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GOOD NEIGHBORS:
AGENTS OF CHANGE IN THE NEW RURAL SOUTH, 1900 TO 1940

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctorate of Philosophy
In the Department of History
The University of Mississippi

by

THOMAS WAYNE COPELAND

May 2011

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ABSTRACT

This work paints an intimate portrait of rural people who lived in the hill counties of northeast Mississippi and southwest Arkansas between 1900 and 1940. Howard County, Arkansas and Union County, Mississippi serve as the representative counties for each hill-country region. Howard County is located in the foothills of the Ouachita Mountains, and Union County is located in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains.

This study identifies who in the rural communities was most responsible for bringing positive changes to their communities, questions what motivated their efforts, and evaluates their successes and failures. To this end, the work first examines how rural people “made do” with limited resources by organizing mutual support systems. It argues that rural people who lived in close proximity, shared similar experiences, and held strong religious beliefs, developed a community consciousness. The study also examines how racial relations in the rural hill-country complicated the community consciousness. The study is particularly interested in the roles women played in their communities. It examines how rural women developed mutual support networks and why these networks were so important for progressive change. The study found that women who were active in their churches joined forces through both religious and secular organizations to reform their communities.

Local efforts to diversify the economy are evaluated in both southwest Arkansas and northeast Mississippi. Civic leaders sought to bring industry to their individual counties. When industries arrived, however, the industries could not employ a significant number of rural people, and many times the industries failed after only a few years. Finally, the study examines the

important work of agricultural extension agents and home demonstration agents and argues that only after becoming part of the communities they served could these agents truly transform the rural South.

For my wife, Dawn,
and our daughters, Alexa, and Edie

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INTRODUCTION

C. Vann Woodward was indeed correct when he penned in *Origins of the New South*, that the expression “Solid South” is of questionable value to the historian. Since the appearance in the 1980s of several pivotal works on the South, including those of Jack Temple Kirby, Gilbert Fite, and Pete Daniel, it has been well understood that the New South should not be treated as if it has a unified history, culture, or politic.¹ Following this dynamic shift in the paradigm of southern history, numerous local studies of the South or “Souths” began to appear. Of particular importance to this study are the works of Melissa Walker, Lu Ann Jones, Rebecca Sharpless, and Mark Schultz.² This newer generation of Southern historian focused on precise areas of the South, from the Appalachian hill-country, to the Blackland Prairie of east Texas. Each local study has allowed historians to move well beyond what was possible in the more comprehensive studies their predecessors offered. At the same time, these works are limited by their sharp focus. Critics, with some degree of accuracy, may say that each local study cannot truly represent anything other than itself. By combining local studies, we construct a new history of the South from the bottom up. Additionally, this methodology allows far more precision and intimacy than the sweeping, top-down approach offered.

¹ Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land : The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Gilbert Courtland Fite, *Cotton Fields No More : Southern Agriculture, 1865-1980*, New Perspectives on the South (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1984); Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost : The American South, 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

² Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work : Farm Women in the New South*, Studies in Rural Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Rebecca Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices : Women on Cotton Farms of the Texas Blackland Prairie, 1900-1940*, Studies in Rural Culture (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Melissa Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm : Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941*, Revisiting Rural America (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

Without question, geography shapes the history, economy, and culture of any region. The development of a region, however, depends greatly on the initiative of local people, as well as resources and investments. In order to understand how a particular geography fostered a culture that valued neighborliness, this study attempts to paint an intimate portrait of local people who lived in the hill country of the rural South. It examines what motivated neighbors to come together for the improvement of their communities, and it evaluates why some efforts succeeded and others failed. Between 1900 and 1940, women became increasingly independent and more involved in leading their communities. As such, rural women, their networks, and their contributions to the communities, draw the most attention throughout this study.

Under close examination are two similar hill-country regions in two separate states. Situated on opposite sides of the Mississippi River, located in the foothills of two different mountain systems, and separated by some four hundred miles of highway are Howard County, Arkansas and Union County, Mississippi. Although both counties are unique in and of themselves, they were chosen because they represent rural, hill-country culture, albeit from different hills. Union County is located in the northeastern part of Mississippi in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Howard County is located in southwestern Arkansas in the foothills of the Ouachita Mountains. Both regions have largely escaped the inquisitive eyes of historians.

Due to the topography of the counties, these specific regions developed differently from the often-studied Delta regions of either Arkansas or Mississippi. Likewise, neither county represents a “mountain culture” normally associated with the Appalachian or Ozark Mountains. The rural culture of both hill-country counties was distinct from other regions of either state. Although cotton grew in both regions, the large-scale plantations normally associated with the Delta regions did not develop here. These hilly regions were the homes of small landowners,

and the gap between the wealthy and the poor was less pronounced, although many poor farm families made an impoverished living through sharecropping or tenant farming. Both regions had ample forests, and timber mills operated in many communities. Both had soil suitable for truck farming and multiple railways serviced each county. Racially mixed populations lived in both Howard and Union counties. During the time of this study, African Americans made up approximately twenty-five percent of the population in both Howard and Union counties. Both counties experienced episodes of violence directed at African-Americans, and both counties had times when racial relations seemed more harmonious.

Union and Howard counties were rural. The bulk of the population lived in small communities. The county seats, New Albany, Mississippi, and Nashville, Arkansas, boasted just over 2,500 residents in 1920. The political history of both counties began during the Reconstruction Era. Mississippi organized Union County in 1870, and Arkansas organized Howard County in 1873. According to the 1890 US Census data, 15,606 people resided in Union County, Mississippi. Not far behind, Howard County, Arkansas had 13,789 residents. Census records indicate a similar rate of population growth between the two counties until the 1930s. Throughout the 1920s, both counties increased in population, and during the Great Depression, both counties experienced negative population growth. The census of 1950 in Union County showed the same approximate number of people the county had in 1910. Howard County's negative growth rate was most severe. Howard County's population peaked in 1920 and declined sharply. In 1940, Howard County's population fell to 10,878 residents, the lowest point in the county's history. It was not until 1980 that Howard County's population exceeded the number it had in 1920.

By the early 1900s, the pulse of both regions began to quicken. Community leaders envisioned the potential of their own townships and recognized the many obstacles they must overcome. To this end, visionaries began earnestly to draw industries to their own areas, construct better roads, and build better schools. At this point, the comparative study between the two counties becomes most valuable as it illustrates which methods of improvement worked and which did not work. The success and failures of each locale, coupled with the efforts of each state and eventually the federal government, joined in a concerted effort to bring both regions out of isolation. In many ways, this study seeks to know the “universals” of rural southern life while also understanding the “particulars” that affected each rural community in the hill country.

CHAPTER 1

MAKING DO

Farm folk were not afraid of hard work. Rural people wanted to work; they wanted to improve their lives. The ethos of rural folk affirmed doing the right thing as the community defined it and helping each other. Although specific geographic qualities altered some experiences of rural southerners, they shared a common experience of hard work. By looking at the hill country of northeast Mississippi and southwest Arkansas, one can understand how rural communities functioned throughout much of the rural South. Working together in otherwise isolated communities, locals developed mutual support between neighbors and community members. They developed a community consciousness that was important for the benefit of all in the area. Margaret Jones Bolsterli, who edited the 1890 diary of Fannie Stillwell Jackson, found that, “A highly developed sense of community responsibility is evident in the way individuals step forward to care for each other during crises.”³ Such a consciousness, of course, competed with racial consciousness and with class. Shared experiences and mutualism enabled rural whites and blacks to interact in ways they could not in the larger towns and cities. Mark Schultz, who studied race relations in rural Hancock County, Georgia wrote, “Segregation was a system of social control first developed in the cities to maintain white supremacy within the social structure particular to cities and towns. Segregation simply did not fit well with the

³ Nannie Stillwell Jackson and Margaret Jones Bolsterli, *Vinegar Pie and Chicken Bread: A Woman's Diary of Life in the Rural South, 1890-1891*, The President's Series in Arkansas and Regional Studies V. 1 (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1982), 2.

economy, geography, and cultural traditions of the rural South.”⁴ The diary of Fannie Stillwell Jackson provides evidence that in their homes, rural white women did not maintain a rigid separation between themselves and their black neighbors. Rather, they visited one another, traded with one another, and took care of one another.

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, dirt roads and trails linked rural southern communities with one another. During winter months, these roads sometimes became muddy enough to impede transportation. Springtime prompted prolific sweet gum saplings to impede on under-developed right-of-ways. Many creeks and rivers had no bridges over them, which meant that travelers forded only when the water was low enough. “Low water” bridges, or roadways laid through creek beds, became hazardous after a good thunderstorm, and it remained possible that a sudden rainstorm might cut a person off from home if it caught him or her on the wrong side of a creek. Julia Kesterson, who taught at the Messer Creek School in southwest Arkansas during the 1920s, crossed a creek to get to and from work each day. Kesterson remembered, “If there had been a rain and the creek was high, I crawled across a foot log.”⁵ Travelers took serious risks when they forced their horses or mules to navigate through fast-flowing waters. William Faulkner, from Union County, Mississippi, wrote with dark humor in *As I Lay Dying* of an instance where a sudden flood wreaked havoc for a family who traveled by wagon. In his novel, the Bundren family traveled to Jefferson to bury Addie Bundren, the family’s matriarch. When the desperate family reached a stream, they decided to forge it rather than turn back. As the wagon sank down to the creek bottom, the casket of Addie Bundren floated downstream.⁶

In the novel, Faulkner presented a serious problem for some rural folk in the first quarter

⁴ Mark Schultz, *The Rural Face of White Supremacy : Beyond Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 86.

⁵ "Howard County Retired Teachers Remember." Howard County Retired Teachers Association, 1983, Howard County Public Library. Nashville, Arkansas.

⁶ William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (New York: Vintage International, 1990).

of the twentieth century. Rural roads and poorly constructed bridges were dangerous. Rainstorms brought floods, and floods often brought tragedies. Such potential dangers gave William Faulkner inspiration for a dark scene, but for some families, such hazards took the lives of loved ones. In 1910, for example, Mrs. Wesley Wright, Mrs. Eugene Heath, and six children were returning to Gilham, Arkansas after visiting relatives on a Sunday in nearby Grannis. The group traveled by wagon and attempted to cross the Cossatot River at Clinton Ford. An afternoon thunderstorm caused a flash flood and the river spilled out of its banks. Driving the wagon loaded with her family, Wright made the decision to push through the water rather than return to her relatives. While crossing the river, the water rapids spooked the horses and swept the wagon downstream. When one of the horses broke loose and returned home alone that evening, the community organized a search party. By following morning, searchers discovered only the wagon and a drowned horse. Searchers later recovered the bodies of the eight victims swept downstream.⁷

This tragedy makes clear that during the early 1900s, roadways needed improvement. This fact drew not only local but also national attention. In 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt called for a commission to study the “problems” of country life and offer solutions to improve the lives of rural folk. Roosevelt recommended that the Department of Agriculture be “transformed” into the Department of Country Life. This new department would not offer only suggestions on raising crops but also suggestions on, “the most intimate affairs of the lives of rural people,” according to the *New York Times*.⁸ Although the Department of Agriculture remained intact, the Country Life Commission reported in 1909 that farmers across the United States demanded good highways, and noted that, “Education and good roads are the two needs

⁷ "Eight Drown in River," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 21 May 1910.

⁸ "Roosevelt Message on Farmers' Needs," *New York Times*, 10 February 1909.

most frequently mentioned [by farmers.]”⁹ People of different classes and occupations realized the need for road improvements, although some debated the best way to pay for any roadwork. Nevertheless, those who desired road improvements were not limited to farmers. Businessmen in both New Albany, Mississippi, and Nashville, Arkansas recognized that improved roadways could improve commerce and began pushing for better roads during the 1910s. Health professionals, likewise, knew that better roadways meant rural people could get medical attention more readily. William Henry Chambers, a country doctor born in 1879, owned a car when the influenza epidemic struck in 1918. To get to his patients, however, Chambers traveled into the hills of north Howard County, Arkansas by horse because most roads remained too difficult to travel by car.¹⁰ In his study of midwifery in Arkansas, Alex Freedman noted that most midwives agreed in the 1930s that Arkansas’s back roads caused hardships getting to the client and, consequently, endangered the lives of both mother and child.¹¹

Rural folk socialized, if only during routine events. “People bought their groceries on Saturday. That was a big day.” Francis Hill recalled.¹² The community stores provided more than merchandise, however. The stores served as meeting places for community members during the week. On the weekends, young white men appeared in town wearing starched white shirts and bought their dates Coca-Colas at the local stores.¹³ Movies theaters in larger communities, such as Mineral Springs or Nashville, Arkansas, or Myrtle or New Albany,

⁹ Henry Wallace L. H. Bailey, Kenyon L. Butterfield, Walter H. Page, Giofford Pinchot, C. S. Barrett, W. A. Beard, *Report of the Country Life Commission*, 60 Cong., Second sess., 1909. 38.

¹⁰ North Howard County Youth Group for Historical Research, *The Unfinished Story of North Howard County* (1982), 189-190.

¹¹ A. S. Freedman, "The Passing of the Arkansas Granny Midwife," *Kentucky Folklore Record* 20, no. 4 (1974): 102.

¹² Francis Hill to author, Interview, 16 February 2006. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/hill.html (accessed 26 July 2008). Hill’s father owned store in a small community near Etta.

¹³ Both Nashville, Arkansas and New Albany, Mississippi had established Coca-Cola bottling companies by the 1920s.

Mississippi, provided entertainment for dates. Families regularly attended church together on Sundays. Church congregations gathered to watch baptisms take place in rivers and in ponds, and they restored their faith at revivals during the summer months. Music teachers sometimes traveled from community to community to conduct “singing schools” where students learned to sing using “shaped notes.” Sporting rivalries developed between schools, and students defended the honor of their community on the basketball courts and football fields. The local newspaper served as a medium to taunt the opposing team as community members wrote in to announce victories over other schools. The social columns of the newspaper reported on church revivals, visitations, and club meetings.

The church and the school served as key institutions in the formation and maintenance of a community identity. The fact that these were segregated institutions could suggest that white and black folks in the rural south may be in close geographic proximity with one another, but they were never really in the same community. Melissa Walker wrote, “The fact that rural southerners saw church and school participation as markers of community membership suggests that these communities may not have been as open or inclusive as their stories might lead a listener to believe.”¹⁴ A church body alone, of course, does not constitute a community. Although the church remained a key component in establishing a community’s identity, other components remained equally important, such as mutual support systems, and the ability of neighbors to relate to one another’s needs, or hardships. Community consciousness, therefore, derives from many sources.

Despite the difficulties of travel, neighbors visited one another regularly. This community function nurtured the social connections needed by all households. Rebecca

¹⁴ Melissa Walker, *Southern Farmers and Their Stories : Memory and Meaning in Oral History*, New Directions in Southern History (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 199.

Sharpless points to a sociological study conducted during 1920s in the Blacklands of Texas, which found that almost all farm people visited with their neighbors.¹⁵ Although Southern rural communities tended to be isolated, these community households were not islands to themselves.

Rural men encountered one another in public spaces, such as the town's bank, hardware stores, cotton gins, and courthouses. They fraternized together at domino and pool halls in towns. They retreated to hunting lodges where they hunted together, drank together, and fought together. Ted Ownby wrote that, "male activities were more public and, usually, more dramatic. They made it fun to be a man in the South...."¹⁶ Rural women enjoyed serene moments with one another; they visited one another in their homes. These visitations played a vital role in fostering a community consciousness, and mutual exchanges bridged the gap between otherwise segregated places. The diary of Nannie Stillwell Jackson documents the frequent visitations of rural women. Nannie Jackson, who lived in Desha County, in southeast Arkansas, kept a diary of her daily routines in her home as well as her visitations in 1890 and 1891. Born in 1854, Jackson wrote her diary while she was in her mid-thirties. Her first husband, a prominent man named Asher C. Stillwell, died within thirteen years of their marriage in 1873, leaving Nannie Jackson with three children to care for alone. In 1899, she married a younger man named William T. Jackson, and they ultimately had two children of their own. In her diary, Nannie Jackson reveals just how much she depended on the support of her women friends. Margaret Jones Bolsterli, who edited Jackson's diary, wrote, "It is the support of her women friends that [sustained] her. Men [were] on the periphery of the 'real' life of Mrs. Jackson and her friends."¹⁷ Jackson's support came from some twenty women, both black and white, who visited regularly.

¹⁵ Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices*, 190.

¹⁶ Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan : Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920*, The Fred W. Morrison Series in Southern Studies (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 137.

¹⁷ Jackson and Bolsterli, *Vinegar Pie and Chicken Bread*, 11-15.

Of those, five visited her almost daily, and her closest friend, Fannie Morgan, often visited more than once per day. The relationship provided therapeutic benefits. On June 27, 1890, for example, Nannie Jackson wrote,

I did some patching for Fannie to day & took it to her she washed again yesterday & ironed up everything today I also took 2 boxes of moss & set out in a box for her, when I came back Mr. Jackson got mad at me for going there [to Fannie's house] 3 times this evening and said I went to talk about him... I just talk to Fannie & tell her my troubles because it seems to help me to bear it better when she knows about it. I shall tell her whenever I feel like it.¹⁸

Visitation between women provided an opportunity for them to discuss the problems each had with her husband or worries about her family. Nannie Jackson's network of twenty friends who visited regularly ensured that women throughout the community knew her struggles. Although husbands might not always appreciate the value of such visits, women like Jackson socialized with one another, and these sororal bonds fused together the community.

Women worked in the home and in the fields, but they also took time to nurture relationships with neighbors. Virginia Smith recalled that on the Toland Farm, in Howard County, Arkansas, many sharecropper families lived all around her. She described the area where she grew up in the 1920s and early 1930s as a community where neighbors "kept-up" with other neighbors.¹⁹ Rebecca Sharpless, who studied the lives of rural women in Texas, found that despite muddy roads, "neighbors often relied on each other for communication and recreation, either in gender-divided groups or in family units."²⁰

Providing evidence that such visitations took place in southwest Arkansas and northeast Mississippi, the pages of the *Nashville (Arkansas) News* and the *New Albany (Mississippi) Times*, regularly reported on the social visits. When women visited one another, attended to a

¹⁸ Ibid., 35.

¹⁹ Virginia Smith to author, Interview, 23 April 2009. Notes in possession of author.

²⁰ Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices*, 190.

sick member of a neighbor's households, or came together for club meetings, they wrote to the newspaper to make their social work known. In some ways, women's charitable contributions entered the public sphere by their desire to have their visitations covered by the local newspaper. This brought attention to their work not only to the mind of others in their own respective community, but to women in neighboring communities as well. Men shared with one another, of course, but they were not as intimately connected as women were. Ted Ownby demonstrated in *Subduing Satan* that men fraternized with one another by engaging in competitive activities. Southern men performed many of their work activities alone, which fostered a sense of individualism. In contrast, responsibilities placed on southern rural women reinforced the importance of mutual support. Thus, fraternal bonds that men shared were often not as deep or personal as the sororal bonds of women. Women created connections among families, households, and neighbors. Rural women proved more in tune with the broader community and most willing to invest in its general well-being. The step from the personal to the communal was a small and logical step.²¹

This does not suggest that all households lived harmoniously in a given community. Rural folk never lived in a communal utopia. In church, men called one another "brother," but even church brothers resorted to fisticuffs. Fighting was one of the most common reasons that churches disciplined men.²² Women were not as likely to strike one another over a dispute as men were, but conflicts between women existed, nevertheless. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich found in her study of women in New England that although neighborliness may have been the norm, we

²¹ Evan P. Bennett, "'A Responsibility on Women That Cannot Be Delegated to Father, Husband, or Son': Farm Women and Cooperation in the Tobacco South," in *Work, Family, and Faith: Rural Southern Women in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Rebecca Sharpless and Melissa Walker (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 68; Conevery A. Bolton, "'A Sister's Consolations': Women, Health, and Community in Early Arkansas, 1810-1860," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (1991); Ownby, *Subduing Satan*; Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices*, 190.

²² Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 135-136.

should not assume that, “material interdependence and physical proximity automatically ensured meaningful personal relationships, a sense of participation, and a feeling of collective caring.”²³ Women found conflict with each other. Women judged one another from the way they hung their laundry on the clothesline or the food they brought to the church potluck. Mothers looked critically towards other mothers, and the behavior of children provided testimony to parental skills.²⁴ Scuffles among neighborhood children could lead to harsh feelings between neighboring mothers. Nora Miller, of the Virginia Agricultural and Home Extension Service, noted in the 1930s that mothers often got into conflicts over “harmless childhood scraps” that began between their children.²⁵ Nevertheless, women shared food items with one another; they worked for one another, and they listened to one another. The hardships associated with rural poverty made these relationships especially important. Race and class differences obviously complicated any development of a community consciousness. Nevertheless, proximity and shared experiences contributed to the making of the Southern rural community.

In the rural South during the early 1900s, poverty was the chief shared experience. Fletcher Cook, born in 1921 to a family of sharecroppers in Howard County, Arkansas, made it clear that his family was poor. “We didn’t have nothing,” Cook explained in an interview.²⁶ He emphasized the point with his voice. This condition was not unique to the Cook family or to neighboring households. Oral interviews collected from rural southerners who lived in either southwest Arkansas or northeast Mississippi during the 1920s, 30s, and 40s reveal the hardships rural Southerners faced as children and as young adults. Their experiences mirror many of the

²³ Laurel Ulrich, *Good Wives : Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 51-52.

²⁴ Joyce Fitzgerald to author, Interview, 8 March 2006. Makin Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/jfitzgerald.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

²⁵ Nora Miller, *The Girl in the Rural Family* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935).

²⁶ Fletcher Cook to author, Interview, 16 July 2010. Recording in possession of author.

experiences of rural folk found in the works of Lu Ann Jones, Melissa Walker, and Rebecca Sharpless.²⁷

Men and women who grew up in the Depression Era stressed in their interviews the lack of material wealth and lack of simple labor saving devices commonly used today. For most of these individuals, the hard work instilled a sense of fortitude. Born in 1923, Wayne McLaughlin of Howard County explained that a person became a “man” when he provided for his family through hard work. Likewise, Lucille Fitzgerald, of Union County, Mississippi stated emphatically that her experiences with hard work during the Great Depression shaped her and made her the strong woman she became. “Now I knew what it was to work... but it was good for me.” Fitzgerald said.²⁸ Such reflections reveal how rural folk considered their suffering, hard work, and resourcefulness as transformational conduits that built a stronger character. These beliefs provided a foundation for an agrarian mythos that country people were stronger people because of their own suffering; consequently, they believed modern generations who never experience such hardships in life remained soft in condition.

In 1909, President Theodore Roosevelt wrote to members of the Senate and the House of Representatives on the work ethic and value of country folk. Roosevelt penned, “I warn my countrymen that the great recent progress in city life is not a full measure of our civilization; for our civilization rests at bottom on the wholesomeness, the attractiveness, and the completeness, as well as the prosperity, of life in the country. The men and women on the farms stand for what is fundamentally best and most needed in our American life.”²⁹ Like President Theodore Roosevelt, the people interviewed, on average between the ages of seventy and ninety at the time

²⁷ Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work*; Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices*; Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm*.

²⁸ Lucille Fitzgerald to author, Interview, 27 October 2005. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/fitzgerald.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

²⁹ L. H. Bailey, *Report of the Country Life Commission*. 9.

of the interview, embraced the agrarian mythos of good strong rural folk. While it is true that poverty and hard work built a unique character in both men and women in the rural countryside, the same individuals also suffered more physically than they may have been aware. The poverty rural Southerners experienced took a human toll. Malnourished farmers, who lacked fresh fruits and vegetables in their diet, felt drained of their energy. The lack of medical and dental care only added to the misery.³⁰ Finally, rural poverty resulted in higher infant-mortality rates, lower life expectancies, and endemic health problems such as hookworm and pellagra.³¹

In 1984, a group of archeologists unearthed the remains of a group of people near the town of Stamps, in southwest Arkansas. The Army Engineers first discovered the remains during a project to control the Red River. As a bulldozer cut into the riverbank, it unearthed a tombstone dated 1910. Engineers then called in the Arkansas Archeological Survey to excavate the graves. The archeologists exposed 117 graves of which, the newest tombstone bore the year 1927 and the oldest dated to the 1890s. The year 1927 proved significant in explaining the mysterious gravesites. During that year, the Red River flooded. Engineers estimated that the flood caused the river to deposit approximately eight feet of silt on top of the cemetery. They surmised the community abandoned and soon forgot the graves. Researchers determined that the cemetery belonged to the Cedar Grove Baptist Church, an important African American church in the community. The Army Engineers gave Jerome C. Rose, an associate professor of anthropology at the University of Arkansas, twenty-four hours to study the skeletons before the engineers reinterred the bones in a new cemetery. The archeological discovery provided Rose a rare opportunity to document forty years of health problems in a black community. According to

³⁰ J. Wayne Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People : The South's Poor Whites*, New Edition ed., Minorities in Modern America (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004), 38-39.

³¹ David B. Danbom, *Born in the Country : A History of Rural America*, 2nd ed., Revisiting Rural America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 129.

Rose, “We were able to provide hard biological evidence for the historians that ...the living conditions of rural Southern blacks were pretty terrible. The general state of health and nutrition for these rural blacks was about as bad as it could be.” According to Rose, malnutrition and diseases severely affected the skeletons. Sixty percent of adult male, fifty-two percent of adult female, and forty-one percent of child skeletons showed evidence of infection at the time of their death. “For an infection to impact the bone, it has to be severe and chronic,” according to Rose. The cemetery revealed a twenty-seven percent infant mortality rate and a six percent stillbirth rate at the turn of the century. The peak mortality rate for infants was eighteen months of age. The poor diet of the community caused fifty-eight percent of the children to suffer from an iron deficiency. Rose found evidence of rickets from a lack of vitamin D and scurvy from a lack of vitamin C. Rose stated, “Many of the children suffered from weanling diarrhea, a common syndrome in the Third World countries today. When children are weaned and put on low-protein diets, they can’t resist infection.”³²

Historian Gilbert Fite also drew a comparison between the Southern rural poor and Third World countries, “The situation for large numbers of southern farmers was not unlike that of the peasants of India and other underdeveloped countries where the bulk of the earnings go for a few absolute essentials.” Fite noted a study of four rural counties in South Carolina during the 1920s, which found that forty-one percent of white children and seventy-one percent of black children existed on deficient diets. Poor diets were pandemic throughout the rural South. Like those children in Stamps, Arkansas during the 1920s, southern farm children suffered from rickets, pellagra, and other diseases due to a lack of minerals and vitamins in their diets. Pellagra stemmed from low-protein diets and diets without fruits and vegetables. The disease caused

³² Bill Bowden, “Bones Depict Many Illnesses,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 1 July 1984.

scaly skin, digestive problems, and affected the nervous system.³³ In 1942, Dorothy Dickins and Robert N. Ford, both of Mississippi State College, completed a nutritional study of 207 black schoolchildren in Oktibbeha County, Mississippi. The study found that at least twenty-five percent of the children admitted to eating dirt. During the early 1900s, health officials believed the desire to eat clay, known as geophagy, stemmed from hookworm infections. Dickins and Ford in the 1940s, however, believed this behavior came to augment a mineral-deficient diet.³⁴

In a number of interviews, women from Union County, Mississippi boasted that their families grew everything they ate, except coffee and sugar. In their interviews, these women unconsciously employ selective memory in answering questions about growing gardens. While southern farm families undoubtedly grew food items for their meals, they could not always count on a reliable harvest. Cool wet springs resulted in rust and blight; late frosts killed plant buds; too little rain stunted plant growth.³⁵ The peak growing season ended in mid-summer. Rural folk consumed the collard greens, which often grew wild. Ida Choate Jacobs, of Howard County, Arkansas, bought groceries, such as flour, sugar, coffee, salt, and other staples, only about twice per year during the 1910s. To make bread, Jacobs kept a starter made of yeast cake, flour, and sugar year around.³⁶ Farm families made it through the winter months on root crops, dried beans, and the Southern staple, cornbread.³⁷ In an ebb and flow rhythm of the growing season, farm families went for months without fresh-picked vegetables to eat, followed by a burst of a vegetable bounty in the spring and early summer months. When vegetables came in, family households often had more than they could consume themselves. Thus, neighbors carried

³³ Fite, *Cotton Fields No More*, 38-39.

³⁴ Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People : The South's Poor Whites*, 40; "Medicine: Why People Eat Dirt," *Time*, 13 July 1942.

³⁵ Carl H. Moneyhon, *Arkansas and the New South, 1874-1929*, Histories of Arkansas (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 67.

³⁶ Research, *The Unfinished Story of North Howard County*, 180-181.

³⁷ Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm*, 126.

extra tomatoes, various gourds and legumes to the homes of others. Such gestures not only provided food items to neighbors, the thoughtfulness bonded neighbors together. The sharing of food items, as well as other resources, encouraged a sense of mutualism, and obligated neighbors to one another. Importantly, it strengthened the communal support system for when times were at their worst.

George Vaughan, who wrote his memories of over twenty-five years of sharecropping between 1890 and 1919, remembered how neighbors helped one another, “Every year the cow would go dry. That was an event to be dreaded because milk was so very important to us. Most of the time we had some neighbor who, at the time, had an abundant supply of milk, and would give us a bucket full every day until our cow ‘come in’ again.”³⁸

Households depended on efficient management of resources. With a lack of resources, farm men became inventors by necessity. Farm men never discarded broken tools; they repaired them. Farm men collected metal parts ranging from broken plowshares to broken car parts, which they forged, bent, or welded into new tools for new applications. Wayne McLaughlin, for example, converted metal conveyor seats into stools, and turned car axels into dog irons for the fireplace. Such invention represented the intellectual creativity men developed as they lived during hard times. Likewise, rural women knew how to conserve resources and recycle items. The use of flower and feed sacks for clothing provides the best example of women’s recycling. Opal Wakley, of Howard County, Arkansas, remembered, “Mama bought chicken feed by the sack, and she would try to get enough with the same color and pattern to make me a dress to wear to school.”³⁹ Farmwomen prized their sewing machines. With the machines rural women sewed for their own families and often for their neighbors. Women sewed for both men and

³⁸ George Lester Vaughan, *The Cotton Renter's Son* (Wolfe City, Tex.: Henington Pub. Co., 1967), 3.

³⁹ Research, *The Unfinished Story of North Howard County*, 273.

women although the majority of women sewed items for other women. In 1905, seamstresses advertized their services in local newspapers and targeted women in their ads. In the *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, for example, Mrs. S. B. Craig took out a classified and with the simple word, “Dressmaking” along with her name and telephone number.⁴⁰ The making of dresses dominated the classified ads for seamstresses. The same newspaper ran ads for the selling or renting of “The Old Reliable Singer Sewing Machine.” The Singer agent in New Albany, F. R Fowler, advertized that women who could not purchase the sewing machine immediately could take advantage of a twenty-four month installment plan.⁴¹ In Howard County, Arkansas, Blanche Musgraves took in boarders in the 1910s and saved her money until she could afford a sewing machine. When Musgraves finally accumulated the money she needed, she and Minnie Nesbitt Graves drove to Grannis, Arkansas in a wagon to purchase a new sewing machine.⁴² According to a survey by the Arkansas Extensions Service in 1954, an estimated seventy-five percent of rural women in Howard County owned sewing machines and sewed for their children and families.⁴³

Rural women found ways to increase their household incomes. The *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette* published a letter from Mrs. Rex Goodman in 1917, which documents that wives made considerable contributions to the family income by independently raising their own chickens, selling butter, and growing their own cotton. Mrs. Goodman wrote:

Editors Gazette: Will you allow me a little space in your paper? I have noticed several articles from our “men farmers” but nothing from the women. So, I thought I would send in a few items. I am a farmer’s wife, and enjoy farm life to the fullest extent. Three years ago today, I went to housekeeping, and this past year I decided I would “keep books” with myself. Husband gave me a cotton patch, and I received a nice little sum of

⁴⁰ “Dressmaking,” *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 7 December 1905.

⁴¹ “The Old Reliable Singer Sewing Machine,” *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 31 August 1905.

⁴² “Howard County Retired Teachers Remember.”

⁴³ “County Agricultural Program.” Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, 1954, Howard County Development Plans, 2, 1145, University of Arkansas Special Collections. Fayetteville, Arkansas.

\$49.68 for my cotton. I only had 25 hens and sold \$25 worth of eggs and \$12.35 worth of chickens. Only had one little cow, with first calf and sold \$3 worth of butter. My father gave me a cow when I married. Last fall I sold her for \$38. I have two nice heifers that I raised from her. My total amount last year was \$133.03. This year I have 40 hens and one-half acres for cotton. I must save up my egg money and get me some early cotton seed. I want to plant just as soon as the ground will permit. I want to try to beat Mr. Boll Weevil.

I raised a nice garden last year, and put up lots of nice fruit. I would like to hear from some other farmers' wives. Husband said I made more money than he did last year, and I must hustle and run him a race for 1917.⁴⁴

Women in Union County, Mississippi sold their eggs to local stores, who then sold them to local customers or produce men. In 1906, the HA Gassaway Company in New Albany, Mississippi, regularly placed ads for eggs, chickens, and butter, and promised to pay the "highest market price for them." In 1912, the Wiseman Mercantile Company, also in New Albany, placed classified ads calling for 999,999 dozen eggs.

Born in the Pleasant Ridge community during 1926, Francis Hill remembered working in her father's country store. Her father bought eggs from local farmwomen and he then sold those eggs. Hill recalled, "A produce man would come by once a week and buy those eggs from us. He would buy chickens. Some people brought chickens also. We would weigh them and whatever the chicken was per pound, that's how much [local people] got." Hill remembered as an adult that local people continued to sell their chickens and eggs to the local stores well into the 1950s. "My husband and I decided to build a little country store about six miles this side of Pleasant Ridge. That was in 1954 when we did this. People were still bringing eggs and chickens and trading them in."⁴⁵

In southwest Arkansas, likewise, rural farm people sold their eggs for consumption by urban populations. In 1914, for example, a peddler named J. T. Anderson left Kirby, Arkansas, and drove a peddler's wagon around the countryside of north Pike, and Howard counties buying

⁴⁴ No Title, *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 4 January 1917.

⁴⁵ Hill to Interview, website (accessed

eggs. Anderson traveled for a week at a time and slept on the ground beside his wagon during the trips. The peddler kept “thousands of eggs” in tubs on his wagon. Once he collected from his rural clients, Anderson turned his wagon towards Hot Springs, Arkansas, where he sold the eggs. He would then buy items to restock his peddler’s wagon and return home.⁴⁶ Like Anderson, peddlers John Tipton, and John Henry Ralls also operated in northern Pike and Howard Counties; and facilitated the movement of local eggs to the much broader market of Hot Springs.⁴⁷ Francis Hill speculated that the produce man who bought eggs from her store in Union County, Mississippi took them on to Tupelo, Mississippi.⁴⁸ In both cases discussed here, local eggs from either Howard County, Arkansas or Union County, Mississippi likely traveled beyond where the peddlers carried them by wagon. These same eggs likely traveled by railroad for an even larger distribution, which may have included Little Rock or Memphis.

Women exchanged fresh eggs, chickens, and butter for multiple items for their households. Gwendolyn Glasgow Copeland sold her butter in specially designed butter molds, which had delicate carvings in the top of the mold that embossed the butter. These enhancements may have increased the demand for her butter specifically. Many children remembered their mothers buying special items with the poultry or dairy items. Margaret Ledbetter, born in Tippah County, Mississippi, during 1924, remembered, “When we wanted to go to the movie, [mother would] give us a chicken. We would come to town on Saturday evening, sell that chicken and go to the movie. Mr. Hale, down on the north end of the street, had a chicken place. He bought chickens, and we knew he would buy ours. We would walk up

⁴⁶ Pike County Heritage Club, *Early History of Pike County* (Murfreesboro, Arkansas: 1978), 128-129.

⁴⁷ Research, *The Unfinished Story of North Howard County*, 272-273.

⁴⁸ Hill to author.

and get our money. It just cost a dime to get into the movies back then.”⁴⁹ Other children remembered their mothers buying school supplies, candy, and special items like sardines from the rolling stores. While memories of such special items stood out in the memories of Depression Era children, mothers certainly traded for the most necessary items as well. Women needed chicken feed, coffee, kerosene, matches, lye, dry goods, material, and shoes for their households. Although the memories of more novel items stood out in the minds of the young benefactors of such trades, farm families depended not only on items traded by women, but also the sagaciousness of bartering farmwomen.

Lu Ann Jones noted that historians provided much information on the cultivation and sale of major cash crops, such as cotton, tobacco, and rice. Under such studies, however, the economic significance of women’s production for local and regional markets has been overlooked. Jones wrote,

Women’s trade, by contrast, appears inconsequential compared to the proceeds of stable crops. Local markets and individual sellers and buyers often determined prices. Therefore, assigning an exact value to women’s contributions to farm family economies is far more difficult than calculating the profits from cotton and tobacco. ...These decentralized transactions, occurring in domestic spaces, were rarely recorded and therefore cannot be followed down a paper trail.⁵⁰

Such income, nevertheless, proved vital not only to the household but also to the farm. As women’s entrepreneurial efforts provided bartered or purchased items, profits from the farm could be invested elsewhere.

The products women sold were not always limited to items traditionally developed within the feminine sphere. Bertha Bell Humphry, of Pike County, Arkansas, sold wooden handles she created herself. Humphry took thick hickory limbs and used a drawing knife to carve handles for

⁴⁹ Margaret Ledbetter to Elizabeth Payne, Interview, 8 September 2005. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/ledbetter.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

⁵⁰ Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work*, 50.

hammers, hatchets, and axes. She then sold or traded the handles on a peddler's wagon she and her husband operated in the late 1930s and 1940s.⁵¹

Bertha Humphry, like most rural women, was unafraid of getting her hands dirty or callused. She worked. Women's work in the rural South required stout women, thus exposing a disconnect between the ideals of southern womanhood and the realities of women's lives.

Martha Lamar remembered her mother, "When I was growing up, [Mother] still washed clothes by hand. We had the big tubs, you know, wash tubs, rubbing boards, and had the big black pot out behind the house. That is what they bleached the clothes in and had the lye soap and all that sort of thing. When we killed the hogs, they made the lye soap there. They did all the hams, tenderloins, and sausage and made all that during the hog killing."⁵²

Country marriages were small affairs in the early 1900s. Mothers often made wedding dresses for their daughters, and the color of the dress was not usually white. Announcements of matrimony appeared in the newspapers for the community's more affluent families. The majority of poor rural Southerners, however, never placed such announcements in the papers and kept the ceremony limited to only a few people. Couples held their wedding services in a variety of locations other than the church. Weddings often occurred in the homes of parents. Many couples traveled to the county courthouse to get married. Earl McLaughlin drove his bride, Leota Corbell, thirteen miles in a borrowed Model T to get married in 1922. The couple arrived at the Methodist parsonage in Nashville. Reverend Hill came outside and performed the matrimony while the bride and groom sat in the car.⁵³ According to Rebecca Sharpless, the

⁵¹ Bertha Bell Humphry and Pearl Bell Humphry to author, Interview, 17 April 2007. Video in possession of author.

⁵² Martha Kitchens Lamar to Elizabeth Payne, Interview, 29 September 2005. Making Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/lamar.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

⁵³ Edith Laverne McLaughlin Copeland to author, Interview, 6 July 2010. Recording in possession of author; Leota Corbell-McLaughlin, "Our Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary Scrapbook." 26 November 1972, Scrapbook in possession of Edith Laverne McLaughlin Copeland.

simplicity of the rural weddings reflected the “seriousness of purpose that pervaded farm life, with little time to play, and the limited financial resources for entertaining.”⁵⁴

Historian Carl Moneyhon wrote that for rural folk, economic success “practically required marriage.”⁵⁵ Many grooms had not yet established themselves well enough to provide their brides with a new home, and they lived with either party’s parents for a while until permanent living arrangements could be made. Women began bearing children soon after they became married, but the topic of sex was taboo among mothers and daughters. Born in 1916 in Pontotoc County, Mississippi, Eloise Newell confessed that she knew very little about sex when she married at age fifteen.⁵⁶ Pearl Bell Humphry and Bertha Bell Humphry, born in 1915 and 1917 respectively in Pike County, Arkansas, both stated that their mother never talked with them about sex.⁵⁷ More often than not, mothers avoided such discussion with their daughters.⁵⁸

Dorothy Wade, of Union County, Mississippi remembered that she learned about sex “...from friends at school because growing up our parents didn’t talk about sex to us. They never discussed that with us.”⁵⁹ Likewise, Mary Patton, born in 1930 in Ingomar, Mississippi remembered how a friend named Prevel Max informed a group of girls about sex and babies. “We were playing up in the barn loft one day, and [Prevel] enlightened us. Aunt Claydus was pregnant at the time, and we didn’t know that either.... Prevel explained what had happened and said, ‘wait and see there’s going to be a baby.’ So, that was my enlightenment. ...Mother never

⁵⁴ Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices*, 29.

⁵⁵ Moneyhon, *Arkansas and the New South*, 9.

⁵⁶ Eloise Conley Newell to Elizabeth Payne, Interview, 23 January 2006. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/newell.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

⁵⁷ Humphry to author.

⁵⁸ Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices*, 41.

⁵⁹ Dorothy Wade to Andrew Tillman, Interview, 20 October 2005. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/dwade.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

mentioned anything [about sex.]”⁶⁰

Expecting mothers kept their condition quiet even from their own children. Betty Gammel, born in Union County, Mississippi, in 1943, remembered that during the 1950s, her mother hid her pregnancy from the children:

I remember the first time I knew [mother] was expecting. I suspected something, but I didn't know what it was. We were out playing as children; we would play at night. I noticed my mom, she was a tiny lady, and her stomach had gotten larger. She and Dad were sitting on the back of the pickup watching us play, and I heard them say something pertaining to a baby. Then not long after that, I found some baby clothes on her quilt stack. She had hid them from us. See back then women didn't let you see them pregnant. If they had a candidate to come to the house or something, they threw a towel over their arm and held it like this to keep that man from knowing that they were with child. They didn't let you see them pregnant. Mother did not tell us that she was expecting a baby. I found these [new baby] clothes and it scared me to death. I thought, 'What in the world is this? Why are all these baby clothes in here?' For some reason, they were new clothes – it was the first baby shower my mom had ever had. Most of the time she just stitched our little diaper shirts and whatever herself out of flour sacks. The neighbors had gotten together and gave her this little shower. I had never seen before was new clothes like that. And I couldn't image what it was. Finally, I got the nerve to ask her, 'Mother, what is that in there, on the quilt stack?' I don't know why, but I related it to death. Because that was the only time you'd see [new clothes]. [The only time] that I had seen anything new was when somebody died. They would put a new gown on them or something. [Mother] told me that I wasn't supposed to have found that.⁶¹

Despite the lack of any real privacy in rural Southern households, sexual relations resulted in frequent pregnancies. Married couples tried different methods of birth control. Two common methods were *coitus interruptus* and the delay of weaning a child, although neither assured the desired result. The first method hinged on the self-discipline of the man during the most intimate moments – when he would be most tempted to succumb fully to his carnal appetite. The second method depended on the woman's willingness to endure the perils of nursing a toothy child. Bertha Bell Humphry, who birthed eight children between 1935 and

⁶⁰ Mary Patton to Marie Baker, Interview, 17 February 2006. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/patton.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

⁶¹ Betty Gammel to Wendy Smith, Interview, 6 October 2005. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/gammel.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

1955, remembered how a neighbor's son breastfed until he was five years old. Humphry recalled that the child named one breast, "Hammer-head" and the other, "Bang-bang." During feedings, the child asked for a specific breast by name. For Humphry, this mother nursed the child for entirely too long.⁶²

Childbirth could be dangerous for both the mother and child. When it came time to deliver a child, parents sent older children to visit relatives, which prevented them from hearing or peeking in on the intense event.⁶³ Protecting the purity of the children often meant denying them information on the biological function of sex. Women, more than men, bore the responsibility of protecting the morality of their family and their community. Because communities considered women as naturally responsible for moral teachings and men so naturally untamed, the community laid a disproportional responsibility on the women for their sexual deviances. To trespass on the sexual mores of a community by succumbing to carnal desires ruined the reputations of women; it only tarnished the reputations of men. Unmarried and sexually active women, therefore ran the risk of not only bringing shame on themselves but on their families as well.⁶⁴

Accidents happened. Young women who found themselves with child and without a husband faced intense scrutiny from neighbors and townspeople. This delicate situation called for desperate actions. Families sometimes sent their pregnant daughters away to deliver the child elsewhere and escape the town's talk. Born in Union County in 1923, Norma Fields learned her grandmother "banished" a daughter named Sugenia between 1900 and 1901. As a child, Fields asked her mother about Sugenia. Her mother responded, "Honey, I don't know where you heard that name, but you don't need to be saying anything about Sugenia around your grandmother

⁶² Humphry to author.

⁶³ Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices*, 41.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 22-24.

Hamilton.” Once Sugenia had been banished, the family was forbidden to talk about her again. “Why my grandmother in that day banished her, we believe, was because she probably was pregnant out of wedlock. She died apparently in childbirth because she died in 1901 [in Salisbury, Tennessee.] The Hamiltons lived in Salisbury before they moved to Mississippi. I guess Sugenia went up there because she knew she would know some people there.”⁶⁵ At least two murders of newborn babies occurred in Howard County, Arkansas in 1910. Presumably, the mothers could not obtain an abortion or travel to a distant relative’s home to deliver the child. Each gruesome action testifies to the criticism unwed mothers faced in their intimate communities.

