highest" books they had.

Miss Sadie joined Fair View Church when she was nineteen. She moved her membership and is now a charter member of Maple Grove Church. This church was established in 1910.

In 1919, Miss Sadie worked at the Central Office in Jamesville. In 1924 she married Columbus James. They lived at Church Cross Roads until 1930. In 1929 Miss Sadie contacted what Dr. Jessie Ward diagnosed as the first case of intestinal flu in Martin County. Her husband Columbus also became ill that winter. He was so weakened by pneumonia that he had to abandon farming.

In 1930, Columbus and Sadie bought the mill where she lives now. The mill had been purchased from Joe and Marie Lanier. Due to an accident, the opening of the mill was delayed. During this time Columbus also trapped and worked in tobacco. Finally in 1935, the Big Mill as it is called, was put into operation. People who came to get their corn ground would want something to eat and drink while they were waiting. So Miss Sadie opened a small store in Henry Daniel's barn. The first goods sold were apples, oranges, Cokes and Royal Crowns.

Columbus and Miss Sadie kept the mill in operation for many years. He died in 1955. They had no children. Miss Sadie's older sister Connie, (Mrs. Fernando Williams), died in 1968. Her other sister Myrtle, (Mrs. Pearlle Lilley), lives in Farmlife. Her brother James Marion Griffin lives between Bear Grass and Robersonville.

Mrs. Martha Piland
Oak City

A native of Oak City, Martha Bellflower Piland has a past full of memories. She was born May 15, 1881. Her parents were Frank and Annie Taylor Bellflower. She went to a school in the Oak City area as a child. The school was not publically supported; the students paid five cents daily for the instruction they received. School convened whenever it could and usually did not last more than two months out of the year. There were no graduations as such. Mrs. Piland distinctly remembers that on the first day of every new school term, the students would be given a copy book.

All during her childhood, Mrs. Piland worked for other farmers. She remembers that the best pay she ever got was eight dollars per month. In the vicinity of her home, peanuts and potatoes were the main crops.

Mrs. Piland's father was a carpenter, blacksmith and a farmer. He hired other men to do his plowing. Her father specialized in his carpenter work as a builder of daskets. Her cousin Bill Johnson lived near her home and he and Mrs. Piland's father swapped work.

During the early part of her childhood, Mrs. Piland stayed close to home. This was not unusual as lack of transportation made travel unlikely for most everyone. She remembered that many people bought their horses and buggies from Kinston. A good price for a nice buggy was seventy-five dollars. But, when she was about seven, the first train came through Oak City. This allowed a greater opportunity for travel. On one occasion when Mrs. Piland was visiting in another town and was called home, she was faced with a problem as she could not get home by horse before night fall. She hitched a ride in the caboose of one of the trains.

The chief entertainment took the form of sugar stews and square dances given by different families. Mrs. Piland gave reference to one dance that took place one cold winter. Tommy Johnson drove a cart-full of her friends to the dance. Upon arrival, Mrs. Piland stepped out of the cart and into a snow covered wash tub. She was wet but went on into the dance anyway and proceeded to have a good time.

Mrs. Piland described her courtship as consisting of parlor visits where young men would come and enjoy an evening of conversation and maybe get involved in an exciting game of checkers. Mrs. Piland married in 1902 by a Justice of the Peace in Tarboro. Her husband, who was born in 1876, was a native of Kinston. They met through his sister Mattie, who lived in Oak City. He served in the army of occupation in Cuba during the McKinley administration. After they married, they rented a farm in the Oak City area. Their daughter, Bertha, who was present during the interview, was born in 1903. They were both able to give thorough accounts of events that took place in the county. Mrs. Piland recalled hearing Gov. C. B. Aycock (1901-1905) speak in Oak City in favor of public schools. Mrs. Piland had her first phone installed in 1917. Dr. Long, a Hamilton physician, owned the phone company. One of the most serious events she remembered was the influenza epidemic of 1918. She said this caused a greater impact on the immediate community than World War I. Dr. Long treated the disease with quinine but the epidemic still took its toll.

Mrs. Piland joined the Oak City Baptist Church in 1918. She has lived in Oak City since then except for a brief stay in Washington, D. C. with Bertha. Now she and Bertha live in Oak City. Mrs. Piland has many nice paintings on the wall that she herself has recently done. She also loves to read. Mrs. Piland volunteered her secret for having lived such a long and happy life. She said, "I don't believe in brooding over things; I take things as they come."

Mrs. Leda (Mrs. Hoyt) Manning
Farm Life

Born August 21, 1895, Miss Leda (Mrs. Hoyt) Manning has been a life long resident of Farm Life Community. Her parents were John Elvin Lilley and Fanny Elizabeth Griffin. Miss Leda was the third child in a family of five children. She had two older sisters and two younger brothers.

