



Mill House, Bynum, NC, © Steven Hessler

Cotton Mill Family Life Survey

Return to: Textile Heritage Center at Cooleemee ♦ PO Box 667, Cooleemee, NC 27014
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Textile Heritage Center at Cooleemee

Preserving the History & Heritage of the Southern Cotton Mill People



October, 2004

Dear friends,

If there were no ordinary folks, there would be no history. This is particularly true of the last hundred or so years in the South. The truth is, if there had been no cotton mill people, there wouldn't be a bank in Charlotte or Atlanta today.

The **Mill Family Life Survey** is designed for those who grew up "in" or "on" one of the hundreds of Southern cotton mill hills, mill villages or mill towns. Almost all of the first and second generation cotton mill pioneers have already passed on to their eternal rewards. For you who remain with us, we need to learn more about your lives and what you can remember of your parents' lives.

Back during the Great Depression, the government began many public works programs---like the WPA and the CCC. One section of the WPA was the Federal Writers Project that hired unemployed writers to do various useful tasks. One of the most valuable things they left us were the "Slave Narratives" and the Survey of Civil War Veterans in Tennessee. These writers gathered up the first-hand stories of every slave and Civil War veteran they could get their hands on. Now, we have a body of testimony which both scholars and the public can examine for all time.

This is what we hope to create with our **Mill Family Life Survey**. It is 23 pages long but we think it will bring back so many memories that you will find it easy to complete. You are welcome to get one of your children or grandchildren to help write out your answers---just make sure the words are your own. Completed surveys are placed in our archives and, if your permission is given, will be available to scholars and the public forever. Eventually, some pages will be added for those who grew up after World War II. And, survey results will be compiled in a digital database that can be searched with a computer.

Remember, you and your family were part of history---an important part. When you finish your Survey we ask you send it back to us. We encourage you to make a copy for your family and your local library's history collection. You are strongly encouraged copy more and get your old friends and neighbors to participate.

This Survey was created in 1996 and about a hundred have already been submitted. But, a much bigger sample is needed. Along with many partners, we have now launched THE SOUTHWIDE TEXTILE HERITAGE INITIATIVE. We hope you will get involved---and please return the survey!

Sincerely,
Lynn Rumley
Director

Family and Home Life Project
Return to CHA, Box 667, Cooleemee, NC 27014

My name is : _____

My maiden name was: _____

___ I would like my survey to be filed without a name. (All surveys will be retained in the archives of Cooleemee's Textile Heritage Center)

___ I give permission for my survey to be quoted.

Signed _____

Date _____

Current Address _____

I grew up in the _____ cotton mill village in the state of _____

It was situated ___ out in the country ___ Near/in a city or town

I was born on _____ (date) at _____ (place)

I began public work at _____ (age). _____ got me my first job.

I finished _____ years of schooling.

I worked at the _____ cotton mill.

I worked there for _____ years as a _____ (job).

If you worked in more than one job or you quit work for a while, tell us about it. _____

My nickname was " _____ "

___ I am a white Southerner ___ I am African-American

___ I am _____ (another ethnic group)

Your Family

My dad's name _____

Dad was born on _____ (date) at _____ (place)

He grew up at _____ (place)

His family originally came from : _____

___ My dad worked at the mill as a _____ (job)

___ My dad **did not** work at the mill but earned his living as _____

How old was he when he began public work? _____ (age)

My mother's maiden name _____

She was born on _____ (date) at _____ (place)

She grew up at _____ (place)

Her family originally came from : _____

___ My mother worked at the mill as a _____

___ My mother **did not** work at the mill but did public work as _____

_____ (type of work)

How old was she when she began public work? _____ (age)

Did she work while rearing her children? ___ Yes ___ No

My parents had ___ children, ___ boys and ___ girls. ___ lived to be adults

I had _____ aunts and uncles. How many of them lived in the village where you grew up? _____. How many cousins lived in the village. _____

___ My dad's parents lived in the village.

___ My mother's parents lived in the village.

Did any other adults live with your family? ___ Yes ___ No

Relationship? _____

Did any other children live with your family? ___ Yes ___ No

Relationship? _____

Your Family's House

(If you lived in more than one house, pick the one where you lived longest between 5 and 15 years of age, or feel free to make copies of this page and add them in.)