In 1910, an eleven year-old boy named Horrace Collier discovered the corpse of a newborn infant in an abandoned well near Nashville, Arkansas. The young boy and a number of his friends were playing on the property of his grandfather, John P. Collier when they made the discovery. The boys then ran to tell their parents. According to newspaper accounts, authorities assembled a group of twelve men, led by Justice W. O. Dorsey. The group removed the child’s body from the well and discovered that it was a newborn baby boy whose skull had been crushed shortly after delivery. The *Nashville (Arkansas) News* reported, “The condition of the child indicated that no doctor had been in attendance at the birth.” The assembly of men could not agree on the race of the child; some thought the child to be white, and others thought the child was a mulatto. To make an official identification, the men voted. The majority felt the child was white. Thus, they concluded, the body’s discoloration resulted from its being in the well for an estimated ten days. According to the paper, “If the blow on the head had not caused death, it was sufficient to have done so, and that its death occurred soon after birth.” The assembly of men

⁶⁵ Norma Lee Hamilton Fields to Elizabeth Payne, Interview, 13 October 2005. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/fields.html (accessed 15 March 2010).

took the remains to the County Judge, J. G. Sain, who buried the body, “at the expense of the county.”⁶⁶ A further investigation led to the discovery of a sack, which had been sunk to the bottom of the well with a piece of iron. Investigators surmised that when the sack rotted, the corpse floated to the top of the well, where Horrace Collier discovered it. The mother of the child was never identified.⁶⁷ In an unrelated incident, local authorities arrested Annie McCuan in 1910, for “concealing the death of an illegitimate child.” McCuan lived in the township of Madison in northern Howard County, Arkansas. McCuan, a white nineteen-year old, lived with only her father and two brothers.⁶⁸ Newspaper articles on McCuan’s arrest did not speculate on the identity of the child’s father. Other women, of course, lived with the scorn and kept their child. Bessie Gaines, of Myrtle, Mississippi, for example, gave birth to an illegitimate daughter in the 1920s. She chose to keep the child and named her Wilma.⁶⁹

Without question, the condition of farm life and poverty hastened the responsibilities placed upon farm children. Children learned at an early age how to work. Edna Miller, born in Union County in 1909 explained, “I learned to milk a cow when I was five years old. Early in the morning and late in the evening, I had to milk.”⁷⁰ Lucille Fitzgerald also learned to work at an early age, “Now I mean, from the time we were six, not more than seven years old, Momma would make us a little sack to put on our shoulders, and we had to pick cotton. We knew what it was to work.”⁷¹ G.L. Vaughan, born to a family of tenant farmers in the 1890s, recalled the laborious efforts he conducted as a young boy, one of which was to relocate rocks newly

⁶⁶ "Concealing a Death," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 27 July 1910.

⁶⁷ "Well Investigated," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 4 June 1910.

⁶⁸ "Concealing a Death."; Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 - Population, ed. Bureau of the Census United States of America, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?h=191053709&db=1910USCenIndex&indiv=1> (accessed 6 June 2010).

⁶⁹ Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 - Population Schedule, ed. Bureau of the Census United States of America, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?h=37916051&db=1930usfedcen&indiv=1> (accessed 2 June 2010).

⁷⁰ Edna Miller to Andrew Tillman, Interview, 9 September 2005. Video in possession of author.

⁷¹ Fitzgerald to author.

uncovered by the plow. “[The rocks] had to be picked up and piled in waste places, on terrace banks, carried outside the field, or just stacked in piles out of the way. Then we would just work around them like we worked around trees that were left standing.”⁷² Although most rocks may have been only the size of a large sweet potato, conglomerate formations could be much larger.

Parents assigned their children duties according to the child’s ability and gender. As such, boys and girls learned of the roles each should have during their socialization process. Indeed, the socialization of boys and girls to their assigned roles began early and continued through the time they lived at home. According to Jeannette Keith, “Families [in the first quarter of the twentieth century] still controlled their children’s education and had no serious rivals as agents of socialization. Schools, weak institutions that offered little more than instruction in reading and writing, posed no threat to the cultural hegemony of the family.”⁷³ In such an environment, children learned the values of their parents. Parents taught their children how to work and how to conserve their resources. Lucille Fitzgerald remembered,

Oh, my goodness, we milked cows. We fed chickens. We brought in wood, and we brought in water [from the well.] [We had] no running water. In the summertime, when we were making the crops, we went to the field. We knew what it was to work from sun up to sun down. We hoed cotton, chopped cotton in the early spring and then in the fall we picked cotton. We went to school. We had a broken term. They would let us go to school two months in the summer, and then a little later in the fall so we could be home and pick cotton. [We had] to go to the field in the morning when it was cold and all that dew on that cotton. But we had to pick it. That is what we had to do because Daddy had to have it to feed us kids, you know. That is the way we made our living. We grew everything we ate, except like flour and coffee and sugar. We had our vegetables. We had sorghum for syrup. I've even had to strip that sorghum, getting it ready for the mill.⁷⁴

Men taught their sons to plow fields, cut wood, hitch the mule to plow or wagon and drive them.

Together they performed the more strenuous fieldwork, “Daddy and the boys always pulled the

⁷² Vaughan, *The Cotton Renter's Son*, 3.

⁷³ Jeanette Keith, *Country People in the New South : Tennessee's Upper Cumberland*, Studies in Rural Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 36.

⁷⁴ Fitzgerald to author.

corn. I didn't have to do that.... We had to do the chopping and the cotton picking.”

This, of course, does not imply that the work of women was somehow less strenuous. Rather, the spaces that men worked were almost exclusively outside in the fields. Women, on the other hand, worked inside performing domestic chores and outside in the fields when necessary; and it was often necessary. Women picked cotton, a lot of it. Mable Downs remembered that she could pick two-hundred pounds a day. Women plowed fields. Betty Wilson and Mattie Ivy Bruce both plowed in the cotton fields of Union County, Mississippi. A disconnect exists between the ideal roles of women and the actual roles women played. According to Rebecca Sharpless and Melissa Walker, the “dilemma of women’s field work” began in the antebellum South.⁷⁵ Slave women worked in the fields with the slave men while proper white women remained in the home and tended to domestic affairs. In reality, however, the division of white female and male labor was not as defined as imagined. Thus, the ideal gender roles broke down on two fronts. First, African-American women openly performed male tasks. Secondly, white women, albeit more quietly, performed traditionally male-defined jobs. Historian Stephanie McCurry observed that this contradiction was “customarily ignored and even denied.”

Following emancipation and the worsening of the southern agricultural economy, sharecropper families needed everyone, both male and female, to ensure production in the fields. Thus, the economic difficulties, especially those of the post-World War I era, only exacerbated the dilemma of women’s fieldwork. Christian-based gender roles mandated that the husband was the provider and the subordinate wife remained in the home. Women who worked in the field, however, dealt with this conflict individually. Some, for example, ignored these roles

⁷⁵ Rebecca Sharpless and Melissa Walker, "Pretty near Every Woman Done a Man's Work': Women and Field Work in the Rural South," in *Work, Family, and Faith: Rural Southern Women in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Rebecca Sharpless and Melissa Walker (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 44-45.

entirely and openly toiled in the fields while others defined women's farm work to accommodate their roles as a woman. In the latter case, a woman could pick cotton without threatening her womanliness, but to plow was something only a man should do. Rebecca Sharpless and Melissa Walker point to several examples that confirm this line of reasoning throughout the rural South. Women's work could sometimes include hoeing and picking cotton while plowing was considered men's work; they found that ten percent of Texas farm women plowed. Margaret Jarman Hagood's 1937 study of white tenant farmwomen found, "an overwhelming majority – seven-eighths – of the mothers like field work better than housework." Farmwomen boasted to Hagood that they worked like the men in their lives; they plowed and cut wood. Hagood explains that women enjoyed fieldwork because each project had a definite starting and stopping place. Housework, on the other hand, never ended. In their homes, multiple tasks bombarded women. The cleaning, cooking, milking, churning, washing, and tending to the children reoccurred each day.⁷⁶

The work for men tended to be gender specific, but the work of women was less so. While Lucille Fitzgerald didn't cut wood as a girl, for example, many school teachers in southwest Arkansas during the early 1900s reported that cutting firewood was expected of them.⁷⁷ Adult women could be called to perform a man's job when necessary. When asked about the differences between the work of men and women, Lucille Fitzgerald responded, "Well, now some women had to plow back then." Indeed, women plowed. The gender stratification among farm work became more permeable as the times demanded. A father without sons old enough to plow was left with little resort than to hand the tethers to his wife to do some plowing. If their husbands became ill, or became injured, or died, women had few options other than to

⁷⁶ Margaret Jarman Hagood, *Mothers of the South : Portraiture of the White Tenant Farm Woman* (Charlottesville, VA.: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 88-91.

⁷⁷ "Howard County Retired Teachers Remember."

work in their husband's place. While under some circumstances, women took the role of men, it does not appear that men felt obliged to fulfill the duties normally assigned to women. When mothers became ill or passed away, the oldest daughter stepped into her shoes. When Mable Downs' mother died at age 42, Mable became responsible for all the children, the youngest of whom was only four years old. At the time, Mable Downs was only seventeen. She explained, "I took over mother. It was pretty hard, but I didn't mind it."⁷⁸

Rural households worked hard to negotiate the harsh realities of rural life, and rural communities worked hard to improve the livelihood of local people. Most importantly, changes in the lives of rural people came because of their willingness to work hard *together*. In a community where people depended upon one another, mutualism and ability to relate became the chief bonding agents for the community. Between 1900 and 1940, rural people witnessed shifts, some positive and some negative, in their families, schools, churches, and communities. These reforms did not come easily, and they did not benefit all people equally. A racial hierarchy complicated their implementation. However, the difficulties of southern rural life emphasized the need for communal support networks and forced neighbors to negotiate around the view of a community as a collection of white folks or a collection of black folks. Thus, mutual exchange systems bridged the gaps between segregated institutions and allowed a community to become more inclusive. In all white or all black communities, however, mutualism never challenged segregation and led to a stronger feeling of racial exclusivity.

⁷⁸ Mabel Downs to Wendy Smith, Interview, 27 October 2005. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/downs.html (accessed 27 July 2008).

CHAPTER 2

RURAL RACE RELATIONS

“Oh, God; Oh, God; I didn’t do it! Have Mercy!” L.Q. Ivy screamed. As the flames intensified, he made a final passionate outburst, “Have mercy, I didn’t do it! I didn’t do it!”⁷⁹ Witnesses reported that L.Q.’s flailing body, chained to a steel axel driven deep into the earth, became calm in the final moments of the seventeen-year-old’s life. The crowd of over four-hundred on-lookers stood in silence, struck dumb by the cry of LQ’s final emotional plea and the image of a corpse succumbing to the flames. “Let’s finish it up.” A mob leader instructed. Following orders, twelve other men stepped out from the crowd and began throwing more wood from the nearby sawmill onto the enraged flames. Weakened by the stench of burning flesh, many onlookers returned to the sanctuary of their homes. Others, however, craved something to eat and entered the town in search for food and talked about what happened at Rocky Ford on that dry September day in 1925.⁸⁰ The 1925 lynching changed the racial dynamics of western Union County permanently, but race relations in the county, and throughout the rural South, must be recognized as complex and nuanced. During most days, the rural town of Etta, Mississippi resembled other quiet communities in rural Union County during the 1920s, yet rural communities differed in their racial attitudes.⁸¹ Due to population trends of whites and blacks in

⁷⁹ "Young Woman Outraged by Negro Brute," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 24 September 1925. This quote appeared in the newspaper in 1925. Many people from the area who are familiar with the incident, either directly or by a generation removed, recall Ivy’s final cry and consider it to be significant to his being falsely accused.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ The name Rocky Ford and Etta are synonymous among the people living in the area. The area was originally known as Rocky Ford, named after the rocky area where wagons could ford the Tallahatchie River. The name of the township, however, is Etta, Mississippi. The area on the east side of the Tallahatchie River is in Union County, and the area on the west bank of the Tallahatchie is in Lafayette County. Within a twenty-mile radius are, New Albany, the county seat for Union County, and Oxford, the county seat for Lafayette County. The town of Myrtle,

the rural South, a single community's race relations might differ significantly from a neighboring community located only a few miles away. Popular representations depict rural society as simple people living uncomplicated lives. To the contrary, rural folk, especially during the early twentieth century, found themselves in a state of flux. Like people throughout the country, rural people carried with them multiple identities under different stages of development: gender, racial, class, religious, communal, and national. At different times in any person's life, or by extension in the experience of any community, a particular consciousness may emerge as dominant and shape thoughts and behaviors. These behaviors may conflict with other identities. Once the stimuli responsible for this emergence wane, thoughts and behaviors normalize, and the engaged consciousness yields to a different identity. The spectacle of lynching African Americans provides graphic images of the thoughts and behaviors associated with white supremacy. It offers an uneasy glimpse into the worst part of a community, a region, and a people. Yet the same area that presented a gruesome episode of white terror also produced cooperative relationships between whites and blacks.

In Union County during the 1920s, a series of events took place that exacerbated white racial identity, and white manhood, which resulted in a tragedy. The *New Albany Gazette* reported that Bessie Gaines, a white woman in her early twenties, went into her father's field to pick peas on a Friday morning when "a negro quietly approached, set upon her and accomplished his beastly, hellish purpose."⁸² The *Memphis Commercial Appeal* similarly announced that while the "daughter of a prominent farmer" picked peas, "one of a gang of timber cutters nearby, assaulted her, accomplishing his fiendish purpose."⁸³ After the alleged attack, Gaines "crawled

Mississippi is less than fifteen miles from Etta, and the town of Enterprise is less than ten miles away. These townships have relevant roles in the story of the LQ Ivy Lynching.

⁸² "Young Woman Outraged by Negro Brute."

⁸³ "Negro Arrested for Attack on Young Girl," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 20 September 1925.

her way to the house and the alarm was given.”⁸⁴ Sheriff John Roberts and number of deputies swarmed the small community of Etta. The posse called upon a farmer named Zack Camp and used his bloodhounds in search of the “Negro brute.”⁸⁵ The peace officers found Ivy along with several other boys near one of the many artesian wells in the area within a short length of time. The sheriff took LQ Ivy into custody. Family members took Bessie Gaines to the hospital.

Mattie Woods Ivy Bruce remembered when her family learned the police arrested LQ and what transpired in the days to come. “It was September 18, 1925, on my birthday.” She turned eighteen years old. Mattie Woods had married LQ Ivy’s brother two years earlier. Only a few months older than LQ, Mattie remembered her brother-in-law very well. In 1925 she and JD Ivy lived at Enterprise, Mississippi, a neighboring town close to Etta. Recalling how she learned the news of LQ’s arrest, Mattie Ivy said, “More or less, it would be coming to us from our own color, not from the white people. It was coming from our people, black folks.”⁸⁶

By Friday evening, a mob descended upon New Albany, calling for the alleged assailant. Reinforcing the ideals of southern white manhood, the *New Albany Gazette* stated that “men who love their homes” stopped their regular chores and “made their way hastily to the court house.”⁸⁷ Talk of a lynching started that Friday. Foreseeing what might happen to the young man in custody, Sheriff Roberts ordered Ivy to be taken to Tupelo. A group of men remained at the courthouse throughout the night, and by the next morning, the crowd increased in size. Established grapevine system and telephone party-lines linked communities and relayed rumors throughout Union County and beyond with lightening speed. By Saturday, news of the attack and the intended lynching spread across county and even state lines, going as far as Memphis,

⁸⁴ "Young Woman Outraged by Negro Brute."

⁸⁵ "Negro Arrested for Attack on Young Girl.;" Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 - Population Schedule, ed. United States of America.

⁸⁶ Mattie Ivy Bruce to Elizabeth Payne, Interview, 1 April 2006. Video in possession of author.

⁸⁷ "Young Woman Outraged by Negro Brute."

Tennessee. The *Commercial Appeal* stated, "Only ignorance of the negro's whereabouts" prevented a lynching that Friday.⁸⁸ Hundreds of spectators descended upon Union County and hoped to witness a lynching. News spread throughout the region and large numbers of people packed into the small town of Etta. "I heard my daddy say he went over there." Houston Rakestraw remembered. "People knew they was gonna do it." Rakestraw stated that many people went to Etta to sightsee. "It took a good while then the way the roads were and the way they had to travel."⁸⁹ A sick excitement vibrated through the community; an emergency developed.

The sensational news spread to distant farm families and town folk alike. Without knowing the character of those involved, men and women in distant communities accepted the hearsay without question. Only locals knew of Bessie Gaines's checkered past. Members of the community remembered her to have a number of suitors but never a lengthy relationship. Many in the community described her as a "loose woman," and stories circulated that Gaines had been caught with a man more than once. She birthed a child named Wilma Agnes the previous year out of wedlock. Gaines never married, and in such a small community, this fact generated considerable talk.⁹⁰ Her past experiences with men may explain why Bob Gaines, her father, made no real effort to escalate the pending violence against Ivy. Newspapers reported that Bob Gaines "expressed himself as being uncertain" of Ivy's guilt.

Family members described LQ as being a quiet and nice young man with a sense of humor. He and his older brother JD developed a close relationship. LQ wore his hair long and in braids, an unusual style for young men at the time, which made LQ stand out among his peers.

⁸⁸ "Negro Arrested for Attack on Young Girl."

⁸⁹ Dale Rakestraw and Houston Rakestraw to Thom Copeland, Interview, 6 March 2006. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/drakestraw.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

⁹⁰ Martha Glenn Stephens Cofield to Elizabeth Payne, Interview, April 2006. ; Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 - Population Schedule, ed. United States of America.

LQ's girlfriend attended the segregated school in Etta.⁹¹ Some members in the white community also commented on LQ's good nature. Jeff Prather of Myrtle met LQ the week prior to the alleged rape after Prather's Ford automobile experienced mechanical troubles, and LQ fixed it. Prather noted that LQ refused to take any money for his repair services. Prather described LQ as a "nice nigger" and expressed shock and disbelief when he learned of LQ's implication in the offense.⁹²

Despite any of these characterizations by people who knew him, newspapers described LQ as a "negro brute," a "snake," or "rattlesnake;" adjectives such as "bestly," "hellish," "fiendish," and "foul" described his actions. The suggestive language used in these articles reinforced the racial stereotype often attributed to black men in the early twentieth century. The same newspaper articles portrayed Gaines as a "young lady" and a member of a "prominent" family. So hurt in the attack, Gaines, "crawled" or "dragged herself home" before her "complete nervous collapse."⁹³ With this language, Gaines enjoyed respectability, although also a frail victim. Despite her questionable past, readers came to know Gaines as the embodiment of white southern womanhood. The article in the *New Albany Gazette* reminded white men of their most important role, the protector. Men who "loved their home" knew what to do. In mass, white men appeared first at the Mayes Hospital in New Albany and later moved to the Union County Courthouse. One newspaper estimated that "two or three hundred men" congregated Friday and spent the night on the courthouse lawn.

⁹¹Bruce to Payne; Macy Ferrell to Elizabeth Payne, Interview, 20 October 2006. Video in possession of author.

⁹² Alan McDaniel, "The Rocky Ford Incident : Fifty Years of Guilt" (Research Paper in Mississippi History, University of Mississippi, Tupelo Branch, 1975), 4. McDaniel grew up in Union County and is the grandson of Jeff Prather.

⁹³ "Mob Lynches Negro Who Assaulted Girl," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 21 September 1925. "Moralizing to No Purpose," *Pontotoc (Mississippi) Sentinel*, 24 September 1925. "Young Woman Outraged by Negro Brute." "Mob Lynches Negro Who Assaulted Girl."

The LQ Ivy story presents a complicated intersection between not only gender roles, and racial roles, but also religious roles. Historian Donald G. Mathews wrote, “At the end of the nineteenth century, [southern white Christians] also imagined the dramas of conflict between good and evil in terms of black skin, white skin, ...the black beast rapist, [and] pure white women...”⁹⁴ Indeed, the symbolism found in the LQ Ivy and Bessie Gaines tragedy drew out dark, embedded passions. The events that followed over the course of the next few days represented a battle between good and evil. It became the duty of white Christians to defend that which was sacred. Pointing to the fact that states with the highest percentage of protestant churches also had the highest percentages of lynchings, Walter White accused the white evangelical churches of permitting color, “to be used as a cover and a justification of the emotions of cruelty which religious fanaticism engenders.”⁹⁵ White southerners defended lynchings as a quick and justified punishment for particular crimes against the white race, and especially against white women. Their actions were not driven by a lust to maintain supremacy and assert their power alone; their actions expressed what southern white culture held most sacred.⁹⁶ The attack of a “black savage” on a sacred white woman, therefore, tapped not only racial consciousness, but religious consciousness as well.

The gendered differences in the descriptive language referring to Ivy and Gaines and the racial differences between white and black men doubtfully ended with the printed word. As news traveled by word of mouth, coded words left little reason to question the guilt of LQ and little reason to consider any course of action other than a lynching. The *Commercial Appeal*

⁹⁴ Donald G. Mathews, "Lynching Is Part of the Religion of Our People," in *Religion in the American South : Protestants and Others in History and Culture*, ed. Donald G. Mathews(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

⁹⁵ Walter White, *Rope and Faggot : A Biography of Judge Lynch* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 41. See Table VI on pages 248-249.

⁹⁶ Mathews, "Religion in the American South," 157.

admitted in the Saturday issue, “The evidence against the arrested negro is still largely circumstantial since his victim has not been in a condition as yet to identify him.”⁹⁷ Many citizens developed an appetite for vengeance. A mob developed.

Jim Ivy, the father of LQ, drove to New Albany when he heard his son had been arrested. As an African American farmer in rural Mississippi, Jim Ivy had been successful. Few rural farmers, white or black, owned their own cars. For black men in the rural South during this time, the status that came with car ownership also provoked white anxiety and exacerbated race, class, and gender antagonisms. Through his hard work, careful planning, and thriftiness, Jim Ivy - the farmer - owned a car. Upon hearing the news of his son’s arrest, Jim Ivy raced down highway 78 from Enterprise to New Albany, cautiously drove across the Tallahatchie River Bridge and slowly crept down Bankhead Street. He passed the string of stores placed on both sides of the wide, main strip that cut through the center of town. He noticed that the whole town seemed different from any other Saturday. He arrived at the large Union County courthouse building, located near the equally large Baptist and Methodist churches that whites attended. He parked his car and pondered the size of the mob. It became tragically clear that Jim Ivy – as a black man – could do nothing to save his son.⁹⁸

Not everyone in the white community became swept up in the rumors. On Saturday, September 19, a group of white leaders called for the crowd to return to their homes. US Senator Hubert D. Stephens spoke first. Raised in Union County himself, he addressed the crowd early Saturday morning and pleaded with the mob to disband. By noon, Judge Thomas Pegram of Ripley, Mississippi and prosecuting attorney, L.K. Carlton, likewise asked the crowd of people to leave. Both promised a speedy trial in the case. The crowd decreased in size following the

⁹⁷ "Negro Arrested for Attack on Young Girl."

⁹⁸ Macy Ferrell to Elizabeth Payne, Interview, 21 December 2005. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/ferrell.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

addresses. A dire situation quickly returned when a group of men from Etta demanded that LQ Ivy appear at the Mayes Hospital for Bessie Gaines to identify. The *Commercial Appeal* reported, “Some men of the Etta community procured a writ from a justice ordering the sheriff to take the negro from Aberdeen to New Albany for identification by the girl. In their petition they recited that the girl who had been attacked was in such serious condition that she might die before she could identify her assailant.”⁹⁹ The same newspaper, ironically, suggested in the previous issue that, “It is thought that she will recover.”¹⁰⁰

That evening, the black communities in western Union County braced for a long night. Mob leaders continued to search for other black men who might be involved. Macy Ferrell, the first cousin of LQ, remembered that her parents sent the children to bed early that Saturday night. She could not sleep and stayed awake all night looking out her window. Ferrell recalled, “We counted 29 cars that night,” which was an unusually high number for such a rural community in the mid 1920s. Ferrell and her family considered such a number of cars driving in rural Mississippi on a Saturday night during the 1920s highly unusual.¹⁰¹

On Sunday, September 20, the mob re-assembled at the hospital when they learned that Ivy re-entered the county at the hands of Sheriff Roberts of New Albany and Sheriff Reese of Tupelo. At the hospital, the sheriffs brought Ivy before the victim. Gaines made the statement that, “she thought she was sure [LQ] was her assailant.” Carlton, the prosecuting attorney, needed a clear answer and pressed Gaines for clarification. He asked if she would, “swear that the negro was her assailant.” She remained ambiguous. The papers reported that Gaines responded with an unconvincing answer: “she thought she would.” The girl’s father, doubting

⁹⁹ “Mob Lynches Negro Who Assaulted Girl,” *Oxford (Mississippi) Eagle*, 24 September 1925.

¹⁰⁰ “Negro Arrested for Attack on Young Girl.”

¹⁰¹ Ferrell to Payne, 2006. Macy Ferrell was interviewed by Elizabeth Payne in 2005, 2006 and again in 2007.

the identification, expressed his desire that, “no hasty action would be taken” by his friends and neighbors.¹⁰² The mob ignored the father’s request.

Because of the restless mass of people outside the hospital, Sheriff Roberts and Sheriff Reese determined that Ivy must be returned to Tupelo. Witnesses at the hospital, Jasper Busby and Frederick Gilliam recalled that Sheriff Reese of Tupelo and several of his deputies made an effort to disarm the crowd of people outside the hospital. After collecting a number of guns and placing them in a pile on the hospital grounds, a deputy stood guard over the weapons.¹⁰³ Sheriff Roberts and Sheriff Reese loaded their prisoner into a Dodge touring car and spirited Ivy away, speeding towards Tupelo. Deputies fixed themselves at the Tallahatchie River Bridge, located closely to downtown New Albany. At this location, deputies managed to hold the pursuing mob “for only a few minutes,” thus giving the sheriff’s car a brief head start. Despite such effort, the sheriff’s car “met resistance” in route and made a turn onto highway seventy-eight, heading to Holly Springs, some forty miles away. Although newspapers report no names among the members of the mob, witnesses later accused Clyde Nash, a blacksmith from Myrtle who owned a fast car, of beating the sheriff’s car to the Myrtle Bridge, located some eight miles from New Albany on highway seventy-eight. Nash and some other un-named citizens used their automobiles to block the bridge.¹⁰⁴ The newspapers reported, “a Buick touring and a roadster blocked the road.”¹⁰⁵ When the car transporting Ivy arrived at the bridge, the sheriff slowed down presumably to turn around. Additional cars suddenly appeared behind the sheriff and prevented any escape. A group of men demanded Ivy from the pinned-in police car. Without

¹⁰² "Mob Lynches Negro Who Assaulted Girl."

¹⁰³ McDaniel, "Rocky Ford Incident", 5.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 6; Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920 - Population, ed. Bureau of the Census United States of America, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?h=102976747&db=1920usfedcen&indiv=1> (accessed 2 June 2010).

¹⁰⁵"Mob Lynches Negro Who Assaulted Girl."

any shots fired, Ivy fell into the hands of the mob.¹⁰⁶ The *Commercial Appeal* claimed, “Sheriff [John Roberts] begged the leaders to wait until complete proof of guilt could be had, but they listened to nothing.” The same newspaper exaggerated that, “Over a thousand persons were in the mob which took the negro from Sheriff Roberts of Union County and Sheriff Reese of Lee County.” Sheriff Roberts made no arrests after the incident and claimed, “That he recognized no members of the mob.”¹⁰⁷

In the final days of LQ Ivy’s life, he became less than a man, less than a person. Ivy came to represent a devil to the white mob. As such, mob leaders could perform their religious duty and, in good consciousness, torture a devil. His captors tied the accused seventeen-year-old to the bed of a truck, and a line of automobiles formed a procession in route back to Etta, the scene of the crime. Along the way, additional people jumped on to running boards or hopped into cars and joined in on the journey.¹⁰⁸ People familiar with events of that day recalled different methods of abuse captors used on LQ Ivy. Whether the captors forced Ivy to run beside the truck in chains or dragged him behind it, the parade of automobiles eventually arrived in Etta.¹⁰⁹ A group of men including mob leader Thad Parker, Book Greer and his son Bill Greer took Ivy into a barn owned by Arlo Graham. The barn stood within a few hundred yards from where the attack occurred. Several papers stated that Ivy confessed while in the barn. Eyewitness reports, however, contradict this belief. Regardless, the torture that took place inside the barn made any confession questionable. The majority of the details of Ivy interrogation inside the barn remain lost to the memories of witnesses although some recall graphic and brutal forms of torture. Witnesses reported that one of the men inside the barn sent for a lemon

¹⁰⁶ McDaniel, “Rocky Ford Incident”, 6.

¹⁰⁷ “Mob Lynches Negro Who Assaulted Girl.”

¹⁰⁸ McDaniel, “Rocky Ford Incident”, 6.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

squeezer. Once obtained, the men used the tool to squeeze Ivy's testicles while they demanded Ivy confess to the crime. Pictures of Ivy following the torture in the barn show no evidence of blood on his pale overalls.¹¹⁰ Some questioned the use of the lemon squeezer, believing that blood would saturate the crotch area of the coveralls if the event truly took place.¹¹¹ Robert Sykes, a medical doctor of forty years, counters this belief by saying a lemon squeezer would crush the testicles and cause massive bruising but would not necessarily lead to blood loss.¹¹²

In the antebellum years, to “lynch” a person did not necessarily involve capital punishment. In his 1905 study of lynching in the United States, James Cutler wrote, “the verb lynch was occasionally used to include capital punishment, but [the expression ‘to lynch’] had not then undergone a change in meaning and acquired the sense of ‘to put to death.’ ...It was not until a time subsequent to the Civil War that the verb lynch came to carry the idea of putting to death.” During the time of this transformation, the actions of a lynching became increasingly brutal in the moments prior to the victim succumbing to death. White lynch men removed and often preserved various bodily appendages of a lynch victim. Even during medieval times, when criminals could be pressed, stretched, or twisted, torturers reserved the dismantling of the body for especially repulsive crimes. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, no restraint existed during the sanguinary moments of a lynching's climax. Grace Elizabeth Hale wrote that coveted, “fetishized objects” possessed entertainment value for some southern white men. Hale found a store owner in Center, Texas, for example, who proudly displayed his collection of body parts taken from lynched victims.¹¹³ Severed pieces of a body invoked interested conversations

¹¹⁰ These pictures show Ivy chained just prior to his being set on fire.

¹¹¹ Alan McDaniel to Elizabeth Payne, Interview, 26 April 2006. Video in possession of author.

¹¹² Robert R. Sykes to author, Interview, 5 May 2006. Notes in possession of author.

¹¹³ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption : Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 272-276; Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness : The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 150, 174.

from white customers and provided for black customers a less-than-subtle reminder of what could happen for transgressions against white supremacy.

Hale argues that lynchings became “well-choreographed spectacles” that opened with a jail attack, a public identification of the alleged criminal, and an announcement of the upcoming lynching. This announcement provided time for interested men and women to get to the scene and witness the punishment – a slow agonizing death. According to Hale, the “main event began with a period of mutilation – often including emasculation – and torture to extract confessions and entertain the crowd.”¹¹⁴

Lynch men often mutilated the sexual parts of African American men accused of rape, but the drive to emasculate the victim came from something more than a desire to obtain a confession and “entertain the crowd.” In recent years, historians provided much analysis of the white-constructed “black beast rapist.” Winthrop Jordan made clear in *White over Black*, several conceptions of black men permeated the white male perspective. Of chief importance in the LQ Ivy case, or any case involving a black man accused of raping a white woman, is the notion that black men are highly sexualized with well-endowed penises. Jordan explains, “Whatever the objective facts of the matter, the belief [of black endowedness] blended flawlessly with the white man’s image of the Negro. If a perceptible anatomical difference did in fact exist, it fortuitously coincided with the already firmly established idea of the Negro’s special sexuality; it could only have served as striking confirmation of that idea, as salt in the wounds of the white man’s envy.”¹¹⁵ As such, white men, when given the opportunity afforded during a lynching, relieved their sexual insecurities by emasculating their victims. The notion that black men wielded larger tools than white men effectually threatened white manhood. The depiction white men created of

¹¹⁴ Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 203-204.

¹¹⁵ Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black : American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 159.

hypersexual black men only caused greater anxiety for white men. In this sense, white men became victims of their own conjured construction of the black man. White men found no relief from this particular anxiety in the usual public performances of segregation. White men forced masculine concessions from black men. They asserted their social superiority by demanding spatial entitlement and public comportment; they maintained political superiority through disenfranchisement; but because of their own reduction of manliness to the physical phallus, they could not finally achieve complete masculine superiority without physical concession. Robyn Wiegman expressed that through genital mutilation, “The white masculine [retains] hegemony over the entire field of masculine entitlements.”¹¹⁶ With envy, white men found it necessary to destroy that which they desired. According to Wiegman, “In [the] destruction of the phallic black beast, the white masculine reclaims the hypermasculinity that his own mythology of black sexual excess has denied him.”¹¹⁷ To destroy the *person* through a lynching was not enough. “In severing the black male’s penis from his body ...the mob aggressively denied the patriarchal sign and symbol of the masculine.”¹¹⁸ Thus, by mutilating black genitalia, white men not only avenged the sexual assault against white women, they revenged the physical insult against white men.

When the posse of white men searched for Bessie Gaines’s alleged attacker, multiple factors drew their attention to LQ Ivy. LQ came from a successful black family whose material possessions exceeded that of many white farmers in the area. LQ drove his father’s car at a time when the automobile was becoming increasingly associated with manhood. With a mechanical understanding, LQ knew how to repair the cars of white men, the act of which implies masculine

¹¹⁶ Robyn Wiegman, *American Anatomies : Theorizing Race and Gender*, New Americanists (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 98.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 83.

superiority, regardless of any humility LQ may have demonstrated. LQ wore his hair in braids, defiant against accepted styles of young black men. LQ stood out in many ways that could threaten white male primacy, but these alone do not explain the impulse of the white lynch leaders to precede the lynching with genital mutilation. As a torturing device, therefore, the lemon squeezer used by the lynch leaders during the LQ Ivy episode served not only to secure a confession from Ivy, but it also served to retaliate for any sexual advantage Ivy might have had over them.

Following the events inside Arlo Graham's barn, the men marched Ivy to a sawmill owned by Lawrence Goolsby – the employer of LQ Ivy. From here the men took Ivy to Will Garrison's mill planer. After driving a steel wagon axel into the ground, members of the mob collected planks of wood and arranging them around the axel. The thin dry strips of wood left by the mill planer made fuel that easily caught fire and quickly accelerated in intensity. Joe Keith Robbins, a veteran of World War I, furnished the kerosene. Mob leaders stood Ivy on top of a sawdust pile where he bowed his head and prayed. According to a reporter present, "He was asked if he wished to confess. He admitted to the crowd that he was guilty and under questioning told the details of the crime."¹¹⁹ Several men secured Ivy's body to a stake made from a buggy axel and posed for photos. Jasper Busby, meanwhile, served water to the spectators from his well. Busby did not support the actions of the mob, and he refused to turn over the well to the mob. Fearing people in the crowd would take the water themselves, over-pumping the well and muddying the drinking water, however, Busby preferred to man the pump himself.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ "Union County World War I Scrapbook." New Century Club of New Albany, no date 1919, Union County (Mississippi) World War I Scrapbook, Z/0172.000, Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Jackson, Mississippi; "Young Woman Outraged by Negro Brute."

¹²⁰ McDaniel to Payne.

While these events took place at Rocky Ford, Macy Ferrell recalled what happened at the Ivy's home. "It was on a Sunday, Sunday evening. We had gone to church, as usual. My mother said, 'Well, I'm going to see Allie.'" Macy and her mother walked together to the Ivy's home and found Allie Ivy lying across the bed. After sitting quietly with her sister, Ferrell's mother returned to her home. During the traumatic events surrounding the LQ Ivy lynching, Ferrell recalled that their white neighbors provided the information on transpiring events. Rush Scott and his wife, America Scott, paid a visit to the home after they returned from Rocky Ford. The couple explained to Ferrell's mother, "Liza, they're going to burn that boy. We went, but when we saw what was going to happen, we left. They are going to burn that boy today." The Scotts, as white neighbors, were uniquely suited to inform the family of any news on LQ.¹²¹ The white neighbors negotiated with ease the boundary between white supremacy and local community. Whiteness permitted the Scotts to mingle with the crowd gathered at site of the lynching. Without suspicion, other whites spoke freely with the Scotts about the day's events. Yet this same white couple found it easy to visit their black neighbor's homes and relay vital information even as the tragedy unfolded.

After talking with the Scotts about the planned lynching, Liza returned to the Ivy home and found her sister. Following the request made by Allie Ivy, Liza spoke to her, "Allie, you told me if I heard anything, come back and tell you. They burning your child up today." Macy Ferrell remembers her Aunt Allie taking a seat in a chair and listening silently. The hours that followed must have been excruciating. Allie Ivy, as a black mother, could not save her son. After hearing the news, she groaned four times but never shed a tear. "She began dying right there." Macy Ferrell continued to tell how LQ's mother, Allie, declined. According to Ferrell,

¹²¹ Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 - Population Schedule, ed. United States of America. According to the 1930 Census, Rush and America Scott had both white and black neighbors.

the mother stopped eating and stopped talking to people. Despite efforts by Jim Ivy to take his wife to church socials, she continued in a deep state of depression. Ferrell remembered how her aunt would be sitting quietly and when someone spoke, she would jump and say, “Oh, I thought that was LQ.” LQ Ivy had been killed in the fall of 1925; by the fall of 1926, his mother had died.¹²²

After the mob apprehended LQ Ivy, the black community gathered at the church, prayed, and waited for more news. White men, in the meantime, scoured the roadways looking for another opportunity to assert their supremacy. Some unknown men left a bundle of switches at the door of the Ivy home. Men searched for any lone black male to witness, against his will, the lynching. A newspaper reported, “Two negroes, said to have been named by Ivy as accomplices, were captured by members of the mob late today. They were taken to the scene of the lynching, but convinced the mob leaders that they were innocent and were freed.”¹²³ Eyewitnesses confirmed that one young African American, Will Talley, appeared at the sight of the lynching against his will. Aubrey Fowler forced Talley to witness the lynching. Talley “had grown up with a White family near Hickory Flat and many believed that [Talley] thought himself an equal.”¹²⁴ Accordingly, Aubrey Fowler felt obliged to remind Talley of his place in society.

As the leaders of the mob soaked wood planks in cans of kerosene, Ivy dug into his pocket and retrieved the keys to his father’s car. He handed the keys to Straud Nowlin, a resident of Etta. Nowlin promised to give the keys to Jim Ivy, LQ’s father. Witnesses reported Thad Parker to be the person who lit the first match.¹²⁵ The pending tragedy moved Miss Roe Manor into desperate action. The young woman called out to the leaders of the mob pleading

¹²² Ferrell to Payne, 2006.

¹²³ “Mob Lynches Negro Who Assaulted Girl.”

¹²⁴ McDaniel, “Rocky Ford Incident”, 7.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

them to stop. As the slow-burning kerosene carried the growing flame towards the restrained Ivy, Manor attempted to douse the fire with water.¹²⁶ It took several men to hold the single woman back, and she helplessly watched the flames consume Ivy. Although many onlookers claimed not to support the lynching, witnesses remember that only Roe Manor made an effort to stop the lynching at Rocky Ford. Law officers, present at the burning of Ivy, made no effort to save the seventeen-year-old. According to newspaper accounts, the deputies who made it to the scene in Etta “claimed they were unable to get through the crowd” in order to prevent the disaster.¹²⁷ J. L. Roulhac, a reporter for the *Memphis News Scimitar*, witnessed the burning of LQ Ivy. He reported,

I watched a negro burned at the stake at Rocky Ford, Miss. Sunday afternoon. I watched them pile wood around his helpless body. I watched them pour gasoline on this wood. And I watched three men set this wood on fire. ...I watched the blaze climb higher and higher, encircling him without mercy. I heard his cry of agony as the flames reached him and set his clothing on fire. ‘Oh, God; Oh, God!’ he shouted. ‘I didn’t do it. Have mercy!’ The blaze leaped higher. The negro struggled. He kicked the chains loose from his ankles but it held his waist and neck against the iron post that was becoming red with the intense heat. ‘Have mercy, I didn’t do it. I didn’t do it,’ he shouted again. ...Soon he became quiet. There was no doubt that he was dead. The flames jumped and leaped above his head. An odor of burning flesh reached my nostrils. I felt suddenly sickened. Through the leaping blaze I could see the negro, sagging supported by the chains.¹²⁸

As promised, Stroud Nowlin delivered the keys to Jim Ivy’s home after the lynching. According to Macy Ferrell, Nowlin told the Ivy family of his final, brief conversation with LQ in the last moments of teenager’s life, “I said to him, LQ, if you done it, be a man and own it. And [Ivy] said, ‘No sir, Mr. Nowlin. I didn’t do it.’” Ferrell commented that LQ’s mother took comfort in these words, which confirmed her belief that her son was innocent.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Ibid., 10. Thad Parker’s wife was Bessie Gaines half-sister. See also, McDaniel, “Rocky Ford Incident”, 4.

¹²⁷ “Mob Lynches Negro Who Assaulted Girl.”

¹²⁸ “Young Woman Outraged by Negro Brute.” This article uses extensive quotes by Memphis reporter, J.L. Roulhac who attended the lynching. The reporter from the *New Albany Gazette* wrote, “I was not there, so will let J.L. Roulac, of the Memphis News Scimitar, who was present, tell about it.”

¹²⁹ Ferrell to Payne, 2006.

Sam Bullock, a white storeowner from Enterprise told JD Ivy, LQ's brother, that he could collect the ashes. Fearing for his own safety, JD refused to drive to the site of the lynching. A black man named Shep Boone asked to collect the ashes for the family. JD and Shep Boone arranged for a third black man, Gates Kilpatrick, to drive Jim Ivy's car to Rocky Ford. The trio drove to Bullock's store in Enterprise and he provided them with an apple box to collect the remains. The trio then drove to the site of LQ's lynching. JD did not get out of the car while Boone and Kilpatrick collected the ashes. Only LQ's heart remained among the ashes according to several stories. Mattie Ivy Bruce recalled, "[The men said the heart] was as black as a crow, but it wasn't burned up." The men took the remains to Baker's Chapel and buried it.¹³⁰

The heart remains an essential part of the memory of LQ. The desecration of Ivy's body deeply affected those near to him. Our modern culture views the "material continuity" of the body as necessary for the preservation of the *person* in death.¹³¹ As an illustration, consider how those who lose a loved one are relieved or horrified depending upon the condition of the *body* at the time of death. For this reason, morticians apply makeup, or in extreme cases reconstruct damaged faces or body parts, to make dead bodies appear as they did when alive. To view the body of the deceased prior to burial reassures loved ones that the person, although dead, is still intact; and onlookers find relief in a body that looks "peaceful." The near total destruction of LQ Ivy's body, however, deprived his family and friends of this relief. The family not only had to deal with the murderous death of Ivy, but also the torture and desecration of his body. Because the whole body could not be recovered, the family considered the recoverable *part* to represent the *whole of LQ Ivy*.

¹³⁰ Bruce to Payne. Macy Ferrell also stated that the heart remained when the ashes were collected.

¹³¹ Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 297.

Those who knew LQ Ivy, therefore, discovered profound meaning in his incorruptible heart. The most sacred part of the human body, the heart holds the capacity for love and provides a harbor for the soul. The heart symbolizes life. No part of the body would have been more revered than the heart. The myth of the heart attests to the innocence of LQ Ivy. So pure, LQ's heart would not burn; it could not be destroyed. In her work on medieval religious beliefs and the body, Caroline Walker Bynum wrote, "The claim that all or part of a saint remained incorrupt after burial was an important miracle for proving sanctity."¹³² Using the same line of thinking, family members and neighbors rationalized why Ivy's heart was unconsumable by the fire. For those who knew him, the incorruptibility of the heart testified to the incorruptibility of the LQ Ivy.

Yet, despite the stories, the idea of only the heart surviving seems unlikely. "Most likely, there would be a conglomerate of organs remaining, and the skeletal matter would still be there," said Dr. Robert Sykes. "It would take a crematorium, which is a special apparatus, to completely turn the body to ashes. The bones are the last to go." Graphic photographs of burned bodies found in the book *Without Sanctuary* illustrate the effects of a lynching by fire. Such photographs document the gruesome aftermath of a lynching by fire. In the photos of such lynchings, the corpse remains somewhat intact although the intense heat destroys the charred body beyond recognition.¹³³ The black community continued to tell the myth of the heart. It remains impossible to know when the myth of the heart began. Both Mattie Ivy Bruce and Macy Ferrell retell the story of the heart. Considering both women personally remembered the events of 1925,

¹³² Ibid., 234-235. Bynum points to hagiographical studies where body parts do not decay after death due to the specific part's role in a sacred work. Bynum uses the example cited by Caesarius of Heisterbach, in which the hand of a master did not decay with the rest of the body because of the hand's use in copying books.

¹³³ Sykes to author; James Allen, *Without Sanctuary : Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Twin Palms, 2000). See especially images number 25, 59, 61, and 97. Images found in the book *Without Sanctuary* deny any real plausibility to the myth of LQ Ivy's heart being the sole remaining part of Ivy's body. Gruesome photographs of victims burned to death in a lynching confirm the statements of Robert Sykes. A medical doctor of forty years, Sykes also served as the Medical Examiner for Howard County, Arkansas, for several years.

the story's origin may go back to the days following the lynching. The mythic symbolism that LQ Ivy's heart proved so pure it could not be destroyed by fire furnished those within the black community a way to dispel the allegations leveled against a fellow member of their community by a white woman.