During the first part of her life, just fulfilling everyday needs kept the whole family busy. Wool from sheep raised on the farm, and cotton made it possible to make all the clothes from start to finish. Other household products were made also. Carpets were made with a loom. Red oak bark and pecan or walnut hulls were some of the sources of dye. Bed sheets were made out of feed bags or white flour bags. Mrs. Caddie Peele, Mrs. Annie Bell Peele, and Mr. Hoyt were present during this portion of the interview and each person had different methods by which to make necessary household items. Miss Caddie used sugar bags to make napkins. Because of their size, these sugar bags were also often dyed and used for quilt squares. Wash cloths were made out of old underwear and seed bags could be easily converted into dish towels. Miss Leda said that in her later childhood, people got away from making all their goods and often yellow homespun was bought to make their bed sheets out of. This material would whiten as it was washed.

Washing clothes was an all day event. A big fire would set water boiling and then the water would be poured into wash tubs. The white clothes would be scrubbed then boiled. The colored clothes also would be scrubbed but the quality of their homemade dye made boiling an impossibility. These ladies recalled with dry amusement the problem of rinsing the clothes. It seems that they all three had mothers who insisted that the final rinse water be perfectly clear before the clothes could be considered clean. Naturally with no running water, this meant lots of trips to the well.

Miss Leda used to walk two miles back and forth to Lilley's Hall. This school lasted four months out of the year. From November through February, she had John Lilley as her teacher in that one room school. Allie Roberson was also one of Miss Leda's teachers. Miss Leda recalled her because the year that Allie Roberson was her teacher, Miss Leda won first prize in the school spelling bee. On the last day of school, there would be festivities. There was a speaker in the morning, then a picnic followed by a school play. The evening square dance would highlight the day.

When school wasn't in session, there was plenty to do. Miss Leda looped tobacco for fifty cents a day and picked cotton for fifty cents per hundred. There were circuses that came to Williamston about once a year and usually some neighbor would take a wagon load of children to see that.

A big project on her father's farm was making honey. Her father would put sulphur coated cotton sticks up into one half of his cones to kill all the bees in it. Then neighbors would be invited over to squeeze the honey out. A party would be made out of the event. The wax from the hives was melted, put in pans, and sold in town.

Miss Leda married Mr. Hoyt Manning in 1916. They had four children. The first, born in 1923, died. Their next child, E.H. Manning, was born in 1925. By 1926, Mr. Hoyt had lost his sight completely. In 1929, a daughter Susie (Mrs. Rankin Dowdy), was born. Their last child, Leda Faye (Mrs. Reg Coltrain), was born in 1933.

Miss Leda and Mr. Hoyt lived then, and still do now in the house that Mr. Hoyt's father purchased from Miss Leda's mother in 1902. So now Miss Leda lives in the house that her mother spent her childhood in. One of the memories that Miss Leda has from her early years of marriage was of an ice box that they had purchased when Lindsley's Ice Co. began operation. The ice box was replaced by a Kerosine refrigerator which they kept until 1934. In that year, Vepco brought electric light to Farm Life. Miss Leda has seen many changes in her life time. But none is more evident in her mind than the change in women's attire - especially in bathing suits. Styles today present quite a contrast to the long stockings, bloomers and middy blouses she remembers wearing when she and her friends would visit Ray's Beach.

Miss Leda attributes many things to her long pleasant life. But most of all, she stressed the good fortune of her family. Her children, all married, lead happy lives of their own. Miss Leda finds that the love in her family is indispensable and that her nine grandchildren and five great grandchildren have brought both she and Mr. Hoyt much happiness.

Mrs. Chrissie Smith
Williamston (Skewarky Area)

Born in a log cabin in the Skewarky Church area, Mrs. Chrissie Smith's birth dates back to February 19, 1886. Her parents were John and Patty Bowen Mizelle. The tenth of eleven children, Mrs. Smith did not know her parents well. Her mother died of unknown causes; Mrs. Smith thinks it was tuberculosis but does not know for sure. John Mizelle continued to farm and worked in a cotton mill. There he injured himself and died as a result. Mrs. Smith along with several of her brothers and sisters, went to an orphanage. Two of her siblings who did not go to the orphanage were her eldest brother Jim, who was married and her younger sister, who was the youngest child in the family. Her name was Maude and she lived with Jim until she was grown.