Did the mill company own your house? ___ Yes ___ No

How many rooms did your house have? _____ (number)

Rent \$ _____ per week?

How was it heated? _____ Cooking fuel? _____

Can you draw a rough sketch floor plan of your house? Show us where the kitchen was, where the people slept and the main pieces of furniture (beds, tables, etc)

Do you remember when electricity was installed in your house? _____ (year)

How about in-door water and plumbing _____ (year)

Did your family live in more than one house in the mill village. ___ Yes ___ No

How many times did they move within the village? _____ (number of times)

Did they ever move out to a house not owned by the mill company ___ Yes ___ No

When did your family get **hot** water? _____ (year)

What year was your house underpinned? ___ 20s ___ 30s ___ 40s ___ 50s

Did any special things happen under the house (workshops, play areas, etc)?

Household Items

What type of beds did you have when you were young? Mattresses? Pillows? Bed coverings? Please describe.

Were there closets? Chest of drawers? Where were your clothes kept?

When you were little was there a living or sitting room used exclusively for that purpose?

Yes No

Was there a sofa or couch? Yes No

In the kitchen where were the dishes kept? _____

Was there a pantry? Yes No

What other pieces of furniture do you remember? _____

How old were you when your family got a radio? _____ (age)

Did you family own a crank ice cream maker? Yes No

How old were you when your family got a record player? _____ (age)

When did your road or street get paved? _____ (year)

What other items could be found in your household that we would not have around today?

Your Yard

Please draw us a sketch of your yard including where your house sat on the lot. Draw in any outbuildings, garden spots, chicken pens, etc.

Was there grass in your yard? Yes No

Did people take short cuts through each others yards? Yes No

My family raised a garden. My family raised chickens.

My family kept a cow. My family raised hogs.

Other animals

Family Production

Did your family preserve hog meat? ___ Yes ___ No
How? ___ Smoking ___ Salt/sugar curing?

Did your family raise a garden?

List main things they canned, dried, and/or put up.

Was your family garden in your yard or elsewhere?

(Where?) _____

Where were your hogs kept? _____

Your cow? _____

When you were little did your family make its own butter? ___ Yes ___ No

Did your family make clabber? ___ Yes ___ No

Did your mother make lye soap? ___ Yes ___ No

Did the men and boys fish ___ Yes ___ No Did they hunt? ___ Yes ___ No

Did your family rely much on this food? ___ A lot ___ Some ___ Not much

List the main food items your parents bought at the store which your family did not produce for themselves.

Did your family buy its corn meal? ___ Yes ___ No

Did your family buy its flour? ___ Yes ___ No

Did your family have an ice box? ___ Yes ___ No

Where did they get their ice from? _____

When you were young did your family have a wood cook stove? ___ Yes ___ No

Who made the morning fire? _____

My mother sewed most of our family's clothes. ___ Yes ___ No

Did she buy all the cloth? ___ Yes ___ No

Did she ever use feed sacks? ___ Yes ___ No

Did the mill sell cloth at a discount to its hands? ___ Yes ___ No

Did you family own a sewing machine? ___ Yes ___ No

What year did they buy it? _____ (year)

Did older women knit socks or other items for the family? ___ Yes ___ No

Did they do tatting or other fancy sewing? ___ Yes ___ No

Please list the main tools your family owned (household tools, special tools)?

Did your family own a horse? ___ Yes ___ No A wagon ___ Yes ___ No

Did your parents own an automobile? ___ Yes ___ No

When did they buy it? _____ (year)

Did your family get any sort of washing machine while you were growing up?

___ Yes ___ No How old were you? _____ (age)

Water heater? ___ Yes ___ No Electric iron? ___ Yes ___ No

Family Meals

How often was bread made? (daily, several times a week)?

Was this ___ Corn bread ___ Biscuits ___ Light rolls/bread

Did your family eat breakfast together? ___ Yes ___ No

What did they usually eat for breakfast? _____

During the week days, was the big meal cooked for dinner (noon-time meal)?

___ Yes ___ No

Was it taken to family member who worked at the mill? ___ Yes ___ No

Who took it? _____

What was prepared for supper during the week (typical examples)?

What sort of cooking was done on Saturdays?

Were there full meals cooked? ___ Yes ___ No

Was a big Sunday dinner prepared and served? ___ Yes ___ No

Was it prepared on ___ Saturday? ___ Sunday?