The white community also developed a reason to question LQ's guilt. The generation that followed the lynching composed a different myth, which involved a curse. It took several decades before the myth of the curse could be developed, made possible only by the suffering of key individuals within the community. Fifty years after the lynching, the stories of how the mob leaders suffered or died tragically became a central part of retelling the story within the white community. Alan McDaniel wrote in 1975, "People speak of [the lynching] in tones of remorse and disbelief and often mention the ironic events of later years. Be it fate or coincidence, all of the men directly connected with the lynching met an agonizing or untimely death or were crippled for the most of their lives."¹³⁴ In an interview in 2006, McDaniel said, "It was almost like there was a curse on the people directly involved in the lynching." McDaniel commented that within the white community, the stories of what happened to those involved became a larger part of the story than the events that took place in 1925. According to McDaniel's interviews, which he conducted in 1975 with community members who remembered the event, many people considered the tragedies a punishment for those involved in killing an innocent man. Clyde Nash, the owner of a garage in Myrtle who took Ivy from the police, became a cripple after a freak accident occurred in the auto shop. Joe Keith Robbins became a victim of bad whiskey and developed the "Jake leg." Book Greer and his son Bill, known as "the most notorious leaders" of the mob became alcoholics. Book Greer froze to death and Bill Greer disappeared in the summer of 1973. Later someone found Bill's partially decomposed body just out of the city

¹³⁴ McDaniel, "Rocky Ford Incident", 10.

limits of Myrtle. Ray Norton died a slow death due to cancer. Hop Collins died in an automobile accident. Hugh Pittman shot himself in the head while drunk. Plez Traynum died in 1964 in an automobile accident that also killed his wife and two daughters. Pauline Coffee, accused of throwing a lit match at the kerosene-soaked Ivy, died in a fire caused by her electric blanket. Finally, Bessie Gaines had an estranged relationship with her illegitimate daughter, Wilma Gaines. “Daddy firmly believed [these events] happened because of the lynching. That’s what he thought.” Martha Glenn Stephens Cofield, the granddaughter of Senator Hubert Stephens, recalled that Senator Stephens warned against mob violence in the days prior to the lynching, and Cofield grew up in Union County hearing family members re-telling the story. As an adult, Cofield investigated the event, motivated by her personal interest. Like McDaniel, she points out that many believe these stories suggest Ivy’s innocence.¹³⁵ By believing those with blood on their hands got what they deserved, the myth of the curse serves to reconcile wrongs of the past. Those guilty paid their debts, thus preventing the younger generation from inheriting the sins of their fathers and somehow lifting the burden from themselves. The myth of the heart and the myth of the curse served the communities that created them.

Macy Ferrell described the days following the lynching of her cousin, “[In the black community,] there wasn’t no loud goings on. Everybody was quiet. Fear, there was fear. Everyone was quiet.” The tragic events that took place on Sunday afternoon made the front page in the Memphis paper on Monday morning. Ferrell remembered,

Well it come out in the newspaper. The *Commercial Appeal*, I remember, had a write-up of it that Monday. We were real sad. The school children got together and read it. We cried. We were hurt. And, see, he was my first cousin; his mother and my mother was sisters. He was a quiet young man. He wasn’t a rowdy young man. He had a girlfriend there; she cried a lot. She cried a lot; she sure did. Her name was Inez Williams. She said, ‘I can’t stand it.’ She’d read a while, and she’d cry a while.¹³⁶

¹³⁵Cofield to Payne; McDaniel, “Rocky Ford Incident”, 4, 10-11. McDaniel to Payne.

¹³⁶Ferrell to Payne, 2006.

The *Oxford Eagle* and the *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette* reported what had happened in the Thursday issues. The *Eagle* reported that Sheriff Roberts arrested no one associated with the lynching because “he recognized no members of the mob.”¹³⁷ Sheriff John Roberts wrote a statement that appeared in the *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*,

To my fellow officers of the County and District and especially to those officers, namely, Hon. L.A. Reese and his able Deputy, Elton Carr, who so signally assisted me in trying to prevent the tragedy of Sunday last, I offer my sincerest thanks. You will always have my strongest friendship and regard. To those who unfortunately frustrated justice, and by your action were against law and order, I simply say I am sorry for your action; and while I have no hard feelings toward you, I cannot sympathize in your attitude. Again I want to thank all those who responded to my call for aid in Sunday’s tragedy.¹³⁸

An editorial appeared in *The Sentinel* four days after the lynching. The Pontotoc newspaper commented, “That was a shocking occurrence at Etta. ...It is nothing to moralize over or preach about, because the crime [of rape] is the only one not mentioned in Holy Writ to which a penalty is not prescribed.” The article never identifies any specifics on the subject of the alleged rape of Bessie Gaines or on LQ Ivy’s lynching. No names appeared and neither did any description of the crime. The uninformed reader, after seeing the article, could only know that something significant occurred in the neighboring county the week prior. For readers familiar with the rumors, allegations, and mob rule, however, the use of symbolic language left little doubt as to how the editors felt. In a specialized language, black men became serpents. “When a rattlesnake rises up in your path, instinct teaches you to kill him with the first thing you can lay your hands on.” Responding to those who preferred to let the legal system run its course, the editor wrote, “Some bone-headed legislator might have inserted in the revised statutes of 1866 a section relating to the propagations and preservation of snakes.” Using religious imagery, the

¹³⁷ “Mob Lynches Negro Who Assaulted Girl.”

¹³⁸ “Sheriff’s Statement,” *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 24 September 1925.

editor argued against anything less than the killing of a black man accused of rape, regardless of how any man-made law may read.

Some inspired idiot invested with authority to legislate might argue that [the Bible] meant literally to ‘bruise’ and not ‘break’ the snake’s head.... All we meant to say is that there is no law, human or divine, to meet the emergency that demanded summary vengeance, swift and sure, from the people of the Etta neighborhood.¹³⁹

The editors of *The Sentinel* justified white violence against blacks, but they employed religious symbols to do it. Donald G. Mathews argues that, “White southerners defended their violence against blacks as punishment for violating the purity of the white race by assaulting white women. At one level, this statement is about the punishment and the exercise of power; at another, it is an expression of what a culture valued most, that is, what it held sacred.”¹⁴⁰ Walter White argued that the emotions behind a lynching came from the South’s religious-infused culture.

It is no accident that in these states with the greatest number of lynchings to their discredit, that the great majority of the church members are Protestants of on the evangelical wing of Protestantism as well. ...Foul pages in American history have been written by means of lynchings and burnings in those very states which most vociferously have adhered to evangelical Protestantism as represented by the Baptist and Methodist Churches.¹⁴¹

Edward Ayers correctly noted that southerners “viewed everything from courtship, to child-rearing to their own deaths” in religious terms.¹⁴² The LQ Ivy lynching reflected how religion permeated a darker side of southern culture. Whites who supported a lynching reconciled their actions of violence and vengeance with Christian beliefs by viewing their actions in terms of good versus evil, by identifying LQ Ivy as a “serpent” and his actions as “hellish.”

¹³⁹ "Moralizing to No Purpose."

¹⁴⁰ Mathews, "Religion in the American South," 157.

¹⁴¹ White, *Rope and Faggot*, 41-42.

¹⁴² Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South : Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 160.

Editors of *The Sentinel* instructed readers what to do; the editorial concluded, “Shut up. Forget it.”¹⁴³ Whites consensually responded and refused to publicly name names, although they whispered names privately. *The Sentinel* cloaked any information surrounding the event. All newspapers concealed the identity of the leaders of the mob.

The silence of the white community on the identity of mob leaders illustrates the deep *vinculum* felt, especially between white elites, in and out of Union County. Newspapers in Lafayette, Pontotoc, and Union Counties, as well as major newspapers in Memphis, and Chicago covered the story. Yet a localized, unwritten, entente between the lynch men and white witnesses existed prior to any mob action. The men who lynched Ivy knew such an understanding existed and would ultimately shield them from legal action. Those responsible for the lynching remained hidden, protected behind a pall of silence.

For his book, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek*, Winthrop Jordan investigated an 1861 slave conspiracy, white punishment for the conspiracy, and the concerted effort of whites to keep the events secret. Jordan wrote, “This slave plot was kept so quiet at the time that it has since remained virtually unknown, or at least not written about by historians, or (so far as can be discovered) even spoken of by living descendants of the antagonists.” It is only because of collected slave narratives that we know that anything happened in Adams County, Mississippi, where the events occurred. According to Jordan, “If we relied solely on all the other evidence [available through white sources], we would be left knowing little more than that the white people of the Second Creek neighborhood thought they were having serious difficulties with some of their slaves in the year 1861.” Within several months of discovering the slave plot,

¹⁴³ "Moralizing to No Purpose."

white leaders hung at least twenty-seven slaves; and within a year, the number climbed near forty.¹⁴⁴

As in the 1861 case of Second Creek, whites remained quiet and protected the mob leaders. In the days following the lynching of LQ Ivy, newspapers published photographs of Ivy, chained at the stake, surrounded by approximately fifty of his captors. Local newspaper men attended the lynching and later interviewed men responsible but refused to identify them. The *Memphis News-Scimitar* quoted William N. Bradshaw, a mob leader as saying,

Not an officer in Union County or any of the neighboring counties will point out any member of the crowd. Why, if he did, the best thing for him to do would be to jump into an airplane headed for Germany – quick. ...Everybody down there knows everybody else. We're all neighbors and neighbor's neighbors. I've known Sheriff Johnny Roberts since he was knee high to a duck, and I was one of the delegation that called him on Friday night and told him we were tired of him dilly-dallying and that he'd have to produce that Negro or take the consequences.¹⁴⁵

Bradshaw provided details on the lynching, but alleged that he was unable to attend. Whether he attended or not, Bradshaw understood the local culture well enough to know a code of silence protected himself and others involved. This code, which protected the mob leaders, essentially validated the lynching of LQ Ivy. Because the mob leaders defended that which was sacred, the white community at-large found no guilt in the mob's actions and, therefore, found no punishment necessary. To ensure this, no witness stepped forward to identify a single mob leader. Unnecessarily instructing readers to "Shut up," and "forget it," the *Pontotoc Sentinel* stated what whites obviously knew already. The "silence" could not have occurred in 1861 or in 1925, if the white community did not consensually agree to be silent. The silence continued for generations because it was imbedded in the psyche of the white community. Locals publicly

¹⁴⁴ Winthrop D. Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek : An Inquiry into a Civil War Slave Conspiracy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 4-6, 25-28.

¹⁴⁵ "Mob Member Laughs at Probe," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, 21 September 1925.

“shut up,” although they did not “shut up” privately. The instruction given by the newspaper editors to “forget it,” however, proved impossible.

The story of LQ Ivy’s lynching rooted itself in the memory of Union County. The county’s most famous son, William Faulkner, wrote of the lynching in the 1930s. Faulkner traveled to Europe in the late summer of 1925 where he remained until December of that year. On Monday, September 21, 1925, the day the Memphis papers ran stories about the LQ Ivy lynching, Faulkner took a train to Rennes, France.¹⁴⁶ He walked through the region devastated by the Great War, oblivious to any tragedy developing back in his home counties of Union and Lafayette, Mississippi. When Faulkner returned to Oxford, he soon learned of the lynching at Rocky Ford. The story moved Faulkner to pen the short story, “Dry September,” which first appeared in *Scribner’s* magazine in 1931.¹⁴⁷ In Faulkner’s story, Miss Minnie Cooper represents Miss Bessie Gaines and Will Mayes represents LQ Ivy. The white woman accuses the black man of rape. A debate ensues at a local barbershop beginning on a Saturday. Patrons at a local barber shop debate the likelihood of Mayes’ guilt and Minnie Cooper’s past experiences with men. Despite the barber’s warning, “Find out the facts first, boys. I know Willy Mayes. It wasn’t him. Let’s get the sheriff and do this thing right.” A group of eight men lynch the young man. When John McLendon, one of the lynch men, returns to his home on night after midnight

¹⁴⁶ Joel Williamson, *William Faulkner and Southern History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 202-206.

¹⁴⁷ Joel Williamson and others have attributed Faulkner’s inspiration for “Dry September” to the 1908 lynching of Nelse Patton, in Oxford, Mississippi. Both the Patton lynching and the LQ Ivy lynching occurred during the month of September, and both lynchings involve a white woman who was attacked by a black man. In the Patton lynching, Nelse Patton slit the throat of Mattie McMillan with a razor blade. Faulkner’s suspenseful telling of a barber using a razor blade to shave a patron’s neck may have led to the conclusion by some scholars that “Dry September” fits with the 1908 lynching. A problem with this conclusion is that in Faulkner’s short story, the white woman lives. Williamson argues that in 1908 William Faulkner, “was almost eleven on the night of the lynching, and his bed was not more than a thousand yards from both the jail and the square. Knowing William Faulker as man and boy as we now do, it is impossible to imagine that he failed to record and retain every detail of the drama that came to his senses. Possibly he saw it all.” (See Williamson, *William Faulkner and Southern History*, page 159.) I believe a more plausible theory to be that at age 28, Faulkner returned from Europe three months after the LQ Ivy lynching, and people were still talking about it.

he strikes his wife because she waited up for him.¹⁴⁸ With the McLendon character, Faulkner teases a story that continues to circulate among the rumors of Bessie Gaines: a white married man attacked Gaines in September 1925.¹⁴⁹

Two books on lynching abbreviated the tragic final days of LQ Ivy. These include Walter White's *White Rope and Faggot* and Neil R. McMillen's *Dark Journey*. Both cite newspaper articles from the days surrounding the lynching. The experience of Alan McDaniel, however, illustrates how desperately the white community wanted to "shut up" and "forget it." A history student from Union County, McDaniel researched the Ivy lynching in 1975, some fifty years after the incident. McDaniel remembered, "Many doors were shut in my face. People just didn't want to talk about it." McDaniel found less than fifteen members of the community who would discuss the events of September 1925. Significant parts of McDaniel's research appeared in a special issue of New Albany's newspaper, *The Gazette*, published shortly after McDaniel completed his research. Fearful of how some individuals might respond to the article, McDaniel requested that his name not appear in the article. McDaniel also asked that the names of the individuals involved also be deleted. Despite this effort, McDaniel received threatening telephone calls after the article appeared.¹⁵⁰

Martha Glenn Cofield, likewise, found herself in an uncomfortable situation as she investigated the Rocky Ford incident in the 1990s. A resident of Oxford who had grown up in New Albany, Cofield conducted research on the Ivy lynching by talking to friends whom she knew to possess some knowledge of the subject. A friend warned her, "Listen, you need to leave

¹⁴⁸ William Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner* (New York: Vintage International, 1995), 169-183.

¹⁴⁹ Cofield to Payne. Cofield suggested that Gaines' attacker was a married white man who had been having an affair with Bessie Gaines. Alan McDaniel also suggested this scenario based upon his conversations with people in the community.

¹⁵⁰ McDaniel to Payne; Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 234, 243-244, 247.

this alone. You don't know what you're getting yourself into. ...Something could happen to you." Cofield traveled to the community of Etta, and while she looked for landmarks which would indicate where the lynching actually took place, a man confronted her. "I know what you want. You're looking for that place where they burned that nigger, aren't you?" her confronter yelled. "It is right over there in that sage grass behind those trees." The man said, directing Cofield toward a secluded area. Cofield felt sufficiently threatened to leave immediately.¹⁵¹

The lynching of LQ Ivy changed the racial dynamics of Etta. Mary Francis Collins Barber remembered when the black sharecroppers who worked for her father left the farm. She said, "I guess they had more offers out there than my pappy could give them. But I have letters now that some of my mother's friends, of the blacks, wrote her and told her what they were doing. She would write to them, and I have pictures of those black people that sent pictures back to my mother."¹⁵² Macy Ferrell also remembered when the black families in the area moved.

Of course, that was in the fall of the year and when they got their crops in, the majority of them began to move out. They all began to move out. We was living with a good man. Mr. Robbins was a good man. But all the black community was moving. We knew we wasn't going to have a church; we knew we wasn't going to have school, and so everybody moved out. It was a sad time, a crucial time, for black people. They was quiet as possible, and as soon as they could, they all left the community.¹⁵³

Both communities protect their version of the story by keeping it secret to the outside world. Rarely does one find someone willing to discuss the lynching. No marker exists at the site of the Rocky Ford incident, and LQ Ivy's gravesite lacks a headstone. When the black church congregation moved from Etta during the late 1920s, the land owned by the church and the cemetery that holds the remains of LQ fell into the hands of private developers. The preservation of the lynching story comes only through oral tradition within the separate black

¹⁵¹ Cofield to Payne.

¹⁵² Mary Francis Barber to author, Interview, 22 February 2006. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/barber.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

¹⁵³ Ferrell to Payne, 2006; Ferrell to Payne, 2007.

and white communities. Because the black population left the area, some moving as far away as Arkansas, geographic space diluted the black interpretation of the lynching. At age 99, Mattie Ivy Bruce stands as the most important source of information on how the events played-out in the black community. Bruce, however, remains steadfastly quiet on the subject. She offers only limited information on the events of September 18 through September 20, yet provides rich detail on the quest to retrieve Ivy's remains and Ivy's heart. The greater concentration of whites facilitated the success of their interpretation of the Rocky Ford incident. Often a person will admit to hearing about the incident but refuse to talk about it. The written records, specifically the newspaper articles from 1925, tell a biased tale and reinforce the white story. When asked why a mob lynched Ivy in 1925, whites who live a greater distance from Etta, and presumably unfamiliar with the myth of the curse, respond by saying Ivy attacked a white woman. When asked in an interview if she had ever heard of any lynchings, Earline McCord immediately responded in an excited voice, "Oh, they used to have a lot of them."¹⁵⁴ When pressed further on this topic, she quieted down and denied knowing anything. For the remainder of the interview, she provided only short answers, visibly upset that the topic came up.¹⁵⁵ Three spheres of memory exist, therefore. In the core region, whites deal with the guilt of the lynching by not talking about it and creating the myth of the curse. In the black periphery, African Americans created the myth of the heart to assert Ivy's innocence. In the white periphery, whites prefer not to discuss the topic of a lynching in their county but believe the 1925 incident resulted because a black man raped a white woman.

¹⁵⁴ Christine Gaines and Earline McCord to author, Interview, 2 March 2006. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/gaines_mccord.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

¹⁵⁵ An example can be found in the Houston and Dale Rakestraw interview and the Earline McCord and Christine Gaines interview. These four individuals live in New Harmony, Mississippi, which is on the opposite side of the county from Etta. When asked about the lynching, their response left little room for doubt regarding Ivy's guilt. Christine Gaines is not related the Gaines' in western Union County.

Newspaper accounts reported that several hundred people descended upon the tiny town of Etta to witness the lynching of IQ Ivy. People traveled from as far away as Memphis. Paris Woods worked for the railroad in Memphis. On the Monday after the lynching, his boss reported, “I was in Mississippi yesterday at a nigger burnin’.” It was not until later in the week that Paris learned that the victim was his own nephew.¹⁵⁶ This highlights the blistering fast communication systems that lynching organizers used. While the notice that his sister’s son had been lynched took a week to travel from northeast Mississippi to Memphis, the news that a lynching would take place on a Sunday afternoon took less than one day.

The tragic story of LQ Ivy marked a particularly disturbing time in northeast Mississippi. Violent actions against blacks also took place in southwest Arkansas. As with the LQ Ivy lynching, local newspapers in southwest Arkansas described white retaliation against black offenders of the established racial hierarchy. In presenting the information, newspapers provided a way for a broad audience to consume the spectacle. Just as newspapers in northeast Mississippi did in the case of LQ Ivy, newspapers from southwest Arkansas informed readers that a black man could not threaten white supremacy. Southwest Arkansas’ newspapers made clear that law officers excused white men who defended white supremacy by committing a violent act against black men.

The *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, for example, reported local and national stories that emphasized particularly violent offenses involving African Americans. The story of Chas. Love, told of a local “negro preacher and voodoo doctor” who insulted a white lady and was later shot for the offence by a white man. By associating the preacher with voodoo, Love’s Christian beliefs became corrupted in the eyes of white readers. As such, any violence against him could not be considered violence against a Christian preacher but violence against a practitioner of

¹⁵⁶ Ferrell to Payne, 2007.

sacrilege. The story caught the attention of readers throughout southwest Arkansas in February 1910. According to the papers, Love worked for Mrs. Patterson's husband when Love, "made his insulting remarks to the lady, and attempted to assault her." After the woman escaped and "gave the alarm," officers captured Love. Some ten days later, Patterson's brother, Lije Mitchell, who lived in Texarkana, "learned in some manner that Love was being brought to Hope" and planned retaliation for his sister's insults. Mitchell waited at the Hope train depot, and while officers moved Love on the station platform, Mitchell shot Love in the neck with a revolver. The bullet entered through the left jaw, "making an ugly wound." The *Nashville (Arkansas) News* reported, "The negro also had a badly battered face, resulting from his falling after being shot." Love's "battered face" most likely came from an attack with fists or kicks from boots rather than a collapse to the floor. Although the wound looked fatal, Love eventually recovered. Sheriff Velvin arrested Mitchell for shooting Love, but the sheriff then granted Mitchell's own friends "the privilege of guarding him." The sheriff, meanwhile, claimed to fear further violence and summoned a militia to guard Love. Law officials then moved Love to the penitentiary in Little Rock for "safe keeping."¹⁵⁷ In this episode, Love, "the negro preacher and voodoo doctor," represented a sacrilegious threat to the sacred as much as a menace to racial hierarchy. In the eyes of the local law officials, newspaper editors, and the white community, Lije Mitchell not only vindicated his sister's attack, he nobly defended something sacred. Rather than reducing himself as a criminal, Mitchell's actions elevated him to hero status; and Mitchell's friends had the "privilege" of guarding him.

Violence broke out in Ashdown, Arkansas after Dock McClain, a black man, stabbed Ernest Hale, described as "a well-known white planter," while at a local grocery store. Hale recovered from his wound, and officers took McClain to Texarkana for "safe keeping." The

¹⁵⁷ "A Negro Was Shot for Insulting a Lady," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 5 February 1910.

Hale plantation experienced problems with its black workers in the weeks prior. Days after Ernest Hale had been stabbed by McCain, Hale became involved in a different altercation with Jordan Dunn, who also stabbed him. The second scuffle began when Hale reprimanded Dunn, a black worker, for neglecting his work duties. Dunn angrily carried out a threat to cut a couple of Hale's ribs in two. This prompted Archie Hale, the younger brother of Ernest Hale, to shoot and kill Dunn. Archie Hale then turned himself in to authorities who released him after he posted bond. By the time McClain was returned to Ashdown, two different black men stabbed the area's "well known white planter." This uprising against an established white planter was more than other white men in the community would tolerate. According to a newspaper report, information that officers planned to bring McClain back to Ashdown for a preliminary hearing "leaked out" and a mob secretly organized. Deputy Sheriffs Jim Wheelis and Clyde Head escorted McClain to the jailhouse around 10 pm. The officers stopped just outside of the jail. Wheelis entered the building alone to notify the jailer of their arrival. While the lone deputy stood and waited outside the jail with the prisoner, a mob of seventy-five men "suddenly appeared" and seized McClain. The idea that a single officer and his prisoner could not enter the jail immediately upon their arrival at the building, combined with the claim that neither officer saw the mob of seventy-five lying in wait makes their protection of a black prisoner accused of a crime against a white person suspect. The mob took McClain to a nearby tree and hanged him. McClain's body remained on display until the following day for all to see.¹⁵⁸

Officers tried to justify their lack of defending a prisoner, thinking such a defense would ultimately prevent any further violence given the determination of the mob. "Safe keeping" remained an empty phrase of no value to the accused who could be plucked away at an

¹⁵⁸ "Lynch a Negro at Ashdown," *Washington (Arkansas) Telegraph*, 20 May 1910.; "A Negro Lynched," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 18 May 1910.; "Negro Was Killed," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 11 May 1910.

opportune moment. Normally when officers transported prisoners, “safe keeping” fell apart. Such opportune moments often appear scheduled. Officers typically claimed to take measures to ensure safety, but somehow attackers managed to get to the prisoners allegedly in “safe” custody.

Law officers faced a conflicting role as law enforcer and white man. They postured themselves as a valiant protector, but they yielded – often without any fight – to the pressures of fellow white men. Law officers of the early 1900s epitomized manhood; they displayed their phallic guns; they straddled horses and eventually patrolled in cars.¹⁵⁹ Through their personification of law and authority, they proclaimed their power and masculinity. Yet, when approached by a mob of lynch-men, led not by the most influential men of the area but the most masculine, law officers found themselves in a crisis of manhood. Charged with the duty to uphold the law and protect the prisoner until a fair trial, law officers should fend off the mob to the best of their ability. Yet, law officers relinquish their prisoners, forced into submission by a dominate group of men. The more masculine men subjugate the law officer. At the moment a law officer yielded to the mob, however, he performed an act of fraternal manhood and effectually joined the masculine group and cause. Through this action, he reclaimed his masculinity by virtue of his proved willingness to rebel against authority for the perceived defense of the sacred – white womanhood. In these moments, to have pointed his gun away from the prisoner and toward the mob would itself be a violation against the perverted justice of lynching.

In the cases of Ivy, Love, and McClain, local and state newspapers described the lynchings and allowed a broad audience to consume the spectacle. News stories on these lynchings made clear that a black man could not threaten the social order by transgressing

¹⁵⁹ The image of a man straddling on top of a horse is a masculine image, displaying the man’s control over a powerful animal; likewise, by the image of a man driving a car is a masculine image, displaying the man’s control over a powerful machine. Women, *proper women*, that is, rode sidesaddle and rarely drove cars in the early 1900s.

against white supremacy. It also made clear that a white man, who defended white supremacy by committing a violent act against a black man, would be excused. This unspoken rule made the early twentieth century a particularly violent time in the rural South.

Newspapers acted “as an organ of propaganda for the system of social caste,” according to a 1935 report published in *The Journal of Negro Education*. Ira Bryant conducted a study of the type of news that appeared most frequently in Texas newspapers concerning African Americans. In the study, researchers collected newspapers published in 1912 and 1932. The data collected came from newspapers from twenty-eight urban and twelve rural areas (defined by a population of less than five-thousand.) Researchers categorized news articles involving African Americans and placed the articles into divisions of “social,” “anti-social,” and “neutral” based on the attitude portrayed in the article. Neutral categories, for example, included birth records, death announcements, and general human-interest stories, while “social” articles could include constructive activities of an individual or organization, and “anti-social” included de-constructive activities. Newspapers in urban areas devoted 84.4 percent of all black-news coverage to anti-social behavior, and rural newspapers committed 78.3 percent to black anti-social news articles. Researchers found seventy-one percent of news in urban areas involving anti-social black behavior could be classified as attacks on women, liquor charges, thefts, robberies, and murder. They also found that sixty-seven percent of rural coverage could be classified as such. Bryant stated:

It would not be amiss to conclude in the light of these figures that the constant playing up of these types of news by the urban and rural papers may cause such beliefs to be formed concerning the Negro’s traits of character as: that Negroes are morally weak; that they have a natural disposition to sexual crimes and crimes of violence; that they are naturally addicted to petty thefts and emotionality.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Ira B. Bryant, “News Items About Negroes in White Urban and Rural Newspapers,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 4, no. 2 (1935): 173.

Bryant's investigation also studied the language of the newspaper articles and found certain characteristics peculiar to news items about African Americans. Writers placed, for example, a racial identifier in the headline if an African-American played the primary character in the story. News writers omitted the use of Mr., Mrs., or Miss in connection with black men and women, and often presented African Americans as superstitious, ignorant, or childlike. Further, the report stated that only a slight improvement took place in these practices between 1912 and 1932. Located less than thirty miles from the Texas border, Howard County newspapers reflected the same racial attitudes as those in Bryant's study. In fact, newspaper articles in Southwest Arkansas and Northeast Mississippi continued with such trends. Local newspapers reprinted general stories of interest from around the respective states and the nation. For example, the *Nashville (Arkansas) News* ran a story about a Little Rock murder of a white man by a black youth. The headline, "Murder by a Negro" caught the eye of many readers. The story reported that a fourteen year-old African-American used an ax to murder Bill Davenport, a white farmer. The Davenport murder did not relate to any local issue. The publishers ran the story because of its sensational value. The story read:

Davenport and the negro became engaged in a quarrel when the later picked up an axe and struck Davenport a blow, splitting his head open. The name of the negro who did the killing is King, and he is but 14 years of age. This youthful murderer was born in the Arkansas penitentiary, where his mother was serving a sentence for manslaughter, and his father was also a convict.¹⁶¹

This article reinforced the notion that African Americans were habitual criminals by their very nature. Newspaper writers reinforced black stereotypes. For example, a "neutral" article appeared in the *Washington (Arkansas) Telegraph*, "Uncle Dick Mitchell, one of the oldest darkies in the county, died Tuesday, after an illness of several days. Uncle Dick was about 87

¹⁶¹ "Murder by a Negro," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 10 February 1900.

years of age, and was liked by all.”¹⁶² The *New Albany (Mississippi) Times*, in 1917, ran a regular cartoon strip titled, “BoBo, The Mischievous Monk.” BoBo, the main character, appears as a black monkey with human features. The simpleminded and ill-behaved BoBo spoke in black dialect and found trouble easy to get into. BoBo attempts to open a box of dynamite with a sledge hammer, for example, or steals away milk from a black baby, exclaiming, “Gime that milk bottle, yuh little runt!”¹⁶³ Comedic images of black folk penetrated the community through newspapers. The actual circulation of the newspapers exceeded the number of newspaper subscriptions. Louise Crafton, of Hempstead County, Arkansas remembered how local newspapers and magazines passed from house to house in the rural south, “Country people passed around all their reading material.”¹⁶⁴ This practice propagated the negative images of African Americans.

In Hope, Arkansas, during the early 1930s, the Woodmen of the World organized a benefit for the Bois d’Arc Camp 28 at the city’s opera house; “The Original Dixie Minstrels” performed for the town’s people. The program, which advertised the town’s prominent banks, drug stores, and clothing stores, announced that the show would open with “Sweet Strains of Southern Melodies by Happy Darkies.” Songs included, “Dat Black Gal Mine,” “One More Ribber to Cross,” and “Dese Bones Gwine to Rise Again.” The concluding act, “Fun on De Ole Plantation” featured characters such as “Uncle Eph,” “Aunt Dinah,” “Plantation Hands,” “Jubilee Singers,” as well as “Coon Shouters and Dancers.”¹⁶⁵ Elizabeth Grace Hale observed, “Catalogs for minstrel costumes served as dictionaries of popular black representations as well as

¹⁶² "Aged Negro Dies," *Washington (Arkansas) Telegraph*, 20 May 1910.

¹⁶³ "Bobo, the Mischievous Monk," *New Albany (Mississippi) Times*, 4 January 1917. This cartoon appeared sporadically in the *New Albany Times* during 1917.

¹⁶⁴ Louise Crafton to Susie Crafton, Interview, 29 November 1975. Ouachita Baptist University Special Collections, U0088a

¹⁶⁵ "The Original Dixie Minstrels," (circa 1930).

promotional vehicles.”¹⁶⁶ Both minstrel programs and advertisements, likewise, served to solidify the imagery of black men and women. The minstrel show in Hope, in fact, reached a broader audience than those who paid from twenty-five to fifty cents for a seat in the town’s opera house. Promotional bulletins, newspaper advertisements, and performance reviews reached a larger audience than the capacity of the opera house. Those who attended the minstrel show joyfully cantillated the songs and dances for their white friends in the days and weeks that followed. This expanded the consumption of black stereotypes to a large market of rural whites – without any need for buying a ticket or attending the show. The portrayal of the “coon shouter” and “happy darkie” became increasingly associated with African Americans. Thus, mass media and the re-telling of the stories reached a more important group – the general public – who consumed these notions in their construction of race differences. Local people re-used such perceptions in their own theatrical productions, folk stories, and jokes; and these images persisted from one generation to another. In the 1950s, parents and students attended a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) fundraiser in Mineral Springs, Arkansas, where PTA leaders Bernice Bridgeman and Thelma Kelly dressed in blackface and sang, “Oh mammy, mammy, tell me ‘bout those white folks chillun.”¹⁶⁷ Locally created imagery combined with national commercial images, such as the well circulated Aunt Jemima or Gold Dust Twins, in reinforcing this construction of whiteness and blackness.

The very omission of positive stories and achievements of local African Americans also contributed to the negative image of blacks. In 1917, for example the newspaper in Union County covered many locals who served as soldiers and nurses in World War I, but neglected to mention the county’s black soldiers sent to Europe. The paper also overlooked the contributions

¹⁶⁶ Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 152.

¹⁶⁷ Copeland to Interview,

of the county's black women who joined with the Union County Red Cross and made socks, bandages, and many other items for US troops. Positive articles and advertisements on activities of the Ku Klux Klan appeared in the 1920s. These emphasized the Klan's patriotism, their services provided to the community, and announced their educational lectures.¹⁶⁸ When the *New Albany Gazette* ran a special edition in 1945 to commemorate the local men who fought in World War II, every white GI's name and photo could be found; but not a single one of the county's African Americans soldiers—of whom LQ Ivy's first cousin was one—appeared in the publication. Finally, it was not until the 1970s that an African-American woman's photo appeared in the bridal pages of the *New Albany Gazette*. In such a way, newspapers denied African Americans important opportunities to gain public acknowledgement for their service to community and country, willingness to sacrifice for the greater good, or value of family and marriage.

Despite overwhelming opportunities to uptake concocted images of African Americans, negative perceptions did not always prevail. The relationships that developed between whites and blacks were nuanced. After studying rural people from Union County, Elizabeth Payne noted, "Both blacks and whites had finely calibrated ways of evaluating each other. Members of each race could and did signal their approval or disapproval of each other according to aspects of character. For both blacks and whites, there existed a spectrum of 'really good' to 'mean and low-down' along which they placed each other."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸The Ku Klux Klan received sporadic exposure during the early 1920s through the Union County newspaper in both paid advertisements and news articles. See especially, "The Ku Klux Klan What It Is and What It Stands For," *Union (Mississippi) Weekly Times*, 26 June 1924.

¹⁶⁹ Elizabeth Payne, "The North Mississippi Women's History Project: Director's Notes", University of Mississippi Department of Outreach http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/directorsnotes.html (accessed 26 April 2011).

The case of LQ Ivy's lynching presents a complicated relationship between whites and blacks in the rural south. Many local recollections testify to positive relationships between white and black neighbors. Macy Ferrell remembered that her white neighbors shared supper with her family after they worked in the fields. "Oh yes, we had good neighbors, and they were white neighbors too! All white people aren't all alike, you know."¹⁷⁰ Throughout Union County, both whites and blacks cite examples to demonstrate good relationships held between white and black neighbors. Ferrell remembered that her family liked living on Rush Robertson's farm. Ferrell's mother worked in the Robertson's home as a domestic. Ferrell recalled how Rush Robertson traveled to town with his black sharecroppers to weigh their cotton. Ferrell explained that if the sharecroppers went alone, they would be cheated out of a few cents per pound. "You couldn't ask for a better land owner than him. They was good people to live with." Robertson may have helped his black tenants because he identified with them personally, not only as tenants but as people from his own community. His paternalistic gesture certainly reinforced his status as a white male. That Ferrell remembered Rush Robertson to be a good neighbor is particularly important given that his wife, Mason Robertson, was Bessie Gaines's aunt. Ferrell described the lynching as being between the "Rocky Ford" or Etta community and the Enterprise community. Although only a few miles of highway separated these two townships, Enterprise had a larger black population, most of which lived on the Rodger's farm.¹⁷¹ As such, white and black neighbors worked more cooperatively in their respective community. In the township of Etta, however, fewer whites had relationships with black folks, other than as day laborers. In Etta, neighborly relationships developed between whites only, and in Enterprise, neighborly

¹⁷⁰Ferrell to Payne, 2007.

¹⁷¹ Ferrell to Payne, 2006; Ferrell to Payne, 2007.

relationships developed between whites and blacks. Thus, the racial climate in more integrated communities continued to be more amicable.

Unspoken and complicated rules still governed the interaction between whites and blacks even in more integrated communities. Mary Francis Barber's recollection of a young black girl who visited Barber's sister demonstrates such customs;

Her name was Helen May Catherine King. ...And she would come up here and play all day long. But you know there was a certain stand-offish with my mother. She wouldn't let my sister go down to her house to play. That feeling was still there. Not a bad feeling but the feeling "I'm white" and "you're black." My mother didn't mistreat them in any way. She just didn't let my sister go down there and play, but she would open [her] arms to Helen May when she came up here. [Helen] would spend the night up here. She didn't sleep in the same bed with [my sister,] Dorothy. Mother fixed her a palette, and [Helen and Dorothy] would hold hands as they fell asleep.¹⁷²

Although Barber's mother would not allow her daughter's black friend to sleep in a bed while a guest, she continued to write to several black women after they moved away following the LQ Ivy lynching. Thus, she enforced the racial hierarchy in her home but continued to maintain the neighborly relationship developed between white and black households even after the extreme case of a lynching. In her book, *The Seed of Sally Good'n*, Ruth Polk Patterson recalls that in the 1930s a white neighbor, identified as "Old Man Henry Reed," visited the Polk household in Howard County, Arkansas on a regular basis. Described as an elderly bachelor, Reed "always visited the Polk home around dinnertime and sat at the table and ate with the family."¹⁷³

Although a racial hierarchy existed throughout the South, its rules were not so rigid that white and black neighbors in rural areas could not negotiate it and accommodate one another's basic needs. Certainly, racial tensions existed; but the rule of neighborliness often soothed such tensions.

¹⁷² Barber to author.

¹⁷³ Ruth Polk Patterson, *The Seed of Sally Good'n : A Black Family of Arkansas, 1833-1953* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 9.

This model can be found in many parts of the rural South. In the Arkansas delta during the 1930s, for example, the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union worked to build an interracial union of sharecroppers. Due to population trends throughout the region, some union locals contained members of white and black members, while others were either homogenously white or black. After looking at the interracial conflicts within the union itself, it becomes clear that all-white locals proved less supportive of the union's interracial approach. Union locals from areas where whites and blacks lived next to one another before ever joining the union, in contrast, supported interracial cooperation most readily.¹⁷⁴ Jeannie Whyne found that white and black timber workers in northeast Arkansas fraternized with one another in timber camps. Living in close proximity, working together during the day, and drinking and gambling together during their off-hours, these men built a bond of comradeship that crossed the color line. White elites considered such relationships a taboo and insisted on segregated camp arrangements to weaken any developing class consciousness that might supersede white solidarity.¹⁷⁵ Elmer Smith, a bookkeeper for Dierks Lumber Company, in Howard County, recalled segregated company picnics in the late 1930s, "We [Whites] had picnics on the fourth of July, and the company furnished everything. ...Black people had their picnic on the nineteenth of June."¹⁷⁶ James Goins also remembered the June celebration, "Dierks [Lumber] would give the black people a holiday a year. And it was always on the nineteenth of June." Goins described how several days before the festivities began, the company ordered a carpenter crew to run electrical wires to the party area, construct a dancing platform, dig a barbeque pit for the hogs, and build toilets, which

¹⁷⁴ Thomas W. Copeland, "Hungry, Hungry Are We' : The Men and Women of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, 1934 to 1940" (Master's Thesis, Henderson State University, 2002).

¹⁷⁵ Jeannie M. Whyne, *A New Plantation South : Land, Labor, and Federal Favor in Twentieth-Century Arkansas*, Carter G. Woodson Institute Series in Black Studies (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996).

¹⁷⁶ Elmer Smith to Wendy Richter, Interview, 29 June 2000. Ouachita Baptist University, Special Collections, U0491a.

they placed over newly-dug “toilet holes.” Goins remembered hearing the parting, “They’d get a little old band and come down there and boy they’d cut the mustard on the 19th and that night. Drink, fight, and fuss.” While activities may have gotten rowdy, Goins recalled, “There wasn’t a whole lot of mischief going on. ...we didn’t have no problem with our black people.”¹⁷⁷ In the context of the interview, Goins’ final statement on “our black people” comes less from a sentiment of paternalism or white supremacy. His lengthy comments on the June celebration seems envious, as if he would have attended the celebration himself had it not been segregated. Goins intended to contrast local African Americans, whom he knew from work and company housing, with those he had likely heard of or read about in the papers. For Goins, the African Americans he knew were not like the ones he did not know.

In his study of race relations in Macon County, Georgia, Mark Schultz found attitudes on race relations differed from community to community. In community areas where whites and blacks found themselves in similar economic conditions and both suffered from a lack of resources, they turned to one another for mutual assistance.¹⁷⁸ The variances in racial attitudes from community to community – even within the same region – can be explained by understanding that while constructing racial identities, whites who had closer relationships with black neighbors drew not only from popular culture but also from their personal relationships or experiences. On the other hand, whites who had no opportunity to develop personal relationships with African Americans used exclusively the imagery found in popular culture to construct their concepts of whiteness and blackness. Large landowners, for example, had few opportunities to develop any meaningful relationship with black laborers; in contrast, small landowners often worked with their black tenants. Lu Ann Jones noted that the shared standards

¹⁷⁷ James and Edith Goins to Wendy Richter, Interview, 22 July 2000. Ouachita Baptist University, Special Collections, U0487a.

¹⁷⁸ Schultz, *The Rural Face of White Supremacy : Beyond Jim Crow*.

of living and work ethics could, “mute hierarchies of race and build bridges of respect, buttressed by paternalism, across the color line.”¹⁷⁹ Whites who developed mutual assistance relationships with blacks drew upon the same resources in popular culture to construct whiteness, but they tempered their racial attitudes by also drawing on their personal relationships with African Americans neighbors and friends. A racial hierarchy existed in all rural areas, but communal bonds eased racial attitudes; in contrast, where no communal bonds existed between white and black neighbors, racism flourished unchecked. Just as heterogeneous communities cultivated interracial relationships, homogeneous communities inhibited interracial relationships.

The performance of the black midwife, for example, successfully challenged racial stereotypes, but only in certain communities. Summoned by white families as well as black families, the black midwife acted more like a commander than a servant. During her duties, she assigned responsibilities to the father, mother, and any others present. In the crucial moments of delivering a baby, the black midwife rose above her prescribed role of the subordinate. Although whites continued to refer to midwives as “grannies” or “aunties” these professional women performed an important role in their communities. Because some white women in rural areas relied on black midwives, in which white women were temporarily subordinate to the midwife’s medical knowledge, these white women could not hold the popularized image of black women as exclusively true. While taking orders from a black midwife during parturition, it would be impossible for a white mother to view the professional midwife, as a simple-minded, happy darkie. This fact also remained for any expecting father who dared to linger close-by during the delivery. The performance of the black midwife, therefore, competed successfully with external sources in the racial constructions within an integrated area. In all-white communities or areas

¹⁷⁹ Lu Ann Jones, “Work Was My Pleasure,” in *Work, Family, and Faith: Rural Southern Women in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Rebecca Sharpless and Melissa Walker (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 19-20.

sufficiently serviced by a country doctor, however, white women did not have the same opportunity to witness an African-American midwife practice her professional skills, and the pre-conceived notions of the “black granny” or “black auntie” midwife stood unchecked.

Poor whites who lived in relatively homogenous communities developed relationships with their own class – which by nature of the uniform composition of the specific community excluded any blacks. Poor rural folk who lived in a heterogeneous community, however, developed relationships with their own class – which included whites and blacks. Within all communities, social institutions – from segregated churches to segregated schools – reinforced a racial hierarchy; but racial segregation could not be enforced in other important areas of social interaction. White and black men mingled almost daily on the grounds outside the Howard County courthouse, for example, to chew tobacco and share conversations in a ritualized affair of manhood. Although the courthouse contained segregated bathrooms, the rule of segregation did not prevent men from socializing with one another while at the courthouse. The power of this particular segregated space to prevent racial mingling proved insufficient, deprived of any real significance by the very culture of manhood. This does not suggest that segregated restrooms are insignificant to racial equality. Rather, the point is that the segregation of men’s restrooms does not prohibit male bonding, because men would not have bonded in an integrated restroom. Men used other spaces to engage with one another. White men and black men who lived near one another, for example, fished in the same ponds and hunted in the same woods. Encounters happened; during such opportunities for interaction, men undoubtedly retold stories of the fish that got away or the largest buck ever slain. On roadsides where wagons became stuck in the mire of red clay or automobiles overheated, men assisted one another. Such an experience between white and black men, however brief, challenged racial stereotypes on the personal,

familial, and community levels. Jeff Prather, of Myrtle, Mississippi, for example, met LQ Ivy only briefly when Prather's car broke down and Ivy helped repair it. The brief encounter led Prather to think positively of Ivy's character. When allegations that Ivy raped a woman flew around the small town of Myrtle, Prather drew on his brief experience with Ivy and disbelieved Ivy's guilt.¹⁸⁰ The short interaction with this young black man proved significant enough that Prather discredited the allegations of his white peers, many whom he had known for a very long time. Elizabeth Grace Hale argued that between 1890 and 1940 "the culture of segregation turned the entire South into a theater of racial difference." In this "theater," southern whites expected a never-ending performance in which southern blacks attended inferior schools, sat in inferior waiting rooms, and entered through inferior doorways.¹⁸¹ Hale's book, however, surveys the "entire South;" and, consequently, misses important nuances in the South observable only at the local level – and in specific Southern rural communities. Following the LQ Ivy lynching, African Americans shifted away from the southwestern section of Union County, where the lynching took place. Some moved as far away as Arkansas, but most chose to remain in Union County and simply relocated to a new area with a greater concentration of black residents. That so many chose to remain in Union County is significant because it suggests that they believed they would encounter different racial attitudes by relocating to a nearby community.

In 1910, a young African American delivery boy named Henry Piggue got into trouble with a group of prominent whites in Nashville, Arkansas, who ultimately forced the Piggue family to move out of town. The young Piggue pulled a prank on the son of Reverend A. H. Autry, the preacher of the town's largest Baptist church, Mine Creek Baptist. The horse young Autry rode threw him after Henry Piggue spooked it. The incident caused young Autry's horse

¹⁸⁰ McDaniel, "Rocky Ford Incident", 4.