Mrs. Smith was about five when she entered the orphanage and she stayed there until the age of nine. At that time, she was selected by Mr. Squire Adams and his wife who lived near Hickory, to come into their home in the capacity of house keeper. She kept the house, worked in the garden and did odd jobs for the Adams family. However, the Adamses were an elderly couple and there was not an excess amount of work, so Mrs. Smith often went and helped some of the neighbors. The Adamses adopted her and she recalled many pleasant experiences while living with them.

Mrs. Smith attended a school operated by a Mr. Murchison. She walked about two miles to get to it. She attended this school on a fairly regular basis; this was quite a novelty for the day. While in school, she made the acquaintance of Dorus Killian, a schoolmate, who she later married. The courtship of Mrs. Smith and Dorus is interesting as it was one essentially by mail. Mr. Killian did try to visit, but his visits were rare. On one occasion when Mrs. Smith was recuperating from a broken leg, Mr. Adams refused to permit Mr. Killian to go up to her room to give her his regards. Mrs. Smith said that on the matter of her relationship with men, Mr. Adams was quite strict. It was for this reason that their friendship was left to develop through the mail. One letter contained a proposal of marriage and Mrs. Smith accepted.

She and Dorus were married and farmed near Hickory. Her life when married was much the same as it had been when living with the Adamses. Mrs. Smith helped manage the farm on which "we grew everything but tobacco". She made molasses from home grown cane and sold that along with black berries. The only source of recreation was going to church. Mrs. Smith had one child, a daughter. Both the daughter and Mr. Killian died. Mrs. Smith sold the farm.

Several years later she married Lee Smith in the home of Ethel Rogers in Bear Grass. She and Mr. Smith lived in Elizabeth City. He died after only five years of marriage. Mrs. Smith said, "he was a good man," and he helped her around the house.

Mrs. Smith next went to live with Maude (Mrs. George Outland) in Woodland. Then she came back and lived with Ethel Rogers and stayed there in Bear Grass until she entered the Martin County Home, where she now resides.

Now her favorite hobby is listening to the piano and she reads the Enterprise and her Bible. A Christian woman, Mrs. Smith says she doesn't know why she has lived so long but she said, "I just try to pray and do the best I can".

Mrs. Mamie Greene Taylor
Williamston, N.C.

Mrs. Mamie Greene Taylor was born in the Bear Grass Township on October 11, 1887, to William Marion Greere and Ida Peele Greene. She was the oldest of six girls and three boys. One brother drowned at an early age. Today one brother and three sisters live in Robersonville, and one brother and one sister live in Whiteville.

Her father was a farmer mostly, but also owned a merchandise and grocery store on Main St. in Robersonville. The Greene family were Primitive Baptist. During her childhood, Mrs. Taylor remembers the "good times", which included Ice Cream Suppers, Square Dances, Candy Parties, Quiltings, and Corn Shuckings which were usually at night. Usually wine made on the farm was served. Also there were Sunday afternoon buggy rides with boy friends and other family members and friends. She laughed and said that in between times they worked a little.

Mrs. Taylor's father, a tobacco farmer, grew the first tobacco that was grown in this area on the Staton Farm on Highway #17.

It was interesting to note that Dr. Cecil Taylor's father and Mr. Joe Taylor were brothers, and that Dr. Taylor's mother and Mrs. Taylor were sisters. Also of interest is that the late Mr. John Henry Edwards' mother and Mr. Joe Taylor were brothers and sisters; Mr. Homer Barnhill's mother was a sister of Mr. Joe Taylor; Mrs. Taylor and her husband had the same great-grandfather- Mr. Malachi Greene.

Mrs. Taylor was educated at the Bear Grass Academy, the Old Williamston Academy which was located where the current Church Street School is, the Buies Creek Academy, and the Littleton Female Methodist College.

Mamie Greene was married to Joe Taylor on March 4, 1908. They lived in the home of her parents. Not long after their marriage her father planned to help them build a home, but he died before plans were completed so they continued to live with her mother in the same house in which she was born. Her husband, Mr. Joe Taylor died in 1933 only ten years after her father's death. It was some time after her husband's death that she decided to have the home remodeled.

During her married life to Mr. Taylor, she remembers that mostly she cooked, washed dishes, and took care of the children. She did her own sewing, but with help. She crocheted some but did not learn to knit. She play hymns on the piano and they used to gather around and have a good time singing hymns. Some of the big events of her day were quiltings and rug turfings which were usually all day affairs with dinner, horse races, and baseball games. One particular baseball game she remembers was when her husband was the winning pitcher against the Washington team. That was a big day, she said. There was other entertainment which included the Chatugua, which was a combination of stories and advertisements, the Lantern Shows in the Community, and the Victrola for playing records. She and her husband had an Edison Victrola soon after they were married.