Did you often have company? ___ Yes ___ No

Was this company usually relatives? ___ Yes ___ No

What was served at a typical Sunday dinner at your home?

Family Purchases

Did the mill company run a store? Yes No

Did your family have credit at the store Yes No

Were these store bills taken out of paychecks? Yes No

Were mill employees paid in scrip? Yes No Cash? Yes No

Did the company store charge interest on their accounts? Yes No

What other places did your parents trade?

Did your family have credit at the stores? Yes No

How many of these were located inside of the mill owned area? _____

Did neighbors swap or barter items with each other (no cash exchanged)?

Yes No

What things were bartered? _____

Did neighbors sell items to each other (for cash)? Yes No

What things did your family sell? _____

What things did your family buy from neighbors?

Your Family's Schedule

What time did your family rise? _____ (a.m.)

Was there a mill whistle? ___ Yes ___ No Times it blew: _____

Did you eat breakfast together? ___ Yes ___ No

What time did the mill shift begin? _____ (a.m.)

When did your mill take on more than one shift? _____ (year)

Did anyone in your family work night shift after that? ___ Yes ___ No

Did you have older sisters or brothers who worked in the mill ___ Yes ___ No

Did those working at the mill walk home for dinner break? ___ Yes ___ No

Did someone take dinner to those working at the mill? ___ Yes ___ No

Did your family usually eat supper together? ___ Yes ___ No

Below show us where everyone sat around the kitchen table for meals. Show us where your Dad sat, your Mother, the children.

Did your family use ___ Benches or ___ Chairs in the kitchen?

What time did your family usually go to bed? _____ (p.m.)

Was there a curfew in your village that the company enforced? ___ Yes ___ No

Did the mill work on Saturdays? When did shift start? _____ a.m. Get out _____

What did your dad do on Saturdays? _____

Your mother? _____

Young'uns? _____

Did the family do anything together on Saturdays? _____

Did you attend church on Sunday mornings? ___ Yes ___ No

Sunday nights? ___ Yes ___ No Wednesday nights? ___ Yes ___ No

Did everyone in the family always go to church together? ___ Yes ___ No

If not every Sunday, on what occasions? _____

Family Labors

Were there certain chores done on certain days of the week? Please describe.

Describe your mother's main chores. _____

What chores did you do? _____

What chores did the other children do? _____

What household chores did your father do? _____

What work did your whole family do together, if any? _____

Did your family ever hire help for household labor? Yes No

Who was hired? For what jobs? _____

Family Leisure

What did your family do for entertainment? _____

Did anyone in your family play a musical instrument? ___ Yes ___ No

Name some of the songs your mother or father sang to you as a child.

Did anyone in your family play cards? ___ Yes ___ No

How did the children entertain themselves? _____

Do you remember your mother taking many rests?

___ Whenever she needed one. Would this be ___ Often ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely

Do you remember your dad taking many rests?

___ Whenever he needed one. Would this be ___ Often ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely

Did your family have a vacation? ___ Yes ___ No

Would you go anywhere? If yes, where _____

Did the mill shut down at a certain time in the summers? When? _____

How much time off was allowed for holidays?

Christmas _____ Easter _____ Any other holidays? _____

Family Relationships

Did your parents consider themselves partners in marriage? How was this shown?

What were their views on divorce? _____

Tell us some ways that your parents showed respect for one another. What was this respect based upon?

How were differences between them solved? _____

What punishments did you get for minor misbehavior? _____

For major misbehavior? _____

How much did your parents reason with you to correct your ways? Give some examples.

Family Honor

Did your parents teach you to be loyal to your family? ___ Yes ___ No

Did your dad ever have to defend your family's honor or good name?

Did you ever have to defend your family honor or good name? _____

How much did men "settle scores" amongst themselves? How much did they rely on "the law" or legal system to settle disputes between themselves? Some examples.

Did your family lock its doors at night? ___ Yes ___ No

What dangers to physical safety did your family face? _____

Did the mill company or town have a hired peace officer? ___ Yes ___ No

Who was mainly responsible for protecting your family's safety?

___ Your father ___ Hired police

The safety of the neighborhood?

___ The men of the community ___ Hired police

If your father saw someone injuring a friend or neighbor or stealing from a friend or neighbor, what would likely have been his reaction?