¹⁸¹ Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 284.

to buck, and the child fell to the ground and broke his arm.¹⁸² To make matters worse, the following week Henry Piggue “chased the little daughter of John Hayes,” a white businessman. It remains unknown which incident caused the most concern, a black boy causing a white boy to break his arm, or the image of a white girl chased by a black boy. White adults likely saw Piggue’s actions to reveal what he might continue to do as an adult – threaten a white man or pursue a white woman. Such possibilities prompted a group of men to warn Henry Piggue’s mother that he would be killed if he remained in Nashville. Sufficiently threatened, the family moved to nearby Clow, Arkansas, a much smaller community with a greater concentration of black families. The Piggue family felt the racial attitudes of a community located only eight miles away could provide a safer environment. The *Nashville (Arkansas) News* agreed, “The limit of endurance upon the part of the white people has been reached, and there is no question that the coon’s health will be better from now on at any other place than Nashville.”¹⁸³ As a child, Henry Peggue learned a lesson about his “place;” likewise, the children of A. H. Autry and John Hayes learned about their “place” in the community. The intensity of such “places,” however, varied according to the specific community. In her study of how black and white children develop their understandings of race, Jennifer Ritterhouse found that the degree of prescribed racial etiquette varied from neighborhood to neighborhood. Black children could play with some white children but not others.¹⁸⁴ With this in mind, Henry Piggue may have played the same games with other white children without any consequences; a different group of white adults might have overlooked the accidental horse throwing or the game of chase.

¹⁸² "Boy's Arm Broken," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 2 July 1910.

¹⁸³ "Troublesom Negro Has Been Warned Away from City," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 13 July 1910.

¹⁸⁴ Jennifer Lynn Ritterhouse, *Growing up Jim Crow : How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006), 164.

The variance between communities, no doubt, caused problems as persons traveled from one area to another. Black travelers often left a particular community where the racial hierarchy was less defined or enforced and entered a different community where seemingly innocuous behavioral expressions elicited a violent response by affronted whites. This explains a newspaper report of a confrontation between a single black man and a group of white men that occurred on the sidewalks of Nashville, Arkansas in 1910. An unidentified black man failed to step off the sidewalk and allow a group of white men to pass unobstructed. The affront to white supremacy resulted in fisticuffs and, ultimately, gunfire. African Americans used passive resistance to challenge white power; however, it seems unlikely that a single man would challenge a group of men over the use of a sidewalk. A more likely plausibility is that the black man, presumably a visitor because the paper could not identify him, was unaware of how his continued tread on a sidewalk would result in such hostilities.

In conclusion, race relations clearly varied from community to community and from time to time. Class lines complicated the development of any accurate picture of African Americans. White elites, for example, developed a paternal relationship with their field hands and socialized within their own class. In towns where white women saw black women as domestic servants, the existing imagery of blacks could not be easily challenged. Black women who worked as domestic servants had the best opportunity to develop a personal relationship with a white family. Still, these women played inferior roles. Tommie Beasley, an African American who was born in 1942 and raised in New Albany, poignantly described the relationship between blacks and whites in towns.

Black women were like a tool, in that they would go into the homes, and they were very welcomed. They were used in various ways, whereas the black man had no opportunity for that. He was a field hand, an outsider, not even welcome in the front door of a house. Very seldom could you get in the house through the back door. To me, black men were

put down real low, made to feel very cheap themselves. There was no pride, had no appearance of having any avenues of ever getting out of it, which, thank God, it didn't work that way. It was quite an impact on the black man.¹⁸⁵

Middle-class whites never experienced a real co-dependence on blacks; mutual support relationships never developed. Uniquely, rural relationships between white and black neighbors forced a different concept of whiteness and blackness. In the countryside, where milk cows went dry or insects suddenly infested a family's vegetable garden, neighbors (regardless of color) necessarily depended upon one another. Thus, the members of that immediate community became more equalized. In rural, integrated communities, mutual assistance systems between white and black neighbors facilitated the development of a community consciousness that could dominate over racial identity – even during an extreme crisis such as the LQ Ivy lynching. In these certain small communities, the realities of rural life exposed the contradictions between popularized images of blackness and who African Americans were. Exclusively white rural communities, however, developed a communal identity in which whiteness appeared to be a necessary condition. With this line of thinking, had the family of LQ Ivy lived next to the family of Bessie Gaines as neighbors, the outcome would have been considerably different.

¹⁸⁵ Tommie Beasley to Elizabeth Payne, Interview, 29 September 2005. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/tbeasley.html (accessed 2 May 2007).

CHAPTER 3

THE WAY OF THE CROSS LEADS HOME

“Death came with his sickle,
And knocked once at the door.
He garnered unto Him our Eda,
To smile on earth no more.
God sent His death messenger to earth,
That He might find a fair flower
To bring to His heavenly garden
And to plant in His beautiful bower.”¹⁸⁶

Eda Stuart lived only twenty years. A young woman could fulfill many important milestones in such a short life. She attended the Methodist Church and accepted Christ at an early age. She married Joe Pelham Stuart, to whom she was a devoted wife. She became a mother, although she died within two months of delivering her only daughter in 1905. Her sister, Minnie, described Eda’s final days: “She, dying sweetly, assured us; she was going to a home fair and bright, forever to dwell with the angels.”¹⁸⁷ Eda’s family and friends took great comfort in knowing that through death, she went to a better place; and by living righteously according to Biblical principles, they would see Eda again. In death, the ways in which survivors remember their deceased loved one points to the values the family and community holds to be most important.

Describing his northeast Mississippi community in 1914, Rad Reed wrote,

Houlka has always been known as a quiet church-going community, believing strictly in the worship of the Blessed Master in happy accord with the teachings laid down in the great Book of Life. Every home is supplied with Bibles and literature of the respective denominations, keeping up with the progress of

¹⁸⁶ "Eda Stevens Stuart," *Pike County (Arkansas) Courier*, 3 August 1905.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Christianity at home and abroad. The Sabbath is observed rigidly as a day of rest, reading and visits among friends.¹⁸⁸

The church-community relationship in the early twentieth century was strong. Religious duty among congregations and neighbors reinforced a community consciousness. By the turn of the twentieth century, government commissions, sociologists, and national religious associations began studies of rural churches.¹⁸⁹ President Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission considered the rural church "fundamentally a necessary institution in country life."¹⁹⁰ Historian Edward Ayers wrote that people in the South "viewed everything from courtship to child-rearing to their own deaths in religious terms. Even those filled with doubt or disdain could not escape the images, the assumptions, the power of faith."¹⁹¹ Rural folk were religious folk, although some were more religious than others. Christian religion, nevertheless, permeated rural communities.

Churches often identified rural communities. Long-established church buildings served as central hubs and place-markers of a rural community and, thereby, represented "home." The church cemetery, where generation after generation buried their own, preserved the place of the church in the hearts and minds of community members who moved away. A funeral director and mortician in the 1930s, Freddy Stone, of Union County, Mississippi, recalled the story of Brother Fife:

He was the man that told me that all the Presbyterians in New Albany came from Ebenezer, up at Cotton Plant; and when they died, they would be buried at Ebenezer because it was the gateway to heaven. When he died, I took him to Ebenezer. I thought about it every inch of the way and thought, 'well old man, you are going back home.'¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Rad Harrill Reed, *Houlka : Yesterday [and] Today* (privately published, 1914), 20.

¹⁸⁹ James H. Madison, "Reformers and the Rural Church, 1900-1950," *The Journal of American History* 73, no. 3 (1986): 645-647.

¹⁹⁰ L. H. Bailey, *Report of the Country Life Commission*. 61.

¹⁹¹ Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 160.

¹⁹² Freddy Stone and Edith Stone to author, Interview, 15 February 2006. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/stone.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

In rural areas, church buildings doubled as community centers and maintained a longer-lasting presence than many other community institutions. For example, the County Line Missionary Baptist Church, founded in 1853 in southwest Arkansas, continues to hold religious services although the rural community's Rock Hill School consolidated with a larger district school and all small business ventures in the area closed before the 1940s. While other rural community institutions came and went, the church stood as a living marker for a community. At the turn of the twentieth century, Baptist folk made up County Line community. So important was the church to the community, that the community became known by the name of the church. The County Line community is nowhere near a county line.

When the church first organized in 1853, church founders met at the line of Hempstead and Sevier counties. The church moved to a new location in 1859, further away from the Hempstead and Sevier boundary. During the Reconstruction Era, state officials carved Howard County out of the larger Hempstead and Sevier counties. From the 1870s forward, the County Line Missionary Baptist Church remained approximately ten miles from the county line.¹⁹³ Those who live in the area today, explain to others that they live, "out at County Line." Many such isolated, rural communities fit this same condition. To live "out at Wakefield," or "at Shiloh" or "Liberty" or "Ebenezer" references the proximity of residence based upon the local church building. At the present time, no institutions remain in these communities other than the old churches. Although many rural country-folk identified their community by unique geographic markers, such as "White Cliffs," "Sand Hill," or "Blackland," others identified with local church buildings.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ John L. Ferguson, *The Church Called County Line : A History* (privately printed, 2002), 1-5.

¹⁹⁴ White Cliffs, Sand Hill, and Black Land, are located in rural Howard County, Arkansas. The Wakefield Methodist Church, Shiloh Baptist Church, Liberty Baptist Church are, likewise, found in rural Howard County. In every case, the communities mentioned were located between five and ten miles from the nearest towns. The people

Church fellowship became a key part of community building, and religious fellowship fostered and reinforced the development of a communal identity. Religious spaces doubled as public spaces. Church buildings, for example, often served as school buildings into the early twentieth century. When the public met, the church sanctuary doubled as a civic center because it could best accommodate a mass of people. Much has been written on the importance of such a space for African-Americans, who could assemble most easily in the confines of the church sanctuary without eliciting suspicions among whites. Macy Ferrell of Union County, Mississippi, for example, recalled that the black community congregated at the church to exchange information and discuss the events surrounding the lynching of LQ Ivy in 1925.¹⁹⁵ As racial tension peaked and whites asserted their supremacy in public spaces, the black community found refuge in the confines of church buildings. "Community life centers in the Negro church to a greater extent than in the white churches," wrote Edmund Brunner, a leading voice in the rural church reform movement in the 1920s. Brunner served as the director of the Interchurch World Movement's (IWM) Town and Country Survey Department in 1920 and later as director of the Town and Country Survey Department for the Committee on Social and Religious Surveys, the successor of the IWM. In 1923, Brunner authored a report from the Committee on Social and Religious Surveys titled, *Church Life in the Rural South*. This study found that African American churches conducted a higher proportion of educational or cultural work than did white churches, not only in the South, but in any region in America.¹⁹⁶ African Americans

who lived in these areas worked as farmers, sharecroppers, and tenant farmers, although most areas also had a community store. Church founders initially named the County Line Baptist Church and the Blue Bayou Church of Christ after nearby geographic markers. Today, however, people look to the church buildings to designate the community's proximity without regard to the geographic marker.

¹⁹⁵ Ferrell to Interview,

¹⁹⁶ Edmund Des. Brunner, *Church Life in the Rural South : A Study of the Opportunity of Protestantism Based Upon Data from Seventy Counties* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1923), vii, 88; Madison, "Reformers and the Rural Church, 1900-1950," 654-659. In James Madison's article, published in 1986, Madison refers to Brunner's

churches provided more than Sunday services, marriages ceremonies, and funerals. The black church, as an institution in the black community, also promoted family togetherness, community uplift, and provided social services unavailable elsewhere.¹⁹⁷ For this reason, the church house became an especially important space for the black community. Whites, on the other hand, had other places to socialize. In towns such as New Albany, or Myrtle, Mississippi, and in Nashville, or Mineral Springs, Arkansas, whites could easily meet and visit at the movie theaters or soda fountains. African Americans, however, could not assemble in such public places without drawing the attention, and suspicion, of whites. African American could go to the movies, but they entered through the “colored” doorway. If upon exiting the theater a group of African American moviegoers became too loud in expressing their enjoyment of the outing, whites noticed. The church building, however, remained a private space where African Americans freely exercised their autonomy, their right to assemble, and their pleasure in one another’s company.

Denominationally the rural south was diverse. Churches and splinter-churches worked to start new congregations across the Southern landscape. As C. Vann Woodward explained, “If there was a ‘solid religious South,’ it was not a denominational solidarity.”¹⁹⁸ In both northeast Mississippi and southwest Arkansas, the religious landscape appeared almost uniformly protestant in the early twentieth century. Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian congregations dominated the countryside. The Church of Christ and various Pentecostal or Holiness churches

organization as the Institute on Social and Religious Research. Edmund Brunner, however, refers to this organization in 1923 as the Committee on Social and Religious Surveys.

¹⁹⁷ C. Eric Lincoln, "The Black Heritage in Religion in the South," in *Religion in the South*, ed. Charles Reagan Wilson (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 52-53.

¹⁹⁸ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, A History of the South, V.9 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 451.

grew prolifically starting in the early 1900s.¹⁹⁹ In most Southern states, Protestants made up over ninety percent of the population. Baptist and Methodist congregations boasted the largest number of churches in the South. These two denominations made up eighty-seven percent of Protestants in southern states east of the Mississippi River. In 1915, eighty-two percent (36,500 out of 44,400) of Baptist and Methodist churches were located in the rural countryside or in small towns.²⁰⁰ Of the 23,580 churches in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) during 1916, Arkansas had 1,409 churches and Mississippi had 1,436 churches. The National Baptist Convention (NBC) had 21,071 churches nationwide in 1916. Of this number, Arkansas had 1,472 churches and 2,527 were in Mississippi. Other Baptist groups found in Arkansas and Mississippi during 1916 included the Free Will Baptists, the Primitive Baptists, and the Colored Primitive Baptists; however, none of these groups had more than 105 churches in either state during the same year.²⁰¹ Among the Methodist congregations during 1916, the Methodist Episcopal Church South (MECS) had the largest numbers in both Arkansas and Mississippi. Of the MECS's 19,184 churches, 1,205 were located in Arkansas and 1,105 in Mississippi during 1916. The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and the Colored Methodist Episcopal (CME) bodies combine to have 778 churches in Arkansas and 902 churches in Mississippi during 1916 out of 11,970 churches nationwide.²⁰²

Before the early twentieth century, a lack of mobility led many isolated communities in the countryside to identify with a specific religious denomination. In Howard County, Arkansas, for example, the County Line community consisted of Baptist families. A mere four miles down the road at the Blue Bayou community, however, the majority of families attended the Church of

¹⁹⁹ Jr. David Edwin Harrell, "Religious Pluralism: Catholics, Jews, and Sectarians," in *Religion in the South*, ed. Charles Reagan Wilson (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 60.

²⁰⁰ Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, 449.

²⁰¹ *Baptist Bodies: Statistics, Denominational History, Doctrine, and Organization*, 1940.

²⁰² *Methodist Bodies: Statistics, Denominational History, Doctrine, and Organization*, 1940.

Christ. The church, as the central institution of either community, served as a common identifier of people from the respective proximities. While towns may have several churches in which townsfolk could choose, the smaller and more isolated communities normally had only one church. Until better roads became available and more churches expanded into rural areas, neighbors in the countryside lacked any real denominational diversity or choice in the matter. Neighbors grew up with one another in a church and buried one another beside the same church.

For each individual churchgoing family, a threshold divided an acceptable distance to go to church from a distance too far to go to church. Families in isolated communities may have been willing to walk or ride in a wagon for two miles in order to attend a church, but they may not have been willing to travel six miles to attend a different church. Fletcher Cook, born in the community of Blue Bayou during 1921 to a family of sharecroppers, remembered that it took over forty-five minutes to travel three miles southeast from his home in the countryside to Mineral Springs, Arkansas by horse. It took two hours to travel seven miles east to Nashville, Arkansas. Travel over the hills between the Cook's home and Nashville made the trip more difficult. The Cooks, a family of seven, used a horse and wagon when they traveled together, which was a slower means of transportation. Time necessary to don or doff tack added to the overall time. Because of the increase in travel time it took to go four miles further to Nashville, Fletcher Cook socialized and associated himself more with folks in Mineral Springs than Nashville.²⁰³

Freeman Henderson, born in Saline, Arkansas, during 1926, remembered such difficulties in travel also. Henderson's mother, raised and baptized in a Baptist church in Pike City, moved with her husband to Saline in the 1920s. The small community had only a Methodist church. The nearest Baptist churches were in Murfreesboro and Pike City, Arkansas, located five miles

²⁰³ Cook to Interview,

west and four miles north of the Saline community, respectively. The topography in this section of Pike County prohibited easy travel. Located in the foothills of the Ouachita Mountains, the Henderson family would have faced a difficult trek on Sundays if they wanted to attend a Baptist church. Consequently, the Henderson family attended the local Methodist church. Freeman Henderson became a Methodist preacher as an adult, although his mother wanted him to be a Baptist preacher.²⁰⁴

Without question, a number of non-religious factors contributed to where families placed this threshold. Edmund Brunner, of the Committee on Social and Religious Surveys, for example, blamed poor roads for keeping people out of church and Sunday Schools throughout the rural South.²⁰⁵ The Works Progress Administration's historical surveyors for Union County expressed, in the 1930s, how improved roadways resulted in higher church attendance:

In the last few years, there has been a marked improvement in the rural Sunday Schools over the county, both in attendance and in the interest shown by those taking part. This improvement is due largely to the improved conditions of the roads in the rural sections, which make it possible for many to attend, who could not do so when the roads were impassable for a part of each year.²⁰⁶

Quite simply, it took a considerably long time to travel over miles of poor road. People suffered when they traveled any lengthy distance in thirty-degree winter weather or during a downpour in spring. Horses and mules suffered to pull wagons or carry saddled riders in one-hundred degree summer heat, and many of the rural poor did not have the healthiest beasts to begin with. Some families lived on the wrong side of a low water bridge or a creek, which flooded with moderate showers. Red clay roads became notoriously sticky and difficult to travel on after a rain. Only after the sun baked the moisture out of the clay could this property become a non-issue for

²⁰⁴ Freeman Henderson to author, Interview, 2 July 2010. Recording in possession of author.

²⁰⁵ Brunner, *Church Life in the Rural South*, 73.

²⁰⁶ Editor Susie Powell, "Source Material for Mississippi History : Preliminary Manuscript Union County." Works Progress Administration, State-Wide Historical Research Project, 1938, University of Mississippi, Special Collections. Oxford, Mississippi.

travelers, and in the winter months, this took several bright days to accomplish. Other families lived in an area without a direct road to a different church.

Localized efforts to better develop roadways ameliorated such obstacles, however, such work came to some communities quicker than others. A significant push for improving highways in rural areas resulted from Alabama's US Senator John H. Bankhead's leadership in passing the Federal Highways Act in 1916. This legislation provided federal matching grants for rural roads and prompted many states and counties to organize booster associations for better roads. Counties improved roadways based largely on economic or commercial needs.²⁰⁷ As such, county officials prioritized their county seats and linked the larger towns of the region. The more isolated communities, however, did not benefit from improved roads until much later. In Union County, Mississippi, for example, the Bankhead Highway ran through the center of New Albany, the county seat, by 1925. The single roadway, however, could not serve many small communities throughout the county. In Union County, Mississippi, and in Howard County, Arkansas, many rural roads continued to need improvement well into the mid-1930s and 1940s. The country dwellers in these areas remained isolated consequently. Julia Kesterson, a schoolteacher at the Messer Creek School in north Howard County, Arkansas, remembered how rural country folk simply did not venture far in the early 1930s. "One day during geography discussion, a seventh grade boy said, 'I would like to go to New Orleans.' His six-year-old brother, [Clifton Sharp,] chimed in with 'I been to Provo.' He meant Provo, Arkansas, a little village a few miles away."²⁰⁸ For Clifton Sharp, even a trip of a few miles to a nearby community seemed rare and exciting.

²⁰⁷ Jeanette Keith, *The South : A Concise History*, vol. II (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2002), 98-99.

²⁰⁸ "Howard County Retired Teachers Remember."

As counties invested in better bridges and made road improvements, isolated rural folk gained access not only to new commercial markets but also to new religious markets. Jack Temple Kirby wrote, “Paved roads spelled death for tiny churches, as farm folk drove off to growing congregations of their own denomination in towns.”²⁰⁹ The Committee on Social and Religious Surveys, which conducted a study of seventy counties in the rural South in the early 1920s, found that in “good-road areas of the counties the majority of the people can reach more than one Protestant church of their own denomination.”²¹⁰ Due to evangelical zeal of each denomination, new churches came to rural areas providing religious choice and, ultimately, religious competition between churches. In Houlka, Mississippi, for example, the Presbyterian Church organized in 1873 followed a few years later by the Methodists. During the 1890s, the Baptists built a church and in the early 1910s, the Church of Christ shared the buildings of other churches for their own religious meetings. The multiple denominations in such a close proximity caused problems, however, as members of one church often discredited other denominational beliefs. Rad Reed explained, “Some men and women in this town will not acknowledge that members of other denominations will go to Heaven. They admit that others may be ‘trying’ to get there and ‘if’ they only belonged to ‘my’ faith, they would scoot to the ambrosia so quick the devil would never hear about it.”²¹¹ Freddy Stone, likewise, recalled such a sentiment when a devout Presbyterian told him that although more people attended a different church in Cotton Plant, Mississippi, “if they want to go to heaven, they have to go to Ebenezer [Presbyterian Church.]”²¹²

²⁰⁹ Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost*, 181.

²¹⁰ Brunner, *Church Life in the Rural South*, 55.

²¹¹ Reed, *Houlka*, 20-21.

²¹² Stone to author.

Disagreements over biblical interpretation undoubtedly increased tensions between churches as Protestant denominations viewed one another with “mild disdain.”²¹³ As preachers advocated the truth of their own theological positions, they offended other churches. As neighbors visited one another following a Sunday service, a discussion of the sermon could become a volatile subject if the neighbor attended a different church. Religious disputes also took place within families. Born in 1915 and 1917, respectively, Pearl Bell Humphry and Bertha Bell Humphry, two sisters who married two brothers, grew up in a small Methodist Church in the rural community of Saline, Arkansas. As adults, Pearl and her husband joined the local Church of Christ in Nashville, Arkansas. Bertha and her husband joined the Assembly of God in Delight. In a joint interview with the sisters on a wide range of topics, only when asked why each chose a different church did the two take a defensive stance against one another. Pearl Humphry believed adamantly that only, “the Church of Christ is right.” Bertha Humphry contended that a she should attend church wherever she wanted.²¹⁴

C. Vann Woodward wrote that Southern churches possessed “a fierce competitive spirit” and, “imperceptible differences over doctrine and policy,” which yielded a religious landscape full of rival churches.²¹⁵ Although Woodward correctly noted the “competitive spirit” between local churches, Woodward’s criticism fails to understand just how important these “imperceptible differences” were to the pious. Churchgoers knew what they believed. In rural areas, congregations preferred the farmer-preacher to the seminary-trained theologian.²¹⁶ Such men readily identified with the work ethic of rural people and understood their struggles. Although the majority of preachers in the rural South had not attended seminaries and had little

²¹³ Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 167.

²¹⁴ Humphry to Interview,

²¹⁵ Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, 451.

²¹⁶ Keith, *Country People in the New South : Tennessee's Upper Cumberland*, 53.

access to the lofty writings of theologians, they studied their Bibles. The rural preacher's sermons came from a simple faith, a personal relationship with God, and were "uncluttered by theology."²¹⁷ Country preachers felt a heightened sense of the spirit that led through impulses to change the message of a sermon, or to pray for a person.

Denominational publishing companies provided to churches valuable material, which greatly assisted both rural preachers and congregations. *The Methodist Hymnal*, which served as the "official hymnal" of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, included educational material beyond church songs. "Material has been supplied," according to the hymnal's preface, "for the ennoblement of services of worship, and provision of hymns and special readings has been made for the worthy observance and celebration of church festival occasions...." *The Methodist Hymnal* included a lengthy section on rituals. It provided a precise script for elders, ministers, and laypeople to follow in rites of baptism, the Lord's Supper, matrimony, and burial.²¹⁸ Hymnals often included responsive reading sections. During services, preachers read from the topic-based section from the hymnal and the congregation answered in unison, reading from the same. Costen J. Harrell, who edited the *Cokesbury Worship Hymnal* wrote:

[The responsive readings are] intended to reflect the dominant teachings and attitudes of the Bible. Brief portions of the Scriptures, related to the many and varied aspects of the Christian faith and life, have been garnered from the wide fields of the Bible and here woven together for use in public worship.... The hope is entertained that the selections which follow, often read in worship, may in some measure serve to make the message of the Bible clear and appealing, and thus to establish the hearts of the worshipers in God and in his Son Jesus Christ.²¹⁹

Regular performances of the responsive reading during church services, Sunday schools, or Wednesday meetings imbedded Biblical teachings in the minds of pious churchgoers and

²¹⁷ Fite, *Cotton Fields No More*, 44.

²¹⁸ *The Methodist Hymnal*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1935), iii.

²¹⁹ Editor C. A. Bowen, *The Cokesbury Worship Hymnal* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Methodist Publishing House, 1938), n.p.

introduced teachings to the newly committed. Responsive readings provided an efficient method for rural congregations to consume theology on topics ranging from “Family Religion” to “God’s Unsearchable Greatness.”²²⁰

Parents instilled church values in their children. Ann Holmes, of New Albany, remembered her experiences as a child and the importance of keeping the Sabbath.

[We were] brought up in a Baptist home, a very strict Baptist home. The Sabbath day was really holy, and we tried to keep it that way. I know we did not sew. If we had a missing button, we went to church with a missing button because you did not sew on Sunday; and you didn’t. There were a lot of things you didn’t do on Sunday.²²¹

Betty Smith recalled that as a child her parents, strict Presbyterians, withdrew privileges such as riding in the car on a Sunday drive or eating ice cream for neglecting her study of religious doctrine. “If you didn’t learn your catechism and go to Sunday school at the Presbyterian Church, then you were not allowed to do anything else that day. ... We grew up knowing that you wanted to learn your catechism.”²²² Devout parents taught their children the differences between churches in their community. They understood that some churches sprinkled and others dipped; some congregations took communion every time they met and others did not; some preachers believed in predestination and other believed in a free will; some church services played no musical instruments, and others beat on drums, clanged tambourines, and spoke in tongues. These matters were not “imperceptible differences” to committed rural churchgoers; these were meaningful differences that effected missions, redemption, salvation, and other important elements of worship.

²²⁰ See *The Methodist Hymnal*.

²²¹ Ann Holmes to Andrew Tillman, Interview, 17 February 2006. Makin’ Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/holmes.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

²²² Sarah Elizabeth “Betty” Smith to Jason Stubblefield, Interview, 24 February 2006. Makin’ Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/ssmith.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

Churches in the South were known to challenge a nearby denomination to a debate over their theological differences.²²³ In southwest Arkansas, the Blue Bayou Church of Christ challenged the County Line Missionary Baptist Church to a religious debate in January, 1902. The County Line Missionary Baptist Church's larger sanctuary provided the necessary space for the debate, and members of both congregations attended despite poor weather. The two churches sparred at least two other times, once in December of 1916, and a final time in December of 1921. Theological subjects for the debates included apostasy, the operation of the Holy Spirit, the condition of man, and the necessity of baptism. In order to ensure a victorious debate, each church solicited a theological expert from their respective denomination. In the 1916 debate, for example, the Baptists invited Ben M. Bogard, of Texarkana, who conducted over one hundred such religious debates. The Church of Christ, likewise, solicited F. B. Srygley of Nashville, Tennessee to represent them. Such debates could last up to a week, and normally took place when the crops allowed time for such activities. Neither side likely admitted defeat or lost many members through the exercise.²²⁴

In truth, church denominations held more in common than they paid attention to. God is great; Adam sinned; Jesus saves. They all believed in the virgin birth of Christ, in the Resurrection, and in the Trinity. All feared a fiery Hell. All churches desired their congregation and community members to adhere to the Ten Commandments. They agreed that the Bible was the God's infallible word. Differences came mainly from varying emphasis or interpretations. This seemed especially true between Baptists and Churches of Christ who had no official creed.²²⁵

²²³ Keith, *Country People in the New South : Tennessee's Upper Cumberland*, 53-54.

²²⁴ Ferguson, *The Church Called County Line*, 25-26.

²²⁵ Keith, *Country People in the New South : Tennessee's Upper Cumberland*, 55.

Expressions of worship differed from one denomination to another, of course, and churchgoers often viewed other religious services as odd. As a child, Lucille Fitzgerald, of Liberty, Mississippi, and her friends sneaked over to a black church service one Sunday and listened to the meeting through an open window. During an interview, Fitzgerald cautiously described black church services as “more spiritual than ours.”²²⁶ During the 1930s, Henrietta Bell, an African American who attended the Church of God in Union County, explained that her church’s worship services differed from white services. She said, “Our worship is carried out mainly by dancing to accompaniment of drums, tambourines, and guitars on special occasions, and in the ordinary services, each member of the congregation pats his foot and claps his hands while singing.” Born in 1875, Hattie Neely, of New Albany, commented that in the “early days” white people “shouted” during church services in both the town and country churches in the area, but by the 1930s, this was less common among whites although African American churchgoers continued the practice.²²⁷ In southwest Arkansas, likewise, Freeman Henderson noted that the last time he remembered any white worshipers “shouting” in church was in the 1930s. In 1967, Henderson preached at a black Baptist church in Murfreesboro, Arkansas, and the church congregation began to “shout” as he preached his sermon. After growing accustomed to quiet, reserved white congregations over the previous thirty years, the emotional outpouring of the black congregation startled Henderson. When asked to describe the experience in an interview, Henderson, an 84 year-old, retired preacher, demonstrated the zeal of the black worshipers attending the service. He sprung from his chair, gestured grandly, and said loudly, “They’d hop up and say, ‘Right-On!’ ‘Yeah!’”²²⁸ Such expressions continued well into the late-1970s. At

²²⁶ Fitzgerald to Interview, website (accessed

²²⁷ Susie Powell, "Source Material for Mississippi History : Preliminary Manuscript Union County." ; Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 - Population Schedule, ed. United States of America.

²²⁸ Henderson to author.

Central Baptist Church in Mineral Springs, Arkansas, Pastor T. Wayne Price told the all-white congregation that Brother Fritz Walton, a local black preacher and barber, asked if he could attend church services occasionally. Price explained to the congregation that he agreed and that everyone should treat Walton as an invited guest. For several years, Walton faithfully attended on the fifth Sundays. During every service, he alone shouted, “Preach-On!” “Alright!” “That’s right!” as the white congregates sat, somewhat uncomfortably at first, in silence.²²⁹

C. Eric Lincoln, in his study of antebellum black churches, found that the expressiveness of black churches varied according to religious “cultural experiences.” Lincoln found that black congregations who attended separate church services were more expressive than those who attended segregated services. Black Christians drew upon the traditions of their white denominational counterparts. The less expressive Presbyterians and Episcopalians, for example, yielded less expressive black congregational services. The expressive Baptists and Methodists, however, yielded expressive black congregational services. In addition, traces of African ritual traditions continued in black services as well.²³⁰ Although both white and black Baptists and Methodists commonly made emotional outbursts during church services before 1900, congregations became increasingly reserved within these denominations. Freeman Henderson observed the differences in expression among white and black congregations in Pike County, Arkansas. He noted that black congregations remained more expressive than their white counterparts did. Henderson felt the explanation was simple, “White people started having too

²²⁹ Copeland to Interview,

²³⁰ Lincoln, "The Black Heritage in Religion in the South," 52-53.

much pride and thought someone would laugh at them.”²³¹ Nevertheless, the expressive nature of black churches waned during the early twentieth century as well.²³²

Of all religious reasons to attend church, congregations held salvation and redemption as most important. Rural preachers devoted much of their sermons on these topics, warning of the fires of hell and promoting the paradise of heaven. Denominations in the rural South placed a high value on their specific rituals, often discrediting the rites of other denominations. Baptists joked about the Church of Christ’s conviction that a person might go to hell if not immediately baptized following a confession of accepting Christ. The Church of Christ baptized new Christians as soon as possible, regardless of the time of day or the weather. Baptists, on the other hand, generally scheduled baptisms for a convenient time. Freeman Henderson, a Methodist Preacher in Pike County, Arkansas explained to his church members why he baptized new Christians only by full immersion. “If you don’t go completely under water, it don’t matter if it’s your uncle or brother. If they go to the Church of Christ down here [in Delight, Arkansas,] they won’t believe you are really saved because they think you have to be baptized [by full immersion] to be saved.”²³³

Salvation was so important and heaven so great that they believed a person should not spend eternity in hell simply because he or she had not been baptized correctly. Dawn Humphry recalled her baptism in a river in 1986 following her confession of Christ at a Pentecostal tent revival. Brother Bob Chambers, the minister at the Crossroads Assembly of God in Delight, Arkansas, dipped the sixteen year-old into the water and upon lifting her up, realized that she had not been completely submerged. Chambers unexpectedly plunged Humphry down, deeper into

²³¹ Henderson to author.

²³² Calvin White, “They Danced and Shouted into Obscurity: A History of the Black Holiness Movement, 1897-1961” (Dissertation, University of Mississippi, 2007).

²³³ Henderson to author.

the water, and held her there longer than anyone expected. Humphry emerged a bit startled, nearly strangled, but very holy.²³⁴

Born in 1929, Earline McCord's religious conviction came with her entry into motherhood. "I wasn't saved until my oldest boy was born. The Lord laid on my heart that I wasn't fitting to raise no baby without being saved."²³⁵ Many cultural expressions drew the connection between motherhood and Christianity. Epitaphs on tombstones reminded all survivors the values held by the "Christian Mother" who departed. Headstones placed to mark the graves of women in the first half of the twentieth century used feminine images especially flowers and garden gates. The garden gate, which could also double as Heaven's gate, left little doubt as to where a particular woman went after she died. The 1940 *Broadman Hymnal* contained songs such as "Faith of our Mothers," "My Mother's Bible," and "My Mothers Prayer."²³⁶ In the singing schools held in rural communities through the 1950s, children learned songs such as, "I Dream of You, Mother of Mine." The verses read,

Time can never erase from my heart your sweet face,
Still I treasure each feature, each line;
Many dear ones have gone and left my heart alone,
But in sorrow I will not re-pine;
At the end of the way, on one glorious day,
I will greet you, sweet mother of mine.²³⁷

Another song, titled, "My Mother" tells the story of a "tho't-less boy" whose mother is "growing old and gray." The chorus sings, "Mother it won't be very long till you shall join the throng who

²³⁴ Dawn Humphry to author, Interview, 15 January 2010. Notes in possession of author.

²³⁵ Ibid; McCord to Interview, website (accessed

²³⁶ See B. B. McKinney, ed. *The Broadman Hymnal* (Nashville, Tennessee: The Broadman Press, 1940).

²³⁷ Reverend E. B. Riddles, "I Dream of You, Mother of Mine" (No. 4) in *Leading Light* (Dallas, Texas: Stamps-Baxter Music Company, 1935).

have been faithful to the Lord and true, but if I should leave this world before you do, I shall wait at the gate of heav'n for you."²³⁸

In New Albany, Mississippi, the Baptist Women's Missionary Union (WMU) posted a resolution in the city's paper upon the death of Mrs. E. L. Wesson in 1917. In the resolution, the WMU women testified to the faithfulness and loyalty of Wesson. The club touted her as a model Christian, wife, and mother. The women of the WMU described Wesson as being, "singularly pure" and of "upright character" which was "worthy of emulation."²³⁹ Upon the death of Sister C. A. Pannell in 1905, the obituary called her, "the most devoted Christian mother in our country...."²⁴⁰

Christianity obviously played an important role in both the lives of Mrs. Pannell, who died in 1905, and Mrs. Wesson, who died in 1917. The mentioning of Christian characteristics and attitudes remained common throughout the twentieth century. Such reflections on a woman's life portray the characteristics considered most noble by the families, churches, and communities. Reports on the death of women differed greatly from the reports of men. Most notable in the years prior to 1917, the obituaries for women were considerably longer than those of the men.

Authors of obituaries usually described women as good Christians and good mothers. The obituary of Mrs. J. L. Gammel, for example, described her as a "professor of faith" and a "kind old mother" who "thought the world of her children." Often the works of these women, such as being good to the poor, serving their church, or simply attending church get significant coverage in the newspaper obituary. In the September 21, 1905 issue of the *New Albany*

²³⁸ J. R. Baxter, "My Mother" (No. 27) in *Leading Light* (Dallas, Texas: Stamps-Baxter Music Company, 1935).

²³⁹ "Resolution," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, no date 1917. This article was signed by WMU committee members Mrs. D.H. Hall, Mrs. Walter Potts, and Miss Mary A. Babb.

²⁴⁰ "Sister C.A. Pannell Obituary," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 19 October 1905.

(*Mississippi*) *Gazette*, Mrs. J. L. Gammel's obituary included forty-three lines of text. The obituary of Mary Elizabeth Ford demanded over sixty lines in the paper.²⁴¹ In stark contrast, the obituary of Mr. George Lacy covers merely thirteen lines. Reverend C. Wash. Smith conducted the funeral services for both Ford and Lacey, which suggests the two individuals may have attended the same church. It must be noted that some women do not receive the same length as other women. Mrs. Sarah Godard, for example, received a short report of only eleven lines in September 1905. Mrs. Godard's report testified that, "She was a good Christian woman and loved by all who knew her."²⁴² The obituaries of men, however, remain consistently short. Typical comments for men include the deceased's standing in the community and on his citizenship.

Community members came together for religious functions, and in such a way, churches served as a much-needed space for socializing. Opportunities for family members and neighbors to get together were an important social time for a community. At gatherings at the home or during church functions, men and women shared with one another their successes and struggles, and young people began their courtships. Revivals provided a time for those in the community to hear a visiting preacher, sing songs, pray for one another, and cordially fellowship. At the conclusion of the revival, a mass baptism took place at a nearby pond or stream, witnessed by fellow believers. Revivals drew scores of people from neighboring communities.

Between 1900 and 1930, the County Line Missionary Baptist Church held annual protracted meetings during the months of August or September. The protracted meetings were similar to revivals and lasted up to a week. The church baptized between ten and twenty-nine converts each year following the protracted meetings and many more joined from another

²⁴¹ "Died," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 2 November 1905.

²⁴² "Mrs. Sarah Godard Obituary," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 14 September 1905.

church. County Line Church conducted baptisms in either Lee McInturff's pond, located just over one mile away, or in the Blue Bayou creek, located some three miles away.²⁴³ The water level and time of year likely influenced which body of water the preacher used for baptism. The Blue Bayou Creek provided clear running water as opposed to the stagnant water of McInturff's pond. In the late summer months, however, smaller creeks ran dry and forced the newly converted to be submerged in murky ponds.

Schools closed not only during cotton-picking season, but also during religious revivals to allow students to attend services.²⁴⁴ Whole communities participated in revivals, and the devout traveled to nearby communities to attend and fellowship with others. Local businesses closed early or allowed their workers time off to attend revivals. The Nashville Lumber Company, in Howard County, Arkansas, allowed workers off early to attend revival services, and facilitated afternoon meetings on the grounds of the mill in 1910 during a two-week revival led by the Methodist Church.²⁴⁵ Multiple denominations attended the Methodist revival, however. During the meeting, many recommitted themselves to attending church regularly, and newspaper editors commented on how this event affected the whole town, "The spiritual condition of the city is wonderfully improved."²⁴⁶ When the services closed, some 120 revival-goers accepted Christ and joined the church. The success of the revival led the newspaper to call the protracted meeting, "the greatest spiritual awakening in the history of Nashville."²⁴⁷

The church revival continued to be an important part of a community's religious life throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Ruby Tate, born in 1939, remembered the revivals she attended growing up in Union County, Mississippi:

²⁴³ Ferguson, *The Church Called County Line*, 17-18.

²⁴⁴ Fitzgerald to author.

²⁴⁵ "A Hundred Conversions," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 17 September 1910.

²⁴⁶ "A Great Meeting," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 10 September 1910.

²⁴⁷ "120 Additions to Methodist Church," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 21 September 1910.

We had noon, prior noon, service at say 10:30 or 11:00. Then everybody would go home with everybody else. You would just go visit and eat lunch with them. That was a wonderful time too. You would have a lot of singing. People were saved, and they would be rejoicing. I lived through that and that meant a lot to me the rest of my life. [A revival service] started me on a quest to know more about the Bible and know more about your soul and professing your faith in Christ and that kind of thing. It was a good influence.²⁴⁸

Laverne Copeland, born in 1943, remembered that Central Baptist Church in Mineral Springs, Arkansas regularly held revival services two times each year, once in the spring and once in the fall. "That's just the way it was when I grew up; but then they started having [revivals] once per year around the late seventies or early eighties, and now sometimes they skip a year."²⁴⁹

Aside from revivals and protracted meetings, which were normally held at the church building, religious camp meetings offered an opportunity for an intense religious experience. Beginning in Kentucky in the early 1800s, camp style religious meetings began to spread over the western frontier, the South and the northeast. Presbyterians first started such meetings, followed soon after by Baptists and Methodists. Of these three denominations, however, only the Methodists continued to build camps and hold meetings into the twentieth century.²⁵⁰ Camp meetings normally lasted two weeks during the summer when the crops allowed farm families to leave their land unattended. Families from nearby communities pitched tents and heard special evangelists deliver spirit-charged sermons. The services provided a powerful emotional and religious outlet for campers, but the intimate setting also facilitated important social interactions.²⁵¹ Camp organizers arranged buildings in a town-square style in which the

²⁴⁸ Ruby Tate to Andy Fox, Interview, 24 February 2006. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/tate.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

²⁴⁹ Copeland to author.

²⁵⁰ Ellen Weiss, *City in the Woods: The Life and Design of an American Camp Meeting on Martha's Vinyard* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998).

²⁵¹ Susie Powell, "Source Material for Mississippi History : Preliminary Manuscript Union County."

tabernacle served as the center of the camp. Hardwood trees provided shade to the campsite, and revival-goers collected water in pails from springs located near the camp. Because campers placed their tents close together, the after-service activities fostered not only a sense of community but also a sense of family. Brothers and Sisters in Christ enjoyed the tranquility of the wilderness. In the evening hours, as kerosene lanterns illuminated the campground and families spoke quietly with one another after hearing powerful sermons and singing hymns, the peaceful campground possessed a spiritual power that engulfed families in an intense sense of fellowship. At the end of the services, families congregated behind their tents to prepare their meals and eat. Children ran freely; the young courted; and parents mingled.²⁵²

Although church revivals became the most common evangelical exercise by the turn of the century, in southwest Arkansas, two Methodist campsites continued to offer religious services into the twenty-first century. The Ebenezer Camp, began by a group of devout Methodists in 1837, held camp meetings every year on the Friday before the third Sunday in August. Originally located in Center Point, the first county seat of Howard, the camp relocated in 1857 to the location it continues to occupy today. A second southwest Arkansas camp that continues to hold meetings is Camp Davidson, a Methodist camp organized in the 1880s and located near Hollywood and Arkadelphia, Arkansas in Clark County. Camp buildings stand unpainted and weather beaten, just as they have for decades. For many years, Ebenezer Camp held five religious services per day. Camp leaders blew a horn to summon campers to the tabernacle before a service began. W.D. Lee, recalled processions of buggies, wagons and horses that brought so many people to the camp during the Sunday service, that the large tabernacle could hardly hold them all. Singing played an important part of the religious experience. The service began with “highly emotional” songs that “left the congregation in the

²⁵² Weiss, *City in the Woods*, 11-14.

proper attitude for the sermon that followed.” Songs such as “The Way of the Cross Leads Home” brought an emotionally heightened close to the services. Those who fell under conviction approached the altar to received prayers from fellow believers. When a person made a public confession of his or her acceptance of Christ, fellow campers welcomed the new Christian with handshakes, hugs, shouts of jubilee, and more singing.²⁵³ African Americans came to Ebenezer Camp to serve as cooks, but, according to Lee, they often became so excited by the evangelist that they shouted up and down the campgrounds. African-Americans generally remained out from under the tabernacle shed, segregated from white Methodists worshipers. Lee recalled one occasion when an African American woman, overwhelmed by the Spirit, shouted her way under the shed and up to the altar. As reported by Lee, when the woman’s husband scolded her for entering the tabernacle with the white worshipers, she replied, “I recon I’m goin’ to heaven with [the] white folks!”²⁵⁴

Families who participated in camp meetings originally set up tents. As camp attendance became a family tradition, however, some clans constructed permanent structures and the furnishings became more homelike as the years progressed. Permanent wood structures appeared in the mid-1800s.²⁵⁵ At Camp Ebenezer and Camp Davidson, for example, family groups who have traditionally returned to the campsite year after year constructed permanent, cabin-like dwellings, although they refer to the dwellings as “tents.” At Camp Ebenezer, families constructed simple “tents” out of unpainted, rough wood and tin roofs. Ebenezer campers built most of the dwellings in a row-house fashion, as one family simply add on to a neighboring structure. In contrast, campers at Camp Davidson, constructed two-story cabins.

²⁵³ Susie Powell, "Source Material for Mississippi History : Preliminary Manuscript Union County."

²⁵⁴ Loreen Meador Lee, "Old-Time Camp Meeting," *Arkansas Gazette*, 15 August 1943. W.D. Lee died in 1939.

²⁵⁵ Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 146; Weiss, *City in the Woods*, 14.

Some cabins have a “dog trot,” or breezeway to make the summer heat seem more bearable. Camp leaders at Ebenezer added electricity to the camp within the last twenty years. The electricity powers only crude lighting and ceiling fans, however. As worshipers gather under the tabernacle today, many fan themselves by hand, as camp worshipers have done for a hundred years. Others use personal battery-operated fans to cool themselves. Campers continue to use a common outdoor shower. Water for the shower is stored in 55-gallon drums and heated only by the ambient summer temperature.

Families from both camps hand down their permanent “tents” from one generation to another. For many, the camp meeting is a time to reunite with their “camp families.” The shared religious experience in the wilderness forms a bond not only within a family unit but also between campers. Today, approximately one hundred campers attend Camp Ebenezer’s meeting, and four to five-hundred attend the meeting at Camp Davidson.