Mrs. Taylor joined the church while she was a student at the Buies Creek Academy and later moved her membership to what is now the Williamston Memorial Baptist Church about 1905, where she remains a member and attends as her health permits.

Mr. and Mrs. Taylor had five children: Fred, Ralph, Eli Marion, Mamie Clyde, and Jennie. Four of the children and their families are members of the Memorial Baptist Church.

Today Mrs. Taylor, at age 87, still lives at the same place she was born. Living with her are her sons Fred, and Ralph and his wife, Mary Virginia. For 33 years Ralph and Mary Virginia have made their home with her. Mrs. Taylor noted that both Fred and Eli Marion were in the military during the war, and that Eli Marion went all the way to the Russian border during this time. Mrs. Taylor has five grandchildren, four boys, two of whom are adopted blood brothers, and one girl. She has one great grandchild, Mary Lynn Cherry.

Near the Taylor home is a family cemetery where several family members are buried, including her husband, Mr. Joe Taylor, his parents, two brothers, a sister, and Mr. Taylor's fraternal grandparents. Also the parents of Dr. Cecil Taylor and the parents of Mr. John Henry Edwards are buried there. Plans are for Mrs. Taylor to be buried there also. Extending back beyond the family cemetery is a spot where several slaves who worked on the Taylor farm are buried.

Mrs. Ella Holliday Vick
Jamesville

Another lady found in the search for Bicentennial Queens is Mrs. Ella Vick. She has lived in Jamesville most of her life since her birth there January 15, 1880. Her father farmed in Jamesville, N. C. She had two brothers, Billy and Sewood who were both younger than she. Mrs. Vick and her brothers went to school during her earlier years. They attended on an irregular basis; she said, "we went anyway we could". One of her most outstanding memories of her school life was that she and her brothers had few clothes to wear. While a young girl, she joined the Roanoke Christian Disciple Church.

When her mother died of dropsie, Mrs. Vick lived with her Aunt Sally Francis Ange. During this time she served the community as a nurse, taking care of people in the area (she was not professionally trained). While all this was taking place, Bobby and Sewood were painting houses.

Eventually Mrs. Vick moved to Jacksonville where she worked in Rosemary Mills. There she met and married Council Vick. He was a native of Jacksonville. She doesn't know the date of their marriage and Bible records have been lost. At this point, Mrs. Vick and her husband moved to Newsome, Virginia where they lived with his father. Both her husband and father-in-law farmed. Mrs. Vick helped with the farm and especially delighted in memories of an ox she used for plowing. Council Vick had a stroke and died. Mrs. Vick moved back to Jamesville and took up residence in her mother's house. She contacted Tuberculosis and spent the next years back and forth between the Sanatarium in Wilson and the Martin County Home.

Mrs. Vick now lives at the County Home. She has no family. She and Mr. Vick had no children. She said that she had no time for a family. What time she didn't spend working on the farm, she spent taking care of sick neighbors. Now she spends her time reading. But her eyes make this difficult. Still, she manages to read the Bible, especially the Psalms.

Mrs. Mary Wynn
Jamesville, N.C.

Mary "Mrs. Jep" Wynn represents a special element of Martin County society. She, like most of the people born more than fifty years ago has no more than an approximation of her age. Those who know her, know that she is at least ninety. Her daughter-in-law, with whom she now lives, says that she is 93. Mary has no idea who her parents were. She is not a native of Martin County. She was born in Creswell. There, she was "passed" from house to house to do housekeeping or farm labor. This was not at all an uncommon fate for children, especially black children, during this time. She best expressed it by saying that back then most folks "grabbed a baby and raised it". Only one of these families stands out in Mary's memory. This was the family of Millie Cabarrus, with whom she lived until she married.

Mary met Jep Wynn who also lived in Creswell. They were married in a Baptist Church there and there are no records of that event either. Mary just knows that her marriage took place "a long time ago". After their marriage, she and Jep lived with Laura McCray. They had one daughter, Ida Mae.

Mary and Jep then moved to Jamesville. Again, Mary has no record of when this move was made. When they arrived, Mary was hired for farm labor at different farms in the area; Jep secured employment at Simon's Mill. Ida Mae did house work. While they were in Jamesville, a son, Raymond, was born to Mary and Jep.

Mary remembers nothing of major events occurring in Martin County. She did recall hearing the men talk about the Second World War but she never paid attention to the conversations because they never affected her. She continued to do farm work as long as she was able. Ida Mae married and moved to Greensboro. Raymond is now dead but he married Mattie Wynn and it is with her that Mary now lives on one of Carlyle Manning's farms.