Family Decisions

Do you remember any big decisions your family had to make about their future?

What roles did each of your parents play in these large decisions?

Who do you believe played a larger role in the decisions affecting your family's future.
___ Your parents ___ The mill company Tell us why you think this.

Were there instances in which the wishes of the mill company conflicted with what your parents thought was best for your family? ___ Yes ___ No If yes, explain the situation

What options did your parents have in this situation? How was it resolved?

Who decided if or when a younger person would begin mill work?

___ Your parents ___ The mill company

Was there pressure? If yes, tell us what kind. _____

Did you receive all the schooling that you wanted to get? ___ Yes ___ No

If not, why? _____

Family Status

My parents: ___ were not in management ___ were in management

Did your parents feel that they were equal to anyone else in the village?

___ Yes ___ No

If yes, how could you tell that your parents felt equal to other adults?

In what ways did they teach you to have pride in your family and in yourself?

Were you or anyone else in your family ever called a name like "linthead" or "cotton mill trash"? ___ Yes ___ No

Who used these terms against mill folks? _____

What was done about it? _____

Were you poor when you were growing up? Were you conscious of being poor? Is so, about how old were you?

Did mill management children mix much outside of school with ordinary mill hand's children? ___ Yes ___ No Tell us something about how they got along.

How important did your parents feel material wealth was for happiness?

Very important Important Not very important

Did they believe that everyone had an opportunity to better themselves?

Yes No

What did they feel were the decisive factors which would lead to someone bettering themselves.

Did they feel that wealthier people exercised undue influence or had more pull than other people in the community?

Yes No in politics Yes No

What political party were your parents affiliated with? _____

What were your parents views about schooling? What relationship did they believe book learning had to common sense? _____

Did your parents ever express regrets over how much schooling they had received

Yes No

How much did they emphasize that you should get an education? A lot Not much

Did they want their children to grow up and work in a cotton mill? Yes No

How many of your brothers and sisters finished high school? _____

Went to college? _____

In your parents eyes, what was the biggest sin that one could commit?

Did families who worked in certain departments tend to live on certain streets?

Yes No

Did management families tend to live on certain streets? Yes No

Which streets? _____

Your Family & the Neighborhood

Did your family have good neighbors? ___ Yes, many ___ a few good, a few bad
In your village, what did neighbors do for each other? Tell us about it.

Did neighbors swap work? Tell us about it. _____

Did neighbors attend each other's funerals? ___ Yes ___ No
When you were little were the bodies laid out at the home? ___ Yes ___ No

What did your parents teach you about snobs and how did they teach you this? (by telling you, by example, by sayings)? _____

What did your parents teach you about bullies? And how did they teach you this? (by telling you, by example, by sayings)? _____

What would make your parents or neighbors talk badly about another family?

If a neighbor family did things which adversely affected others would they suffer any consequences (like refusal of neighborly help, etc)? _____

Did you ever hear about a man beating his wife in your village? ___ Yes ___ No

Was there any response from the men of the community? ___ Yes ___ No

From the mill company? ___ Yes ___ No Please describe any responses.

Neighborhood Race Relations

What was the racial make up of your mill village (your best estimate)

_____ % White southern _____ % African American _____ % Other

Was there neighborhood segregation? ___ Yes ___ No

What did your parents feel about relations between races? _____

Did they have friends among other races? ___ Yes ___ No

What did they teach you about how to behave towards people of another race?

Were you ever criticized by your parents for being out of line in race relations? If yes, what had you done?

Did your parents believe in integrating the schools? ___ Yes ___ No

In interracial marriage? ___ Yes ___ No

In separate neighborhoods? ___ Yes ___ No

Did friendship ever develop between people of different races? ___ Yes ___ No

Comments? _____

Neighborhood Social Life

What were the favorite pastimes in your village? _____

Was there a place where the men gathered to “solve the problems of the world”?

___ Yes ___ No Where was it located? _____

What social activities engaged the neighborhood women? _____

Were there fraternal organizations like Woodmen of the World or others? Please name.

Was there a baseball team? ___ Yes ___ No

What was its name and what league was it part of? _____

Were there homemade string bands? Fiddler Conventions? Dances?

Was there a brass band? ___ Yes ___ No

When did it play? _____

Were there special community gatherings on holidays or other occasions. Describe