Despite the continued success of Camp Davidson and Camp Ebenezer in southwest Arkansas, the number of active camps declined during the twentieth century. By the 1930s, town churches constructed sizable buildings that could accommodate a large number of people, and consequently, camp meetings became less necessary. Congregations saw the church revival not only as an opportunity to hold spiritually awakening services but also to present their new facilities to a large audience. In the nineteenth century, religious folk believed that they must sequester themselves in nature in order to absorb fully the spiritual blessing. During the twentieth century, however, religious folk valued the convenience and comforts of a church revival. Ellen Weis, who studied nineteenth and twentieth century camp meetings, explained that camp opponents thought, “Camp meetings were all right when Methodism was new and its

adherents poor and dispersed, but now that the well-to-do population was served by large churches the device ...should be abandoned.”²⁵⁶

Churches provided many opportunities for community members to come together, beyond the revival or camp meeting. Neighboring communities traveled to special all-day singing events. The “singing” service provided an especially light-hearted environment, which appealed to many rural folk. Attendees spent their time in the sanctuary or outside on the church grounds where they sang songs and nurtured communal relationships through religious fellowship. The singing service normally lasted until mid-afternoon. Singers broke for lunch, or “dinner on the grounds,” which the women of the host-church prepared.²⁵⁷

The Ebenezer Methodist Church, located near the Saline-Grant County lines in southwest Arkansas instituted an “Old Folks Singing” service in 1885. The singing marked the dedication of the congregation’s new church building, which replace a previous building that a fire destroyed. The tradition of an “old folks” singing continued for over one hundred years, celebrated every year on the third Sunday in May. Families who moved away from the community treated the singing as a homecoming and returned to reconnect with relatives and friends. Songs came from the *Christian Harmony* songbook. Originally published in 1873, *Christian Harmony* used seven “shaped notes,” which assigned a special shaped character to a particular tone in the scale.²⁵⁸ This allowed a singer to participate with only a basic knowledge of how to read music. Parents valued the ability to read music, even if only with shape-notes,

²⁵⁶ Weiss, *City in the Woods*, 8.

²⁵⁷ Juanita Murphree to Andrew Tillman, Interview, 9 November 2005. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/murphree.html (accessed 26 July 2008); Susie Powell, "Source Material for Mississippi History : Preliminary Manuscript Union County."

²⁵⁸ Mike Trimble, "Shall We Gather..." *Arkansas Gazette*, 28 May 1978. Another popular songbook is *Sacred Harp*, which uses only four shaped notes.

and they sent their children to “singing schools” to learn how to read such notation and sing. Singing schools normally lasted two weeks and taught the rudiments of music.

Ruby Tate, born in Union County, Mississippi in 1932, attended singing schools in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Tate explained, “Back in the late thirties, most anybody that knew a little music could develop a singing school in a community. We paid a nominal amount of money.... Maybe there would be twenty-five or thirty kids, it got to be kind of a social thing.”²⁵⁹ Mable Downs, born in 1917, also attended singing schools in Union County, “Sometimes we would [get] up in the morning and stay [at the singing school] until the evening. We would take us a bite of lunch, and we had a good time.”²⁶⁰

Ruby Tate described her experience at the singing school in Union County, “[The songbook we used] had all these little instructions in it. It was just the beginning of elementary music. At the end of [the school,] they would have a big singing, and we would all get up and lead. They showed us how to direct. It was a wonderful chance for kids to learn a little bit about singing church music especially.” The socialization experienced by children prepared them not only for church singing, but also for singing with family members and neighbors, an important interaction that reinforced the bonds of community.

Rather than teaching music students to read the notes A through G, shaped notes assigned a note to a particular shape. As students read their music, they did not worry about where a note was located on the staff; instead, they recognized a particular shape, such as such as a triangle or a square, to represent a particular note on the scale. Ruby Tate explained, “Each note on that scale had a different shape, and in the songbooks we had were shaped notes. If you got on the right home note, you knew your scale.”

²⁵⁹ Tate to Fox.

²⁶⁰ Downs to Interview, website (accessed

Juanita Murphree, of Union County, Mississippi, learned to read shaped notes at a singing school. Born in 1923, she constructed a mnemonic device using common imagery of rural farm life to associate with each particular shaped note. She explained: “*Do* was like a chicken coop, closed at the bottom. *Ra* was kind of like a pot, and *Mi* was like a little diamond. ...*Ti* was like an ice cream [cone].”²⁶¹

The remaining shapes and notes were as follows: an inverted right triangle represented *Fa*; a circle represented *Sol*; and a square represented *La*. A second type of shape-note singing utilized only four notes, often called “Sacred Harp.” The four-note method used only the notes of *Fa*, *Sol*, *La* and *Mi*. Juanita Murphree remembered singing the additional notes of *Do*, *Ra*, and *Ti*; therefore, she learned to sing using the seven-note method. In Sacred Harp singing, the shapes represented the same notes. Intended only to be performed *a cappella*, Sacred Harp differed from the standard seven-note variety, which could be performed with or without a musical instrument.²⁶²

Sacred Harp singers traditionally arranged themselves in four groups: bass, tenor, alto, or treble. The four groups faced inwards towards one another and left a hollow square in the center for a song leader. Both men and women sang tenor and treble parts, so the groups were not gender specific. The basses sit in a group on one side and in clockwise order were the altos, trebles, and tenors.²⁶³ Once the groups took their places, the service opened with a prayer, and then the singing commenced. Before singing any words of a song, the groups sang the notes of *Fa*, *Sol*, *La*, or *Mi*, which rendered a dissonant sound throughout the first two or three measures. Keeping time as directed by the song leader, the groups then seamlessly returned to the beginning of the song and sang according to the notation. The position of song leader rotated

²⁶¹ Murfree to Tillman.

²⁶² "Singing from the Social Harp, Program Notes," ed. University of Georgia (Athens, Georgia: 1974).

²⁶³ Ibid.

and gave every participant an opportunity to call-out his or her favorite song. After a song or two, a new song leader took over. At lunchtime, the singers broke for dinner on the grounds and reconvene shortly after. Before the meeting closes, participants hold a short memorial for those who passed away in the last year. Meetings always opened and closed with a prayer.²⁶⁴ One commonality that both four-note and seven-note singing conventions shared was the keeping of detailed records of who attended, who led the music, and which songs the singers sang.

Religious songs, singing conventions, and singing schools were commonplace in the early 1900s. The Union County Singing Convention formed in 1911 to promote “better singing” in churches, Sunday schools, and in homes. Organizers held singing conventions twice per year in Union County during the months of May and September. Different communities held the convention meetings, and people from the surrounding area took advantage of the opportunity to fellowship together.²⁶⁵

In 1937, Joe Pannell, of New Albany, Mississippi, noticed that the number of singing schools in Union County started to decline in the 1930s.²⁶⁶ In Howard County, Arkansas, Laverne Copeland attended a singing school in Midway, Arkansas during the late 1940s and noted that such schools became increasingly rare. School music programs, which became available in consolidated public schools during the 1950s, lessened need for a two-week singing school in rural communities.²⁶⁷ Melba Bounds, of Howard County noted, however, that since the 1990s, a revival of music schools developed in the South. A local authority on shape notes,

²⁶⁴ For an example of traditional shape note singing, see United Sacred Harp Musical Association, *In Sweetest Union* (Community Music School), Audio Recording. This 2-CD set records the total proceedings of the United Sacred Harp Musical Association’s 110th session, held September 11-12, 1999 at Liberty Church in Henagar, Alabama. Alan Lomax recorded the same musical association’s meeting in 1959. On the 1999 recording, one can hear the opening and closing prayers, lamentations of participants, and calling out of many hymns. I was fortunate to experience a shape note singing, and lunch on the grounds, in Mississippi in 2007. I describe the characteristic sound of the music as a thrilling dirge.

²⁶⁵ Susie Powell, "Source Material for Mississippi History : Preliminary Manuscript Union County."

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Copeland to author.

Bounds worked for several publishers of shape-note songbooks, where she transcribed music written in traditional musical notation into shape-notes. Bounds traveled to local churches and others in the Ark-La-Tex area to attend singing conventions. In the fall of 2009, she organized the National Singing Convention, held at the First Baptist Church in Nashville, Arkansas. Some singing groups came to the convention from far away as South Carolina.²⁶⁸

Without question, some congregations met for a singing service without the formal protocols of a singing convention. Churchgoers enjoyed fellowship, and through the singing service, each person participated directly. Church members enjoyed the spiritual uplift they received from singing together. As their voices harmonized, so did the congregation. Church music could “prick the heart,” and make a person ready to hear the word of God, according to Melba Bounds.²⁶⁹

The very hymns sung in church or in the home provided a simple way for laymen to consume theology. Hymns such as “Jesus Paid it All,” “At the Cross,” and “He Died for Me” taught deep meanings in Christ’s atonement. “Bringing in the Sheaves,” “Christ for the World We Sing,” “Tell it Again,” and “Rescue the Perishing” emphasized missions. During invitations, congregations beckoned the sinner to accept Jesus with hymns such as, “I Surrender All,” “Come, Sinner, Come,” and “Come Home.”²⁷⁰

Hymns, by the turn of the twentieth century, took on a softer tone in comparison to those of the eighteenth century. Ann Douglas, who wrote *The Feminization of American Culture*, found that hymns of the mid nineteenth century began to ignore hell and highlight heaven.

²⁶⁸ Melba Hutson Bounds to author, Interview, 20 July 2010. Recording in possession of author.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Selected hymns taken from the *Broadman Hymnal* and *Heavenly Highway Hymns*. McKinney, ed. *The Broadman Hymnal*; Luther G. Presley, ed. *Heavenly Highway Hymns* (Dallas, Texas: Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company, 1956). The *Broadman Hymnal* is often used in Southern Baptist churches, and the *Heavenly Highways* is often used in Missionary Baptist churches.

Douglas cites the example of an early hymn written by Samuel Davies in 1758, which read, “In vain for mercy now they cry; In lakes of liquid fire they lie.” Largely due to the influence of Victorian era sentimentalism, and benefitting from an increased number of women writers, newer hymn writers produced a more emotionally uplifting type of hymn. By the late nineteenth century, “More and more Protestants were singing more and more hymns written by Unitarians, like minded Congregationalists, and women.” One hundred years after Samuel Davies wrote his frightening hymn about sinners burning in hell, Fanny Crosby, a blind poet and hymn writer, wrote:

We are going, we are going
To a home beyond the skies,
Where the fields are robed in beauty,
And the sunlight never dies.²⁷¹

Hymns at the turn of the twentieth century stressed the concept of a heavenly “home,” and families sang these hymns together. Neighbors visited one another during the evening hours, and as they gathered on the porches, they sang favorite hymns. Libby Savely, of New Albany, Mississippi, recalled a time before television in which people gathered on the large porch of her family’s home and sang her favorite hymns, “We Shall Gather at the River,” “In the Sweet By and By,” and “On the Jericho Road.”²⁷² Earline McCord explained that she was not saved at church but on the porch listening to Cecil Carter’s gospel music on the radio. Carter’s musical group, The New Albany Quartet, sang music on radio station WELO in Tupelo in the mid-1940s. The power of Carter’s music moved McCord to accept Christ. “I was out on the front porch, and he was singing [over the radio.] I was saved by that song. ...I didn’t ever tell Mr. Cecil about me being saved while he was singing. That would have done him so much good. But I just

²⁷¹ Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1977), 219-220.

²⁷² Libby Savely, "Family Memories," in *Memories of Mississippi* (University, Mississippi: University of Mississippi, 1994), 181.

didn't ever tell him."²⁷³ Born in 1905, Cecil Carter lived in Union County, where he dedicated his life to music. He attended Normal Training in music in Nashville, and Chattanooga, Tennessee, and later in Dallas, Texas. Well known for his musical ability, Carter conducted a number of singing schools in Union County during the 1930s, sang at church revivals, and served as choir director. During a single year, Carter sang for sixty-five funerals.²⁷⁴

Churchgoers carried music with them wherever they went. They privately sang hymns while working and joined with family members or neighbors during social events. Fraternal organizations, social clubs, and even midwife clubs began meetings by singing hymns and offering prayers for protection of mother and child.²⁷⁵ Rural folk sang hymns not only for entertainment but also for solace. Rural people experienced many painful moments and hardships that seemed impossible to overcome. Mothers gave birth to stillborn children; men, women and children suffered injuries and illnesses; storms blew down houses and barns; droughts destroyed crops; expensive farm animals, such as a dairy cow, plow mule, or horse, died. During extreme moments of hardship, rural folk sang hymns as they tried and make sense of things when it appeared their world was falling apart. Verses like "Not a shadow can rise, Not a cloud in the skies... Not a doubt nor a fear, Not a sigh nor a tear, Can abide while we trust and obey," appropriate hymns could be recalled for a particular moment of spiritual need. In times when a person felt unable to make sense of his or her circumstances, the verses of "Have Thine Own Way, Lord!" likely came to mind, "Wounded and weary, help me, I pray. Power all power surely is Thine! Touch me and heal me, Savior divine!"²⁷⁶ Hymns reassured the believer that

²⁷³ McCord to author. Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 - Population Schedule, ed. United States of America.

²⁷⁴ Frances Dunlap, "Carter-Skinner," in *Union County History* (Dallas, Texas: Curtis Media Corporation, 1990).

²⁷⁵ L. Lane Noel, "Midwives of Mississippi." University of Mississippi, 2006, 19.

²⁷⁶ Adelaide A. Pollard, "Have Thine Own Way, Lord!" (No. 254) in *The Broadman Hymnal* (Nashville, Tennessee: The Broadman Press, 1940); Reverend J. H. Sammis, "Trust and Obey" (No. 48) in *Gospel Songs and Hymns* (Fort Worth, Texas: Will W. Slater Publishing, 1944).

despite all difficulties, God remained constant and in control. In many ways, hymns had a longer presence with a person than a strong sermon. Even the most devout churchgoer did not repeat a sermon over and over in his or her head or aloud with friends. Hymns synthesized Biblical scriptures; their tunes made the messages easy to remember. The repeated singing of hymns ensured that theological messages became engrained in an individual's psyche and collectively in the psyche of the community.

Rad Reed wrote of Houlka, Mississippi, "In Sunday school work and prayer meetings the churches are doing a great good in the development of the younger minds of the town, and much better harmony seems to have crept in with excellent results."²⁷⁷ Church congregations concerned themselves with the moral and physical health of church members and, by extension, the community. Churchmen, and especially churchwomen, reported violations of community values, and church leaders disciplined trespassers. Margaret Rutherford Ledbetter of Union County, Mississippi, recalled that the church put her step-mother out because the step-mother physically abused her step-children.²⁷⁸ Many offenses drew the attention of the church. In a study of the County Line Missionary Baptist's church records, John F. Ferguson found that the church commonly took action against members for fornication, and dancing, although a more generic offense of "unchristian conduct" also snared members. The most common offense was that of heresy, in which a member defected and joined a different denomination.²⁷⁹ To discipline a person for heresy had little effect, however, because that person already desired to join a different church. Most likely, church leaders took such actions to prevent other members of their flock from wandering astray. Church discipline began a steady decline in 1900. In a last gasp at church discipline, the County Line Missionary Baptist Church held a "special

²⁷⁷ Reed, *Houlka*, 21.

²⁷⁸ Ledbetter to Interview, website (accessed

²⁷⁹ Ferguson, *The Church Called County Line*, 23.

conference” designed by church leaders to “discipline the church” in June of 1920. Church leaders placed ads in the local newspaper, which requested all members of the congregation to attend the conference. Church leaders brought charges against members for a range of offenses such as having two living wives or husbands, use of profane language, and playing a violin for a dance, among others. At the end of the conference, church officials removed some of the accused from fellowship, but required others simply to make a public confession and apology. A lack of evidence forced church officials to drop many charges.²⁸⁰ Given the buildup that led to the conference to discipline the church, the ending seemed anti-climatic. The remaining few examples of County Line Missionary Baptist Church’s discipline cases resulted from heresy, which demonstrated little power over the accused who already denounced their church membership in favor of a different church.

The declination in church discipline at the turn of the twentieth century may be attributed to the fact that its effectiveness had waned due to increased mobility of church members between the 1930s and 1950s. This allowed disciplined church members to join another congregation in a nearby community. Several studies attribute stronger law enforcements and the influence of cultural elements to this effect.²⁸¹ The seductive pull of modernity cannot always explain why rural, isolated congregations used church discipline less in the early 1900s than ever before. Rural church members in the mid to late 1800s attended the only church in their community. The threat that a person may be placed outside the fellowship would mean that he or she could no longer attend church, which could have eternal consequences. By the 1930s, however, increased mobility of churchgoers, brought by improved roads and the automobile, along with

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 23-24.

²⁸¹ Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 169; Ted Ownby, "Mass Culture, Upper-Class Culture, and the Decline of Church Discipline in the Evangelical South: The 1910 Case of the Godbold Mineral Well Hotel," *Religion and American Culture* 4, no. 1 (1994): 117, 126.

the greater availability of religious congregations to join, muted the threat of excommunication. Rad Reed explained that in Houlika, Mississippi the only church in the community was the Presbyterian Church in 1875. Locals who wished to attend church, therefore, had only one option. When church leaders threatened to put someone outside the congregation, the threat was very effective because there was no other place to go. By 1915, however, the families who lived in and around Houlika had four different churches to choose from due to denominational evangelism and church building from congregations in surrounding areas. These four churches in Houlika competed with one another for members within the small pool of people in the community.

For years in New Harmony, Mississippi, likewise, the only church that served the community was a Presbyterian Church. It was not until May 16, 1897 that a group met for organizing a Baptist congregation, which became the New Harmony Baptist Church. The new church held a protracted meeting and within four months had fifty-four members. The following summer, New Harmony Baptist had ninety-two members. During its very early years, New Harmony Baptist withdrew fellowship from members for swearing, drunkenness, fighting, dancing, and adultery. The accused member could rejoin the congregation after he or she duly acknowledged the trespass and asked the church to forgive the sin. In 1908, the congregation attempted to address the problem of men not attending services, a significant problem faced by many congregations. New Harmony Baptist adopted a resolution that any man who failed to attend church services for three months without giving a reasonable excuse would be discontinued as a member. The resolution lasted less than three years and was rescinded in October of 1911.²⁸² The policy likely led to the dismissal of too many male members. Because

²⁸² Dale Rakestraw, "New Harmony Baptist Church 100th Anniversary, May 1897-1997." 18 May 1997, copy in possession of author.

men committed themselves less to church attendance, the policy only made male absenteeism permanent. Further, the wives and children of the excluded men likely resigned from the church as well and sought another, less strict congregation in the area. In such a way, certain members of the congregation used what anthropologist James C. Scott would recognize as a “weapon of the weak.”²⁸³ The threat of moving membership could be used as leverage against church discipline and ultimately force a negotiation of a particularly strict policy into a relatively softer policy. Because of the growing religious market and the competition between churches over members, this negotiation tool could be used more effectively in the early 1900s than at any previous time.

Churches in a community all agreed on certain moral standards and found drunkenness, gambling, and adultery offensive. But churches differed on how to treat members guilty of violating the moral standards.²⁸⁴ The overwhelming majority of church discipline cases involved men. In Ted Ownby’s study of ninety-seven white evangelical churches between 1866 and 1915, the gender divide in church discipline stands out. Ownby calculated that churches brought charges against men five times more often than women. Further, almost seventy percent involved what Ownby called the “sins of masculine aggressiveness,” which included drinking, gambling, fighting, and profanity.²⁸⁵ New Harmony Baptist Church records reflect mixed emotions in the community about a newly established Baptist church.²⁸⁶ As newly established churches sought members, they accepted those who defected from a different congregation. A

²⁸³ See James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak : Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

²⁸⁴ Keith, *Country People in the New South : Tennessee's Upper Cumberland*, 51.

²⁸⁵ Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 134-135. See especially Table 7.1, "Disciplinary Charges for 97 Evangelical Churches, 1866-1915. Men were involved in 99.4% of all drinking charges, 89.4% of all recreational offenses, such as gambling and fighting, and 83.5% of all moral offenses. The closest subcategory between men and women was dancing, in which men were charged 57.4% and in Sexual and family offenses, in which men were charged only 40.4% of the time. In all other categories, men made up at least 75% of the charges.

²⁸⁶ Rakestraw, "New Harmony Baptist."

strict policy on male attendance yielded transient congregation members. Although the church leaders sought to bring members back in line, other churches in the area were in competition with one another. If a church removed a member, he or she could find another congregation willing to welcome him or her into fellowship. This competition led not to increased discipline policies but conciliatory policies that could be bent or overlooked out of Christian forgiveness and, importantly, congregational harmony and growth. This explains why the County Line Missionary Baptist Church's conference to discipline the church had such a weak ending.

Jeanette Keith found that at the Pleasant Grove Methodist Church of Putnam County, Tennessee, two people charged with immoral conduct actually requested that their names be taken off the membership list.²⁸⁷ In Ted Ownby's study of Summit Baptist Church in Summit, Mississippi, some churchmen requested that church leaders bring charges against them for operating a dance hall. In the same case, a couple charged with dancing learned that they had been removed from fellowship and literally joined together and danced their way out of the church building.²⁸⁸ Most likely, the couple continued to go to dances and continued to go to church – albeit at a *different* church. This does not suggest that churches became powerless to reinforce moral standards, but it does demonstrate that churches needed to utilize pressures other than church discipline.

Even the more rigid Pentecostals sects adjusted their standards of holiness. David Harrell found that between the 1920s and 1930s, Pentecostals accommodated the times, relaxed certain policies, and allowed members to join labor unions, grow tobacco and wear inexpensive wedding rings. Pentecostals took seriously any potential threat to individual spirituality. The sect condemned dance halls, circuses, and moving picture shows in the early 1920s.²⁸⁹ As late as the 1980s, the Delight First Assembly of God in Pike County, Arkansas, continued to require

²⁸⁷ Keith, *Country People in the New South : Tennessee's Upper Cumberland*, 51.

²⁸⁸ Ownby, "Decline of Church Discipline in the Evangelical South," 111.

²⁸⁹ David Edwin Harrell, "Religious Pluralism," 78-79.

members to sign a pledge not to go to the movie theater. The closest theater was located thirty miles away in Howard County. Members at the Delight Assembly were not likely to be expelled from the congregation for going to the 7 o'clock movie on a Saturday night. However, it was very likely that statements against such transgressions would be directed their way from the pulpit, at 11 o'clock Sunday morning. After her teenage daughters complained of being "preached at" and ridiculed during the sermon over their wearing makeup and pants in 1984, Katie Humphry moved her family to the Crossroads Assembly of God. The congregation at Crossroads proved more open minded about women wearing pants and getting their hair cut.

Some men who came to church on Sundays appear to have been motivated as much out of a desire to fraternize as a desire to repent. In small, rural churches, courteous men relinquished their seats for women. Men often congregated and remained outside the church building during the services, where they had the option of listening through an open window or door, or talking amongst themselves a short distance away. The congregation of men outside the church provided considerable liberation; men could enjoy a smoke or cud of tobacco without disapproving glances from the pious. If they slipped and spoke a curse word, the native tongue of manhood, their fellow brothers would offer immediate forgiveness. Without question, the women inside the church knew what transpired among the men outside the church. In some instances, women usurped chivalry and offered their seats to the men, so they might benefit from the sermon. The *Nashville (Arkansas) News* reported on the "determination" of women to get the men of the community to attend a revival service and sit *inside* the church building:

The men of Nashville and vicinity are especially invited to attend the services. They may rest assured that there will always be room in the building for them, as the good women of the town have resolved that no man shall be turned away for want of a seat. Several days since the ladies adopted the plan of remaining outside until all the men are seated, and nothing will alter their determination.²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ "A Hundred Conversions."

Church attendance, even if sporadic, reinforced feelings of mutual responsibility among churchgoers. Congregants prayed over and laid hands on the infirmed. Church members came together to mourn the loss of a fellow congregant. The church bell normally rang on Sundays as a call to worship, but the bell also summoned the community to the church in an emergency. In the case of a death, men and women assembled and organized gender-specific tasks. Women prepared the body for burial, cooked food for the family, and volunteered to help with chores while the family was in mourning. Women cleansed the body, washed the hair, dressed the body and applied makeup.²⁹¹ Men soon began the laborious task of hand-digging a grave in the cemetery. Freddy Stone, a long-time funeral director for Union County, Mississippi explained:

Right out here, at the Pleasant Ridge Church, out in the community, there is a great big old bell out in the cemetery. If you have a funeral for someone to be buried in the cemetery, you run out there, take your tents, blocks, and what-not and you rang that bell. The farmers would come out ...to see what you were ringing that bell about. You would tell them we are going to bury Mrs. Jones right here and showed them the family plot.²⁹²

Using pick axes and shovels, men worked together to chop and pull the occasional tree root from the ground, crack their way past rocks, and shovel through dense, packed clay to arrive at the proper depth of a grave. “The hardest grave I ever saw dug in my life was dug in Pleasant Ridge,” recalled Stone. “There was a gravel road going around [the cemetery.] Then, they changed the highway. [The church] took the gravel road as an extension to the cemetery. You should have seen them trying to dig a grave in that gravel road.” In the early years, men had no option other than to dig graves by hand. Motivation for such labor came not only from necessity, but also for a commitment to the deceased. It would be easy for a man to simply ignore the duty and leave it to others to complete. “Out of with respect for their neighbor, [men] dug the grave and stuck around and filled it up [after the funeral service.] Those people out in the county were

²⁹¹ Fitzgerald to author; Ledbetter to Payne; Stone to author.

²⁹² Stone to author.

real good to do things.”²⁹³ Alger Harrison, of Howard County, Arkansas, remembered a time when churchmen dug graves by hand. Harrison, a lifelong member of the County Line Missionary Baptist Church, was in charge of the cemetery for several decades. Harrison often lamented to the younger men in the church about the passing of hand-dug graves. Although the church no longer needed them, Harrison kept the church’s worn-out picks and shovels stored safely under the church building. When Harrison died in 2005, the men of the church saw it fitting to hand-dig his grave. These men knew that the church cemetery was located on a gravel hill and such would entail hours of hard work. As the men dug through the night, their conversations likely mirrored those of generations past who labored through the same gravel out of respect for their brothers in Christ. The very nature of such a work was therapeutic; it brought the men close to one another, and demonstrated a profound reverence for the life of a fellow Christian.²⁹⁴ Alger Harrison and Freddy Stone saw the labor of hand digging the grave as an important gesture of respect. This sentiment began to change by the 1940s when men in the towns paid to have graves dug and filled. Stone explained that the pallbearers “would get tired of getting their shoes muddy. It would cost 15 dollars to dig a grave and 5 dollars to fill it around 1938. Now [in 2006] they charge 250 dollars, and they dig it with a machine.”²⁹⁵

When a member of the community died, churchwomen began preparing food items for the family of the deceased. Such efforts relieved the family, especially the wife, of the large duty of feeding the family, thus allowing time to grieve. As women matured, and continued the tradition of bring food, each became known in her community for her special dish. Folks around Union County, Mississippi, for example, knew Edna Miller because of her delicious pecan pies.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Following Alger Harrison’s death, the County Line church created a permanent display of the old picks and shovels used to dig graves by hand before the 1950s.

²⁹⁵ Stone to author.

When she was older and had a deep-freezer, Miller cooked several of her, “Dead Man’s Pies” at a time and froze them until needed.²⁹⁶ The tradition of bringing home-cooked dishes has changed in recent years, however, in favor of convenience. Since the 1990s, some younger churchwomen have opted to bring pre-prepared food items purchased at local stores. While younger churchwomen continue to bring food items to comfort the grieving family, many of the older generation openly feel that the younger generation is taking the easy way out. While a store-bought pie may taste just as good, it does not mean the same thing, especially to other (older) women. “Well, when they get off work,” explained Laverne Copeland of Nashville, Arkansas, “they just zip in and out of the store and show up with a dish in a disposable container.”²⁹⁷ The labor that went into the dish was more important than the dish itself. The physical works of women preparing food or men digging graves were special gestures. Older churchgoers lament the passing of such traditions.

Church spaces were gendered spaces. Elizabeth Hayes Turner found that in Galveston, Texas, women feminized church buildings as they purchased stained glass windows, fine art, or woodcarvings in memoriam.²⁹⁸ But in rural, country churches, very few buildings benefitted from such feminine embellishments, such as fine art or expensive stain glass windows. Still, women found a way to bring beauty into the church building if only by the use of fresh cut flowers. Born in 1909 and raised in Union County, Edna Miller grew flowers since she was “big enough” to raise a garden. She cut flowers and created arrangements every Sunday. Her flower garden consisted of multiple flowers that bloomed at different times of the year, and she used her own creativity to design arrangements that included a variety of specimens. Miller laughed as

²⁹⁶ Miller to Interview,

²⁹⁷ Copeland to author.

²⁹⁸ Elizabeth Hayes Turner, *Women, Culture, and Community : Religion and Reform in Galveston, 1880-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 40-54.

she recalled the interest other women took in her Sunday creations, “Now you would be surprised at what I used. I used everything. See, I was one of these homemakers and we used everything. We didn’t throw away anything. [The churchwomen would] say ‘wait, I want to see what you got in the flower arrangement today.’”²⁹⁹

Men led the churches, however, women served in minor leadership roles. Edna Miller explained her official role in her church, “Now I was the secretary of Sunday school, I ordered literature, I prepared communion on communion days, and just done whatever there was to do.”³⁰⁰ The most common place to find a woman in a leadership role was in Sunday school, but there were limits as to whom she could teach. Women taught children’s Sunday school classes but not adult classes. The reason churches allowed women to teach, as long as they taught children, came from the way male church leaders conceptualized motherhood. Ann Douglas noted that during the nineteenth century, women who taught in public schools began to outnumber men. Americans in the mid to late 1800s increasingly subscribed to the “cult of motherhood” and believed that American society benefitted from the influence of mothers. Douglass explained, “grade-school teaching appeared a mere step away from cribside duty.”³⁰¹ The logic followed that women were also best suited to teach children in Sunday school. The arrangement of women teaching children pacified women by allowing them a position in the church although it denied them equal footing with men. This conveniently relieved the men of the church from such duties, and denied women equality in the church house. Dale Rakestraw, of New Harmony, Mississippi, expressed pride in being a Sunday school teacher for many years

²⁹⁹ Miller to Tillman.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, 76.

at the New Harmony Baptist Church but commented that she did not know why she could not teach adults.³⁰²

Many of the duties women performed in churches centered around the image of motherhood. Ann Holmes, of New Albany, Mississippi remembered her mother attending the Missionary Society. When Holmes grew up, she continued to participate and considered the work of women to be the “backbone of the church.” Holmes continued, “Whether Paul believed it or not, women are so important in the church. We are responsible for Board’s suppers, getting the food together for the administrative boards. We are mission-minded, and we do studies.”³⁰³

Women organized and contributed to special church events. Women commonly orchestrated decoration days and homecomings, in which community members gathered to clean the church and cemetery grounds. During such special events, women dominated the day’s program. At the May decoration day at Liberty Baptist Church in Howard County, Arkansas, for example, the names of only two men appeared on the program. The names of sixteen women, in contrast, appear for a number of assignments from songs to recitations.³⁰⁴ Many other women contributed, although their names could not be found in the newspaper. When community members gathered at the church building for a social, women brought food dishes. Women cooked for many special services held at church. During revivals that lasted two weeks, or more in some cases, women prepared food for every service. Many revivals held two services per day, and women cooked for every meal. For singing services, homecomings or decoration days, the responsibility to feed the masses fell upon the women. Considerable pressure came with cooking church meals. Women judged one another on a range of domestic duties, from how they hung their laundry, to the meals they brought to church socials. The responsibility to “feed the

³⁰² Rakestraw to Interview, website (accessed

³⁰³ Holmes to Tillman.

³⁰⁴ "Decoration Day," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 17 April 1920.

preacher” fell upon the woman’s shoulders as well. After church services, a man, be him a deacon or layman, often cordially invited the preacher home for lunch. Such an invitation placed the bulk of the work on the woman of the household, however. The husband and the preacher visited while the wife labored to prepare plates for her family and a hungry preacher. A preacher who had a small family, of course, effectively doubled the work of the wife. Additional biscuits or cornbread needed to be prepared, an additional chicken may need to be killed, plucked, and cooked.³⁰⁵

The sheer number of women in the church made them a powerful force, which a preacher had to reckon with. Churchwomen used their cooking skills to generate funds for the church. Church socials doubled as fund-raisers for many local congregations. Women volunteered to cook copious amounts of food items for the socials with the expectation that the public would pay to eat the vittles. After a particular church social failed to draw the expected attendance and a lack of revenues became obvious, the *Nashville (Arkansas) News* ran a snippy editorial, “Most men can pay two or three dollars for a hotel meal and not bat an eye, but it pulls like the devil to cough up fifty cents for a good home-cooked supper at a church social.”³⁰⁶ Despite the occasional low-turnout, women contributed fantastically to their churches by the selling of their food items. Robbie Ray of Union County, Mississippi, for example, cooked over ten-thousand of her special pound cakes for the Methodist Church in New Albany. In one week alone, she baked 113 cakes. During a twenty-year period, she raised \$100,000 for the church’s youth program, which the youth used to go on mission trips.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ McCord to author; Fitzgerald to Interview, website (accessed

³⁰⁶ "Editorials," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 3 July 1920.

³⁰⁷ Robbie Ray to Elizabeth Payne, Interview, 8 September 2005. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/ray.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

The work of churchwomen played a crucial role in broadening the role of the church, moving from the private sanctuary to the public sphere. They served on church committees and, through local missions work, helped community people in need. Church women joined together and created their own autonomous clubs and organizations within their churches to circumvent male leadership. They went beyond the church walls to organize temperance lectures and cultural events. Rural women committed themselves to the betterment of their local schools. They formed school improvement and parent associations and conducted health inspections and demonstrations.

National organizations realized the potential of rural churches and wanted to reform the institutions in rural areas in order to make the church's effectiveness in the public sphere more efficient. By the turn of the twentieth century, government commissions, sociologists, and national religious associations began studies of rural churches, motivated by a fear of a declining rural America. The examination of rural cultures resulted in a number of conferences, books, and initiatives, of which rural schools and churches garnered the majority of attention. President Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission considered rural churches "fundamentally a necessary institution in country life." The commission considered the rural church in a unique position of opportunity to "reorganize" rural life. By teaching rural sociology in colleges and seminaries, the Country Life Commission believed that specially trained preachers could benefit rural folk.³⁰⁸ Over the next two decades, studies on rural churches proliferated, and social reformers concluded that interdenominational cooperation was a necessity. These reformers,

³⁰⁸ J. Wayne Flynt, "Feeding the Hungry and Ministering to the Broken Hearted': The Presbyterian Church in the United States and the Social Gospel, 1900-1920," in *Religion in the South*, ed. Charles Reagan Wilson (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 102; L. H. Bailey, *Report of the Country Life Commission*. 61; Madison, "Reformers and the Rural Church, 1900-1950," 645-647.

however, “tended to instruct rather than listen to the people they so wanted to help.”³⁰⁹ The report of the Country Life Commission, for example, stated, “There are too many churches in a given community. Sectarian ideas divide unduly and unfortunately.”³¹⁰ In short, reformers considered rural communities to be “overchurched.”

To correct the problem of “overchurching,” liberal reformers sought to restrain denominational evangelism and rivalry, especially in home missions.³¹¹ The notion that rural churches should “restrain” their efforts of evangelism, stood counter to the very purpose of the rural church. At that point, all reasoning of the liberal reformers became moot to rural churchgoers. Although reformers sought interdenominational cooperation, the fact that local churches had challenged one another to debates that emphasized doctrinal differences, not common ground, made any such effort particularly difficult if not impossible.

Outside reformers advocated the loss of two vital institutions in rural communities, the churches and the schools. School consolidation efforts in both Mississippi and Arkansas threatened a loss of identity among the small communities. In truth, school consolidation was more ominous because the locals could not fight the state. Country folk ultimately watched their schools dissolve and reconstitute in alchemy of communities directed by county superintendents and state officials. Women in larger towns continued to influence their now larger school districts, just as they had before; but established social circles excluded country women from assuming the same level of influence.

The state played no role in regulating the churches, and the national religious associations possessed no real power to consolidate congregations. Thus, in the rural countryside, the first blow to a loss of identity came with the closing of the country schools. The local church,

³⁰⁹ Madison, "Reformers and the Rural Church, 1900-1950," 646.

³¹⁰ L. H. Bailey, *Report of the Country Life Commission*. 61.

³¹¹ Madison, "Reformers and the Rural Church, 1900-1950," 650.

supported by local people, could not be threatened by anyone other than the local people themselves. As historian James H. Madison wrote, “The rural church reformers encountered strong resistance as many rural Americans refused to accept their diagnoses or their proposed remedies.”³¹² The notion that too many churches existed in their communities seemed particularly offensive to women, especially given their commitments to their own churches. As demonstrated by other studies of southern churched women, women gained satisfaction and respectability through their church work.³¹³

Seeking to promote a social gospel in the rural areas of the country, religious reformers held conferences to bring rural ministers on board. The Interchurch World Movement, for example, held a conference in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1920. Reverend J. H. Cummins, the pastor of the Methodist Church in Nashville, Arkansas, attended along with over six-hundred other preachers from different denominations around the state. At the conference, Cummins learned the results of the Interchurch Movement’s surveys and desires of ecumenical progressiveness to prevent “overlapping of work and waste of energy and funds.” According to the *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, a meeting between local churches, which would include the preachers, laymen, and laywomen, would be held later to discuss the goals of the Interchurch World Movement’s strategy.³¹⁴ The Committee on Social and Religious Surveys, an outgrowth of the Interchurch World Movement, expressed the general findings and stratagem of the religious reformers:

Overchurching in the South has about it something of the unusual in that competition between churches in an average community there is confined to fewer denominations than would be the case in some other parts of the country. There are too many instances of church competition within the same denomination whose churches struggle in

³¹² Ibid.: 247.

³¹³ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Turner, *Women, Culture, and Community*.

³¹⁴ "Interchurch Plan Outlined at Meeting of Arkansas Pastors," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 20 March 1920.

communities too small to maintain them. If, however, it should be possible in a number of communities to consolidate churches, especially of the same denomination, there is no doubt that, with adequate education, a program of evangelization, worship and service could be worked out under resident leadership which might become self-supporting and greatly increase evangelization in those communities. This is something to look forward to, and something which population movements are forcing upon the southern church.³¹⁵

The primary obstacle to an efficient administration of the social gospel was that there were too many churches, none of which was willing to work together. Not only would denominations not work together, but class tensions prevented cooperation within denominations. Reverend Cummins returned home, eager to begin the work of reforming the local religious landscape. The newspaper, however, never covered any meetings between Howard County's churches, presumably because individual churches objected to any plan of reform that questioned their effectiveness or threatened their very existence.

Reverend Cummins led one of the largest congregations in the county, and developed plans for a \$50,000 church building, thus, class identity sprung into the consciousness of Howard County's rural religious folk.³¹⁶ In Nashville, Arkansas, the town's elite attended either the large First Baptist Church or the city's Methodist church; the poorer folks in the countryside attended small churches like Temperanceville Baptist, Shiloh Baptist, or Wakefield Methodist.

Business and social leaders tended to belong to one particular church in the towns.³¹⁷ As the Baptist and Methodists tended to dominate the religious landscape in rural towns, the chances were good that the town's elite attended one or the other. In theory, the church acted as an egalitarian institution, where members called one another "brother" and "sister." Jeanette Keith, however, found that in practice, religious institutions appeared, "egalitarian, but only within

³¹⁵ Brunner, *Church Life in the Rural South*, 51.

³¹⁶ "New M. E. Church Has Been Planned by Committee," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 5 June 1920; "New M. E. Church Is under Consideration for Nashville," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 20 March 1920.

³¹⁷ Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 167.

gender.”³¹⁸ Considering the *de facto* homogeneity of congregations throughout the South, churches acted egalitarian only within color and within class. Country women expressed that they felt, “less sophisticated” than town women.³¹⁹ The women in New Albany, Mississippi, demonstrated their attitudes towards the small countryside churches in Works Progress Administration’s historical survey of the county’s churches. Surveyors for Union County, Mississippi, described the New Albany Baptist Church as, “a stately building of Gothic architecture and beautifully decorated. The auditorium is equipped with a balcony and opera chairs, and will seat about a thousand people...” The New Albany Methodist Church, likewise, received accolades. The church had “Ionic architecture” and was a “beautifully decorated structure of three stories.” The Baptist parsonage, located next to the church had “about twelve rooms... equipped with all modern conveniences.” A “brick bungalow situated upon a high terrace,” served as the Methodist parsonage. As expected, the Methodists preacher also enjoyed modern equipping in his seven-room house. The names and accomplishments of New Albany’s Baptist and Methodist preachers, as well as their wives, may be found in the historical surveyors’ report. The small rural churches in the county, however, received little or no mention at all, leaving the impression that the less-than-grand structures did not deserve recognition beyond the fact that they existed. Surveyors portrayed Union County as a religious county but only the larger churches received any description.

African American churches in the town of New Albany received brief mention in the report, complete with concise statements on church buildings and parsonages; but surveyors found it unnecessary to discuss their countryside counterparts. Surveyors described rural African American churches collectively as, “[having] a way of dissolving and reorganizing at short

³¹⁸ Keith, *Country People in the New South : Tennessee's Upper Cumberland*, 48-49.

³¹⁹ Fitzgerald to author.

intervals.” This remark implies that black congregations lacked a lasting commitment to their faith. Edward Ayers, however, found that black churches flourished throughout the South. After studying population trends county by county, Ayers calculated that those counties with a higher percentage of African Americans, twenty-five percent or more, had the highest church membership overall. Edmund Brunner found that ninety percent of black churches held regular Sunday schools, as oppose to only seventy-five percent of white churches.³²⁰ Rural churches struggled to overcome difficulties, both black and white. The rural poor could not afford to build elaborate churches, comfortable parsonages, or reliably pay the salary of the preacher the same way the people did in the larger towns. Country preachers never made much money. New Harmony Baptist paid, in 1906, a pastor \$53.00 for his annual salary.³²¹ In 1906, the average salary for a Baptist preacher outside the principal cities was \$334 for whites and \$227 for blacks. Countryside preachers often served in part-time capacities and worked the land to generate supplemental income. Other preachers took on more than one church at a time, split between multiple congregations.³²²

Rural churches normally did not meet every Sunday prior to the 1940s. In Union County, Mississippi during the 1930s, only the churches in New Albany met on a full time basis and had full-time preachers. In the countryside, however, churches met only once or twice per month. Of twenty-six Baptist churches in Union County, seventeen congregations shared their preacher with another church. Baptist preachers E. S. Hall and T. C. Hodges each ministered to three congregations around the county. W. G. Wages ministered to the smallest congregation of forty members at Oak Grove Baptist. Among the twelve Methodists churches in the county, nine shared a preacher. L. M. James ministered to five Methodist congregations, and S. P. Ashmore

³²⁰ Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 164; Brunner, *Church Life in the Rural South*, 72, 87.

³²¹ Rakestraw, "New Harmony Baptist."

³²² Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, 450.

ministered to four. A. J. Henry led the smallest congregation of fifteen members at Blue Springs, Mississippi. The Churches of Christ and the Presbyterian churches both had two congregations in Union County. Of the eighteen African American churches, Baptist, Methodist, and Holiness, eight shared preachers, but no preacher had more than two congregations.³²³

These small churches lacked revenue and manpower, or more appropriately womanpower, to reform the rural countryside. Yet, these same country folk had too much pride to join with the larger, wealthier churches in the towns. Instead, the country people did the best they could with what they had; and they never had much. Roosevelt's Country Life Commission correctly recognized the potential power the church had in rural areas. If that power could have been harnessed, trained, funded, and managed, the desire to "reform" the rural areas could have been done through an existing institution, already trusted within the community itself. But it becomes clear in the language of the Country Life Commission's report that the federal government had absolutely no intention of manipulating the churches. Instead, the government had to create new institutions. State and federal agencies and programs needed to be established in order to bring reforms to the rural areas, which could run independently of the churches. National religious associations, including the Interchurch World Movement, could not operate in rural areas without the rural churches. Because the rural churches rejected the reforms, the religious organizations were powerless in bringing meaningful reforms to the rural South. For local people to suggest a particular church or denomination to be unnecessary was one thing; it was entirely different for an outsider to say so.

³²³ Susie Powell, "Source Material for Mississippi History : Preliminary Manuscript Union County."

CHAPTER 4

LOCAL LEADERS

“New Albany is building right along, yellow fever or no yellow fever,” reported the New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette in 1905.³²⁴ Boosterism was equally contagious. The turn to the twentieth century stimulated optimism among many folks of the South, and within southern rural city dwellers in particular. During this time, leaders in both Howard County, Arkansas and Union County, Mississippi expressed pride in their respective communities. Like many town leaders in the rural South, they could hardly constrain their optimism about the future the twentieth century would bring. In both Howard County, Arkansas and Union County, Mississippi, the petite bourgeois boasted with an un-waning euphoria that their individual towns were in the right place at the right time. In 1910, for example, the *Nashville (Arkansas) News* heralded southwest Arkansas to be “one of the most desirable sections in which to live on the globe today.”³²⁵ City leaders across the rural South wrestled with what their community was and what they wished it to become. Such contemplations inevitably led to conflict between townships, and community members. One thing proved certain; the local elite experienced no problem imagining development for their community, but the production of actual results proved far more elusive. As local leaders strove to advance their respective communities towards their envisioned goals, their own egos, personal interests, and biases sometimes led to wasted energies, shortsighted investments, and discriminatory policies. Yet these same leaders were also

³²⁴ "Editorial," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 21 September 1905.

³²⁵ "A Favored Section," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 20 July 1910.

responsible for bringing changes. Such successes came most often by their willingness to work together and with state and federal programs.

Local churches provided the leaders of the community. Business and social leaders tended to belong to one particular church in the towns.³²⁶ As the Baptists and Methodists dominated the rural religious landscape, the chances were good that the town's elite attended one or the other. Religion remained a central aspect in the lives of women during the 1800s and the 1900s. As they worked within their respective churches, they experienced a transformation from privately pious women to organized women concerned with spreading the gospel and attacking social problems.³²⁷ Although women played active roles in churches, most Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Church of Christ churches limited the roles of women. Men led the churches as preachers, elders, deacons, or Sunday school superintendants. Women, on the other hand, could teach Sunday schools, as long as their students were children. Dale Rakestraw, of New Harmony, Mississippi, expressed pride in being a Sunday school teacher for many years at the New Harmony Baptist Church but commented that she did not know why she could not teach adults.³²⁸ Churches allowed women to teach children because of the way church leaders conceptualized motherhood. For these men, it seemed natural that women were best suited to teach children in Sunday school.³²⁹ This arrangement conveniently relieved the men of the church from such duties and denied women equality in the church house. Ann Holmes of New Albany, Mississippi remembered her mother's commitment to church work. When Holmes grew up, she too participated in church work and considered women to make up the "backbone of the church." Holmes defended her position, "Whether Paul believed it or not, women are so

³²⁶ Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 167.

³²⁷ Anne Firor Scott, *Making the Invisible Woman Visible* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 190-191.

³²⁸ Rakestraw to Interview, website (accessed

³²⁹ Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, 75-76.

important in the church. We are responsible for board suppers, getting the food together for the administrative boards. We are mission-minded, and we do studies.”³³⁰

Churches encouraged women to work for benevolent causes or certain social causes perceived to have spiritual consequences, such as the fight for temperance or prohibition. Churchmen deemed women suitable to raise money for foreign missions and to take care of the parsonages or the cemeteries. Women who fulfilled their prescribed church-related responsibilities gained not only spiritual satisfaction but also a sense of competence which ultimately led them to spring from the spiritual realm into the political realm. Historian Ann Firor Scott wrote, “For many married women, church work was the essential first step toward emancipation from their antebellum image of themselves and not of ‘woman’s sphere.’”³³¹ Women organized special church events and orchestrated decoration days and homecomings, in order that the community might come together and clean their local church and church cemetery. Women in New Albany organized the Cemetery League in 1908, and women in Nashville had organized the Cemetery Association by 1910. Women of such associations toiled together to maintain and improve cemetery grounds. In Nashville, Arkansas, women of the Cemetery Association placed an iron fence with a concrete foundation around the cemetery.³³² When cemetery clubs organized special events, such as homecomings or decoration days, women dominated the day’s events. At the 1920 May Decoration Day at Liberty Baptist Church in Howard County, Arkansas, the names of sixteen women appeared on the program, compared to only two men. These women captured the limelight as they performed music and recited poetry

³³⁰ Holmes to Interview, website (accessed

³³¹ Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady : From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930*, Expanded paperback ed. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 138-140.

³³² "Help Is Needed by Ladies of the Cemetery Association," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 21 May 1910; "Notice!," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 27 August 1908.

to entertain all who attended.³³³ The work of involved churchwomen played a crucial role in broadening the role of women in society, but it first involved a “personal transformation” of women in the church societies. In these societies, churchwomen found their voices and learned to make speeches in public; they learned how to organize, define goals, and strategize. Because they performed church-related jobs, they avoided criticism from male church leaders or their own husbands. The image of the “Southern lady,” so embedded in Southern culture, forced women to take a “long apprenticeship in such outwardly safe organizations as church societies and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union [before] they began to venture into women’s clubs and suffrage organizations.” By 1910, women’s voluntary associations increasingly put women out in the open, although the critical eyes of male church leaders and the women’s husbands or fathers remained upon them.³³⁴ Southern women could not jump off the pedestal with reckless abandon; they eased themselves down gradually.

A subtle move that these associated women took in their move from the church house to the public sphere may be seen in their efforts to bring beauty to their towns. This particular type of work project differed from the previously mentioned cemetery homecomings because those dealt exclusively with sacred spaces. The beautification or clean-up projects dealt with secular spaces. Their work feminized the aesthetics of their community by planting trees and flowers on both public and private properties. One such effort can be found in the New Albany Civic League, which organized in 1908.³³⁵ These clubwomen engaged in many efforts to “clean up” or “beautify” the city of New Albany over the years. In the spring of 1917 the Civic League organized an effort to make New Albany the “cleanest city” in the state of Mississippi. The group entered New Albany in a statewide contest in 1916 and won honorable mention for “Most

³³³ "Decoration Day."

³³⁴ Scott, *Making the Invisible Woman Visible*, 199-200, 206, 215-219, 224.

³³⁵ "Notice!."

Beautiful City.” At their March meeting, the Civic League discussed the possibility of putting on a play at the Dreamland Theater in New Albany, the message of which would stress the “evils of a dirty town.” Other activities of the organization included tasks such as planting flowers around the city’s ice plant and light plant. The Civic League ladies also planted more than two hundred trees around the Union County Courthouse and other parts of the city.³³⁶

The US entry into World War I provided southern women with an opportunity to expedite their move from the sacred to the secular and ultimately moved Union County’s women into the political sphere. On June 5, 1917, young men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-one reported to the Union County courthouse to register for the draft. This event prompted the women of Union County to take action. An account written in the New Century Club’s WWI scrapbook described how seeing the young men descend upon the courthouse quickened the pulse of patriotism among the citizens of Union County and among the women especially.

...As we watched these boys as they marched to our county courthouse, and saw the spirit of gloom and despondency on the faces of the parents who accompanied them, it aroused the feeling of patriotism which had lain dormant in our hearts, and to us came the vision of arousing that feeling in the hearts of our countrymen, and helping these boys who must fight and die for us.³³⁷

On June 25, 1917, Mary Armour Houston, the district president of the Federated Clubs, called the women of different churches of New Albany together on the Union County courthouse lawn. Houston presided over the meetings and gave an outline of the work performed by the Red Cross. The women present at the meeting enthusiastically urged the organization of a local Red Cross chapter and nominated Houston as the temporary chairperson. Those present also organized a membership committee, headed by Mrs. E. M. Owen. During Owen’s “One Day Membership Drive,” the local group gained between 150 and 200 new members from around the

³³⁶ "Begins Preparations for Clean-up Week Here," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 1 March 1917.

³³⁷ "Union County World War I Scrapbook."

city. Houston then traveled to the rural communities to recruit women to join the auxiliary. On August 8, 1917, the Red Cross granted a charter to the Union County Red Cross.³³⁸

Various clubwomen from around the county, including the Mississippi Federated Clubs, the Civic League, and the New Century Club, worked together through the Red Cross.³³⁹

Community leaders donated earnestly. A “generous public spirited citizen,” D. H. Hall donated the first building used for the headquarters. The group later moved to a different building provided by R. B. Henderson and James Toney. Various individuals or businesses donated sewing machines, tables, chairs and other equipment, and the New Albany light company provided electricity, fans, and electric motors without charge.³⁴⁰ Written in 1919, a history of the Union County Red Cross, found in the New Century Club’s World War I scrapbook, serves as a who’s who list for leaders of the county. The anonymous author of the history named the people who made the most significant contributions and sacrifices for the cause. In examining the history, one notices the distinct connection between the leaders and their churches. The author writes, “Mr. E. M. Hawkins, Chairman [of the personnel committee,] is one of the leading citizens of the town, a very busy man, and a leading member of the Baptist Church. He is also the Superintendent of its Sunday School.” “Mr. J. F. Hall is one of the most prominent banks and businessmen of New Albany. He has been very active in Liberty Loan and Red Cross work. He is a member of the Methodist church.” The history notes the various contributions made by pastors of the three white churches in New Albany: E. E. Strong of the Presbyterian Church; Webb Brame of the Baptist Church; and J. M. Bradley of the Methodist Church.³⁴¹ The author drew a direct connection between the church and the men but never connected any of the women

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Susie Powell, "Source Material for Mississippi History : Preliminary Manuscript Union County." ; "Union County World War I Scrapbook."

³⁴⁰ Susie Powell, "Source Material for Mississippi History : Preliminary Manuscript Union County."

³⁴¹ "Union County World War I Scrapbook."

with a specific church, although such connections existed. She wrote, “Thus it will be seen that the personnel of the Red Cross Chapter in New Albany is made up from the churches, and not only the officers, but the superintendents of departments, and our most faithful workers, also come from the churches, showing that the Red Cross is composed of the best people in the county.”³⁴²

The men who served on various supervisory roles in the Union County Red Cross were exclusively white and usually held some position in their respective church. Excluded from the ranks of such leadership were African American men. The racial hierarchy that so dominated southern society prevented leaders of the black churches from serving either supervisory or committee positions because such an assignment would make white women subordinate to a black man. Nevertheless, African American women made significant contributions to the cause and served in leadership positions among their respective auxiliaries. The author of the history of the Union County Red Cross praised the work of the black women in New Albany, “The Negro Auxiliary at New Albany, of which Fannie Watson was Chairman, was very enthusiastic doing some sewing and knitting and also raising considerable money, which was turned over to the chapter.”³⁴³

Black and white women from the surrounding communities, including Ellistown, Glenfield, Darden, Center, Liberty, Mount Olive, Branyan, Chestnut Grove, and Ingomar, worked to provide items needed for soldiers and war refugees. Collectively, these women made 650 suits of pajamas, 520 bed shirts, 570 bed socks, 100 convalescent gowns, 12 operating gowns, 90 comfort kits, 150 hot water bag covers, 250 operating leggings, 1,000 towels, 200 bath cloths, and 80 “helpless case shirts.” They knitted 18 mufflers, 670 sweaters, and 2,300

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Ibid.

woolen socks. The women who focused on surgical needs, provided 2,100 four-inch square gauze wipes, 864 various sized absorbent pads, 2,600 sponges, and 5,624 dressings. Additionally, the women delivered a special allotment for a hospital in France and made 9 bedspreads, 15 pillowcases, 25 refugee quilts, 15 hospital sheets, 2 bed quilts, and a pair of woolen blankets. The Union County Red Cross ultimately furnished 12,906 articles. The Junior Red Cross sent additional 333 articles, ranging from sweaters to rugs. Finally, a group of younger women who called themselves the “Quaker Maids” sent 180 Christmas packages to soldiers in 1917 and 175 Christmas packages in 1918. Mailed items included cigarettes, chewing gum, and hard chocolate. Each of the young women put her address in the Christmas packages she prepared, and many received thank you letters from the recipients of the packages.³⁴⁴

In June 1918, many of the women leaders organized the Woman’s Committee Council of National Defense. The group elected Mrs. R. L. Smallwood as the chairperson. Within two months, the group held a mass meeting at the county courthouse to explain the work of the woman’s committee. At the meeting, committee leaders gave instructions to some sixty-three women from the surrounding communities. The Union County Woman’s Committee Council of National Defense (UCWCCND) worked in conjunction with existing women’s clubs including the New Century Club and the Civic League. The group disseminated informational brochures and services through the county’s black and white school districts. The committee encouraged patriotism by distributing patriotic songs to community schools and encouraged the children to learn and sing the songs. They gave service flags to every home in the county who had a son in the military. The women organized a city parade with “Uncle Sam,” patriotic songs, and addresses from “several prominent speakers.” At the parade, group leaders pinned a red, white, and blue ribbon on the fathers, mothers, and wives of the county’s soldiers. Union County,

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

through the UCWCCND, supported twenty-five orphans in France. Like the Red Cross effort, the work of the Woman's Committee Council of National Defense involved both white and black women. According to a report for the committee, "...The colored women [have been] very active. They held child welfare campaigns, and weighed and measured about seventy-five children. Five different kinds of literature on childcare [were] given each mother." Smallwood's report gave credit for the African American women who "always respond[ed] splendidly" in various efforts including war fund drives.³⁴⁵ Once the war ended, the UCWCCND reduced the number of community representatives from sixty-three to fourteen. With this organizational structure in place, the UCWCCND turned its attention from war funding drives and patriotism to improving the health of the communities. This organization sent "valuable literature" to the mothers of schoolchildren in many of the county's schools, both black and white. During the influenza epidemic of 1919, the committee sent literature on the flu and tuberculosis to the county's schools and to the "flu stricken families of the poor." In some cases, the UCWCCND provided nurses for these families. Chairperson Smallwood wrote, "People seem interested and I believe are so thankful for [this service.] They are willing to fight as hard for health as to fight against the Huns."³⁴⁶

The intense cooperation among the clubwomen during the war years caused the women's clubs of Union County to turn an attentive eye to their community's civic character; and they maintained this focus. The Federation of Clubs of New Albany sought to "improve the standard of education and citizenship" and desired to establish a "higher social standard in general," according to Mary Armour Houston, club president.³⁴⁷ Local personalities invited national organization leaders and representatives to attend luncheons held in their honor. Mary Houston,

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Mrs. J. G. Houston, "With Federated Clubs," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 1 March 1917.

for example, held a reception honoring Mrs. McGee of Como, Mississippi, who had been elected as the President of the Women's State Federation of Clubs. Also honored was Miss Pauline Orr of Columbus, Mississippi, who served as President of the State Suffrage Association. Mrs. McGee's address titled, "The Woman of Today, Yesterday and Tomorrow" highlighted the day's event before a concluding address by Miss Orr on "Democracy."³⁴⁸ The women's associations' emphasis on progressive womanhood and American democracy imprinted not only a strong sense of patriotism among the women of Union County, but it also increased their desire to express patriotism through the vote and public office.

By 1923, the women of New Albany organized a chapter of the League of Women Voters, with the stated goal of taking "a live interest" and "make intelligent study of governmental problems." They sought to understand "the issues in the county political campaigns."³⁴⁹ Local candidates seized the opportunity to meet with these women voters and answered questions regarding their platform. These women developed their own list of concerns for the county, which ranged from stricter traffic enforcement to stopping bootlegging, gambling, and prostitution. The group threw their support behind the county's first woman candidate, Zelia Harrison, who ran unsuccessfully for Circuit Clerk in 1923.³⁵⁰ The first woman to serve Union County as the Chancery Clerk was Mrs. Walter Coker between 1936 and 1940. Mrs. Emma Shelton won the election in 1940 for the position.³⁵¹

While the Union County League of Women Voters studied "governmental problems" and sought to know more about local issues, the increasingly politically active clubs expanded their

³⁴⁸ "Meeting," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 29 March 1917.

³⁴⁹ "Union County League of Women Voters," *Union Weekly Times*, 29 March 1923.

³⁵⁰ "Interesting Meeting," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 3 April 1923; Wendy Smith, "The Women of Union County, Mississippi: A Generational Overview, 1920-1940." University of Mississippi, 6 January 2006, copy in possession of author.

³⁵¹ *History of Union County Mississippi*, (Dallas: Curtis Media Corporation, 1990), 21.

fields of interest to national and global topics. Anne Firor Scott pointed out that many southern women joined local clubs for the opportunity of self-education.³⁵² This is evident among the clubwomen of Union County. The New Century Club of New Albany, for example, held meetings in 1929 where attendees enjoyed a program by Addye McBryde on American diplomatic relations in building the Panama Canal. Mrs. Sperry Cole led a discussion on the Boulder Dam and the far-reaching results of such an effort. In the previous meetings, Mrs. Edgar Stephens discussed America's diplomatic policy and opening trade with China, and Mrs. Potter discussed British trade relations with China and Japan.³⁵³ The following year, the New Century Club began a study of African American literature. The club described the Harlem Renaissance as a "literary revolution." African-American literature, "together with an increasing interest in Negro painting and sculpture and in Negro music, has made the black man one of the most important facts of contemporary American art."³⁵⁴

By the 1920s and 30s the women of New Albany organized themselves into a growing number of voluntary associations. A Business Girls Club organized in 1925; the Daughters of the American Revolution organized in 1929 and sometime before 1938, the Daughters of the Confederacy organized. Also in 1929, a group of women formed the Garden Club. The Progressive Mothers Club organized in 1933. The Welfare League organized in 1933 and sought to cooperate with the county health department and the Workers Progress Administration's lunch program to provide lunches for schoolchildren.³⁵⁵ Women learned to organize and assume leadership. Under such associations, the women of Union County tackled local issues and promoted citizenship and pride in their communities and country.

³⁵² Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 150-151.

³⁵³ "New Century Club," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 17 January 1929.

³⁵⁴ "Club and Social Activities," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 30 January 1930.

³⁵⁵ Smith, "The Women of Union County, Mississippi: A Generational Overview, 1920-1940." ; Susie Powell, "Source Material for Mississippi History : Preliminary Manuscript Union County."

Because community leaders attended the influential churches, many improvements these leaders supported had strong religious overtones. One example is the fight against alcohol. Arkansas passed a statewide prohibition against alcohol in 1917. Mississippi passed a local option law in 1886 that allowed each county to determine by vote whether it would be wet or dry. Over the next twenty years, only seven counties in Mississippi voted to become wet. In 1908, the Mississippi legislature passed a statewide prohibition bill.³⁵⁶ Despite the total outlaw of alcoholic beverages, deviant entrepreneurs sought to capitalize on the scarcity of their potent product, and local law-enforcement seemed hell-bent to stop them. In New Albany, Mississippi, and in Nashville, Arkansas, the fight against alcohol played out in the papers, the schools, and, of course, the churches.

During the first twenty years of the century, Union County communities each worked to provide educational opportunities for their children. Sporting rivalries developed and sport teams defended the honor of each community on basketball courts and football fields. The local newspaper served as a medium to taunt the opposing team as community members wrote in to announce victories over other schools. Active women promoted the community schools and established inspection teams to examine the school and advise the community to possible improvements. Teacher associations held open meetings and reported the minutes to the local paper. Singing schools also attracted many students. The social columns of the newspaper reported frequently on the educational endeavors of the young citizens from individual communities. A report appeared in 1905, which stated, "A number of New Albany girls will attend college this session despite the belated openings." The report named the young women who planned to enter college. The report pointed out, "It is a noticeable fact that more of our

³⁵⁶ Tom Spight Hines, "Mississippi and the Prohibition Controversy: 1932 to 1934" (Master's Thesis, University of Mississippi, 1960), 8.

girls are pursuing their studies through college than our boys.”³⁵⁷ Blue Mountain College became one of the more important places for the women of Union County to receive an education. A Baptist institution, Blue Mountain College offered classes for women only and drew many students from the surrounding counties. In southwest Arkansas, men and women normally attended either Ouachita Baptist College or Arkadelphia Methodist College, both located in Arkadelphia, Arkansas.

During the 19th century, an increasing number of women taught America’s schoolchildren, displacing men from schoolroom positions. Although men continued to serve in supervisory roles, women dominated classrooms by the turn of the 20th century. In the United States, where the “cult of motherhood” became entrenched in our culture, the transition for women from the home to the schoolhouse seemed natural. Ann Douglass explained, “grade-school teaching appeared a mere step away from crib-side duty.”³⁵⁸ As teachers, women positioned themselves to wield feminine influence, and elementary education became associated with the feminine sphere. Women became increasingly active in reforming their local schools. Rural women committed themselves to the betterment of their local schools, forming school improvement associations as well as parent teacher associations. Rural women conducted health inspections and demonstrations in the local schools. Although parent-teachers associations, school improvement associations, and many women’s clubs worked to improve their schools, their work could not relieve the problems faced by the rural educational systems. In many cases, the reforms needed by many rural schools could come only from state officials willing to overhaul the system.

³⁵⁷ No Title, *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 2 November 1905.

³⁵⁸ Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, 76.

In a study of the schools in Itawamba County, in northeast Mississippi, Greene Sheffield found that in the early 1930s, the rural schools suffered with a number of problems. Itawamba County had 42 elementary school districts for white children and nine elementary school districts for black children. There were 140 white teachers and 11 black teachers who served their schools. The largest communities in the county had well constructed school buildings where students enjoyed sufficient lighting, heating, and drank water from deep wells. In the county's smaller communities, however, the rural school buildings were least likely to be sufficient for their purpose. These buildings suffered from poor lighting, ventilation, seating, and heating, and many of these lacked toilets. Sheffield found that many trustees of the smaller school districts needed a better education themselves, and some were illiterate. Trustees held hiring power for the teachers in the district. Sheffield found that school district trustees hired teachers based on the popularity or the connection of a particular candidate within the community. He cited examples of nepotism as trustees hired local people who had eighth grade educations over other candidates with college degrees.³⁵⁹

Although Sheffield's study examines one county in northeast Mississippi, his findings of the problems in rural Itawamba County are similar to other rural districts in Mississippi and in Arkansas. A federal report conducted in 1921-1922 by the United States Bureau of Education found that many Arkansas teachers had little better education than their students did. The problem seemed especially evident in rural districts. According to the report, in districts with less than 200 residents, less than 25 percent of the teachers completed four years of high school. Fifty percent of the smaller, rural school districts had children who were too old for the grades they attended, and most dropped out by age fifteen. Throughout the state, the one-room and two-

³⁵⁹ Greene Edgar Sheffield, "A County-Unit Administrative Organization of Schools of Itawamba County, Mississippi" (Master's Thesis, University of Mississippi, 1933), 12-14, 24, 26-27.

room schoolhouses had the shortest school terms, the lowest-paid teachers, and the worst buildings. A different study conducted in central Arkansas in 1925 found that in twelve counties, 499 schools had no toilet facilities.³⁶⁰

State education officials suggested a basic prescription for these ailments: increased state aid for poorer districts, increased rural high schools, consolidated districts, and better-educated teachers. In Arkansas, the first progressive step towards school reforms came between 1911 and 1919 under the direction of governors George M. Donaghey and Charles H. Brough. During this time, compulsory attendance laws were strengthened, a state board of education was created, and voluntary consolidation was sanctioned. Despite the encouragement for smaller rural districts to consolidate, however, the number of school districts increased slightly from 5,110 in 1910 to 5,118 in 1920.³⁶¹

Two major problems explain why school consolidations did not happen during these years, and both played a significant role in the resistance of local churches to consolidate during the same timeframe. The first and most obvious problem was the matter of transporting students over a greater distance to attend a school in a neighboring community. Even in the 1930s, people in isolated communities did not travel often to other communities. Julia Kesterson, a schoolteacher at the Messer Creek School in north Howard County, Arkansas, recalled an incident that illustrates this point. Kesterson remembered that during a geography lesson, “A seventh grade boy said, ‘I would like to go to New Orleans.’ His six-year-old brother, [Clifton Sharp,] chimed in with ‘I been to Provo.’ He meant Provo, Arkansas, a little village a few miles away.”³⁶² For these schoolchildren, both places seemed distant even in the 1930s. A lack of

³⁶⁰ Ben F. Johnson, "'All Thoughtful Citizens': The Arkansas School Reform Movement, 1921-1930," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* XLVI, no. 2 (1987): 109-110, 117.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*: 108, 110.

³⁶² "Howard County Retired Teachers Remember."

good roads inhibited travel from one rural community to another. Before schools could consolidate, the necessary infrastructure to transport students had to exist. Although the “good roads” movement gained traction by 1920, not every rural community received the full attention of county road planners. Consequently, only the larger towns and those rural communities immediately between them first benefited from county efforts to construct better roadways and bridges. The smallest and most isolated communities, which were most likely to suffer with the worst schools, could not consolidate even if local people supported consolidation. A second problem that prevented the voluntary consolidation of rural school districts was the unwillingness of one community to give up its own school. In the rural communities, two institutions fostered a communal identity, the churches and the schools. Although a rural community could not provide the same brick schoolhouse as the larger towns in their county, both blacks and whites took pride in their schools.

Local leaders, especially women, contributed to their community’s school. Their influence waned, however, after the states effectively bureaucratized education. During the 1930s, both Arkansas and Mississippi initiated consolidation mandates that closed schools in very small communities and opened larger districts based in larger towns. Cleo Ivy, a schoolteacher in Macedonia, Mississippi reflected on the impact that losing the local school had on her small community, “[Consolidation] tore it all apart.” Ivy felt that consolidated schools districts did not have the same level of parental involvement.³⁶³ Through the school consolidation program, many local communities lost an institution that was central to their identity, and many local women, especially in the country, lost an avenue to express power in the public sphere. Although women in larger towns continued to influence their now larger school

³⁶³ Cleo Ivy to author, Interview, 3 March 2006. Makin’ Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/ivy.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

districts, established social circles excluded country women from assuming the same level of influence. Louise Fitzgerald, a former schoolteacher in Liberty, Mississippi, stated that she felt she was “just not as sophisticated as town women.” Many women in the rural countryside expressed this sentiment. For many rural women, a trip to town seemed rare and exciting. Town women enjoyed access to a number of services, such as city water and electricity. They also attended movies as well as grand churches. They shopped and drank sodas. Finally, they attended important meetings. As women in the country read and shared their newspapers, they kept up with the town women. Clubwomen in larger towns met with local political candidates. Clubwomen held meetings to discuss US diplomatic policies or discuss literature. As such, rural women felt increasingly “unsophisticated.” Thus, increased state involvement and the consolidation movement in education eroded some responsibilities rural women assumed previously in their communities, and class differences between “country” and “town” folks exacerbated the feelings of loss.

Beyond social development, local leaders worked to improve the economy of their respective counties. By 1910, in both Nashville, Arkansas and New Albany, Mississippi enjoyed the modern services of electricity, water works, and telephone systems. Although both counties had similar potential for economic development, the counties did not develop equally. Both counties had sections of blackland, suited for not only growing cotton but truck crops as well. Northeast Mississippi and southwest Arkansas had an abundance of timber. Railroads provided both regions with an efficient way to access larger commercial markets. Both regions assembled committees to promote their part of the country and bring new commercial ventures to their respective areas. Yet, the leaders of Howard County, Arkansas lacked the same success in developing a diverse economy in comparison to Union County, Mississippi.

In 1910, developers considered southwest Arkansas's rich land perfect for agricultural products. Consequently, the region's businessmen sought to develop the agricultural output of the county, especially timber and peaches. Landowners in the northern, highland area of Howard County planted peach orchards around the turn of the century. The impetus for this came from suggestions made by railroad representatives. In September 1902, D. E. King, the General Traveling Freight Agent of the Missouri Pacific Railway System, investigated the area and found favorable conditions for growing peaches. In October 1903, King returned to Nashville with a representative of the Iron Mountain Railroad. The *Nashville (Arkansas) News* reported on the meeting that followed, "By actual count there were 67 citizens in attendance, composed of men who own property and are fully able to engage in any enterprise that proves profitable." At the meeting, King encouraged these citizens to grow the Elberta variety of peaches. In April 1904, Reverend Daniel Jackson Sossamon, a Presbyterian preacher who had some experience growing peaches, joined with Bert Johnson to plant the first commercial orchard of approximately 100 acres. Sossamon eventually withdrew from the venture, but Johnson announced his intention to increase the number of acres of the orchard as soon as possible. In 1913, Johnson mechanized his peach orchards. Johnson traveled to Chicago and purchased multiple "traction engines" which he used to maintain his vast orchards. By 1916, Johnson owned over ten "Cletrac" tractors made by the Cleveland Tractor Company and likely purchased additional machines as his orchards expanded. Over the next thirty years, Bert Johnson increased his land holding to some 4,700 acres in Howard and Pike Counties and committed approximately 3,000 acres to peaches. As Johnson met success, other landowners quickly followed suit.³⁶⁴

³⁶⁴ "Freight Agent Investigates Peaches," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 2 October 1902; *Howard County Heritage*, (Dallas, Texas: Howard County Heritage Club and Taylor Publishing Company, 1988), 41-45; "Meeting of Fruit Growers Held," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 4 November 1903; "Southwestern Orchard and Planting Association,"

Howard County landowners allocated 719 acres of land to peaches in 1910, which produced 15,237 bushels of peaches. By 1925, the number of acres committed to peaches increased to 3,352 and the number of bushels jumped to 85,230. The zenith for the peach industry came in 1940 when 7,658 acres produced 588,480 bushels of peaches. The growth and decline of the peach industry in Howard County mirrors the growth and decline of truck farming efforts in neighboring Hempstead County. From 1910 to 1940, both counties experienced increases in production, and from the 1950s forward the agricultural production of both counties dropped precipitously. From 1940 to 1980, the number of acres committed to peach orchards decreased and the number of peach farms declined from 850 to just 21.³⁶⁵

In January 1927, city leaders announced their plans to build an ice plant in Nashville. During the peach harvest time, the Southern Ice and Utilities Plant manufactured up to 100 tons of ice per day and a storage vault held 10,000 tons of ice. A loading dock that stretched one-quarter of a mile facilitated the easy loading of the ice on to the cars that carried peaches or truck crops.³⁶⁶ Around 1920, the peach industry employed an estimated 2,500 workers during the harvest season. Although most of these came from the surrounding areas and nearby counties, many transient workers also came to the orchards. The timing for the peach harvest fit nicely with the slack time for cotton farmers. The orchards used temporary workers during the months of July and August to pick, grade, and pack the peaches. This allowed some households to generate additional income during peach harvest time, but there was no guarantee that peach orchards needed additional workers during a given season.³⁶⁷

Nashville (Arkansas) News, 13 April 1903; "Traction Engines to Be Used," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 8 November 1913.

³⁶⁵ *Howard County Heritage*, 33; James L. McCorkle, "Truck Farming in Arkansas: A Half-Century of Feeding Urban America," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* LVIII, no. 2 (1999): 183, 186-188, 194-195.

³⁶⁶ "Great Commercial Developments for This Section Will Start with the New Year," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 1 January 1927.

³⁶⁷ *Howard County Heritage*, 43.

Despite the promise of the peach industry, profits hinged on a number of factors. Pests, diseases, or unusual weather patterns, such as droughts, late frosts, or hard freezes, devastated whole harvests. In mid-January 1930, for example, Howard County reported temperatures that fell below zero degrees. The cold temperature killed the peach harvest for that year. The following year, the county's orchards produced a bumper crop; however, with prices at a low of 55 cents per bushel. Orchard growers saw little profit. In 1931, the *Nashville (Arkansas) News* reported that Johnson's orchard would be "sold under mortgage foreclosures." Although the newspaper predicted a large turnout for the auction, only a single bid was made for the property. Guy Phillips, who represented the Mississippi Valley Trust Company of St. Louis made the winning bid of \$35,000. During the fall of 1931, other orchards in Howard County suffered the same fate of foreclosure. The surviving orchards were those owned by smaller operations without hired labor costs or heavy investments in buildings and equipment.³⁶⁸

Southwest Arkansas had several timber-related mills that worked fresh-cut trees into marketable raw products such as veneers, handles, staves, or simple planed lumber. There were no manufacturing plants, however, to develop further the local area's wood resources to build wood furniture. In 1910, C.F. Peterson announced his intentions to construct a hardwood and veneering plant in Nashville, Arkansas. Peterson announced that he could provide the necessary material of a large furniture factory. "It is a difficult matter to comprehend the worth of [Peterson's] enterprise to Nashville. It will give employment to a large number of people, many of them skilled, high-priced workmen, increasing the volume of business [and] will assist in securing other enterprises."³⁶⁹ Despite the encouragement from Peterson, Nashville's Commercial Club, and local newspaper editors, no businessman ventured into a furniture factory

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 44-45; "Orchard Sold for \$35,000," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 13 October 1931; "World's Largest Peach Orchard to Be Sold," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 9 October 1931.

³⁶⁹ "Hardwood Plant Has Been Secured," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 9 July 1910.

in the area. Consequently, the potential wealth the timber resources could provide was only partially realized within the region. The timber companies sold their products to outside markets, which used Southwest Arkansas' wood to construct finished products, such as furnishings that sold at a higher value.

The Nashville Commercial Club worked to bring industry to the city. Described as “a wide awake commercial club,”³⁷⁰ the small group of Nashville's prominent men struggled to bring lasting changes to the region beyond timber mills. In 1910, the club failed at bringing a wagon manufacturer to the area. A major concern that prevented such a plant regarded the “healthfulness” of the community.³⁷¹ The rejection of Nashville by the wagon manufacturing company, allegedly because the community's health was in question, left a mark on the Nashville leaders. After this revelation, the *Nashville (Arkansas) News* ran editorials that boasted just how healthy the citizens of Nashville really were. The newspaper, further, took aim at nearby communities and claimed their standards of health could not compare with that of Nashville.³⁷²

Despite the best effort of the local newspaper editors and the Nashville Commercial Club, investors were never convinced to build a wagon manufacturing plant in Nashville. The Nashville Commercial Club offered free factory sites and “reasonable bonuses for industrial enterprises” as enticements for investors. Local leaders boasted that the town was located “within a few miles” from the large power plant under construction on the Little Missouri River “which will insure cheap power for manufacturing concerns.” Newspaper editors wrote, “Nashville is situated midway between the diamond mines [of Murfreesboro, Arkansas] and

³⁷⁰ "A Favored Section : The Many Advantages of Nashville and Southwest Arkansas," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 27 July 1910.

³⁷¹ "Wagon Manufacturers," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 23 April 1910.

³⁷² *Howard County Heritage*, 82.

cement deposits [of Okay, Arkansas.]” If that were not enough, the *Nashville (Arkansas) News* also reported, “Southwest Arkansas comes nearer having all the coons up one tree than any other section on earth.”³⁷³ Despite such promotions, industrial investment beyond the timber mills remained elusive from Nashville and Howard County, Arkansas until the post WWII years, when the county finally saw a small flourishing of industry. In 1952, the W.R. Case and Sons Cutlery opened a knife plant. A basket factory was built in Nashville to complement the peach industry and by 1954, and the factory employed some 200 workers. By the 1960s, due to the lack of demand for peach boxes, the factory retooled and made boxes for shipping produce and poultry. During the 1960s, the poultry industry gained momentum in Howard County, opening two feed mills, and a Tyson’s poultry processing plant. Also in the 1960s, the Nashville and Howard Manufacturing Company began sewing robes and garments.

In Union County, Mississippi, in contrast, the local timber mills sawed-up and planed-out the abundant timber resources, and a manufacturing plant developed in the county seat at the turn of the twentieth century. A major character in the drive to bring industrial facilities into Union County, likely came from an eccentric millionaire named Paul Rainey. Originally from Ohio, Paul Rainey re-located to Union County, Mississippi, and became one of the county’s most legendary characters. An avid hunter, he moved to Mississippi and bought several thousand acres in neighboring Union and Tippah Counties where he built an elaborate hunting lodge. Between 1903 and 1924, the year Rainey died, he became the largest stockholder of both of Union County’s largest banks, The Bank of New Albany, and The Merchants & Farmers Bank.³⁷⁴ Paul Rainey used \$75,000 of his own money to construct a large hotel in New

³⁷³ "A Favored Section." Murfreesboro, Arkansas is located approximately thirteen miles northeast of Nashville; Okay, Arkansas is located approximately fifteen miles southwest of Nashville.

³⁷⁴ James R. Collins, "History of the Bank of New Albany," in *History of Union County Mississippi* (Dallas, Texas: Curtis Media Publication, 1990).

Albany.³⁷⁵ This structure burned in 1915. Rebuilt in quick order, the Rainey hotel remained a prominent landmark in the town of New Albany until burned down again in 1981. Rainey encouraged the establishment of a power plant, an ice plant, and a local factory. Although it cannot be determined just how big a role Rainey played in bringing additional industries to Union County, it remains clear that Rainey invested heavily in the area and stood to benefit from successful economic development of the region. Due, in part, to his leadership, New Albany grew quickly during his life in the city.

The New Albany Furniture Factory began “putting her furniture on the market” during the fall of 1905. According to business manager C. W. Young, the company employed over seventy-five employees. The facility covered several acres of ground and provided “cottages” for its employees. The *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette* made clear just how important such a development was for Union County and the surrounding area, “No other enterprise means more to North Mississippi than this factory.” The paper pointed out that the furniture company provided a market for hard wood timber and, “thus [brings] money to timber men and laborers.”³⁷⁶

New Albany also had a productive clothing manufacturing company. The New Albany Clothing Manufacturing Company employed workers in the early 1900s. The company shipped its trousers via rail not only to surrounding markets in Mississippi but also to markets as far away as Oklahoma and Texas. The company ran “double forces” in 1906 to meet the demands of these markets. During the same year, the company increased its capital stock from \$50,000 to

³⁷⁵ "Paul Rainey Was 'Nice Man,' Former Strawboss Says." No Date, Union County Historical Museum. New Albany, Mississippi. This newspaper clipping came from the Paul Rainey Papers, which include many personal letters and newspaper clippings.

³⁷⁶ "Editorial."

\$100,000.³⁷⁷ In the late 1920s, the Tupelo Garment Factory acquired the factory site in New Albany and began producing shirts. Irwin B. Schwabe and Leonard Herrington bought the factory in 1938 and renamed it the Irwin B. Schwabe Manufacturing Company. Schwabe became the company's president, and Herrington served as the vice-president and general manager. Before World War II, Schwabe opened additional shirt factories in other towns in Union County, including Hickory Flat and Ecu, and one in neighboring Pontotoc County and provided jobs to an increasing number of rural women from northeast Mississippi.³⁷⁸

Many town and country people wanted to work in the shirt factory. The clothing factory provided women with an opportunity to work outside the home and off the farm.

Leonard Herrington worked as the manager of the Schwabe plant in New Albany. During the Great Depression, his son, Jack Herrington, recalled how people were desperate for work:

[My father] lived next door up there on Highland Street to that factory. And he said it just got so bad that when he would come out the door in the morning, there would already be a line of people out there standing in line wanting work. And he said we were already wall to wall people [and that] we couldn't hire anybody else. It was just so many in there that you didn't have room to work hardly. And he said he finally just got to where he would just go out his back door and sneak around and come in the back door of the plant because he just didn't want to face them. Just...he couldn't hire them all, you know, [and] he said that was one of the most difficult times he'd been through.³⁷⁹

Frances Gardner, who worked for the Tupelo Garment Factory in New Albany until 1933, remembered how important steady work was for rural people who otherwise had no steady income.³⁸⁰ The stability of a constant paycheck certainly relaxed many anxieties families dealt with. Prior to factory work, the income of a farm family could be devastated by things beyond their control, such as a drought or an invasion of hungry grasshoppers. When Gardner first

³⁷⁷ "Doing Good Business," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 1 February 1906.

³⁷⁸ Jack Herrington to Elizabeth Payne, Interview, 15 September 2005. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/herrington.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Frances Gardner to Marie Baker, Interview, 17 February 2006. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/gardner.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

started working, she earned one dollar per day. "I was so happy; I didn't know what to do." She remembered.³⁸¹ For women lucky enough to gain employment at the garment factory, the earning potential could bring significant changes to their households. The number of applicants always exceeded the number of vacancies. Virginia Hillis started working for the factory in 1944. Her husband, James Hillis left to serve in World War II; before he left, the couple agreed that the wife would work until he returned. James returned in 1946; however, his wife continued to work forty more years and retired in 1986.³⁸² Errentine Stephens commented:

Some people deplored those factories, saying they worked women long hours for very little money. But as a teacher in the public schools, I could see the difference they made in children's lives. Children who once did not have enough clothes to wear to keep them warm, now dressed adequately and often attractively. Children who had looked as if they were not eating the right foods began to have good color and sparkling eyes. ...I could probably say that the coming of factories was the most important development of the twentieth century here.³⁸³

Jack Herrinton explained further,

This was the only factory employment available in New Albany when it started, other than the old what they call the Armour Creameries. Armour Company had that on Carter Avenue here in town...had a creamery down there and they made cheese. So that was the two places that you could work other than in the fields or work in one of the stores downtown. So, all these women came in to supplement the farm incomes or sometimes even more than the farm income.³⁸⁴

The earning potential of the factories remained out of reach for many of Union County's people. Because so many women desperately sought the factory jobs, employment depended largely upon whom you knew. Factory worker Etoy Harkness remembered that those who had a close relative or neighbor who also worked for the company stood a greater chance of getting the

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Joshua Dowdy, "The Shirtfactory: Bringing Women out of the Fields into a New Life Style in North Mississippi." University of Mississippi, 4 May 2001, copy in possession of author.

³⁸³ Errentine Stephens and Maxine Mroz, "Errentine Stephens - Remembers Early 1900's of New Albany," in *History of Union County Mississippi*(Dallas, Texas: Curtis Media Coporation, 1990).

³⁸⁴ Herrington to Payne.

prized positions.³⁸⁵ Factory supervisors did not hire African Americans until the late 1960s, thus prohibiting any distribution of factory money to the black communities of Union County for over fifty years. The first African American hired, in fact, was a domestic worker who worked in the home of Jack Herrington.³⁸⁶ As Errentine Stephens remembered, the factories brought positive changes to the families of the surrounding area, but all those families were white.

Jack Herrington remembered, “[The factory] was like a great big family because the women came in from all over this area and to the factories here which is where I worked most of the time. But they came from all over Union County.”³⁸⁷ Rural women who were lucky enough to get a job working a factory faced the common obstacle of getting to work every day. This need spawned the entrepreneurial spirit among rural women and men alike. “Mr. Leo Wallace used to have a school bus,” Herrington remembered, “and he would bring a school bus full [of women] every morning to work, and that was the way they got there.”

A valuable component for a rural community’s development, good roads provided easier travel within the community and made commercial markets accessible. Before Senator John H. Bankhead of Alabama advocated the use of federal dollars to construct highways in 1916, which led to the passage of the Federal Highways Act, counties struggled to fund road improvements or construction on their own. Rad Reed described the condition of the rural roads in his hometown of Houlka in northeast Mississippi during 1914. Reed wrote,

The roads are fierce; [it is] not the supervisor’s fault but because there is no money to spend on them. Continual hauling over the western roads at a time when wagons go hub deep in the mud and slush have torn to ‘smithereens.’ If the road is graded nicely then comes hundreds of wagons to cut it to pieces again. Gravel is the only remedy for the Schooner roads, and they certainly need to be dosed liberally.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁵ Dowdy, “The Shirt Factory.”

³⁸⁶ Herrington to Payne.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Reed, *Houlka*, 22.

In 1909, the Country Life Commission found, “Education and good roads are the two needs most frequently mentioned in the hearings. Highways that are useable at all times of the year are imperative not only for the marketing of produce, but for the elevation of the social and intellectual status of the open country and the improvement of health by insuring better medical and surgical attendance.”³⁸⁹ The Country Life Commission recognized that improved roadways provided not only commercial transportation, but also increased medical access for rural folk. Local practitioners agreed. In a study of midwives in Arkansas, A. S. Freeman found that most of the midwives agreed that the poor conditions of the back roads in rural areas caused great hardships in getting a midwife to her clients. So severe was this problem, that many felt that the lack of good road put the health of mothers and babies at risk.³⁹⁰ William Henry Chambers, a country doctor born in 1879, owned a car when the influenza epidemic struck in 1918. To get to his patients, however, Chambers traveled into the hills of north Howard County, Arkansas, by horse because most roads remained too difficult to travel by car.³⁹¹ Additionally, improved roadways and bridges were essential for the consolidation of smaller rural schools.³⁹² Thus, improved roadway allowed rural folk to gain easier access to goods and important services. Towns that invested in better roads and bridges positioned themselves for easier economic development than neighboring communities did.

A central debate in the progressive agenda of road improvement revolved around the planning and funding needed to build better road in the countryside. An article from the *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette* argued in 1917, “Good roads mean so much to the country today that highways are being built everywhere....” “No man or woman in the entire county can afford

³⁸⁹ L. H. Bailey, *Report of the Country Life Commission*. 38.

³⁹⁰ Freedman, "The Passing of the Arkansas Granny Midwife," 102.

³⁹¹ Research, *The Unfinished Story of North Howard County*, 189-190.

³⁹² Sheffield, “A County-Unit Administrative Organization of Schools of Itawamba County, Mississippi”, 6.

to oppose a bond issue for improving this county's highways, and especially is this true of our people of the rural sections."³⁹³ Another article pointed out the fact that, "Good roads knit communities together as few other things can."³⁹⁴ Newspaper articles compared Union County's "bad roads" with Lee County's "good roads." Meanwhile editorials and guest-writers persuaded the citizens of Union County to support the building of better roads. Local community members, including both men and women formed associations to promote the construction of better roads in the county by 1917. Newspaper editorials made clear to Union County folk that they should stand with the local leaders and support the good roads movement. They joked, "Now, we ask the good roads knocker frankly, do you like mud?" In 1925, muddy roads still presented problems for travelers. Norris Hardware warned, "Driving without chains on slippery muddy roads is not only risking your own life and happiness but is equally dangerous to the other fellow." Drivers worried about their safety, of course, purchased the needed chains at the hardware store.³⁹⁵ Many leaders in the Southern rural communities desired to improve their local roads. Opposition to the good roads movement normally came from farmers who worried that improved roads meant higher taxes.³⁹⁶ This explains the commonplace of articles, cartoons, and editorials found in the newspapers, which encouraged everyone to get on board with the good roads movement. Despite such encouragement, protesters made their opposition known to local officials. In Sevier County, Arkansas, a group of "good roads opponents" warned County Judge Luther Tribble to leave the county. Tribble received warnings through the mail, which demanded he leave within ten days. He refused. The attitudes of rural people in the northern part of Howard County cooled to the thought that their tax dollars might increase due to road

³⁹³ "Says Good Roads Mean Everything," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 22 February 1917.

³⁹⁴ "How Good Roads Help," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 4 January 1917.

³⁹⁵ "Do You Like Mud?," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, No Date 1917; "When a Feller Needs Chains," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 8 January 1925.

³⁹⁶ Keith, *The South : A Concise History*, 98-99.

improvements. Locals protested as surveyors came around to plan for local road improvements. The newspaper reported, "When the preliminary surveys were begun in that section the surveyors were received hospitably by the citizens, but it is said that they will not now allow them to enter their yards to get a drink of water."³⁹⁷ Although no example of a threat towards a county official or good roads committee member can be found in the newspapers of Union County, Mississippi, the fact that the paper continued to persuade citizens to support the effort suggests that some local farmers were not totally convinced. In 1917, as county officials worked to secure a Bankhead highway, a number residents signed a petition against it. According to the *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, "Many who signed their names to the petition do so under a wrong impression, misunderstanding the bond issue."³⁹⁸

Senator John H. Bankhead's Federal Highways Act provided federal matching grants for road construction. Because of the federal grant money and the increased state funding of road improvements in the 1920s and 1930s, the number of "good roads" increased in the South. As John Boles put it, "took hundreds of thousands of farmers out of the mud and rural isolation and helped them enter the American mainstream."³⁹⁹ The rural road improvements facilitated faster delivery of mail, the infrastructure to move truck crops from rural areas not directly serviced by the railroads. Farmers, both men and women, benefited from improved roadways because they allowed travel to towns with factories. This proved particularly important in New Albany, Mississippi because of the existing factories. As the local factories needed more workers, especially women in the shirt-factory, improved roadways assured women easier travel to their jobs. E. M. Hawkins, a manager of several stave mills, noted that many mills were being moved

³⁹⁷ "Judge of Sevier Has Been Warned to Leave County," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 28 June 1916.

³⁹⁸ "Preliminary Work on Union's Good Road Start," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 4 January 1917.

³⁹⁹ John B. Boles, *The South through Time: A History of an American Region* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1995), 417; Keith, *The South : A Concise History*, 99.

to Alabama. Hawkins said, "Good roads mean a long step forward, and every[one], especially the farmer, should be a good roads booster. Let's keep good old Union County in the line of progress."⁴⁰⁰

In 1917, over 170 men and women joined the Bankhead Highway Association in Union County. County officials organized the association to promote and secure the construction of a Bankhead highway. By 1924, the Bankhead Highway passed through Blue Springs, Wallerville, New Albany, and Myrtle. This stretch of highway went through Tupelo and ultimately connected the cities of Memphis, Tennessee, and Birmingham, Alabama. An important supporter in the US Congress was John E. Rankin of Tupelo, Mississippi. Elected to the US House of Representatives in 1920, Rankin worked to bring projects to his rural constituents and supported several progressive initiatives, including the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and the Rural Electric Association (REA). He welcomed President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1934 to Tupelo, Mississippi, to throw the switch on a newly developed power system. Rankin developed a reputation of getting federal projects in his district, including a canal that connected the Tennessee and Tombigbee rivers, and the Natchez Trace, a highway that connected Nashville, Tennessee to southwest Mississippi.⁴⁰¹

Solidarity among the businesspersons increased New Albany's chances to develop commercially. In 1917, the mercantile businesses of J. J. Houston, Scott Parks, the Owen Brothers and N. W. Parks, all of New Albany, allied themselves, worked together to promote commerce, invited new businesses, and fought "out-of-town" competition.⁴⁰² The *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette* referred to this collection of businesses as, "New Albany's progressive dry

⁴⁰⁰ "E.M. Hawkins Sees Benefits," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 11 January 1917.

⁴⁰¹ John Howard, *Concentration Camps on the Home Front : Japanese Americans in the House of Jim Crow* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 53-54.

⁴⁰² "Developing New Business, Our Aim," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 18 January 1917.

goods stores.” During the spring campaign, the stores adopted the slogan and incorporated it in large advertisements.⁴⁰³ In New Albany, Mississippi, local merchants worked together for their collective benefit. They organized sales together, which lured folks to town. Jamie Houston, a businesswoman who managed one of the town’s stores explained, “We merchants of New Albany should give more time and study to combating and meeting out-of-town competition. We should direct our efforts toward developing new business, and not towards fighting our local competition.”⁴⁰⁴ The fact that the local merchants coordinated sale dates, bought advertising space together, and desired increased commercial activity – beyond each person’s respective business – made the town’s business leaders unique over their counterparts in Nashville, Arkansas. With a collective mindset, local businesses in New Albany took aim at their greatest outside competition, the mail-order companies. The Union County Progressive League first discussed the growing problem of mail order catalogs and the consequential loss to local businesses in 1916, and the league challenged locals to buy locally. The *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette* stood firmly beside local businesses, but the drive for this loyalty came not only because of the advertisement spaces local merchants bought. The local newspaper shared the same vision of New Albany. A small town, the newspaper men knew the merchants personally. For these reasons, articles appeared in the newspapers that warned readers, “Every year the mail order houses of the country draw heavily on our people’s finances, and take money from us, money that rightfully should come directly to New Albany.... And the county suffers materially from this loss of money.”⁴⁰⁵ The “Mail Order Kings” in the distant cities got richer at the expense of New Albany and Union County. Scott Parks, owner of Parks’ Cash Store, made the connection between local businessmen and the community clear for readers of the paper. His

⁴⁰³ "Grand Millinery Opening," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 8 March 1917.

⁴⁰⁴ "Developing New Business, Our Aim."

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

advertisement asked questions such as, “Who builds churches and schools in this community?” and, “Who does your money help when you send it away to mail order house?”⁴⁰⁶

Cartoons appeared in the paper that reinforced the notion that buying from local companies benefited both the community and the consumer. The *Gazette*'s cartoonist, who signed his work only with the name Rhodes, drew illustration with vigor. Rhodes' artwork included images of men with money bags leaving the “Home Town,” and depictions of the city being destroyed by the “Cyclone” of mail-order businesses. The source for Rhodes' illustrations came not only from his imagination; he also incorporated the stories from local vendors. For example, an article appeared in the *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette* titled, “How's This For Nerve – Heh?” It told the tale of a local man who entered a local dry goods store with a shoe box under his arm. The man, according to the article, wanted to exchange his ill-fitting mail-order shoes for a similar pair from the local shop. The local owner examined the box of shoes and realized the shoes came not from his store, but a mail-order house. According to the article, the sore-footed man left without new shoes.⁴⁰⁷ The following week, Rhodes drew an illustration of the event. In the cartoon, “Mr. Brown” realizes his mistake as he limps into the shoe store holding a boot in his hand. The narrative below the cartoon suggests that people ask themselves, “Am I doing anything that is keeping back the growth of our community?”⁴⁰⁸ In February of 1917, he depicted two women shopping for clothes in a cartoon titled “The Right Way.” In the illustration, the fashionable women expressed their happiness in finding the perfect fit in their clothes. The store's tailor explained, “We always alter all garments to fit. But when you buy from out-of-town, you have to take them whether they fit or not!”⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁶ “The Community Builder,” *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, No Date, March 1917.

⁴⁰⁷ “How's This for Nerve - Heh?,” *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, No Date, March 1917.

⁴⁰⁸ Rhodes, “Where the Shoe Pinches,” *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, No Date, March 1917.

⁴⁰⁹ Rhodes, “The Right Way,” *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 15 February 1917.

Although the New Albany business leaders fought “out-of-town” competition, they did not fight against competitors from neighboring towns or communities. To the contrary, these leaders worried about the distant, impersonal businesses in large far-away cities. In contrast, leaders in Nashville, Arkansas demonstrated less cooperation with one another. Additionally, for Nashville, an “outsider” was someone outside of the town, and ample evidence proves that conflicts existed between neighboring towns. This problem appears typical for the region of southwest Arkansas.

As each town boasted over their particular advantages, whether real or imagined, competition between communities increased, and sometimes resulted in outright name-calling. Consider the heated debate between Washington, Arkansas and Hope, Arkansas, over which town should be the seat of Hempstead County. Although Washington, Arkansas served as the county seat, a group of wealthy landowners in nearby Hope demanded that county officials move the seat. In 1910, John Kent, of Hope, Arkansas, emerged as the chief spokesperson for the move and wrote a letter to the editor of the *Washington (Arkansas) Telegraph* stating, “We want the Court House at Hope.” Kent’s letter boasted that Hope, Arkansas, had the best cotton market in southwestern part of the state. He added that the railroad made Hope accessible from five different directions.⁴¹⁰ Although Kent could not have known the future in 1910, he recognized the value of Hope’s railroad connections. By 1925, Hempstead’s farmers used the railroads in Hope to move watermelons to urban markets.⁴¹¹ The threat that Washington, Arkansas might lose the status of county seat prompted a heated debate. Following Kent’s letter, a sharp reply was submitted to the paper signed by “a Tax Payer” which accused “a few already wealthy real estate owners” in Hope of wanting the county seat changed for their own personal financial gain.

⁴¹⁰ John Kent, "Letter to Editor," *Washington (Arkansas) Telegraph*, 6 May 1910.

⁴¹¹ McCorkle, "Truck Farming in Arkansas," 183.

The reply stated that Kent “goes wild in his extravagant praises of Hope” and called the elites of Hope “cobtoters.”⁴¹² Over the course of the next thirty years Washington, Arkansas and Hope, Arkansas battled over the placement of the county seat. In 1916, Hope won a special election for the county seat; however, there were 845 more votes cast in the election than were eligible voters in the county, and the Arkansas Supreme Court kept the seat in Washington.⁴¹³ The “cobtoters” eventually won. After five elections, the county seat came to Hope in 1939.

Jealousies between townspeople often resulted in outlandish claims over their particular citizens and resources. When, in 1906, John Wesley Huddleston discovered diamonds on his farm in Murfreesboro, Arkansas, in Pike County, neighboring communities soon boasted that they too had diamonds. In February, 1910, George F. Kunz, the vice president of the Tiffany Company of New York visited Arkansas to evaluate cut and uncut diamonds found in Murfreesboro. He concluded the uncut diamonds were worth \$125 per carat and the cut diamonds were worth \$400 per carat. The Arkansas Diamond Company expected to invest \$143,000 to erect a plant in Murfreesboro to collect and wash the diamonds. The plant was capable of washing approximately 100,000 tons of dirt in six months and yielding approximately 25,000 uncut carats of diamonds.⁴¹⁴ The amount of money invested in Murfreesboro and the potential profits from the gems excited neighboring communities. Later that year, a newspaper reported that Dan W. Green, who lived near Ozan in Hempstead, Arkansas, found diamonds on his property. According to the report, “The stones were taken to Murfreesboro by Mr. Green to be submitted to an expert there, but the expert was away at the time. While there Mr. Green was shown several of the Pike County stones, but he says his diamonds are clearer and prettier than any shown him from the mines there.” The paper alleged that Green eventually sent his stones to

⁴¹² “Reply to John Kent,” *Washington (Arkansas) Telegraph*, 13 May 1910.

⁴¹³ “845 Votes Too Many,” *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 16 February 1916.

⁴¹⁴ “The Pike Diamonds,” *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 23 February 1910.

“an expert in Indiana, who pronounced them genuine and of high value.” Green’s farm was located some twenty-five miles from the diamond field in Pike County.⁴¹⁵ Within a week of this article appearing in print, an African-American man allegedly found another diamond while he worked on the bridge near the train depot in Washington, Arkansas. For the next ten years, the *Nashville (Arkansas) News* sporadically repeated that it was “near” the diamond mines, although it neglected to mention the city of Murfreesboro by name.

Although the local leaders of New Albany succeeded in promoting their city, bringing in new industry and fighting outside competition, leaders from other areas floundered. In Nashville, Arkansas, city leaders sought to develop the local economy by bringing in new businesses, but their energies lacked appropriate focus. In some cases, local leaders seemed most concerned about flaunting their status. For example, one of the Commercial Club members, Major F. T. Shepherd, organized a “Riding Club” in during 1910. According to the newspaper, Shepherd “has been in many riding contests, and has never yet failed to win a prize.” The riding club members provided themselves with “uniforms and handsome mounts.” Members attended fairs and reunions in an effort to “put Nashville on the map.”⁴¹⁶ It seems unlikely such activities could inspire new capital investments in the city. Although it remains impossible to quantify the level of interpersonal relationships between leaders of Howard County or of Union County, the sources available suggest Union County benefited from a closer network of leaders, both men and women.

⁴¹⁵ “Diamonds Found in Hempstead County,” *Washington (Arkansas) Telegraph*, 13 May 1910.

⁴¹⁶ “A Riding Club,” *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 7 May 1910.

CHAPTER 5

AGENTS OF PROGRESS

Although local leaders saw many needs in their communities and worked to address problems, some were beyond their capability to solve. Rural communities, with varying degrees of success, attempted to develop their economies. Rural people still lived in desperate times, and they suffered from poor health as much as poor bank accounts. Although both Howard County and Union County leaders tried to bring industries to their regions, agriculture continued to dominate the local economy and, therefore, the lives of the majority of residents.

Their focus on bringing industry was a legitimate concern, but it could not bring immediate relief. Even if new industries came immediately to rural areas, they could not employ even a small majority of workers in the counties with regular, high paying salaries. Training households how to be more productive, efficient, and healthy, however, could provide relief from malnutrition, poor health, and improve the quality of life for rural southerners. Such an effort required a highly organized and sufficiently funded system that could reach all the counties and communities in the rural South. Thus, one of the most effective ways to improve the lives of local people was to educate them with a focus on agricultural needs, home life, and health. In this sense, the best programs to improve the general conditions of rural life came not from local people but state officials. Rural families needed greater access to health care, more nutritious diets, and cleaner living conditions as well as more efficient and productive farming techniques. Trained midwives and extension agents brought real progress to the rural areas.

In order to improve the standards of living of rural folk, similar attention was needed on health issues ranging from birth to nutrition. Additionally, households needed to become more efficient. This was not possible except through improved services and education. The implementation of programs to provide better health conditions suffered for a number of reasons. For example, county administrators did not always take advantage of state and federal initiatives either because the administrators failed to see the value of such programs or because they felt the county could not afford its share of the necessary funding. Further, racial attitudes among county officials often led to unfair hiring practices ranging from home demonstration agents to county health nurses.

In his study of federal rural health programs during the great depression, Michael R. Grey found that folks in the rural communities suffered worse health problems than people in the towns and cities.

The prevalence of preventable or treatable diseases such as pellagra, hookworm, syphilis, tuberculosis, malaria, and typhoid were stark reminders that rural America had been materially poorer than the rest of the nation for decades. Moreover, rural communities had a more difficult time generating the public funds needed to build the infrastructure that would have made improved access to medical services more meaningful, such as better roads, public health programs, or even hospitals.⁴¹⁷

Rural poverty resulted in a higher infant-mortality rates, lower life expectancies, and health problems such as hookworm and pellagra.⁴¹⁸ The lack of medical and dental care posed a significant problem for the rural poor.

Lack of medical care gained increasing national attention during the 1920s and 1930s. Through the support of the United States Public Health Service and several philanthropic organizations, a group of representatives from medicine, the social sciences, and public health

⁴¹⁷ Michael R. Grey, *New Deal Medicine : The Rural Health Programs of the Farm Security Administration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 21.

⁴¹⁸ Danbom, *Born in the Country*.

agencies formed the Committee on the Costs of Medical Care (CCMC) in 1927. The CCMC issued a report in the 1930s that found the two biggest obstacles to health care in the nation were lack of access to doctors and cost of their services. According to the report, doctors provided medical services based on a patient's ability to pay rather than the need for medical care. Some country doctors bartered with their patients and accepted a range of items from fried chicken to farm equipment.⁴¹⁹ Jo Jo Billings, of Center Point, Arkansas, remembered traveling with her uncle, Dr. E. D. Dildy, to visit patients in the 1930s. Before arriving at the door of a particular patient, he told her, "Now this is where we get that good ham." Although Dr. Dildy bartered with his patients, he complained that other doctors in the area were not interested in such and demanded prompt payment. For many rural people, however, prompt payment was not possible. In an extreme case that occurred in 1916, Doctor P. A. Tyler, of Pike County, Arkansas, killed Frank Scott, an African American, over a medical debt of ninety cents. Doctor Tyler brought a Winchester rifle with him to collect the money Scott owed him. He found Scott and another African American named Jeff Conway cutting firewood near Scott's home. According to Tyler, he demanded Scott pay the account when Scott ran at him with an axe. Tyler fired three times. Two bullets went through Scott's body; the third grazed the neck of Jeff Conway. After the shooting, Dr. Tyler went to Murfreesboro, turned himself in, and claimed self-defense. Tyler stood in court two months later for first-degree murder. Conway, the only witness, testified that Tyler shot him while he was running away from the rifle-wielding doctor, not towards him. Nevertheless, the jury acquitted Dr. Tyler.⁴²⁰

Although the murder of Frank Scott over a ninety-cent medical debt was unusually severe, it illustrates the attitude some doctors held for patients who did not pay for rendered

⁴¹⁹ Grey, *New Deal Medicine*, 22-23.

⁴²⁰ "Dr. Tyler Acquitted," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 23 March 1916; "Dr. Tyler Held," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 26 January 1916; "A Negro Shot," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 8 January 1916.

medical services. In a more common method of dealing with such patients, doctors refused to treat patients who owed money. A group of doctors in Howard County, Arkansas, formed an association in the 1930s and refused to see patients who owed another doctor for medical services. This group created a debtors list that they circulated among their group that effectually blacklisted certain households from any medical services.⁴²¹

Rural households who paid their medical bills had no guarantee of timely medical attention. Although the automobile potentially could have increased the area to which a country doctor could travel, the poor roads in the countryside often negated any advantage. During the early 1900s, it remained logistically difficult for a country doctor to attend to all his patients due to the poor roads in the rural countryside. In the hilly region of north Howard County, Arkansas, the roadways remained unimproved into the 1930s. Consequently, Dr. William Henry Chambers, who owned a car, continued to visit his rural patients on horseback due to bad roads.⁴²² Additionally, country doctors traveled the countryside but could not attend to multiple people. Outbreaks of communicable diseases, such as the influenza epidemic of 1918 or the occasional outbreak of yellow fever spread the country doctor very thin. The number of people in a community could exceed any reasonable ability of a country doctor to provide adequate care, and this problem grew more severe during the 1940s. In 1920, for example, there was one physician for every 1,000 people in Mississippi. By 1944, however, the number declined to one physician for every 1,900 people.⁴²³ During the 1940s, the number of doctors in Arkansas followed the same pattern of Mississippi and declined drastically. A significant cause of the decline was World War II. At the end of 1941, 1,819 licensed physicians practiced in Arkansas;

⁴²¹ Jo Jo Billings to author, Interview, 7 March 2009. Recording in possession of author.

⁴²² Research, *The Unfinished Story of North Howard County*, 189-190.

⁴²³ "The Relation of the Midwife to the State Board of Health." Mississippi State Board of Health, 1 January 1944, folder Births-Multiple, Series 2036, Mississippi State Department of Archives and History. Jackson, MS.

however, by July 1942 the total number of licensed physicians in Arkansas dropped to 1,019, which amounts to a 44 percent drop in six months. By 1944, there was one doctor for every 1,500 people in the state of Arkansas.⁴²⁴

The lack of access and the inability to pay for medical treatments from a doctor led many rural people to turn to others in their communities for medical assistance or advice. Women in the community normally filled this need.⁴²⁵ Local newspapers in both southwest Arkansas and northeast Mississippi carried stories that reported on women who visited the homes of the ill. In such a way, a woman's otherwise private care giving became a "visible emblem of status," recognized by others in surrounding communities.⁴²⁶ Visitations of the sick demonstrated a woman's Christian commitment to her neighbors. Unfortunately, newspapers reported disproportionately the activities of white women who sat with neighbors over their African American counterparts.

Some community members did more than wait on the sick, they practiced the craft of healing and used remedies found in nature or used for other purposes on the farm. Natural remedies may have provided varying degrees of effectiveness. Although men sometimes practiced folk healing, women made up the majority of practitioners. The Mississippi Writer's Project interviewed healers from around the state during the 1930s and documented folk cures used to treat ailments that ranged from asthma to warts. Common ingredients included various tree barks, weeds, roots, honey, turpentine, kerosene, and whiskey. The Mississippi Writer's

⁴²⁴ Pegge L. Bell, "'Making Do' with the Midwife: Arkansas's Mamie O. Hale in the 1940s," *Nursing History Review* (1993): 155-156.

⁴²⁵ Bolton, "'A Sister's Consolations'."

⁴²⁶ Ulrich, *Good Wives*.

Project also recorded a number of superstitious cures practiced by both white and black healers during the 1930s.⁴²⁷

Mary Bradford McLaughlin and Bertha Bell Humphry, of southwest Arkansas, recalled going to white women “healers.” In McLaughlin’s case, the healer blindfolded her, tied her hands behind her back, led her into the woods, and cured her of warts. In Humphry’s case, a woman concocted a salve for an ailment. When Humphry inquired about the ingredients of the salve, the healer explained that she could not tell because she would “lose her power.” Although both women were devout Christians, neither felt uneasy about the supernatural component of their healing experience. The intermixing of the supernatural and Christianity did not seem out of place to either McLaughlin or Humphry, and both felt satisfied with the outcome of their treatments. In another instance, Humphry took her daughter, Emma, to Nathan Lamb to be cured of thrash mouth in the early 1940s.⁴²⁸ Many people in the Delight community believed Lamb could cure thrash mouth by breathing into the mouth of the child. Lamb received this “power” by virtue of his being a seventh son. Barden Lamb, a son of Nathan, remembered how women from the community brought their sick children to their home,

Mothers would take their babies to the doctor, and give them medicine trying to cure thrash mouth. When all else failed, they would bring them to Papa. He would take the baby into another room, and of course, it would start crying, which is exactly what Papa wanted – so its mouth would be open. Papa would blow into the baby’s mouth and then bring it back to its mother. Mothers would say in a day or two’s time their baby would be completely cured.⁴²⁹

For white women or men, healing powers were a benign mixture of superstition and Christianity. Although country people commonly visited folk healers, many middle and upper

⁴²⁷ "Cures." Mississippi Writers' Project, no date. folder Folklore-Superstition-Cures, Series 438, Mississippi State Department of Archives and History. Jackson, MS.

⁴²⁸ Copeland to Interview, ; Humphry to Interview,

⁴²⁹ Gaylon W. Lamb, *Lamb Tales: Anecdotes and Stories of Pike County, Arkansas* (Ackerly, Texas: Gaylon W. Lamb, 2005), 59-60.

class whites, who could afford private physicians, considered African American women who used superstitious healing methods to practice voodoo. Nevertheless, in some communities, black women performed “healings” on white community members and carried a mild celebrity status in their communities.⁴³⁰ The association of voodoo with black women was well rooted in the white consciousness and reinforced by the popular media.⁴³¹ White women healers, on the other hand, escaped the same stigma.

Midwives stood at the center of folk healing in rural communities and especially in predominately black communities. Highly respected, the midwife carried status in her community and in neighboring communities. Many women, both white and black, used midwives to deliver their babies. The midwife charged less for her services than the country doctor did, and the midwife often stayed longer with the mother and child.⁴³² Laurie Jean Reid, a white nurse from The United States Public Health Service came to Mississippi in 1921 and indentified some 4,000 midwives. State officials identified 1,000 more a few years later. Between 1920 and 1950, Mississippi had twice as many midwives as physicians.⁴³³ In 1941, less than twenty-five percent of births in Arkansas occurred in hospitals. Of the seventy five percent born outside of the hospitals, roughly one fourth were born using a midwife, and the majority of births took place without any medical attention.⁴³⁴ Despite the importance of the midwife to the rural community, medical officials in both Mississippi and Arkansas considered midwifery dangerous to both the mother and child.⁴³⁵

⁴³⁰ Kate C. Hubbard, "Aunt Dezzie." No Date circa 1935, folder Folklore-Superstition-Aunt Dezzie, Series 438, Mississippi State Department of Archives and History. Jackson, MS.

⁴³¹ Bryant, "News Items About Negroes in White Urban and Rural Newspapers," 173.

⁴³² Olivia Jefferies to Elizabeth Payne, Interview, 8 September 2005. Digital copy of video in possession of author; Susan Lynn Smith, "White Nurses, Black Midwives, and Public Health in Mississippi, 1920-1950," *Nursing History Review* 2, no. (1994): 31.

⁴³³ Smith, "White Nurses, Black Midwives," 32-33.

⁴³⁴ Bell, "'Making Do' with the Midwife," 157.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*: 31; Smith, "White Nurses, Black Midwives."

In 1909, President Theodore Roosevelt called the first White House Conference on Children. Florence Kelly, the general secretary of the National Consumers League, and Lillian D. Wald, founder of the Henry Street Settlement in New York, first suggested to the president that a federal agency was needed to study and promote child welfare. Increased attention on the needs of children led to the Children's Bureau in 1912. Senator William E. Borah sponsored the bill that created the bureau, signed into law by President William Taft. Julia Lathrop served as the first head of the bureau, a position she held until 1921.⁴³⁶

In 1921, Congress passed the Federal Maternity and Infancy Act, popularly known as the Sheppard-Towner Act. This legislation provided grants to states to assist in reducing maternal and infant mortality rates and protecting the health of mothers and infants. Control of the program was vested in the Federal Board of Maternal and Infant Hygiene. Board members included the Children's Bureau chief, the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service, and the Commissioner of Education. From the time the act became law in 1921 until 1929 when the legislation expired, forty-five states received federal grants. After 1929, the Children's Bureau devoted itself exclusively to child research, fact-finding, and distributing information on child problems. The Children's Bureau returned to administering state grants in 1935, after the Congress passed the Social Security Act.⁴³⁷

The service midwives provided in rural Mississippi, especially in African-American communities was indispensable. Pike County, Mississippi, for example, had approximately 32,000 residents during the mid-1930s. The county had a near fifty-fifty ratio of whites and blacks with whites having only a slight majority. Maxwell Lapham conducted a study between 1931 and 1936 on the maternity care in the county. There were twenty-two practicing physicians

⁴³⁶ Malcom D. Lamborne, *A Report on the United States Children's Bureau* (Washington, DC: American Medical Association, 1951).

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*

in the county, but only sixteen carried the bulk of the obstetrical practice. During the study, 4,795 births took place in the county. Doctors delivered 2,616 babies, or fifty-five percent of the total number. Of the number of women attended by physicians, 2,052 were white and 564 were black. In 1937, Pike County, Mississippi, had four white midwives and twenty-seven black midwives.⁴³⁸ From this study, we learn that white women normally received a doctor's care, and black women usually did not. For black women, midwives played a major role in the delivery of babies. Trained midwives would have improved the chances of survival of both mother and child.

Despite the advantage of using trained midwives to deliver babes, state officials desired, initially, to remove midwives from practicing. State health officials believed untrained midwives posed significant health risks and mandated that the midwife work under supervision of a physician. During the 1920s, the state supervised over 6,000 midwives. By the 1940s, Mississippi health officials became convinced that midwives were no longer needed and should stop practicing. Health officials encouraged midwives to retire and pledge not to deliver any more babies. The number of practicing midwives began a steep and steady drop. By 1944, only 2,600 midwives carried permits to practice in Mississippi.⁴³⁹

The state board of health operated on the presumption that rural patients could travel to the county health office and see a health nurse or go to county hospitals and receive treatment by licensed physicians. The idea that county health offices, local hospitals, and physicians could or would assume the responsibilities of all patients in their service area did not take into account class and racial prejudices that existed against poor country folks, in general, and African-Americans, specifically. Consider the barriers to health care found in Marshall County,

⁴³⁸ Maxwell E. Lapham, "Maternity Care in a Rural Community: Pike County, Mississippi, 1931-1936," (New York: The Commonwealth Fund, 1938), 2-5.

⁴³⁹ "The Relation of the Midwife to the State Board of Health."

Mississippi. The Marshall County Health Department fired the only black health educator in 1954, due to a lack of funds. Officials decided to keep the white health educator, thus creating an all-white staff at the county health office.⁴⁴⁰

The county health educator, whose job was modeled after that of the county home extension agent, visited rural communities and spoke in homes, schools, or churches on important health issues. Such work was vital to improving rural health. The study of county health care conducted in Pike County, Mississippi, faulted the patient or family in nearly fifty-percent of maternal and postnatal deaths. The report argued that education on maternal and infant care would have prevented those deaths.⁴⁴¹ Therefore, the health educator provided a desperately needed service; but because of segregation, white educators often worked with whites only. Thus, the removal of a black health educator painfully limited much-needed health information to black residents and resulted in grave consequences. In Marshall County, Mississippi, the loss of the black health educator affected over seventy percent of the population. Although the health office may have continued to provide services to black residents, racial attitudes of the all-white staff would play a role in the aggressiveness of such a program and the real-life accessibility.

Segregation policies complicated access to health services for most African Americans. As a final example, the Marshall County Hospital in the early 1950s disproportionately designated seventeen beds for whites and fifteen beds for blacks in a county with only 7,000 whites and over 17,000 African Americans.⁴⁴² If the allotted beds were taken, the hospital turned away African Americans, despite any need of medical attention. When this happened, African

⁴⁴⁰ Christine F. Jenkins, "Some Health and Nutrition Problems of Rural Families of Marshall County, Mississippi" (Master's Thesis, University of Mississippi, 1954), 1-4. Marshall County's only nursing home served whites only.

⁴⁴¹ Lapham, "Maternity Care in a Rural Community," 60.

⁴⁴² Jenkins, "Some Health and Nutrition Problems of Rural Families of Marshall County, Mississippi", 1-2.

Americans sought the services of women like Olivia Jefferies, a midwife who also performed healings.

When the hospital in Union County, Mississippi, turned away an African American baby, the mother called Olivia Jefferies. Jefferies learned that a seven-month-old baby had double pneumonia, and the local hospital refused services to the child. Hearing the mother's pleas, Jefferies readily agreed to come see the baby. She packed her black bag and went to the family's home where she found the baby in convulsions. "Oh my God! Ya'll, why didn't ya'll keep it in the hospital?" Jefferies asked. The family explained that the hospital doctor told them that there was no place for the baby in the hospital and instructed them to take the baby home and, "just see to it." Jefferies retrieved from her medical bag the elixirs she would use to treat the baby boy. Since the 1920s, the Mississippi State Board of Health regulated midwives and the items they could carry in their bag. As Jefferies looked into her bag in the 1950s, little had changed in thirty years. The typical bag carried silver nitrate drops, sterile pads, bellybands, and official literature -- including the midwife manual, birth forms, and pledges. Jefferies did not reach for any of the state sanctioned items, however. To treat this child, she "greased the baby up" with pine tar and "wrapped him up tight." She poured turpentine into a saucer, slid it under his bed, held the baby in position over the saucer and waited anxiously for midnight to strike. According to Jefferies, the child's fever broke. "At twelve o'clock, that fever broke. Now, it ain't gonna break until twelve o'clock."⁴⁴³

Faced with a shortage of doctors during WWII, state officials in Arkansas considered training midwives and issuing state permits to practice in the 1940s. In 1925, the state considered midwives responsible for much of the maternal and infant mortality and tried to

⁴⁴³ Jefferies to Payne; Smith, "White Nurses, Black Midwives," 34-35.

regulate the practice.⁴⁴⁴ According to a study conducted by Arkansas' Committee on the Study of Midwifery, in conjunction with the Arkansas State Medical Society, at least 500 more beds for African American maternity cases were needed in Arkansas to provide for the 10,000 annual births.⁴⁴⁵

The existing midwives offered a potential to educate their own communities. Neither Arkansas nor Mississippi took full advantage of the existing networks of midwives. By committing fully to the training of midwives, these states could have improved multiple aspects of rural community health. Although the states failed to employ the capabilities of midwives, they did invest in another service that truly improved the general rural population, the state extension service.

“I believe no single piece of legislation in the history of the country has done, or is doing, so much for the agriculture of the nation as is the Extension Act,” said A. F. Lever, the co-author of the Smith-Lever act. This act facilitated the work of the extension agents who traveled throughout their service areas, developed relationships with community members, and provided education through demonstrations.⁴⁴⁶ The extension service initially focused on agricultural education but soon provided domestic training, especially for the improvement of the general health and standards of living for the family.

The idea of teaching farmers scientifically proven methods of farming by demonstration is attributed to Seaman A. Knapp. Born in New York in 1833, Knapp made his living both as a farmer and an educator. In 1866, Iowa State College of Agriculture appointed him professor of agriculture; he later became president of that institution, a position he held until for almost

⁴⁴⁴ Bell, "Making Do' with the Midwife," 155-156.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.: 159.

⁴⁴⁶ A.F. Lever, co-author of the Smith-Lever Act, as cited in "Ten Years of Cooperative Extension Work under the Smith-Lever Act." United States Department of Agriculture Extension Service, 1924, Folder 6-5, Box 6, University of Arkansas Special Collections. Fayetteville, Arkansas.

twenty years. Knapp later moved to Louisiana to manage a company that planned to colonize millions of acres of poor cattle land and convert it to commercial crop land. Knapp thought it suitable for growing rice, and in 1889 he organized his own land company, the Southern Real Estate, Loan, and Guaranty Company, which handled some 500,000 acres in Calcasieu Parish. Although Knapp believed the land had tremendous potential, he encountered skeptical locals convinced the proposed crop land was infertile. With such convictions, it became obvious that few potential laborers would settle in an area considered bound to fail. Despite efforts of the speculators, the locals did not respond to printed brochures that touted potential profits from growing rice. Knapp subsidized an effort to move farmers from the Mid-West to Louisiana (and later Texas and Arkansas) and provided them with farmland near key towns. The Midwesterners, however, used wheat-farming techniques in the rice fields with unsatisfactory results. It became clear to Knapp that the new rice farmers needed training, and he believed a demonstration to be the best method. Within a few years, these farmers grew a crop and gleaned a respectable profit. Seeing for themselves, the locals changed their minds and became interested in farming. Knapp later confessed that he took this action out of desperation; but because it was successful, he knew the model could be adapted for other situations.⁴⁴⁷

The United States' Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Plant Industry became interested in improving farming practices in the South during the same time. After learning of Knapp's success in Louisiana, the Bureau of Plant Industry hired him. Upon his arrival, Knapp proposed the use of farm demonstrations.⁴⁴⁸ The Bureau agreed and placed Knapp in charge of

⁴⁴⁷ Hendry C. Dethloff, "Rice Revolution in the Southwest, 1880-1910," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (1970): 69; J. A. Evans, "Recollections of Extension History," *North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service Circular* 224 (1938): 6-7. In the rice producing counties of Arkansas, over 60 percent of rice growers migrated from Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, and Ohio.

⁴⁴⁸ Mena Hogan, "A History of the Agricultural Extension Service in Arkansas" (Master's Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1940), 23-26.

“demonstration farms” designed to teach new farming methods. Knapp worried that local farmers might challenge the legitimacy of any profit or increased productivity that came as a result of a government subsidy. He maintained that the community itself should subsidize the demonstration farm in order best to prove any benefits of using these new farming methods. Just such a demonstration began in 1903. After meeting with the president of the Texas Midland Railway and the Chamber of Commerce in Terrell, Texas, a group of businessmen raised \$900.00 to guarantee a demonstrator against loss. Walter Porter, a local farmer, agreed to farm seventy acres of his own land using Knapp’s instructions. The experimental area became known as the “Porter Community Demonstration Farm.” By the end of the year, a close examination of the demonstration’s farm records revealed an increase of \$700 in profit in comparison to the old methods of farming. The demonstration farm convinced local farmers to modify their farming methods and convinced the Department of Agriculture that such teaching methods worked.⁴⁴⁹

A few years earlier, farmers in south Texas found a small, menacing insect wreaking destruction to their cotton fields. Originating in Mexico, the bug progressed further north each year. The boll weevil continued its march up from Mexico and, by 1903, invaded the southern half of Texas. The invasion resulted in widespread panic among Texan cotton growers. Following a meeting in Dallas, Texas with cotton planters, Texas politicians, and chiefs from the US Department of Agriculture, the US Congress debated how to combat the boll weevil and appropriated \$250,000 to the fight. President Theodore Roosevelt signed the legislation in January 1904. With money available, the Bureau of Plant Industry assigned to Knapp the authority to launch “Farmer’s Cooperative Demonstrations.” These farms, it was hoped, would prove that despite the pest, a successful cotton crop could be grown using the right methods. Opening an office in Houston, TX within a few weeks of the assignment, Knapp divided the

⁴⁴⁹ Evans, "Recollections of Extension History," 8.

weevil-infested areas into districts of ten to twenty-five counties in both Texas and Louisiana. Special agents traveled to each county in their respective districts and organized cooperative and demonstration farms. By the end of 1904, some seven thousand demonstrators and cooperators had enrolled in the program and reported on average a one-hundred percent increase in cotton yields over non-participating farms in the same locales. The press reported the findings at the end of the growing season. Interest quickened, and Knapp increased the number of agents in Texas and Louisiana and appointed agents in Arkansas and Mississippi in 1905.⁴⁵⁰

The money appropriated by Congress could be used only in “combating the ravages of the Mexican cotton boll weevil,” therefore, only counties with weevil worries received agents.⁴⁵¹ Farming practices not related to the boll weevil could not be addressed by the demonstration farms. The Department of Agriculture and the General Education Board of New York struck a deal in April, 1906 that provided finances for demonstration work in areas of the South not yet touched by the boll weevil. The General Education Board, concerned with the inadequate schools in the South, believed that until southern farmers could increase their incomes, the schools in the South could not improve. Thus, by educating farmers on more profitable farming methods, local children and local schools would benefit. With available funding, work began immediately in Mississippi, Alabama, and Virginia. Two years later, in 1908, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, and Georgia received demonstration agents as well.

W.C. Stallings became the first county agent in extension history. Local business men and farmers in Smith County, Texas urged Knapp to assign someone to work in their county

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.: 9-11. Demonstration Farms ranged from 5 to 20 acres and were located near the principal towns in each county. The demonstration farm received seed and fertilizer. Cooperative Farms could be any size but received neither seed nor fertilizer. Cooperative farmers agreed in writing to follow the directions given to them by their special agent. The special agents paid regular visits to the demonstration farms, but were not expected to visit the cooperative farms.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.: 10.

exclusively. Knapp agreed on the condition that these same business men and farmers pay half of the agent's salary. In November 1906, Stallings began his extension work. Within a year, a small number of counties in both Texas and Louisiana employed their own county agents. In the early days of the extension service, county agents were "secured by the business men and farmers cooperating in paying the salaries."⁴⁵² This model, however, empowered key business leaders and affluent farmers by giving them considerable say in who was hired and who was fired. Thus, the county agent could find himself in a precarious situation in which his very livelihood could be threatened if he offended the perceived interests of these community leaders.⁴⁵³

Realizing the potential of the demonstration farms and the limited effectiveness of having only a few farms among a vast population, Knapp pushed for the Department of Agriculture and the General Education Board of New York to provide the funds to hire agents for more counties. Knapp argued that only by having an agent in every county could the masses learn to change their existing methods of farming. Using funds from the General Education Board, agents began working in each state, and district lines were drawn. In the beginning, some states shared State Agents. J.A. Evans, for example, operated out of an office in Shreveport and served both Louisiana and Arkansas.⁴⁵⁴ In 1907, R.S. Wilson became the State Agent for both Mississippi and Alabama, although he eventually served only Mississippi.⁴⁵⁵ Wilson was a native of New Albany, Mississippi.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵² Ibid.: 12-13.

⁴⁵³ Hogan, "A History of the Agricultural Extension Service in Arkansas", 27.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Evans, "Recollections of Extension History," 13-14. Texas had two state agents, one working the eastern district, the other working the western district.

⁴⁵⁶ C. J. Goodell, "Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, State of Mississippi." Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service, No Date, Folder 1910-1940, Mississippi State University, Special Collections. Starkville, Mississippi.

Howard County shared extension agent J. F. Dellinger with four other counties in southwest Arkansas starting in 1907. Dellinger continued to work in the county until 1913 but never worked exclusively with the county's farmers. The first full-time extension agent who worked for Howard County exclusively was J. W. Clardy. He started work in 1913 and continued until December 1915. After this time, the county went without an extension agent until 1923, except for the one-year appointment of J.T.M Holt in 1918. After 1923, the county consistently hired extension agents year after year. C. L. Rodgers (1927-1934) and Paul Eddlemon (1937-1944) each served eight years, which made their tenure in Howard County the longest on any extension agent during the first fifty-years of the county's extension history.⁴⁵⁷ County agent Eddlemon contrasted the way local people felt about the extension service during the early days with experiences in 1939. According to Eddlemon, "[In the early years,] only a few people felt the need of attacking certain problems affecting agriculture, which tended to retard the progress of ideal rural community life."⁴⁵⁸ Agent Eddlemon was not the only agent who experienced a resistance to the extension service. In the first years of the agricultural extension service, local farmers dismissed the "book farming" proposed by the extension agents. County Agent W. B. Connor of Woodruff County, Arkansas, spent much of his time in an attempt to impress upon farmers the value of his farming techniques, many of whom "hooted" at his suggestions.

As in Arkansas, early agricultural extension agents in Mississippi met resistance from locals. In 1911, E. P. Clayton of Tupelo attempted to organize corn clubs and domestic science clubs in his county. He sought members by visiting schools and writing articles for the

⁴⁵⁷ Julia Ann Hintze, "University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service Work in Howard County Beginning 1918." 1998, 1, MC # 1145, University of Arkansas Special Collections. Fayetteville, Arkansas.

⁴⁵⁸ Paul N. Eddlemon, "Historical Appraisal of Extension Work in Howard County: 1914-1939." Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, No Date 1939, Howard County, 3, 1145, University of Arkansas Special Collections. Fayetteville, Arkansas.

newspapers, a commonly accepted method of recruitment. He wrote of his experience, “The farmers, and business men and some teachers threw some coolness over the work by remarks that were not at all commendable.”⁴⁵⁹ Likewise, Mississippi’s District Agent for Negro Work, M. M. Hubert wrote that although the farmers he encountered eventually saw the extension service as a means of “rural uplift,” they initially viewed agents suspiciously. He wrote of his first encounters,

I’m taking the work back to where ignorance and superstition exist. The people are perfectly satisfied with the present conditions because of the fact that they know no other. There, the agent finds one of his greatest problems. He is looked upon as one who has come to cheat and swindle the farmer of what he has accumulated.⁴⁶⁰

In 1917, W. C. Mims, who started serving Union County in 1913, commented that it took him two years to gain the trust and interest of his farmers in his Cooperative Farming program.⁴⁶¹

The extension services’ tick eradication work offers the best example of the suspicion and resistance to the ideas of the extension service. Agricultural extension agents received training on tick eradication and the vaccination of livestock.⁴⁶² In Howard County, Arkansas, agent T. A. Green devoted much of his time to overseeing the construction of community dipping vats. According to the *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, “Professor Green will gladly give any information relative to the building of these vats, free of charge. It would be a good idea for all who are interested to see him, as the government insists on certain specifications as to dimensions so that the state and government veterinarians can instruct the user as to the proportions of the chemicals to be used, and will be able to test the dips.” By 1916, livestock

⁴⁵⁹ E. P. Clayton, Mississippi Extension Service, Lee County, 21 December 1911, Microfilm Roll 1, NFX Ref S 79.M57, Mississippi State University, Special Collections. Starkville, Mississippi.

⁴⁶⁰ M. M. Hubert, *Fourth Annual Report of the Agricultural Extension Service as Performed by Negroes for the Year Ending December 31, 1919* (1920).

⁴⁶¹ Will C. Mims, "Report of Work of the County Agent, 1917." Mississippi Extension Service, Union County, No Date 1917, Microfilm Roll 3, NFX Ref S 79.M57, Mississippi State University, Special Collections. Starkville, Mississippi.

⁴⁶² Hogan, “A History of the Agricultural Extension Service in Arkansas”, 73, 77.

owners used dipping vats in the communities of Forgy, Shiloh, County Line, Bluff Springs, Mineral Springs, and Temperanceville. Centre Point had two vats, one located at “Cowling’s pasture,” and another at the Centre Church. Landowners around the county owned several more dipping vats. Despite the encouragement of the extension agents, some cattle owners refused to dip their cattle believing the chemical solution harmed their animals. The Arkansas legislature required cattle and pig owners to dip their livestock, which infuriated some livestock owners. Frustrated farmers resorted to destroying the dipping vats by use of dynamite. Between February and April of 1920, vandals blew up four dipping vats in Howard County, two of which were communally owned by the folks of County Line and Temperanceville, and two other owned by individual landowners.⁴⁶³ The *Nashville (Arkansas) News* seemed at a loss in explaining why someone would take such actions,

The vat was the property of a large number of the citizens of the Temperanceville neighborhood, and was one among the first vats to be built in the county. There were perhaps seventy-five persons interested in the vat. The cause of the destruction of this vat remains a mystery to the officers as well as the owners, as the vat was located in a neighborhood where there had never been any great opposition to the dipping of cattle, and as there was to be no compulsory dipping this year.⁴⁶⁴

Opposition to the dipping vats led to their destruction across the state. In some counties in Arkansas, the work of an agent to develop dipping vats in his district resulted in the loss of his job. While no evidence suggests that any Howard County agents lost their jobs due to their support of the tick eradication program, agents in other parts of the state lost their position. Mena Hogan found that in other parts of Arkansas, community leaders associated the despised

⁴⁶³ "Another Vat Was Blown up near This City," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 7 April 1920; "More Dipping Vats Have Been Completed in Howard County," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 12 April 1916; "More Dipping Vats to Be Built in This Section," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 23 February 1916; "Vat Is Blown Up," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 28 February 1920.

⁴⁶⁴ "Vat Is Blown Up."

dipping vat with the county's agricultural extension agent, "often in numbers sufficient to influence the quorum court against appropriations for his maintenance."⁴⁶⁵

By 1911, the Mississippi legislature permitted the County Board of Supervisors to appoint a county agent, who would receive a salary from the county. County boards did not always see the cost benefit of hiring an extension agent. In 1911, only eight county boards in the state of Mississippi appropriated funds. The citizens of Grenada County supplemented the board's appropriation by the use of privately collected funds of \$360. The Madison County Board of Supervisors refused to appropriate any money for the hiring of C. W. Watson. Shortly after the board reached this decision, a group of citizens raised \$1000 for the employment of agent Watson. He proved to be a valuable agent, so much so that he was hired as the State Agent for Arkansas in October 1911.⁴⁶⁶

Home demonstration work in Arkansas began in January 1912 with an appropriation of \$1,500 from the United States Department of Agriculture. Emma Archer, who served as Arkansas' director of women and girls' clubs in 1916 and 1917, wrote of the disbelief that early home demonstration agents encountered, "The little girl living far back in the county never in touch with commercial activities, located where opportunity seldom knocks, can hardly understand why a stranger should show an interest in their welfare and that without money or price. Parents as well as children are slow to believe."⁴⁶⁷

Howard County's experience with home demonstration agents started six years after Arkansas's first appropriation from the US Department of Agriculture and lacked any real consistency in the program until the early 1930s. Odessa Holt, the county's first home

⁴⁶⁵ Hogan, "A History of the Agricultural Extension Service in Arkansas", 73.

⁴⁶⁶ "Mississippi Annual Report of Progress." Mississippi Extension Service, 1 November 1911, Microfilm Roll 1, NFX Ref S 79.M57, Mississippi State University Special Archives. Starkville, Mississippi.

⁴⁶⁷ Emma Archer, "History of Home Demonstration Work for 1912." as cited by Hogan, "A History of the Agricultural Extension Service in Arkansas", 44.

demonstration agent, began her work in early February 1918. She split her attention between Howard and Montgomery Counties. Odessa Holt's employment mirrored that of her husband, J. T. M. Holt, who arrived in the county in January 1918 and worked as the county agent for both Howard and Montgomery Counties. Between 1915 and 1920, the wife of the county agricultural extension agent served the same county as the home demonstration agent twenty-one times in Arkansas, and in two cases, the daughter of the county agent was employed. The Holts stayed with Howard County less than one year; both left their positions on November 30, 1918.⁴⁶⁸ It is reasonable to believe that their accomplishments – such as organizing clubs or demonstrations – fell apart in their absence. This situation forced new agents to start over in the county and rebuild what their predecessors left.

The emphasis during World War I for food production led many counties and quorum courts and county boards to fund extension agents. During World War I, the federal government made emergency funds available through the "Emergency Agricultural Appropriation," designed to stimulate the production and distribution of food products during the war. Resulting from this act, many counties in Arkansas and Mississippi increased hired extension agents. After the war ended, however, the emergency funds were no longer available effective July 1, 1919.⁴⁶⁹ With the reduction of emergency funds, counties felt a larger financial burden in the salary and expenses of the extension agents. This led many quorum courts not to employ agents. Those who employed agents did so sporadically.⁴⁷⁰

Howard County went without a home demonstrator for five years before Jenny Betts came to the county to serve as the new agent in 1923. Counties struggled to fund agents and

⁴⁶⁸ Hintze, "Cooperative Extension Service Work in Howard County." ; Hogan, "A History of the Agricultural Extension Service in Arkansas", 67.

⁴⁶⁹ R Wilson, "Report of Agricultural Extension Work in Mississippi, 1919." Mississippi Extension Service, 1919, Microfilm Roll 4, NFX Ref S 79.M57, Mississippi State University, Special Collections. Starkville, Mississippi.

⁴⁷⁰ Hogan, "A History of the Agricultural Extension Service in Arkansas", 89-94.

often had to make the decision to hire agricultural extension county agents or home demonstration agents. Normally, the county agents were preferred by the quorum courts. According to the *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, The Howard County Quorum Court appropriated funds for the employment of a county agent and a home demonstration agent in 1921.⁴⁷¹ Despite the appropriation, the next home demonstration agent, Jenny Betts, and the county agent, J.S. Knox, did not come to Howard County until 1923. Howard County had no county agent for the years from 1916 to 1922 except for 1918.⁴⁷² The reason for the five-year gap between demonstration agents in Howard County remains unclear but gaps in service appear common in southwest Arkansas until the mid-1930s. In neighboring counties around Howard County, the same trend of inconsecutive agents holds true from 1914 until the mid 1930s. Pike County, Arkansas, received its first home demonstration agent in 1917. Yet between 1917 and 1936, the county sporadically went without a home demonstration agent for a total of twelve years. Likewise, in Hempstead County, Dauphine Kapp served as the first home demonstration agent in 1916. Between 1916 and 1934, Hempstead County went without a home demonstration for only 5 years, 1924, 1925, 1930, 1932, and 1933. A closer examination of the home demonstration agents hired reveals that many agents remained in the county for only a few months at a time. In 1926, for example, Mary Buchley served as the county's home demonstration agent for only one month in the fall. The sporadic meeting of the home demonstration agents could not facilitate the development of a strong program within the county.

Union County Mississippi, in contrast, did not suffer with gaps between agricultural extension agents or home demonstration agents. Laura Wiseman served Union County by 1917 and continued until 1924. In 1917, Wiseman organized "poultry clubs" around the county and

⁴⁷¹ "Quorum Court Meets," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 10 November 1921.

⁴⁷² Hintze, "Cooperative Extension Service Work in Howard County."

the “poultry club girls” competed against one another by demonstrating their best eggs. Wiseman also organized canning clubs. Through her work, Union County’s demonstration club members received training on a wide range of topics from baking cornbread to growing tomatoes.⁴⁷³ Union County’s rural people benefited from having a consistent and active demonstration agent. As a result, rural women sold a higher number of domestically produced items on the local markets in Union County. The newspaper in New Albany, Mississippi carried more classified advertisements from women who wished to sell eggs or purebred chickens than did the newspaper in Nashville, Arkansas. The likely reason comes from the fact that women in Union County received instruction on producing and marketing their products; the women of Howard County did not.

The annual reports submitted by Wiseman provide a more precise account to the difference a good home demonstration agent can make for a county. In 1921, Wiseman spent 214 days in the field and sixty-nine days in her office. She wrote 1,844 letters and distributed 1,150 bulletins related to home demonstration work. She logged 4,206 miles by automobile, 614 miles by rail, and 126 miles by team.⁴⁷⁴ In 1922, Wiseman estimated the home demonstration women of Union County produced 525,000 pounds of fresh vegetables and 850,000 pounds of fresh fruit. The total weight of vegetables sold came to 257,000 pounds, valued at \$19,200; and the total weight of fruit sold came to 150,000 pounds, valued at \$150,000.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷³ Mrs. H. B. Wiseman, "Mrs. Wiseman Calls Country Club Girls," *New Albany (Mississippi) Gazette*, 22 March 1917. Laura Wiseman was the wife of Hugh Wiseman. She signed her name as “Mrs. H. B. Wiseman.”

⁴⁷⁴ Mrs. H. B. Wiseman, "Annual Report of Home Demonstration Agent of Union County, 1921." Mississippi Extension Service, December 1921 1921, Microfilm roll 8, NFX Ref S 79.M57, Mississippi State University, Special Collections. Starkville, Mississippi.

⁴⁷⁵ Mrs. H. B. Wiseman, "Annual Report of Home Demonstration Agent of Union County, 1922." Mississippi Extension Service, 1922, Microfilm roll 10, NFX Ref S 79.M57, Mississippi State University, Special Collections. Starkville, Mississippi. Laura Wiseman eventually left the extension service to become an agent for the GM&D Railroad.

When home demonstration agent Betts arrived in Howard County in 1923, the few clubs organized by Odessa Holt in 1918 were no longer active. Betts traveled the county from farm to farm on horseback in an effort to re-ignite any interest in home demonstration clubs. Under the direction of Betts, the county's home demonstration clubs began to organize. Betts recognized that mothers with young children could not easily attend meetings and sought a way to overcome this obstacle. She hired a regular baby sitter to travel with her to meetings in the county. This allowed mothers to bring their children to demonstration meetings and remain focused on the educational work at hand. Despite her success in the county, Jenny Betts stayed in Howard County only eighteen months. After Betts left her position in November 1924, no other home demonstration agent served the county until 1933. During this nine-year gap between home demonstration agents, Howard County continued to fund the agricultural agents. This makes the second gap different from the first gap between 1916 and 1923 when the county had neither a county agent nor a home demonstration agent. Howard County lacked a consistent home demonstration agent until the early 1930s.⁴⁷⁶

Helen Griffin came to Howard County in 1933 and organized the first home demonstration club in the County Line community during that summer. The club met for the first time in Thula Cassady's home, and the club's thirteen members elected Cassady as president. By the end of 1933, Griffin organized nine clubs in Howard County with 268 members. Griffin remained with the county until the end of 1933 when Hazel Craig replaced her.⁴⁷⁷ Craig grew up in the small town of Strong, located in southeastern Arkansas, and became the chief homemaker at age fifteen after her mother died. The oldest of eight children, Craig eagerly joined the local 4-H group. "All I had to do was keep the 4-H records reporting the

⁴⁷⁶ Hintze, "Cooperative Extension Service Work in Howard County."

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

things I was already doing [as the homemaker.]" She remembered. Craig won several 4-H competitions, which allowed her to take a number of trips, including a two-week training school in Springfield, Massachusetts. She was one of two 4-H Club members from Arkansas to be awarded a trip to Washington to the National 4-H Camp, where she and other delegates camped in tents on the grounds of the US Department of Agriculture building. Her success as a student of the extension service eventually led her to a new career as an adult. Craig commented that as she assisted rural women achieve a fuller life through extension work; she "satisfied [her] desire to serve as a missionary."⁴⁷⁸

Craig served Howard County from 1934 until 1937. Through Craig's hard work, Howard County had 20 home demonstration clubs organized with 592 members by 1936. As the number of clubs increased throughout the rural communities of the county, Craig encouraged the home demonstration women to organize the Howard County Council of Home Demonstration Clubs. Such councils first appeared in Arkansas during the early 1920s. As the number of farmwomen who took advantage of the expanding programs increased, home demonstration leaders around the state saw the need for closely coordinating the work of all the clubs in a county. The Howard County Council held meetings four times during the year and allowed women from different communities around the county an opportunity to socialize and discuss their needs from the home demonstration service. Council meetings were particularly important for the success of the program, because much of the demonstration ideas came from local women expressing their household problems or needs. Through these meetings, women from different parts of the county socialized together. With the county council meetings, women engaged with

⁴⁷⁸ Effa Laura Cather, "Homemaking: A Necessity, a Career, a Joy," *Arkansas Democrat*, 5 June 1966.

one another and saw themselves as part of a larger community of women.⁴⁷⁹ Craig remained in Howard County for four years before she moved to Texarkana to serve as the demonstration agent in Miller County. The Arkansas Extension Service later promoted her to the position of state leader for Extension Home Economics where she served from 1951 until her retirement in 1969.⁴⁸⁰

Following Hazel Craig, Crystal Campbell served Howard County as the home demonstration agent from 1938 until 1945.⁴⁸¹ Like her predecessor, Campbell first became interested in home demonstration work after witnessing the importance of such work as a child. Campbell reflected in 1939:

Since my early childhood, I can remember the Extension workers coming to my farm home. As soon as I was old enough, I became a 4-H club member. I started to the University with being an Extension worker in mind. I think it is one of the best professions because it gives you an opportunity to deal with the rural people, and the betterment of the rural and farm people are the ones I am interested in.⁴⁸²

While in Howard County, demonstration agent Campbell orchestrated a number of projects in the county, including canning kitchens, home kitchen improvements, and mattress making. During World War II, she organized Victory Gardens and a Red Cross Nursing School. During the war, the demonstration clubs studied “food production with the year-round garden” and “clothing a farm family in war time.” Club members made quilts with the names of local soldiers on it. Campbell oversaw the development of a market in Nashville where local farmers brought their products for the home demonstration women to sell on a commission basis. The demonstration club members also sold their own products, ranging from farm-raised eggs to

⁴⁷⁹ "Historical Appraisal of Extension Work in Hempstead County: 1914-1939." Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, No Date 1939, Hempstead County, 3, 1145, University of Arkansas. Fayetteville, Arkansas.

⁴⁸⁰ "'34 Home Demonstration Agent to Return for Spring Meeting," *Nashville (Arkansas) News*, 27 April 1995; Cather, "Homemaking: A Necessity, a Career, a Joy."

⁴⁸¹ Hintze, "Cooperative Extension Service Work in Howard County."

⁴⁸² Eddlemon, "Historical Appraisal of Extension Work in Howard County: 1914-1939."

hand-tailored dresses. Club member Mrs. Rector Pate, of Center Point, won a trip to Little Rock in 1939 for the "Best Dress" made in the county.⁴⁸³

Seaman Knapp hesitated to appoint African American agents during the early years of the Extension Service. Fearing that racial problems would arise from putting black men in positions equal with white men, Knapp believed that white agents could serve both white and black farmers.⁴⁸⁴ The General Education Board of New York, however, authorized an agreement in the fall of 1906 between the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and the US Department of Agriculture to hire Thomas Monroe Campbell to serve as the county agent for Macon County, Alabama. Campbell graduated from the Tuskegee Institute in 1906. Under the agreement, Campbell would be paid \$840 per year. The General Education Board appropriated \$500 and the Tuskegee Institute paid the remaining \$340.⁴⁸⁵ With this agreement, the Tuskegee Institute became the first college to cooperate formally with the US Department of Agriculture in the employment of demonstration agents.⁴⁸⁶

Ralph Amos served as Arkansas' first African American extension agent in 1912. His territory included nine counties, Lee, Pulaski, Phillips, Lonoke, Crittenden, Monroe, St. Francis, Jefferson, and Arkansas County. Amos conducted much of his work in connection with the public school system and organized groups in the counties he served. He focused on food production and preservation or canning. Between 1912 and 1917, seven agricultural extension

⁴⁸³ Hintze, "Cooperative Extension Service Work in Howard County."

⁴⁸⁴ Evans, "Recollections of Extension History," 12-13.

⁴⁸⁵ *The Booker T. Washington Papers Online*, "A Memorandum of Agreement between Tuskegee Institute and the General Education Board", in the University of Illinois Press, <http://www.historycooperative.org/btw/Vol.9/html/121.html> (accessed 29 February 2009).

⁴⁸⁶ Evans, "Recollections of Extension History," 13. In 1912, the Hampton Institute signed a similar agreement that employed JD Pierce, an African-American, to serve as extension agent for three counties in Virginia. By 1938, both Campbell and Pierce had been promoted to field agents for the Federal Extension offices, headquartered at their respective institutes.

agents and five home demonstration agents, including one husband and wife team, served African Americans in nineteen counties.⁴⁸⁷

Between 1907 and 1950, an African American extension agent served Howard County for only three years: 1942, 1946, and 1947. Roy Betton, an African American extension agent, split his time between Nevada and Howard Counties in 1942. According to an agreement between the two counties, Betton spent two-thirds of his time in Nevada County and only one-third of his time in Howard County. In 1946 and 1947, Charles Walker, an African American extension agent, served the black farmers of Howard County as a full-time agent. Hempstead County hired the first African American home demonstration agent in southwest Arkansas, albeit for only the months of May and June of 1918.⁴⁸⁸ Howard County did not have a black home demonstration agent until 1941. An African American home demonstration agent named Lena Eddington served Howard County only during 1941 and 1942. Eddington split her time evenly between Howard County and Little River County.⁴⁸⁹

Mississippi took an aggressive approach to serving black farmers. Mississippi's state director of extension work, R. Wilson, wrote in 1919,

The negro is and will always be a strong factor in the agricultural development in Mississippi. With all of his imperfections, he fills a place that from indications so far, no other class of labor will fill. The Extension Department, recognizing his economic importance, has endeavored to assist and encourage the negro in every possible way. Mississippi will never attain the standard of efficiency and productiveness that she is, by the natural resources, entitled to as long as so large a part of her agricultural population remains in ignorance, even with regard to the principles of agriculture. Therefore, the agents have been instructed to assist the negroes especially where we have no negro agents.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁷ T. R. Betton, "A Brief History of Agricultural Extension Work among Negroes in Arkansas." Arkansas Extension Service, 1962, File 3, Box 8, MC 1145, University of Arkansas Special Collections. Fayetteville, Arkansas.

⁴⁸⁸ "Cooperative Extension Service in Arkansas: History of Home Demonstration Work, 1914-1965." Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, 1966, MC 1145, University of Arkansas. Fayetteville, Arkansas; "Historical Appraisal of Extension Work in Hempstead County: 1914-1939."

⁴⁸⁹ Hintze, "Cooperative Extension Service Work in Howard County."

⁴⁹⁰ Wilson, "Report of Agricultural Extension Work in Mississippi, 1919."

During 1919, white agents in Mississippi conducted 97 field demonstrations with African American farmers and tenants. White agents assisted African American farmers in securing six purebred hogs and 631 purebred poultry. The white agents organized 15 black community agricultural clubs with a total membership of 509. According to R. Wilson, the director of extension work in Mississippi, white agents “almost always invited [black farmers] to the general agricultural meetings and the white agents often go and address negro meetings.” “Under the influence of the white agents, 17 negroes have built new houses, 10 new barns, 6 new school houses, and 1 new church. Fifty-four buildings have been improved.”⁴⁹¹ In 1917, Union County extension agent W. C. Mims wrote of the interest the African American farmers developed in his work,

The negro farmers of the county have become very much interested in this work. We have had some of them represented in nearly every car [of hogs] that has been shipped. In fact, the colored farmers of the county are just beginning to realize what my business is in the county, and it is nothing unusual to see one of them stop me or call at my office to get information along different lines.⁴⁹²

The extension service desired its white agents to work with black farmers in their districts. In 1919, every county agent was to submit the “Special Report by White Agents on Work With Negro Farmers.” This report asked specifically for the “number of negro demonstrators,” the number of “negro agricultural clubs,” and the number of “farms and rural improvements made due to agent’s influence.” These improvements included the building of new houses, barns, schools, and churches, or the improvement of such existing structures. Questions from the reports illustrate the desire for white agents to work with black farmers in their districts and provide insight to the commitment level of individual white agents to their black constituents. This does not suggest, however, that all white agents complied equally. The racial attitudes of

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² Mims, "Report of Work of the County Agent, 1917."

each individual agent and of each specific community trumped the state's desires for integrated extension meetings. In Union County, Mississippi, county agent Will C. Mims submitted a blank form. To explain why he could not list any specific work, he wrote, "There are only a few negro farmers in the county and they attend with the white farmers."⁴⁹³

The extension service also employed African American agents in Mississippi. The black agents organized 272 meetings, addressed 467 other meetings, and reached 41,022 people. Through 166 field meetings on farms, they reached an additional 14,084 people. R. Wilson wrote, "The negroes attend these field meetings in a much larger number than do the white people and take a very active interest." In 1919, black extension agents alone traveled 58,380 miles. They held 431 conferences, 221 school meetings, and cooperated with 738 teachers. They terraced and drained 678,091,976 feet of farmland.⁴⁹⁴ So effective were the black extension agents that H. H. Hubert submitted a yearly report that recommended the extension service add more black agents to the force, both agricultural agents and demonstration agents.⁴⁹⁵ Alice Oliver, the district agent for Home Demonstration in Mississippi praised the work between white and black demonstration agents. She explained that the relationship between "White and Negro Extension Workers is one of unselfish congeniality. Much is accomplished from the cooperation of the White and Negro agents in the rural districts."⁴⁹⁶

Some of the improved practices taught by home demonstrations agents originated with the farmwomen themselves. One example is the mattress making demonstration that began in

⁴⁹³ Will C. Mims, "Special Report by White Agents on Work with Negro Farmers." Agricultural Extension Service, Union County, Mississippi, No Date 1919, Roll 5, Microfilm NFX Ref S 79.M57, Mississippi State University, Special Collections. Starkville, Mississippi.

⁴⁹⁴ Hubert, *Fourth Annual Report of the Extension Service as Performed by Negroes, 1919*.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Alice Carter Oliver, "A Supplement to the Annual Report of the Agricultural Extension Service as Performed by Home Demonstration Agents in the State of Mississippi for the Year Ending December 31, 1920." Mississippi Extension Service, 1920, Microfilm Roll 6, NFX Ref S 79.M57, Mississippi State University, Special Collections. Starkville, Mississippi.

Sebastian County, Arkansas in 1926. Some of the county's farmwomen worked in a nearby mattress factory. These women made their own mattresses using cotton they grew and taught other women in the area how to do the same. A home demonstration agent, Rosalie L. Wolfe, came to study their technique and began teaching others within her service area how to make mattresses using homegrown cotton. By 1930, the mattress making demonstration became a state-wide program and over the next ten years, approximately 40,000 mattresses were made in Arkansas.⁴⁹⁷ In 1940, the Arkansas Extension Service joined with the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the Surplus Marketing Administration to launch the one of the most successful home furnishing programs in the history of home demonstration activities. A cooperative mattress demonstration program used surplus cotton provided by the Surplus Marketing Administration. This program reached farm families whose income amounted to less than \$400 annually as certified by the Agricultural Adjustment Administration committee. Between 1940 and 1941, 375,853 mattresses were made for the low-income families in Arkansas.⁴⁹⁸ Photographs taken of various community mattress-making events in Miller and Jefferson Counties around 1940 depict the demonstration, construction, and delivery of mattresses from the community center to various houses. Some photographs document that the events were integrated in some communities, while other demonstrations were either all white or all black. Photos of the integrated demonstration show white and black women crowded around a sewing machine. In one photo a black woman assists a white woman examine the stitching while others watch. Another photo depicts a small group of white and black men delivering mattresses stacked on a wagon.⁴⁹⁹ Bobbye Ann McCollum, who served as a home demonstration

⁴⁹⁷ Hogan, "A History of the Agricultural Extension Service in Arkansas", 129-130, 171.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 169-171.

⁴⁹⁹ "Mattress Making." Arkansas Extension Service, No Date circa 1940, File 1-9, Box 1, University of Arkansas Special Collections. Fayetteville, Arkansas.

agent in Union County from 1953 until 1957, remembered that during the county had both white and black home demonstration agents. McCollum, who was the white home demonstration agent, remembered integrated meetings.

We bridged the [color] gap without any real problems. Those ladies came to all our meetings. All the meetings in our office were integrated. Those meetings out in the communities, by choice of the community, were segregated. Then there came a time when they had signs up that said anybody [could attend.] We never had any problems at all. We just had a friendly environment.⁵⁰⁰

Women who joined home demonstration clubs in the early years became frustrated when their agents did not return the following year. Mrs. Riley Lewallen, a demonstration club member from Hempstead County, Arkansas expressed this sentiment in 1939, “[Home demonstration] work doesn’t cost the farmer anything and is worth a million dollars. There has been so much of the time that we have not had home agents. We would not get organized good until [the quorum court] voted them down.”⁵⁰¹ Once the women in the rural communities realized the value of the home demonstration agent, they often rallied behind their agents and challenged the quorum courts over not hiring them for additional years. According to the Historical Appraisal of Extension work in Hempstead County, club members organized and attended county meetings of the quorum court to “fight for their agents.” Mrs. J. E. Mosier, a demonstration club member in Washington, Arkansas boasted that she “helped to fight battles for the agents in the [Hempstead] county quorum court” after she first joined a club in 1932.⁵⁰²

Women from Polk County, in southwest Arkansas, waged an unsuccessful campaign to keep their home demonstration agent, Lorraine Blackwood after the extension service removed from her position in 1948. The Arkansas Extension Service relocated Blackwood because she

⁵⁰⁰ Bobbye Ann McCollum to author, Interview, 26 October 2005. Makin' Do website http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/media/documentary/women_history/mccollum.html (accessed 26 July 2008).

⁵⁰¹ "Historical Appraisal of Extension Work in Hempstead County: 1914-1939."

⁵⁰² Ibid.

could not “work in harmony” with the county agent, and a “small group of men” criticized her “Balanced Farming Program.” It remains unclear what criticisms the men held, but it is certain that the women of the county strongly supported Blackwood. Her removal resulted in an outpouring of letters from home demonstration clubwomen. Club member Mrs. W. F. Ryals wrote to Aubrey Gates, the Associate Director of the Arkansas Extension Service, “As our club hears, she is about to be moved. She is doing a mighty fine piece of work here. Everybody likes her and thinks she is a nice and decent woman. If she is moved, I am afraid it will ruin more clubs than this one, for I have heard more clubs than ours say so.” Mrs. Raymon Simpson, likewise, wrote, “We don’t want someone else who might do just as well as Mrs. Blackwood, we want her. We think she is a strong character.” Another letter read, “Mrs. Blackwood has worked with us women very faithful. She is so interested in all these farm women.” All fourteen home demonstration clubs in Polk County submitted petitions signed by members and community people in support of Blackwood. Unsatisfied with the response of the extension service, the Polk County women sent letters to US Congressman Fajjo Craven, who also inquired as to why the Arkansas Extension Service removed Blackwood from her position.⁵⁰³

Many of the letters written in support of home demonstration agent Blackwood cited not only her effectiveness as a demonstration agent but also her moral character. The extension service provided rural people with information and techniques to improve their lives, but the relationship between the demonstration agent and her club members went further than that of a teacher. Emma Archer, who served as Arkansas’ director of women and girls’ clubs in 1916 and 1917, described with biblical illusion the importance of the home demonstration agent,

⁵⁰³ Aubrey Gates to Fajjo Cravens, March 19, 1948; Mrs. W. F. Ryals to Aubrey Gates, March 19, 1948; Mrs. Raymond Simpson to Aubrey Gates, March 12, 1948; Mrs. John S. James and Mrs. Scott Kinnerson to Fajjo Cravens, March 12, 1948, Arkansas Extension Service, 1948, 6-2, 6, University of Arkansas, Special Collections, Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Following the example of the Great Teacher, [the home demonstration agent,] by precept and example, aids the poor, encourages the weak, teaches industry and thrift, educates the mind, instills beauty, purity, and love in the heart, trains the hands to labor efficiently and intelligently, and crowns the whole with the strength and health that comes to a body well-nourished and exercised. It is a great missionary vocation that combines mental, physical, and spiritual uplift and makes for a strong self-reliant, God-fearing womankind.⁵⁰⁴

While the men of the rural areas grew to appreciate the value of the demonstrations, there seems to have been a personal connection among the women. During the mid-1930s, as counties consistently employed agricultural agents and home demonstration agents, and as local people came to trust their work, the service resonated particularly with rural women. According to the Statistical Records of Arkansas' Agricultural Extension Service, the number of women who actively engaged as volunteers for adult extension programs in Arkansas far outnumbered the number of men. The number of male county or community leaders who actively engaged adult extension work during 1930 was 3,188. The number of women, in contrast, was 1,654 during the same year. At this time, however, many counties in the state had not committed fully to the hiring of home demonstration agents, although they regularly employed agricultural agents. By 1934, when counties began consistently hiring home demonstration agents, the women leaders who volunteered in adult work outnumbered men 5,867 to 3,949. Between 1930 and 1936, the number of male volunteers did not exceed 4,000. The number of female volunteers, however, jumped to 11,167 in 1936, nearly doubling their numbers in two years. The number of women volunteers in adult work doubled again between 1936 and 1940 to 20,859; the number of men who volunteered in 1940 climbed only to 8,496.⁵⁰⁵

Although the rural people were initially suspicious of extension agents, rural folk soon learned the value of the extension service. Through their hard work, the extension service

⁵⁰⁴ Emma Archer, "History of Home Demonstration Work for 1912" as cited by Hogan, "A History of the Agricultural Extension Service in Arkansas", 42, 56.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 103.

increased the standards of living for many rural households by teaching them how to do so themselves. As a result, rural folk lived on productive farms, produced diverse foodstuffs, ate nutritious diets, canned food items and sold surplus items to local, regional and even national markets. Better nutrition and sanitary living conditions reduced diseases such as pellagra and hookworm. Increased household incomes led to home improvements such as screened windows and domestic laborsaving devices such as an electric washing machine. Through the home demonstration's better babies demonstrations, children's health improved and through demonstrations on budgeting, household planned for and made larger household purchases. The maternal death rate declined in Arkansas and Mississippi because of the use of trained midwives. Nevertheless, both states missed an opportunity to continue that momentum and improve the general health of women and children with the existing midwives, who could provide prenatal and postnatal education. When the states discouraged midwifery, the job of providing such education fell squarely on the extension service's home demonstration agents. As such, these agents carried the possibility of real change to the rural South.

While local community and civic leaders rightfully sought to diversify their local economy, these measures could not affect the majority of people in the rural areas to the same extent as the extension service. Bobby Ann McCollum stated that the demonstration agents helped rural communities "band together" to get rural telephone service, road improvements, gas service or electricity.

Back then, we were trying to get telephones in all the areas or even in some cases, extreme cases, even electricity. We had a lot of work -- groundwork -- that everybody has forgotten about. Somebody had to try to spearhead that. We were trying. The telephone company did not seem to feel that they needed to put a telephone system out there [in the rural areas] and provide that service. When you get a group together and they are all interested in the same thing and working on this, you get people to pay more attention. So that enabled [rural people] to get the things they needed in those areas, from roads, to telephone lines, to water systems, and gas systems. Rural communities would

have their own little organizations, and they would set up goals that they wished to obtain. Maybe this year they were going to work on getting just the telephones. That was going to be their emphasis. They would have the telephone people come out and explain what they had to do and how they had to do it and all these kinds of things. [The Extension Service] was definitely an avenue from which many things were improved in our county.⁵⁰⁶

While technologies such as electricity and telephone services became available to the residents of larger towns, the people in the more isolated rural areas often lived beyond the reach of these services. The home demonstration agents played a major role in organizing the rural people so that their lives could benefit from these modern improvements.

Rural Southerners, perhaps disproportionately, credited Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal from saving them from the depression. Mary McJunkins, a staunch Democrat who was born in Howard County during 1942 and raised by parents who lived through the Great Depression, explained that her mother and father instilled in their children a strong reverence for FDR. "When we were children," she joked, "we thought that if we were good, we would go to Roosevelt when we died."⁵⁰⁷

When works programs gained momentum, they provided communities with new educational and recreational structures. In Howard County Arkansas, for example, the communities of Centre Point, Dierks, Mineral Springs, and Nashville all benefitted from WPA gymnasiums and school buildings. The African American community of Tollette, Arkansas, gained a two-story, brick schoolhouse in 1938. Without the federal project, it would be unlikely that these communities could have afforded such grand structures on their own. By 1940, the agencies created during the New Deal facilitated an array of changes in the rural South, from better school facilities to rural electricity. Callie Young of northeast Mississippi remembered that on a Sunday morning in November 1934, she traveled to Tupelo, Mississippi to see

⁵⁰⁶ McCollum to author.

⁵⁰⁷ Mary McJunkins to author, Interview, 20 April 2009. notes in possession of author.

President Roosevelt. Tupelo was one of the first towns powered by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Congressman John Rankin, himself a vicious racist, invited Roosevelt to his home district to “symbolically throw the switch on hydroelectric power.”⁵⁰⁸ Callie Young went to see the person whom she credited for bringing the most significant change to her county, President Roosevelt. She did not realize, however, that behind the President and Congressman Rankin stood a number of local people from the county who also contributed to the organization and construction of the county’s TVA and REA power lines.

The New Deal programs brought jobs and services to rural people. However, these programs could not have worked as efficiently or immediately if they had not utilized existing networks of local people; and during the New Deal, the extension service stood as the best entrance to the rural communities. Historian Jerome Tweton noted that the Agricultural Adjustment Administration’s farm programs were in place by the 1934 growing season only because the federal agency “engaged the Extension Service’s agents as its local coordinators and employed [local] farmers to oversee county operations.”⁵⁰⁹ Although new and increasingly massive federal agencies made programs available, local people made the programs *happen*.

⁵⁰⁸ Howard, *Concentration Camps on the Home Front : Japanese Americans in the House of Jim Crow*, 53-54; *Memories of Mississippi*. (University, Mississippi: University of Mississippi, 1994), 215-216.

⁵⁰⁹ D. Jerome Tweton, *The New Deal at the Grass Roots : Programs for the People in Otter Tail County, Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988), 163.

CONCLUSION

In the American mind, rural people lived wholesome lives in the countryside. Accordingly, men and women on farms stood for what was most fundamental about America. The agrarian myth portrayed rural folk as strong characters. In truth, however, rural folk often suffered from poor diet, poor living conditions, and subsequently poor health. Historian Marilyn Holt pointed to the disconnect between the popular images and reality of rural people, “Whereas medical care was often nonexistent, popular culture portrayed farm people as healthy and robust.”⁵¹⁰ The agrarian myth was different from the agrarian truth. Rural poverty took a human toll. Malnourished farmers, who lacked fresh fruits and vegetables in their diet, felt drained of their energy. Many lacked adequate medical and dental care. Rural poverty resulted in higher infant-mortality rates, lower life expectancies, and endemic health problems, which ranged from hookworm to pellagra.⁵¹¹ The difficulties of living in the rural South in the early 1900s made mutual support systems necessary. In the hill counties of southwest Arkansas and northeast Mississippi, neighbors came together during times of crisis. They visited one another regularly and felt obliged to take care of one another. These relationships, proximity, and shared experiences contributed to the making of the rural community, and mutualism served as the chief bonding agent.

Race differences, however, complicated community consciousness and at times came to dominate the actions of individual community members. Racial attitudes varied from town to town because members of each community drew from different sources to develop their notion

⁵¹⁰ Marilyn Irvin Holt, *Linoleum, Better Babies & the Modern Farm Woman, 1890-1930*, 1st ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 96-97.

⁵¹¹ Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 129.

of race. In areas of Howard County, Arkansas and Union County, Mississippi where whites and blacks lived in similar poor economic conditions, they turned to one another for mutual assistance. Communities with white and black neighbors living amongst one another drew not only from popular culture, but also from their personal relationships or experiences with their neighbors to construct the meanings of community as well as form their racial identity. Poor rural folk who lived in a heterogeneous community developed relationships with their own class, which included both whites and blacks. As such, their idea of community included both whites and blacks. Thus, whites tempered their racial attitudes by drawing on their personal relationships with African American neighbors and friends. Within all communities, social institutions – from segregated churches to segregated schools – reinforced a racial hierarchy, but in areas where blacks and whites lived more closely, the community consciousness soothed racial tensions. Racial segregation could not be enforced during other important opportunities of social interaction. White men and black men who lived in close proximity encountered one another in random places and shared common experiences. During such encounters, personal assessments of an individual's character superseded racial stereotypes and prejudices. Therefore, the race relations in the hill counties of both southwest Arkansas and northeast Mississippi were nuanced.

In exclusively white communities, neighbors constructed their racial identity based upon popular culture's rendering of blackness and their own experience with exclusively white neighbors. Where no communal bonds existed between whites and blacks, racism prevailed most readily; poor whites who lived in relatively homogenous communities developed relationships with whites only. Likewise, in towns where whites saw blacks only in subordinate positions, there were fewer opportunities for the prevailing imagery of blacks to be challenged.

Black women who worked as domestic servants had the best opportunity to develop personal relationships with a white families. Still, these women played inferior roles. In rural heterogeneous communities, however, relations between white and black neighbors forced a different concept of whiteness and blackness. Regardless of color, neighbors depended upon one another. The members of that immediate community were more equalized. In rural, integrated communities, mutual assistance systems between white and black neighbors facilitated the development of a community consciousness that took precedence over racial identity. Exclusively white rural communities, however, developed a communal identity in which whiteness appeared to be a necessary condition. Therefore, race relations could be improved when opportunities for more interactions between whites and blacks became available.

The church remained the most important institution in the community's consciousness. Through this institution, local people examined their own communities as well as the larger world. Church fellowship became a key part of community-building as members met for religious functions and socialized together. Opportunities for families and neighbors to get together were important social events for a community. At these gatherings, men and women shared with one another their successes and struggles. Church congregations concerned themselves with the moral and physical health of church members and, by extension, the overall health of the community. Churchwomen in both Howard County and Union County worked for benevolent causes and developed a confidence needed to move beyond the confines of church work. Church work proved to be especially important in the development of a political and social consciousness among women in these hill counties, and it led them to progressive action. Efforts to improve the schools in their communities or to organize temperance lectures gave these women a spiritual satisfaction and a sense of competence. Newspapers elevated the status

of women as community leaders, as they reported the meetings, lectures, and works conducted by local women. As a result, the position of women in the public sphere gained credibility. Importantly, women often joined more than one club, which resulted in an even larger network of women who shared a drive to improve their communities. The thrust of these reforms ranged from improving the health of children to ensuring stronger law enforcement against crimes.

In his study of the “New South,” historian Edward Ayers noted that business and social leaders tended to belong to one particular church in the towns.⁵¹² Ayers failed to consider that women’s clubs linked their community’s broader religious landscape. As active churchwomen joined multiple women’s organizations, they created a network of faith-minded leaders, which amounted to ecumenical efforts to reform their communities. Motivated by religious impulses, these Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian women united and effectually linked and involved multiple congregations for a number of causes. As this effort came through the women’s clubs, it was done without the approval of the traditional, patriarchal church leaders. Thus, while the male leaders of particular denominations found it difficult to reach across to different churches, churchwomen did so readily by virtue of their existing associations through multiple clubs. The Union County Red Cross provides an excellent example of non-sanctioned ecumenical work. During and immediately after the First World War, women from different churches, both black and white, acted through different women’s clubs and joined for common causes. These included providing surgical gauze for military hospitals in Europe to caring for Union County’s infirmed during the Influenza Pandemic of 1918. During the following decade, these same women worked with local schools to improve the health of children in Union County. They also joined with the home demonstration agents to improve the health of local children, both white and black. Clubwomen, therefore, accomplished ecumenical progressivism.

⁵¹² Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 167.

National religious organizations realized the potential of rural churches but wanted to reform the religious institutions in order to make them more efficient in their outreach ministries. The Interchurch World Movement (IWM), as an example, failed to become a conduit through which rural reforms could be achieved in the 1920s. The clear difference in the approach of the IWM versus that of the clubwomen was the fact that the clubwomen were local leaders who worked together and posed no threat to existing institutions, especially the churches. The Interchurch World Movement, on the other hand, saw church consolidation as beneficial and necessary to bring the IWM's prescriptions to the rural communities. Thus, one of the most important elements for rural reform was the participation of local people, in short, neighbors trusted neighbors.

Although rural communities attempted to develop their economies, the success of these efforts varied. Local leaders sought to bring industry to their regions; however, there was no guarantee their vision would materialize. Union County saw a number of industries open for business by the 1920s, yet industrial investment eluded Howard County Arkansas until the mid-1950s. Even when new industries came to rural areas, they could not employ even a small majority of workers in the counties with regular, high-paying salaries. Further, these factories suffered with vicissitudes in the economy and were susceptible to fluctuations in the market demand for their products. The furniture factory in New Albany, for example, boasted of its employment possibilities in 1905, but the factory eventually closed when the mission-style furniture it produced became less fashionable. Although the diversification of the local economy was important, it alone could not increase the living standards of rural people. It was home demonstration and agricultural extension agents that did the most to achieve this objective by training households throughout the county to be more productive, efficient, and healthy. One of

the most effective ways to improve the lives of local people was to educate them with a focus on agricultural needs, home life, and health. By themselves, the local communities throughout the rural South could not provide the valuable training, however. In this sense, the best channel to improve the general conditions of rural life came not from local people but state officials. The demonstrations combined to improve the quality of life for rural southerners. Such an effort required a highly organized and sufficiently funded system that could reach all the counties and communities in the rural South. The Smith-Lever Act facilitated the work of extension agents, who traveled throughout their service areas, developed relationships with community members, and provided education through demonstrations. The extension service initially focused on agricultural education but soon provided domestic training, especially for the improvement of the general health and standards of living for the family. In the early years of the service, many country folk and county leaders failed to see the benefits of such programs. As such, they initially dismissed “book farming” and distrusted county agents. County extension agents and home demonstration agents covered districts consisting of multiple counties. Under these conditions, the extension service worker could not connect with the local people as easily. It was not until the agents immersed themselves in the community that they became most effective. The case of Union County was particularly unique in that the State Agent for Mississippi, R. S. Wilson, was a native of New Albany.⁵¹³ Wilson’s direct connections to the local people led to a faster acceptance of the extension service within that community and the County Board of Supervisors. Additionally, Union County’s first home demonstration agent, Laura Wiseman, was from New Albany, which gave her credibility. In contrast, in Howard County the early service agents moved into the county and never stayed for any length of time until the mid 1930s. It was not until agents remained within the community long enough to become

⁵¹³ Goodell, "Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, State of Mississippi."

established members that they became effective. To illustrate this point more, consider the case of Polk county home demonstration agent, Lorraine Blackwood. Controversy erupted when the Arkansas Extension Service announce that Blackwood was being replaced because she had a conflict with the county agent. Although the extension service reassured local women that Blackwood's replacement would be equally qualified for the position, local people specifically wanted Lorraine Blackwood. Blackwood had developed a personal connection with her club members and, as such, became part of the community. As such, these agents carried the possibility of real change to the rural South. Ultimately, hegemony worked best when local people associated the agents of change with their own community.

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VITA

THOMAS WAYNE COPELAND

EDUCATION

PhD Candidate, University of Mississippi – May 2011

Dissertation – “Good Neighbors: Agents of Change in the New Rural South, 1900 to 1940”

Major Field – History of the United States

Minor Fields – History of the South and History of Latin America

Master of Liberal Arts, Henderson State University – May 2002

Master’s Thesis – “Hungry, Hungry Are We: The Men and Women of the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union, 1934 to 1940”

Major Field – History of the United States

Bachelor of Science in Education, Henderson State University – May 1994

Social Science Major

EXPERIENCE IN EDUCATION

University of Mississippi

Curriculum Designer and Resource Agent for Mississippi Schools – 2009

Graduate Instructor – 2007 to 2008

Teaching Assistant – 2004 to 2007

Courses Taught:

History of Europe Since 1648

US History Until 1877

US History Since 1877

Senior Research Seminar in Women’s History/Oral History

Cossatot Community College of the University of Arkansas

Coordinator, Upward Bound Program – 2003 to 2004

Adjunct History Instructor – 2002 to 2004

Courses Taught:

Arkansas History

US History Until 1877

US History Since 1877

Western Civilization Until 1700

American National Government

Geography

Family Life Center, Nashville, Arkansas
Grant Administrator and Coordinator, Family Literacy Program – 2003 to 2004

Nashville Public Schools; and South Pike County Public Schools, Arkansas
Secondary History Teacher – 1994 to 2002; and 2010 to 2011

Courses Taught:

Advanced US History/US History

Arkansas History

American National Government

Civics/Economics

Psychology/Sociology

AWARDS AND HONORS

University of Mississippi Graduate School Summer Dissertation Grant – 2010

J. L. and Diane Holloway Dissertation Fellowship – 2009

University of Mississippi Graduate School Summer Dissertation Grant – 2009

University of Mississippi Graduate School Summer Research Grant – 2008

Elbert Hillard Oral History Award, Best in Oral History, for North Mississippi

Women's History Project, documentary, and website – 2007

University of Mississippi Graduate Student Council Research Grant – 2006

Who's Who Among America's Teachers, ninth edition – 2005

Who's Who Among America's Teachers, eighth edition – 2004

Who's Who Among America's Teachers, sixth edition – 2002

Alpha Epsilon Lambda – honor society, Henderson State University – 2002

Arkansas Association of College History Teachers, *Teacher of the Year* – 2001

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

North Mississippi Women's History Project, University of Mississippi – 2005 to 2009

American Folklife Center's Field School in Oral History, Library of Congress – 2007

Nominating Committee for Faculty and Student Awards, CCCUA – 2004

Oral History Training, Arkansas Center for Oral and Visual History – 2002

Southwest Arkansas Documentation, Project Ouachita Baptist University – 2001 to 2002

Advance Placement Certification in History, University of Arkansas – 2001

Personnel Policy Committee, Nashville Public Schools – 1997 to 2002

Close Up Washington DC Sponsor, Nashville Public Schools – 1996, 1997, 2001

Comprehensive Evaluation Committee, Nashville Public Schools – 1996 to 2001

Literacy Committee, Nashville Public Schools – 2001, 2002

COMMUNITY SERVICE ACTIVITIES

Single-Parent Scholarship Selection Committee, Howard County, AR – 2011

Board Member, Family Life Center, Nashville, AR – 2008, 2009

Habitat for Humanity Home Builder, Oxford, MS – Spring 2007

Family Life Center Grant Writer, Nashville, AR – Fall 2004

Board Member, Elberta Arts Center, Nashville, AR – 2003, 2004

Community Builder, Modern Woodman of America, Nashville, AR – 2003

PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

“*Makin’ Do* in the Classroom: A Teacher’s Guide”

US History Curriculum Guide for Mississippi Public High Schools,
Published by the University of Mississippi’s Department of History and the
Department of Outreach, 2009.

From Many Voices: Creating the Documentary Film *Makin’ Do* from Oral History
Interviews

Oral History Association 42nd Annual Meeting, Louisville, Kentucky, October 14-
18, 2009.

Faith Healing, State Healing: North Mississippi’s Rural Women as Agents of Health for
their own Communities, 1900 to 1950

Rural Women’s Studies Association Triennial Conference,
Indiana University, September 24-27, 2009.

“Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union in Mississippi”

Encyclopedia of Mississippi, Ted Ownby and Charles Reagan Wilson, editors.
Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, forthcoming.

Review of *From Diversity to Unity: Southern and Appalachian Migrants in Uptown
Chicago, 1950-1970*, by Roger Guy, Lexington Books, 2007

Oral History Review, vol. 36, no. 2 (Summer 2009).

Makin’ Do: Women Coping with Difficult Times, Editor and Assistant Director

University of Mississippi Center for Media and Documentary Projects, 2008.

Lights, Camera, Action: Initial Considerations for a Digital Oral History Project

Oral History Association 42nd Annual Meeting, Pittsburgh, PA, October 15-19,
2008.

Saving Local History: The Urgency of Archiving Local Voices and Stories

Society of Mississippi Archivists Annual Conference, University of Mississippi,
April 19-20, 2007.

Making Do: Women Cope With Hard Times in Northeast Mississippi

7th Annual Isom Student Gender Conference, University of Mississippi, March 2-
3, 2007.

Using Modern Technology to Preserve the Past: Making Documentary Films

10th Annual Creating Futures through Technology Conference, Tunica,
Mississippi, March 18-20, 2006.

Review of *Thad Snow: A Life of Social Reform in the Missouri Bootheel* by Bonnie
Stepenoff, University of Missouri Press, 2003

Arkansas Review: A Journal of Delta Studies 35, no. 2 (August 2004).

Their Voices, Their Faces: Expressions and Perceptions of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union

Delta Blues Symposium IX at Arkansas State University, Jonesboro, Arkansas, March 27-29, 2003.

Leaders, Reformers, and Martyrs: African American Women in the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union

4th Annual Graduate Student Conference in African American History at Memphis State University, Memphis, Tennessee October 18-19, 2002.

"Hungry, Hungry Are We: The Men and Women of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, 1934 to 1940"

Master's Thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Henderson State University in candidacy of the degree of Master of Liberal Arts, May 2002.

Ideology, Women, and Racial Relations in the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union: 1934 to 1940

23rd Annual North American Labor History Conference at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan October 18-20, 2001.